
Review of Daughter of the Forest

Review of Daughter of the Forest, Book One of The Sevenwaters Trilogy
by Juliet Marillier

Imagine Robin Hobb at the top of her game with a strong Celtic twist and you have Juliet Marillier's world. This is High Fantasy as it should be and so often isn't. Not only that, Marillier manages to prolong the magic so that the second and third volumes in this haunting series are every bit as good as this first book.

Set in Ireland sometime during the Dark Ages, Sorcha, youngest of seven children is the only girl. As her mother died giving birth to her, the children run wild among the forest surrounding their home. While their chieftain father spends his time fighting the Britons, their childhood is idyllic as they bond into a tightknit unit while exploring the forest, streams and lake and communing with the spirits protecting their home. Being the youngest and a girl, her brothers take it upon themselves to protect her. However, when evil overwhelms her fey, clever brothers, it falls to Sorcha's determined courage to try and save them. Narrated in first person viewpoint, Sorcha's adventures, which take her across the water to England, gripped me right to the end.

Marillier's characterisation is absolutely spot-on with her main protagonist. Through her eyes, we are given atmospheric descriptions of the ancient forests and glimpses of the Otherworld as well as the everyday chores she performs, without any lessening of pace or narrative tension. Her world-building is extremely effective with a varied cast of complex characters. Unlike too many books in this genre, the author manages to depict the clash of cultures between the Celtic druids and the new Christian faith starting to displace them, without subjecting her readers to pages of ancient lore or tedious explanation. The English household Sorcha finds herself in is also a strong contrast to the magical Irish landscape.

The unfussy writing style allows this compelling tale to bowl along at a good clip, which it richly deserves. The storyline is strong – with echoes of the Grimm tales and Marillier's evident expertise in this period of history giving the cracking plot a resonance that makes it into a stay-up-till-2am page-turner.

Of course, I would have preferred... Um. Nope. Can't do it. This is the paragraph where I suggest an improvement where Marillier could have tweaked the style/characterisation/pace, etc. And I can't think of a single thing I'd rather she'd done differently. This is a wonderful story, superbly written.

If you enjoy classical fantasy at all – or even if you normally don't (it's certainly not my favourite genre) this is a must-read series. I'm delighted to announce that on going onto her website, I've discovered that Marillier is working on a fourth Sevenwaters book. Hurrah!

10/10