

Abstract

The collection of stories in *Harmony House* is linked by setting and characters. A vintage house in New Orleans is converted into four apartments rented by young professionals who grapple with problems that often trouble young adults.

In “Encore” Celeste Tyler Percy, an intellectual and ballerina in graduate school in Maryland, returns to New Orleans during her mother’s illness. Celeste and her father dodge old tensions, and Celeste again is vexed by a former high school rival. Facing trouble with family and the old nemesis, Celeste struggles over whether she and her husband should stay up East or return home after his Air Force tour. Her father befriends a boisterous contractor who is renovating an old house on Harmony Street.

“The Wench Upstairs” treats romantic complications. Kevin Kennan, a young lawyer unlucky in love, rents a unit in the renovated house after his wife leaves him. Devastated, he soon falls for an exchange student, while sparring with a feisty hippie neighbor, Meara Burke. Kevin’s romance with the French student Monique craters. He and Meara share mutual attraction and interests, but both are opinionated and stubborn. Meara fears that dating Kevin will force her to join a circle of snobs, while Kevin worries that blunt Meara will alienate his friends.

In “Somebody to Lean On,” Robin Woods Wright left a job she loved when her husband Adam secured a transfer to New Orleans. Though she empathizes with Adam’s need for distance from his father, a wealthy planter and prominent state legislator, Robin is so bored in New Orleans that she takes a job with an arrogant lawyer. He tries to seduce, then rape, her. Adam Wright is a former all-SEC fullback with a white knight complex. Ignoring all advice, Adam evens the score with the would-be rapist and is

arrested. Robin is torn over whether to seek the Senator's help as, pregnant, she doubts Adam's readiness for parenthood.

In "Ritornello" Celeste and Eugene Percy return to New Orleans. A promised job falls through, and the now-unemployed musician and ballerina live with her parents. Celeste learns that her high school enemy caused Eugene to lose his teaching position. Regretting their return, the couple work at menial jobs and lament the loss of friends and independence. Reconnecting with a Creole friend, Celeste and Eugene seek acceptance into a new group and a niche in her home town.

In "The Names of Saints" medical intern Sam Wright and his writer-wife Katie Kennan have a young son. Katie wants a daughter, but a medical condition precludes more children. Sam, a devout Catholic, finds a baby girl in a hospital dumpster. A chaplain wants to "help" Sam adopt, but Sam has deep misgivings, and he fears the girl as a rival to his son. Katie battles maternal guilt and anger at God, while Sam debates whether he is "supposed" to adopt an injured Asian-American baby.

More than an address links the characters. Robin befriends Meara. Katie is Kevin's sister and Robin's best friend. Adam and Sam are cousins. The Creole musician Martine knows Celeste from high school and Katie from graduate school. Kevin and Eugene bond over music, and Katie and Celeste over literature. Celeste and Meara's dads are friends. Participating in one another's stories, the young adults share challenges, uncertainty, and healing which, like all human healing, is partial and makeshift, as fragile as human hope.