

# The View from the Café

by Matt Quinn



Photograph by Ana Prundaru. "Kamakura Beach, 1333" was written by Mary Kendall for *Rattle's* Ekphrastic Challenge, October 2015, and selected by Prundaru as the Artist's Choice winner.

Six men haul a jet ski out of a placid sea  
that's flashing cream-soda in the evening sun;  
they drag it up onto the beach and cover it  
in a shroud of plastic. And Paul says:

*I think that in some way we are all refugees*  
and leaves it hanging there in the salty breeze.  
So Jane steps in and tells of us of this dream she had  
where the whole world was packed inside a giant coracle,

except really it was only thousands of people  
that she saw, but in the dream she knew  
it was the population of the whole planet crushed  
together and drifting on an unending ocean

in a boat that might so easily tip over or break apart.  
She says that seen from above the bright colours  
of people's ethnic clothing against the blue-green sea  
made it all seem so beautiful it could have been a photo

in a Sunday magazine. We kick the metaphor about  
for a while as Paul wanders off to buy the next round  
of beers, and I store the image away just in case  
there's a poem I can slip it into later. Then John says

that surely we are all evicted from our homes  
at birth, squeezed naked and defenceless  
out into the cold and the clamour, the gate double-locked  
behind us by an angel with a flaming sword.

We watch the men emerge from the sea a second time,  
and Paul says that really, if you think about it,  
we've been refugees ever since we first dragged  
ourselves out of the ocean on makeshift limbs, choking

back the oxygen in our brand-new lungs. Meanwhile  
I'm working on something clever to say about Heidegger's  
notion of *unheimlichkeit* and how, existentially  
speaking, none of us is ever truly at home anywhere

in this world. Now the six men are back in the water  
herding the third empty jet ski up onto its trailer.  
Susan drains her beer and says she's never seen a refugee  
on a jet ski. I can't tell if she's bored of this game,

or is somehow trumping us all. We watch the sun sink  
into the waiting sea, then Jane calls for the bill.  
It's cold on the beach, and no one's brought a coat.  
We finish up our drinks and head for home.

