

Siam

by Sean Ferrell

Our city is really two cities, conjoined. One lives during the day, the other at night.

Those who live and breathe daytime air call the city by one name, a name which evokes the relative newness of the place, a name with words just barely invented. Those at night have a different name. They call it by words so old that breath comes hard, and faces become flushed. Words that require work and meaning. Those at night know their city is over-ripe.

At night the city is cleaned. The buildings themselves are moved, pulled down, and laid on their sides near the rivers that run along the city edges. They are sprayed with fire hoses until a stream of refuse spills from them. Flowers from weddings and funerals wash into the rivers, petals falling away from stems, their true purpose neutered by florists' scissors. Memos crumple under the water. Notes from lovers rip and run. Recipes and grease sluice from kitchens. Dust falls from crystal chandeliers.

The night workers straighten their backs at dawn, or at least try. They yawn and lift the bricks and mortar back into position. They spin the buildings to face the sun and dry them out. The docks and riverside are swept of any remaining books, ink or erasers. Calendars from past years are collected and burned to dry out the muddy puddles from the night's work.

The daytime citizens rise. They drink in the light and move onto the streets. They pester one another for space and complain of the traffic of hunched night workers, whose faces are turned toward the ground as they move home, running with their vices and drinks and faiths, returning to feed open mouths like graves.

