

# Safe

LIBBY FLORES

Our anger kept us safe for a while that summer. The lizards were skittering around the willow trees in the backyard and Bub the dog would draw our hands to him, and we'd forget the burning in our chests. A piece of toast and a hot cup of coffee left by the front door, sheets tugged back to cover feet, a vacuumed house after a long day of work, scrambled eggs made and served when one was still blinking from insomnia—we were never terrible to each other. If she didn't call the house, the small kindnesses could continue. You were angry at this new restraint: me at the lie. Our limbs ached; for weeks we had not embraced. Arms, even legs, frail from under-use.

In that dead summer heat the boy who cut our lawn came a day early. On his break he leaned against our old fence and I forced my gaze to him, understanding maybe for the first time the word *brawny* after decades of relying on a man built like a post.

Later that July one of Bub's eyeteeth rotted. When we reached down to him his panting smile revealed a festering smell. How odd this betrayal, so late in our lives—the fetish of it after many nice years. It reminded me of when we saw those bodies of chickens on the side of the road in El Paso. I rolled the window down for a better look. Four donkeys making a meal of them: the openness of the carnage, the upturned animal kingdom, the atrocity, blatant, and plain.

