

Today's Date: 21/02/16

Feast of the Fires by Harriet Smart.

'Janey-mac' I say to myself as another one of ma's hand sown buttons came undone and hit the wet mud where it sinks like quick sand. My legs are burning and sore and I know that I will fall down any second now. These dirty trousers are sticking and grabbing at my legs. 'I don't know why ma want's me at the high king of Tara's castle so early. The sun is only coming up now. I quickly stop talking to myself, da is always telling me off about it. 'It's the first sign of madness" he says. Soon I reach the drawbridge of the castle and already there is a huge crowd of ordinary people like you and me waiting to be let in. So that is why ma wanted me here this early, so I would be near the front of the banquet hall. Within the hour there is hundreds upon hundreds of people there. While I am waiting as everybody else, I can't help but look at what everyone is wearing. They are all in their best clothes, well when I say best clothes I mean the only other thing they have to wear besides their raggedly, moth eaten ordinary clothes. I look at myself wearing an old black pair of trousers that stop half way down my thigh and an old waist coat that has no buttons. So this morning ma had to find every shirt in the house (which is only two) and resew the buttons on to that. One nearly fell off while I was running, but it's staying on well enough. Under I have a dirty grey shirt.



As I try to push myself to the front of the crowd, people are elbowing and shouting at each other. 'Hey' snarled a voice, I look behind me but the fiery ginger haired man was talking to someone else. But then he goes over to the other man and shouts 'I was here first, go to the back of the crowd'. By the way he was slurring I could tell he was overly drunk. He grabs him by the collar and throws him on the ground. No one wanted to fight and so every- one scatters as I am left in an open space with the angry drunken man. People make a large circle around us, the man on the ground is pale in the face and shivering. Ma told me not to get into trouble, and here I was right in the middle of a fight. 'Dam it' I say under my breath, 'I am going to do extra chores and see the back of my fathers hand again'. 'What did you say mister' barked the drunken man. I looked at him in fear. Suddenly out of nowhere he charged like a bull his spit slobbering as he ran. I didn't know what to do, I shut my eyes and took a step to the left. The man didn't notice and flung himself straight off the draw bridge. For a moment everybody was silent and looking down into the water, all you hear is the last words the man spoke 'Curse you, curse all of you.' And then nothing. I was very shook up and wanted to go home to the crannog. But that would mean double chores for me.

The big iron barred gate opened and everyone rushed inside the castle. In the rush I met my friend Daragh. 'My ma was chatting to Mrs. O'Neill and she told me to look out for a saint that was going to be coming' he explained "no way" I didn't believe that for one second, in a saint, an actual real live saint. If that was true I definitely glad I stayed.

"Janey Mac" I gasped "its huge" the banquet room had fire torches stuck from the walls, animal skins were hung from the roof and there was every kind of stuffed animal you could think of. The high King sat on his wooden carved throne at the top of the room. Ordinary people who are servants to him run up and down to and from his throne. "mmmm I hum as a waft of the glorious food comes this way". Soon the feast of the fires began and everyone was celebrating the beginning of summer. Food, drink and laughter filled the banquet hall. I was having a great time. "Oh look I think I see the saint over there" I tell Daragh sarcastically. The high king of Tara stood

up and shushed us all. After a long speech he told us all to go out to the Hill of Tara. There was a mad rush as everyone fled the castle and I lost Daragh. On top of the hill King Loíguire ginger hair flew back as the wind blew ferociously. Everyone was talking and chattering excitedly. Traditionally King Loíguire will light the fire that is used to light the other smaller fires. Everyone was ready to celebrate the beginning of summer and welcome the light and forget the darkness. Some servants were striking the flint as we all watched in silence. Panic came to the servants' face, when the fire wouldn't light for him. "What is taking you so long" boomed the king's voice over the hills. The servant jumped and the stone tore across his flesh, blood poured like water down his arm and hand. He shrieked and ran down into the crowd. Everybody watched as the King picked up the flint. Strike one, nothing... Strike two... a crackle, Strike 3. Everyone gasped as a man in his early thirties stepped out from the gathered people. "It won't light because, there is only one true GOD" says the man to King Loíguire. "God wants us to believe without seeing, he calls this Faith". "And why should I believe you" mocked King Loíguire. A grin on his face. "You have nothing to prove to us that your God exists". "All you have to do" explains the man is believe. I believe God is always with me, and because I believe I am stronger in myself". "You said the fire won't light because of your God, show me then if you believe, your God will make it happen". I could see that King felt confident. This man was not stronger than he was. But as much as King Loíguire tried the fire would not light. After trying as much as possible the king stopped. "The flint" he said "it's too old" and he trusted it at the man.

"I believe, I believe" said the man under his breath. Strike one, nothing..... Strike two, nothing.....Strike three, suddenly there were flames, a glow of light and a beautiful crackling sound. A triumphant smile came to his face. "The power of God is everywhere" he shouts. The crowd didn't know what to do. Should we cheer for the man, or be on the King's side. The king slowly walked over to him. "Tell me your name" he bellows. "Patrick" the man answers "Saint Patrick". The crowd cheered and clapped. I feel so bad for not believing Daragh but I also can't wait to tell my two year old sister Ciara. She will be soooo jealous. "Hey" the King barked "I am still the Ruler". The crowd went silent again. "Patrick why are you here, just to prove that your God is the only true God." "No" said Patrick "I have come here to tell and share my beliefs". King Loíguire thought about it for a moment. "Fine you may share your beliefs with Ireland but I however am not converting". Clapping and cheering echoes down and across the hills. Soon the fire is lit and into the flames were thrown a huge pile of twigs and dry leaves. The celebrations were underway again. After the sun started to set I began my way home again. I can't wait to tell

ma and da about everything, well not absolutely everything. I finally reach home and as soon as I open the rotted door to the crannog Ma rushes over to greet me with a huge hug. I hug her back, glad to be home safe and sound. Ciara is on the kitchen table playing with her doll. I wink at her as I make my way over to Da. She giggles, still amazed at how I do it. Da looks up from his wood carving and laughs at the state of me. "Were you in a fight or something" he laughs. I feel myself going red. "Don't be laughing at him óran, he has had a long day and is tired. Dad goes back to his wood work as my Ma heats some hot goats milk on the open fire. It's my favourite but I am tired, so I say goodnight and tell Ma I don't want any. "I will hear about how you got on in the morning then" she says looking disappointed. As I plod into the only other room we have, I remember to talk to Daragh in the morning. As my head hits the pillow and my yes flutter close, all I can think of is the angry, red checked drunken mans face as he falls into the water and the absolutely fantastic day I have had. Before I know it all memories from today are pushed to the back of my mind for tomorrow and I have the best sleep I have had in ages.

