

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.
When she returns, she'll say,
"Trinidad doesn't need more men like you!"
The whole street offers her consolation.
She can go to her mother's any time.
She has many aunts, too many:
hear them rail at my faults (pauper,
earns no money).

Some days I think, this day is all others.
I take my hat and go out.
I buy bread.
I eat it on the way to the cigarette stand.

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.

My husband, you screeched,

 he will kill me he will sniff this he
 will chase me out with the dog!

Boy was I a nut.

You at thirty, I forty-five,
and Sonia my wife. If she caught the slightest cold,

 they said, You poor angelic sufferer,
 that lousy rat Nikos slept with gorgeous whores.

Pow pow what a lawsuit.

Come on, Lina, we have cheering up to do.

Do the calculus. I'm eighty, you're a luscious sixty-five,
 church pillar,

voluptuous benefactor you are practically the Pope.

You think I'll stain your reputation.

 Lina little closer I want to breathe you.

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