

The Moonlight Emporium: Further Adventures of the Ravenwood Clan

Violeta F. Sterner

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Sterner has created an alluring and mysterious heroine.

A woman battling medical problems rediscovers a romantic relationship that transcends time in Violeta F. Sterner's *The Moonlight Emporium: Further Adventures of the Ravenwood Clan*. Protagonist Kate must make sense of, and find a place in, her new life as the mate of the clan leader. Her hardships with her health and the politics of the local town add intrigue to the themes of love, hate, and magic that come together in the intricate novella.

Kate is introduced in an esoteric recap of the previous book that has her sustaining a head injury after she stumbles upon and saves children trapped in a school bus. Though it's somewhat unclear where the recap of the previous book ends, Kate finds herself a mate in Ravenwood, the head of the clan, and the two decide to get married in spite of Kate's head injuries. Kate's bizarre journey includes run-ins with the local DA, named Santini, child abusers, and an FBI crime scene investigation.

This novella reads as an inchoate outline of a story that is generally difficult to decipher because of vague plot elements that are mentioned but never developed, or things that are mentioned and summarized within a few sentences or pages. The Moonlight Emporium, for example, is a huge store that is described as "a large and fascinating place." Though mentioned in the title, the relevance of the emporium; its owner, Stella; and Mr. Po, who makes the potions sold there, is unclear.

The time period and setting are vague, although the book describes a mountain scene, Kate choosing Ravenwood in some sort of ritual, ("Kate had dropped into the middle of the clan, and Ravenwood had claimed her"), and Ravenwood and Kate having met many times in previous lives. Mentions of the corrupt district attorney, the FBI investigation, and the shoes that Kate wants for her wedding ("a British tan in a nice 2, maybe 2.5 inch heel") are extremely jarring because there appears to be no relationship between any of these elements.

The undeveloped plot is also obvious in the first of two sudden mentions of child abuse, when a young boy thanks Kate for saving the trapped children on behalf of the whole town: "Some of its most prominent members and one butt-fucking SOB, she thought. She wondered if the prominent community members knew what Mr. Miller did every night. She thought not." Though Mr. Miller's son is brought up several times later, questioning what his father did to him, this theme does not further the plot in any obvious way.

Though there is allure in the mystery of Kate's past and hints of Ravenwood's personal magic, for example with the insinuation that he can change his physical form, an expanded narrative that extends beyond the fifty-some pages of this book would give characters a chance to be developed so the reader could really appreciate Kate's struggles, Ravenwood's strength, and the depth of their relationship.

Romance and mystery readers may find appeal in *The Moonlight Emporium*'s story of never-ending love coupled with secrecy in a small town.

MAYA FLEISCHMANN (January 31, 2014)

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