Love

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By Maurice Kirby

Wherein one man still believes women are beautiful and—true

THE midnight moon was high and bright and smiled upon me as I drove. For the moment there seemed to be just two of us in all the universe—the gnarled old man alone in his moon and I alone in my car. And both of us, I knew, were dreaming of the lady we had just escorted home. We worked together well, I and the old man, for I had youth and he experience. He never changed his course, or so it seemed, while I, like the transient fox, would next week stalk fresh game in different hunting grounds. The streets ahead seemed floating roads hung through a trelliswork of leafy boughs and soft, caressing shadows. A timid moonbeam filtered through somehow and paused awhile upon the shiny hood, then disappeared inside to mingle with the motor's rhythm and emerge, finally,
no longer light but music played on pipes of steel by flames of gasoline. I felt a warm wave of contentment buoy me up, and something told me I was part of a great brotherhood of men returning from a well-spent evening.

I saw a young man standing on a corner, waiting for a bus I knew would never run again that night. I stopped, and he thanked me as he climbed into the seat.

“You saved me a long walk home,” he said in a husky voice, which made me look at him again. He was a powerful fellow, with ham-like hands and a square brick of a chin, and the glow of dreaming youth in his eyes. His clean-cut face bespoke sincerity in everything he did. We rode a quiet while beneath the moon before he spoke again.

“It's a wonderful night, isn’t it?” he said, and I knew that I had met another member of the great brotherhood. No pica-yune details of introduction were necessary; the moonlight let us understand each other.

“Did you have a good time?” I asked.

“Well, not tonight,” he said deliberately, “I had to study at the library. But I know she stayed home and thought of me. She had work to do, too.”

Here, I saw, was a man truly in love. The hushed gleams of moonlight, the haunting, almost living singsong of the tires on the pavement as we rolled along, the delicious, perfumed tang of the midnight air, everything just then seemed to exist for romance only. And his presence gave a meaning, a fulfillment to the muted promises and throbbing whispers of the night.

“You must,” I said, “have a wonderful woman.”

His warm, faithful eyes sought out the moon. He seemed to drink it in, to look completely through it and beyond, as though he knew its mysteries. There was a rippling of muscles along his jaw, a quiver of the great cords of his neck.

“She's the only girl in the world,” he said softly, “and she wouldn't look at another man. She's crazy about me.”

The echo of his words lingered an instant in my ears, and I had a flitting understanding of the whys of many things—why
men fight and struggle so that they may have some place to call "home" and something that is "security," and why the world really turns around. It seemed perfect somehow—just right. The implicit faith which he expressed . . . that wonderful understanding . . . the resonance of two human souls. I said as much to him.

He relaxed into his seat and seemed to expand visibly. I saw that he was going to take me into his confidence, and I felt honored.

"You know," he said, "it's perfect. Sometimes I think to myself, 'This is too good to last. It's heaven, and you have to die before you get there. And then I think of her, and I know she's so true and beautiful and everything, and I just sort of feel warm and tingling all over. Ah, it's a wonderful feeling. It's the greatest thing in life.'"

A thought came to him, and he tightened a little.

BUT if I ever thought she ran around with anybody else, I don't know what I'd do. I think I'd go nuts. Why, if I heard of another man . . ." The merest hint of green danced and flickered in his eyes. His huge, businesslike hands gripped the dashboard and almost bent it with the force of his emotion. It was as if he had forgotten everything but love. He said simply,

"I'm afraid I'd kill him."

"—kill him!" A thrilly shiver scampered up my back. But it was a warm shiver, a subconscious paean of discovery that there were really women in the world who merited such high fidelity, and men who would give it no matter what the cost. I was glad that there were ladies who were true as well as glamorous, and that there were men who loved so strongly that their passion could find expression only in the absolute units of life and death. The world was a better place to live in somehow, and love was sweeter to anticipate.

"I'd like to see her sometime," I said after a bit.

He fairly glowed with pride. "Here—," his massive hand went into his pocket, "here's her picture. Isn't she a honey?"

And he held out a snapshot of the lady I had just escorted home.