

The moments between

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THE MOMENTS BETWEEN

Robert C. Ackworth, *The Moments Between*, a paperback-novel, 1959, Hillman Books, 535 Fifth Avenue, New York 17. N.Y.

In the late Fifties there was a tendency to be found in paperbacks to introduce quite a few homosexual characters, mostly minor figures, into the plots. Needless to say, they were always a bad lot, either criminals or dope fiends or whatever the authors could think of. It therefore comes as a surprise to see the tables turned in one of these volumes. In Robert C. Ackworth's novel, «The Moments Between», the nearly pornographic details of description are used for the heterosexual figures in the book; the homosexuals for once get a fairly decent treatment. The «hero» of the book is a homosexual teacher at a small American university and is friends with another teacher, also a homosexual. The dilemma Paul Curry find himself in is described understandingly and sensitively. The problem of a teacher's homosexuality is faced sincerely and though, naturally, there is no «happy end», at least we do not face yet another suicide at the close of the book. We recommend this paperback highly to our readers.

With the publisher's kind permission, we quote below three pages from this novel. Paul Curry and his friend Ted Gaines return to their small university after a weekend's «cruising» in the nearby town:

«It was very late, and even though Ted Gaines was driving his Chevrolet convertible very fast, Paul Curry doubted that they would make it back to Eddingtonville much before dawn. That would look cute, if someone saw him strolling into the residence hall with the milkman, Paul thought.

Slumped in the seat, Paul rested his head against the cracked leather upholstery. He had a slight headache and he felt bleary-eyed and he was sorry he had gone on this wild goose chase. Not that something hadn't happened. But he felt let down.

For one thing, it was necessary for him to acknowledge to himself that he couldn't take these all-night shenanigans the way he'd been able to as a kid. He was a little irritated with Ted for prolonging the trip so much. In Carlston they had split up upon arrival and had agreed to meet at Ted's car at two, and Paul had rushed through things to get there on the dot. But Ted hadn't gotten there until after three, until after Paul had crushed half a pack of cigarettes under his heel. Ted had been sheepish about his tardiness, had explained that time just slipped away.

But Paul had been angry about being kept waiting. Now, however, after driving for a half hour in almost total silence, he felt the unreasonable resentment begin to ebb from him. He guessed he *ought* to understand.

He turned to look at Ted, who had judiciously kept silent during Paul's sulk. «Why do we do it?» Paul demanded.

«Good question,» Ted said. «We do it because we have biological urges. We do it because we want attention. We do it because we want to affirm that we can still get somebody. We do it—hell, we could go on all night as to why we do it, couldn't we?» Ted laughed.

«How'd you make out?» Paul said.

«Well, I cruised the park first thing, nothing but a bunch of old queens there. So I dropped in at Little Harry's and picked me out a sailor to drop the heavy hand on, and I wasted a beer on him before I learned he wasn't having any—seemed he liked the lacey type. I was thinking of hightailing it over to the Bird Cage then, because the crew at Little Harry's was pretty scroungy, but all of a sudden this doll walked in—a doll but not the fruity type, you know what I mean—fresh and good-looking. Well, everybody in the joint was trying to rub knees with this kid and it took me a long time, a hell of a long time, before I finally walked out with him. He had a room in a boarding house and we had to sneak in there and play it quiet. Maybe *that's* why it was disappointing. Anyway, it *was* disappointing—you work for hours, and then get nothing. So I couldn't get out of there fast enough.»

«That all?»

«No. I met somebody else, and this I couldn't resist, lousy as I felt by then. I was heading for the car when I saw this kid standing on the corner, and for a moment he looked like Jimmy—you know, the one I had last year and who's in the Army now. Well, this one made up for the disappointment in the first one. Kid named Joe, Joe Watts. I liked him and I took his phone number. Might strike up something heavy there. He *does* remind me of Jimmy. I *am* kind of sick of this cruising around. One-nighters are for the birds.»

«Yes,» said Paul, firmly. «But there's some freedom from emotional stress that way. I mean, you meet someone, you fulfill a brief passion, and you're on your way.» He stirred in the seat. «When you get involved emotionally with someone in this game, then you're really on shaky ground. Nine times out of ten, something plops and the relationship ends abruptly.» He sighed. «It certainly isn't a world of security.»

«No, that it isn't,» Ted said in a serious tone. «How'd you make out tonight?»

«I made out,» Paul said flatly. «First, I went to the Bird Cage, but most of the desirables were already taken by the time I got there, so I went to the Underground. I met a Naval ensign there—maybe he reminded me of someone—same thing you felt about the kid who looked like your Jimmy. Anyway, we went to his hotel. As nice as the guy was, I couldn't wait to get out of there—same thing as you felt about your first one tonight. A huge disappointment. I was disgusted with myself for even going to Carlton tonight.»

«Sure,» said Ted. «The big letdown. That's the way it bounces unless there's love. And Christ it's hard to find love. It's hard enough to keep it after you find it. But you keep looking for it. And that's why you cruise, really—more than just the urge, more than just the need of reassurance that somebody's attracted to you. You think, way down deep, that the next guy you meet might be the one you're going to love.»

«Yes,» said Paul, looking out the window at the patchwork of fields, umber under the dying autumn. «I felt a little edgy in the Bird Cage tonight,» he went on. «I think one of the campus belles was there, one of those young snips that swish on the Triangle. He looked familiar.»

«Unless you're strictly monastic, you're bound to run into them.» Ted sighed. «It's tough for everybody, but it's especially tough for teachers. But, I don't know, think of all the Boy Scout leaders and senators and movie stars and street cleaners and taxi drivers who are like us and who are finding it tough, too.»

They arrived in Eddingtonville just as morning was hinting. On the way to the residence hall, they drove past the Sig house and Paul turned to look back at the rose-tinted windows of the officers' quarters.

«I want love,» he said.

«Hell,» said Ted. «Who doesn't?».»



Drawing by Mario de Graaf