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Classic Celtic Fairy Tales

John Matthews, editor
Ian M. Daniels, illustrator
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Renowned author and lecturer on the Celtic and Arthurian tradition, Matthews has searched the almost forgotten archives of Scotland, Wales and Ireland for the very best fairy tales in the Celtic tradition. The result is this companion volume to Tales of the Celtic Otherworld (1998): a compilation which recaptures the beliefs of bygone eras and reminds its readers of the loss of oneness with the land, sea, nature and even one another.

A few of the tales, such as “Beira,” “Queen of Winter” and “The Legend of Llyn-Y-Fan-Fach” are accounts based on folk-memory: tales passed on to explain certain events—in these stories winter itself and the ancestral lineage of local doctors, respectively. Many, however, are typical of fairy tales found in other parts of the world and Arthurian in nature: “one year and a day” journeys involving tasks that must be completed by the hero in order to break curses or destroy evil creatures—and usually to win the hand of a royal maiden. Three of the tales stand out: “The Princess of Land-Under-Waves” and “In the Kingdom of Seals” for the intricate descriptions of the underwater kingdoms and “The Stones of Plouvinec” for its mention of the religious protection against evil gained from the form of the Celtic cross.

A beautiful asset to this collection—one which cannot possibly be overlooked—is the instantly recognizable artistry of illustrator Ian Daniels. More than twenty-five images reflect the intriguing ethereal quality to these seventeen tales. Readers will find themselves returning to these illustrations—just as they did with their favorite picturebooks as children—making this collection one that will be read often.

Though at times some of the stories seem disjointed, detailed explanations and interpretations by Matthews follow each story for clarification and a deeper understanding of the Celtic traditional beliefs. Not only is this an excellent book for adults, parents will enjoy reading them to children.
NELLY HEITMAN (September / October 1999)

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