

# The Anatomy of Endings

by Anoushka Narendra



Even tender mornings are labor here,  
something to be fought for. Light must erode  
itself through a membrane of smog, thick  
and silent as blood. The newspaper once called  
this sheet of pollution *soup* and I imagined  
us all broiled and begging in a great vat of the city,  
our tongues shrinking into white onions and vermicelli.  
Still, in the sharp glaze of summer, we will learn  
to stand outside ourselves. To measure distance  
with past-tenses: *this was once the video rental store,*  
*some long-haired banyan trees, a boy.* My country  
is dressed as a body-sized nothing. Can one know  
crevices, interludes, before any language or name?  
The dark eyes of potholes. Urine-streaked alleys.  
I've forgiven the stench, the sting of it all—  
it as much mine as anyone else's. Stray dogs whip  
like ribbed arrows through metal carcasses, make feasts  
from boiled peanuts wrapped in damp tissue.  
We've all fed ourselves with the spill of something  
and called it enough. Yesterday it was the smoke  
I rinsed out from my hair. Tomorrow it will be a stranger  
with a face like an oil lamp—so burnished and flickering  
that I'll mistake him for a fallen sun. It's a dull hurt,  
to keep walking against such ordinary beauty. But  
there are sleepless borders to outrun, stubs of grief  
to be plucked from the dirt. My country is dressed  
as a tumor of cement and glass, multiplying lifelessly.  
All you can count on is the low whisper of passing limbs,  
fraught with warning: *remember, these scaffoldings were planted  
on someone's chest.*

Image: "Dog Walking" by Alice Pettway. "The Anatomy of Endings"  
was written by Anoushka Narendra for *Rattle's* Ekphrastic  
Challenge, November 2019, and selected as the Artist's Choice.