



The Conference on Beautiful Moments (Johns Hopkins: Poetry and Fiction)

Richard Burgin

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The *Chicago Tribune* has called Richard Burgin "among our finest artists of love at its most desperate," a critic for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* dubbed him "one of America's most distinctive storytellers... I can think of no one else of his generation who reports the contemporary war between the sexes with more devastating wit and accuracy." Through an extraordinarily vivid and variegated set of characters, *The Conference on Beautiful Moments*, Burgin's sixth collection of stories, continues his daringly dark yet often humorous exploration of these themes, as well as our mysterious quest for truth, success, and identity.

In the gently satiric "Jonathan and Lillian," a movie star throws a dinner party with very different meanings for her biographer, her butler and ex-lover, and herself. In "Cruise," an aging straight man befriends a young gay man. Together they meet on their cruise ship's deck to confess to each other "the worst thing they have ever done." In the title story, a journalist sent to investigate a conference formerly devoted to discussing beauty in the arts discovers it has turned into something considerably more sinister.

In *The Conference on Beautiful Moments*, Burgin writes with equal compassion and insight about the homeless and the wealthy, prostitutes and businessmen, an autistic child and an art forger. His characters are masterfully illuminated by their interior narratives, which burst sharply into conversations at once intimate and calculated.

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