

Mariana crushes her daughter to her chest and rocks as she repeats the *Al Brazo Poderoso*, the Catholic prayer for protection. She can barely hear her husband Marco's full-throated swearing over the roar of the plane as it clings to its altitude. He's wrestling the yoke, fighting to keep the plane level. The corded muscles of his neck strain against his blue linen shirt. When he'd stood that afternoon next to the groom at the altar, his shirt had been crisp and pleated. Now it's limp with sweat. Sleeves are rolled up. His necktie swings mid-chest from its loosened knot like a noose.

*He's going to lose this battle.* The thought flies unhindered through her mind. This storm is too much. Marco has no business flying in it. He'd insisted he personally fly the family to his friend's island wedding. She chokes back her rage at his arrogance.

Four-year old Lucia squirms in Mariana's arms. Tears flood down her little girl's face. With each buck of the small plane little Lucia screams, as does Mariana. The dark cabin floods with lightning. In that second, Mariana locks eyes with her father-in-law sitting directly across from her. Neither one speaks. The understanding is immediate. Shrouded again in darkness. Only the helter-skelter green and red beams from the cockpit instrument panel pierce the cabin.

Like her children's oft-discarded dolls, the plane is tossed. Invisible updrafts collide with downdrafts, pulling the floor out from under the fuselage. They are buckled tight into their seats, the buttery leather ones that Marco had personally selected. Crystal goblets and porcelain plates he'd insisted upon now shatter against their shelves. Mariana's mother-in-law clutches her chest, pitches forward and vomits onto the carpeted floor. The stench fills the air of the stale cabin. With each plunge all their stomachs fly to their throats until a smack, as if hitting concrete, catapults them upward again. Stomachs fall back toward slackened bowels. God, in his fury over Marco's vanity, has squeezed them all in his gargantuan fist and is shaking them like a maraca.