

Three Poems

SARAH PALEY

Human Kindness in the City

You're my fucking husband and I'll kill you if I want! The wife claws and flails fruitlessly. The glowering husband does his own riff. She wears a hijab, he has on his kufi. They appear to be acquainted with some God but are having a not so private jihad as people veer around them with their dogs trying not to stare at the towering, ramrod drag queen who holds them apart. Her arms spread like a fashionable Christ on the cross—a huge flat palm on either forehead, charms dangle from her thick wrists. Serene, she tosses her hair, as she guides them across the street and coos: *Simmer, now, simmer. Lets us be sweet.*

Human Kindness at 10th & 6th, NYC

Goddamn motherfuckin' flat ass bitch!
Don't need you for nothin' you flat ass witch.
Get out my face with your flat ass. I betta
not look up and see your flat ass—
flat ass flat ass flat as a fuckin' letta
ass. You think I wanna see that? Last
thing I wanna see is that FLAT ASS. Why
am I still lookin' at that sorry excuse
for a . . . Thank God! S'long!! I need to buy
me something. Food. Who's got a dollar? Loose
change? Loose change cause I'm hungry. Help me
out? Anything helps. That's a cute baby you
got there. And that baby happy as shit
cause you got yourself some nice ass tits.

Human Kindness in the Elevator

Harold Smith, the elevator operator
lets the daughters of the dead tenant
formerly in 2A pray in the corridor
outside of the deceased's apartment.
*I'm gonna have to tell them they can't no
more at some point.* He shrugs. *It's kind of creepy
but it makes them feel better. If, Dobrilo,*
(“encourages goodness in others” in Serb) *if he
finds out. . .* Harold does not finish the thought.
He shakes the Super's image away: *Did you ever
meet Mickey Rooney? . . . No? I did. He bought
suits from my father's store.* He adjusts the lever.
He opens the wooden box he has manned for twenty years.
Nice guy. Sunlight and interlopers appear.