

Ripped Pants

Kate Atkinson

Always, I've wanted
to travel, up to the
top of the earth,
to the cold and snow
and whole days
that are completely
night.

Wrapped in layers
of wool, duck down,
animal warmth
and be on a boat
holding onto a rail
with gloved hands.

To stare at the sky
and see colours
ribboning, to see
green, pink, blue hazes
billow across the
starry blackness
we call space.

It's been a dream.
A bucket list thing.

On Saturday,
in the evening after hockey,
my flatmate and I
packed blankets, hot chocolate,
hot water bottles, gloves
duck down jackets and I
took my camera.

And we got on the
motorway near our house.
Veins pumping cars along.
We sang radio music —
Taylor Swift.
And came to Woodend Beach.

Gate closed, half a K
walk to the dunes.
Ahh bugger it, we'd driven
20 minutes. Let's walk.
We talked, saying the stars
looked nice. We'd heard there was
the strongest solar storm
in years.
They cut power before
it blew things apart.
Patchy darkness in houses
across the motu (island).

Up the dunes, over the lip.
Holy. Shit.
Pink-drenched sky. Green
on the blackened horizon.
The slap brushstroke of
the Milky Way overhead.
I couldn't breathe.
Rays poured from some
central point in the sky.
Poured towards us.
Colours rose and fell
and morphed.

Back long ago,
maybe the world was
ending.
But it's some geomagnetic
thing. Science.
Still, my flatmate said
it looked like light from
the sacred heart of Jesus.
I could believe it.
Ethereal.

Standing, eyes up.
I turned and turned and
laughed. A smile that burst
into the air.
A few others were down
there too.

Rippling hazes ballooned
in the sky. My feet were
in the sand.
Maybe Ranginui (sky father) was
Reaching toward Papatūānuku (earth
mother).
I could believe it.
Science felt like the
plainest explanation.

I ripped my pants on
driftwood in the excitement.
I cared, but hardly.
The sky was alive.
Cool air got in the hole.
We drank hot chocolate
under blankets. Under the stars.
This is it, I thought. Life.
I released my excited breath.
Peace flowed.
Pink faded to green to black.

People wandered back
over the dunes.
We stood, the breeze cooled my legs
through the hole in my pants.
We laughed.
I saw an aurora right here.
I saw an aurora on Woodend Beach.
Who would have thought.