

FAMILY SKETCH

Mami charges into the room to find me, slamming the door against the wall, something I imagine my spine might do if she flings me against the floor. Her eyes search, *where is the girl that beat on her baby brother?* Finally she finds me and rushes me. All the light leaves my sight. Her hand grips my greña, the short, thin, wispy hairs of my skull, and she drags me out. I will remember thinking I deserved this beating.

Junior is curled over on the plastic-wrapped sofa, his knees pressed into his chest. I didn't hit him that hard. I didn't. I know I didn't. His face is red with his small mouth letting out Os of pain, like when he blows soap bubbles in the bath. He's snailed tightly, so small. His sneakers are on the couch cushion, I see the crumbs of dirt settling in the crevices. Why isn't he in trouble for this?

Abuela stirs the oxtail soup with her thick, dimpled arms, reciting some island prayer to some island god. In indigo culottes I study the spidering green, purple, and blue veins on her calves. They remind me of the meridians on a map. I love how plump and fat she is, like a green olive. I especially love the pudge of her underarms, like kneaded dough, sometimes I try to hang from those skin curtains. When she notices me, she swats me off with the wooden spoon. It has three slits in the center, allowing it to travel through the air quickly.

Abuelo is on the patio, smoking. He is always in the process of quitting. I love him the most because he's the only one that dresses up every day, whether he's going out or not. A button-down gingham-pattern polo with the pressed collar and navy slacks. Always shoes, never chancletas or slippers or circulation-socks. The cigarette smoke matches his salt-and-pepper thinning hair, coiffed back with so much gel it cracks and leaves flakes on all his pillows. *Go inside with the women*, he says, blowing the smoke out the side of his lip.

Papi sleeps. He's tired from a long-shift of driving buses. We are to be as quiet as possible. Any laughter or holler is met with a snarl from my mother, and the threat of being put outside, like a dog. I sneak in and see he's

MADARI PENDÁS

shirtless, his gut hiding his face. I turn away, nakedness is bad. I know this now. My brother and I are no longer allowed to take baths together, and our rooms have been switched. I know to always look away, but there is not another room in which to rest. Everywhere I go I am reminded that I'm bad and that I deserved that beating.