ForeWord Reviews

JUVENILE FICTION

Fireside Stories: Tales for a Winter's Eve
Caitlin Matthews
Helen Cann, illustrator
Barefoot Books
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"When the nights grow long and the days grow short, when summer is a distant memory and the cold and darkness of winter an ever-present reality, it is good to sit by the fireside and tell stories," the author writes. There's no better place to start than with this inviting collection of eight folktales from Europe and North America. Beginning with Halloween, it continues with the first snowfall, New Year's arrival, Twelfth Night, and concludes with spring's onset.

The stories range from the familiar Russian "Babushka," in which a childless yet loving old woman follows the Three Kings to find the Christ-child, to the lesser-known "The Cantor of the Trees," another Russian tale in which a young Orthodox Jewish boy's prayers and devotion save a huddle of trees from harsh winter storms. The stories also comprise many formats, from "The Bag of Warmth," a Slavey creation tale from Canada in which a wolf, fox, bobcat, and other animals steal the sun from the bear and return warmth to the land. In the mysterious Scottish tale, "The Lonely Boatman," a fisherman encounters unfortunate consequences when he breaks a promise on Halloween night.

A prolific writer on Celtic and British mythology, author Matthews is a writer, singer, and storyteller in Oxford, England. Some of her titles for children include *Celtic Memories* and *The Barefoot Book of Princesses*. Also no stranger to folklore is illustrator Cann, who was trained in fine art and illustration at the University of Wales. Her artwork has appeared in such titles as *Brigid's Cloak: An Ancient Irish Story* and *The Lady of Ten Thousand Names: Goddess Stories from Many Cultures*. In this collection, she employs watercolor, marbled papers, and other media to create brightly colored, patterned illustrations and borders with sumptuous attention to local detail.

The author introduces each tale with a brief reference to the time of year and culture. She ends with source notes, which provide more information about the stories' legacies.

While older elementary and middle school students will have no problems taking on these stories independently, the author's narrative style is most conducive for group readings.

Gather round! (September)

Angela Leeper