

Port Townsend author focuses on smell in coming-of-age novel

Erica Bauermeister, the best-selling Port Townsend author whose novel, “The School of Essential Ingredients,” led to a popular sequel, “The Lost Art of Mixing,” has moved beyond what had proven to be a winning combination of food and friendship to strike out in a different direction.

Her new book, “The Scent Keeper,” is a coming-of-age novel that begins on a remote island inhabited by only two people. And yet, as the title suggests, Bauermeister still places a premium on the power of our senses. In this book, she focuses on the sense of smell.

Emmeline has grown up on a remote, forested island in a cold, saltwater sea. Her father brought her to this uninhabited island as an infant. They live in a cabin lined with drawers – each holds a small vial containing a rolled up slip of paper that is imbued with a unique

This Week's Book

“The Scent Keeper” By Erica Bauermeister

St. Martin's Press – 320 pp — \$26.99



Bauermeister

fragrance.

Her father has a machine – a small, sleek, silver box – that he unwraps only once a season. When he activates it, it captures

the current scent of the place on a small square of paper that rolls out of the machine like an old Polaroid photo. And that, too, is rolled up and sealed into one of the vials and

tucked away in its own drawer.

Life on the island involves plenty of subsistence work – foraging for food, chopping wood – but it is also a place to learn and grow. Emmeline’s father teaches her how to read the signs of the forest and the

sea, and how to read books. Once a month they go down to a sheltered cove on the island and find supplies – left by a mermaid, her father tells her.

As Emmeline grows older, she begins to ask more questions, which leads to a confrontation with her father that propels her into the world at large, without him at her side.

She is taken in by Henry and Colette, a kind couple who operates a mom-and-pop summer resort. They send her to school, where she doesn’t fit in well with most of the kids. There is one boy, however, who is also a misfit, and he and Emmeline become close. But Fisher comes from a dysfunctional family with an abusive dad, and when he can take no more, Fisher finally runs away.

At the same time, Emmeline is trying to figure out her own background, and why her dad absconded with her to the island all those years ago.

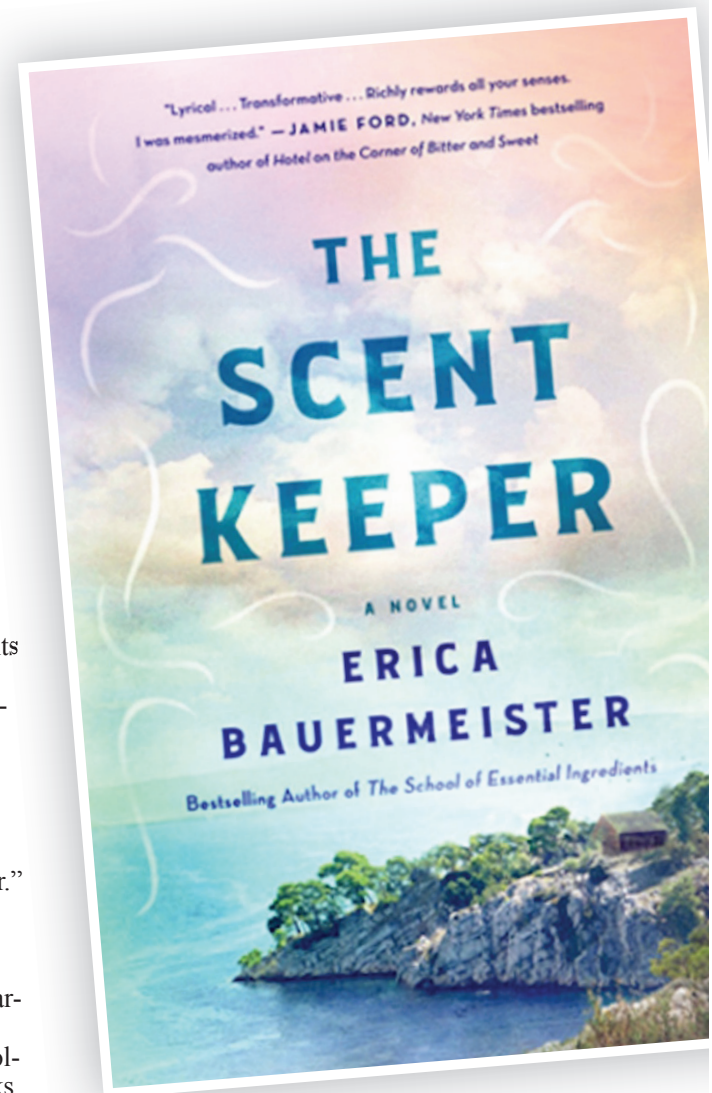
Eventually she, too, leaves the safe nest that Henry and Colette have tried to create for her, to seek more answers in The City.

“The Scent Keeper” is an ambitious mash-up of fable, teen identity quest and family strife, lavishly provisioned with Bauermeister’s descriptions of accompanying fragrances that “mingled and danced and whispered. Their scents slipped into yours...”

And, Emmeline discovers, the scents can invoke memory and manipulate behavior.

From beginning to end, some nagging questions arise in “The Scent Keeper.” Underneath the olfactory enchantments, there are some harder truths.

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at bkmonger@nwlink.com



Author Erica Bauermeister's coming-of-age novel "The Scent Keeper."



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