

SHARANYA MANIVANNAN

---

Sestina: Two Names

When you come back to the city of two names one  
day, come and look for me. In a grove of yellow  
blossoms, a crescent in my hair and stars in my mouth,  
I'll have waited, without waiting, for rumor of change.  
If you lose your way, take the path of drought, not harvest,  
and when you get to the river, don't turn back as you cross.

When you enter the city, look for the sign of the cross,  
and beyond it, a forest thick with only one  
tree. Smoke will appear where once rose harvest.  
The city a gravestone on the old country of yellow  
arable. It is true that things have come to pass, and change.  
These are the omens to look for at the river's mouth:

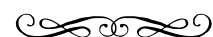
from the north, a bird with a rosary in its mouth,  
a sigil of opium seeds at the point of crossing.  
If you negotiate with a gondolier, let him keep the change.  
All rivers can be entered no more than once,  
even ours, that heavy swamp of darkening yellow.  
That which we have sown is that which we shall harvest.

When you arrive, I will call for the honey-gatherers' harvests.  
I will anoint your soles and sweeten your mouth,  
and give praise to the tree goddess of turmeric-yellow.  
When I pay my dues in silver to the priest in the cross-belt,  
don't be alarmed—since your departure I have learnt one  
skill: commerce, survival, the rules of exchange.

Some things through the years remain unchanged.  
Though the fields are parched, my heart has its harvest.  
In ash and cinder will sprout new life. Listen to me, beloved one,  
I will not deceive you. Bring your ears close as I mouth  
the words: I burnt the city but not the bridges you crossed;  
and lit for you a trail of lanterns flickering yellow.

In this hour, the light unpaints everything yellow.  
Day parts like a curtain. My changeling,  
behold the illusive line of nightfall. Step across.  
Take from my arms the weight of the harvest.  
Take the memory of burnt stars out of my mouth.  
In the city of two names, call me by my secret one.

Welcome, wanderer. Mouth marries mouth,  
under a sun of yellow,  
under a moon of harvest.



## ABOUT SHARANYA MANIVANNAN

---



Sharanya Manivannan is the author of *Witchcraft* (Bullfighter Books 2008), and her work has appeared in *Hobart*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Wasafiri*, *Drunken Boat*, and *Best of the Net*. She lives in Chennai, India, and maintains websites at [sharanyamanivannan.wordpress.com](http://sharanyamanivannan.wordpress.com) and [www.sharanyamanivannan.com](http://www.sharanyamanivannan.com).

HERON TREE

27 October 2013

[herontree.com/manivannan1](http://herontree.com/manivannan1)

