ForeWord Reviews

Recovering Charles
Jason F. Wright
Shadow Mountain
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With the recent aftermath of Hurricane Katrina looming in the background, Wright's new novel hovers delicately between the reality of the hurricane's catastrophic damage to the city of New Orleans, and the intertwined lives of a few holdouts remaining in the city. As the broken residents hunt for survivors, successful New York photographer Luke Millward arrives to search for his missing father, Charles, a former architect who has long been absent from Luke's life.

This *New York Times* bestselling author cuts deeply into the soul of New Orleans residents, and weaves a touching, if somewhat sentimental, tale of paternal love and emotional resurrection. Luke's personal journey to New Orleans reveals much about his father's recent life, including his recovery from alcoholism, a fascinating and mysterious fiancée, a revived musical career, and a group of intensely loyal friends who make it their personal mission to reacquaint Luke with his father.

Effectively employing flashbacks to Luke's idyllic childhood, the slow deterioration of his relationship with his father is played out in touching vignettes, leading up to the suicide of Luke's mother following an inconsolable bout of depression. In his distinctively abrupt style, Wright easily describes his father's emotional turmoil soon after his mother's death: "My father clung to his complicated, braided rope of faith. He said one day Mother's soul would surface again…" His father's subsequent plunge into alcoholism becomes the basis for Luke's inability to commit to his longtime girlfriend, as well as the motivation that drives his career ambitions as a Manhattan photographer.

Wright has previously published three novels, *The James Miracle*, *Christmas Jars* and *The Wednesday Letters*, and is also a well-known political/social editorialist. In *Recovering Charles*, mystery and romance readers will be hooked on Luke's puzzling search and his encounter with an exotic mystery woman while in New Orleans. Readers favoring realism will suffer Luke's pain through aptly described recollections of his childhood. With a harsh dose of reality, Wright is accomplished in his use of imagery, as his descriptions of New Orleans are often graphic and moving. His plethora of New Orleans characters are intriguing and occasionally puzzling, if not particularly inspiring. In a surprising twist, the unexpected conclusion leads Luke to a place he never imagined, and leaves the reader with much to ponder.

Amy Falberg