

# **REETIKA VAZIRANI**

## **Three Poems**

### **Nikos at 42**

Today's like yesterday.  
My wife tells me I'm sick;  
it's true, she says I'm sick of life.  
Sonia's the expert,  
knows everyone's business.

What's the use?  
I lie on the bed  
till 4:30 in the afternoon.

I light up and then I may talk to Emil,  
metaphysical Emil full to the brim.  
Long after my cigarette's out, I'm waiting.  
Emil, my day demands, I say.  
But he wants to talk about God. Yes,  
I say I believe on occasions, sometimes I disbelieve.  
He brightens - he thinks I'm complex after all.  
At last I say, Emil I got to go.  
The hurt look on his face, fine,  
but I carry his sigh within my sigh.  
I tell you it's no good.

Friend, I used to say, my street is full of kooks  
flipping the white placard: open, closed  
for lunch. In the past, how was I different?  
As for women, there are names I can't shake off.  
The beautiful Althea with the cinnamon tongue,  
    after Althea, Maura.  
Women I loved, women who later clouded my name.  
Now I don't even whore but my old ways follow me like a dog.

No bread, no more cigarettes.  
Just me and the overeager birds.  
What's it with them, clacking gossips  
on the hill past Father Malgre's church?  
The old people say, Nikos go to the South Pole --  
    you need to look at ice.  
Why's the remedy always clear across the world,  
like when I'm thinking of Alvaro,  
need to talk to Alvaro, but he's a waiter in Belgium.  
Not only that, he's in a town I'll never find.  
Should I wait all my life for the train?

I'll live to be eighty, I'll be ninety

like those would-be Braganzas in my line.  
Shopkeepers, they pinned our name to a rented door,  
and lasted a century each.  
Sonia who doesn't listen always rushes out  
for a better tablecloth.  
If coffee dips to the last bean,  
she runs to Coelho's store. Maybe that's the trouble.  
Maybe I should say to her, Relax, Unbraid your hair.  
And Emil? what's his trouble anyway? -  
he's got a grudge against normal chatting.

Little by little, I'll figure it out.  
I'll say to them, Relax, we'll live to be a hundred.  
If I sleep until dinner, what's lost?  
I'll sort things out.  
Then I'll go back to my job sorting mail.  
Two-three hours pass away.

I've cleared out boredom, that dirty straw.  
I'll look in the paper.  
I'll live a long life.  
We'll give a dinner party,  
and all those who are sore at me, we'll take the quick  
embrace by the door.  
If Emil finds out, we'll invite Emil.

I'll tell them, tonight we'll feast.  
Boredom comes and goes, but we'll raise  
our drinks to Caravy Street.  
Our hands will mingle  
passing the baker's longest loaf.

## **To Angelina from Nikos in his Old Age**

The time comes, Angelina, and the day's blinking.

No sleeping around, no mother,  
nothing interesting about the weather.

We played hooky a lot and made gossip.

But I thought you liked it, cheating on Nisseem  
who became emperor of coffee -

    how'd he do it!

He was loaded, I was good in bed.

You got your rich husband,  
and for years my cock.

You fussed over the time I  
sprayed your new lilac dress twice in a row.

I loved your thick hair shaking  
at the sink as you rinsed your dress.

You're gray? So'm I,  
nobody's looking.

This is Trinidad. We were the left margin of Spain.  
It is evening and I have no money.

Once I was great and you wanted me.  
I surrender; I wanted you more.  
Nevermind Althea, nevermind Lucky  
from Kuala Lumpur,  
the Americans were just a lark, topless --  
what could I do?

You were a woman. Forgive me I didn't tell you,  
you were my spark, your lowcut bodice.  
Don't rant at me later if I wink at you in church.  
I, a Portuguese, wanted to claim Cervantes,  
so all my life I rode my horse.

### **It's a young country and we cannot bear to grow old**

James Baldwin Marilyn Monroe  
Marvin Gaye you could've sung the anthem  
at the next Superbowl  
We sing America You are  
magnificent and we mean  
we are heartbroken  
What fun we chase after it

Can't hurry go the Supremes  
Next that diva soprano  
after whom stagehands at the Met  
wore the t-shirt I survived the battle

We leave for a better job  
across the country wish you were here  
in this hotel two of us one  
we are with John Keats on his cot  
in the lone dictionary I'm falling again  
on dilemma's two horns  
If you are seducing another  
teach me to share you with humor  
Water in my bones and the sound  
of a midnight telephone Hello love  
I am coming I do not know  
where you sleep are you alone

We grow old look at this country  
its worn dungarees  
whitewashing picket fences or picking cotton  
stealing timber bullets prairies  
America's hard work have mercy  
fathers in order to form a more perfect  
some step forward some step back  
neighbor here's a seat  
through orange portals lit tunnels  
over coastal bridges brooklyn golden gate  
weather be bright wheels turn yes  
pack lightly we move so fast