

Aurora Borealis

by Jack Swenson

I needed a job while I went to school in SF. Got one out on the foggy avenues. I worked for a crazy lady who made books for blind kids. Not braille books; regular books. They were big print books for kids who could see a little.

We had an apartment on Nob Hill just a couple of blocks from Grace Cathedral. It was on the fourth floor of one of those buildings that are all up and down. You stood in our kitchen, looked down the hall, looked out a rear window, and you could see the East Bay; we had a fabulous view.

I say "we" because I had taken a bride by that time. Married a girl from Las Vegas. It wasn't a marriage made in Heaven, but we were getting along in those days, more or less.

One day I got a shock. I was walking back to the apartment after work, and I ran into a girl I knew when I lived in Minneapolis. She was lugging a basket of folded laundry. Yes, she lived out here now. Her apartment was right across the street.

I thought no more about it that day. I woke up that night thinking about it. I recalled the one night stand I'd had with the girl one balmy summer evening in Minneapolis. We lay on my bed in the moonlight, and I touched the nipples of her tiny breasts with the thumb and pinkie of one hand. She didn't want me to do that. "Do not make sport of me," she said.

I didn't see her for weeks, and then one day I ran into her on the street again and asked her in for a drink. My wife was in the hospital. Again. My wife had problems. A bad back, she said, but it was all in her head. It got worse when one of her friends died, a girl she went to high school with. The girl's family blamed The Pill.

My Midwest friend and I sat in my apartment taking in the view. It was a clear night, and you could see about a million lights. We chatted about this and that. She wasn't a talker. I remembered that

about her from before. She would sit in a group of people who were chattering like blackbirds and not say a word.

I told her she looked lovely. She did, too. When she got up to leave, at the door, I put my arms around her, and she leaned back against me. I kissed her hair. She covered my hands with hers. Her hands were cold. "Call me," she whispered. I said I would.

When she was gone, I poured some more bourbon into my glass, and stood at the window in the tiny living room looking out. The bridge, Treasure Island, the East Bay in the distance. It was like watching the show of lights on a winter night in Minnesota.

