

In Word and Thread

A letter to

*Catherine De Le Voye*

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MICCA

*Dear Catherine,*

Sixty years.

I linger over your age longer than I might have done in the past. I am over sixty myself. An age that can so easily seem like little more than a number in an old document feels very different to me.

I know how much life can fit into sixty years.

You were married to Jean De Robertmazure, whom people called Monsieur. You lived in Ellezelles. History has preserved little more than that about your life.

And yet your name feels close.

I live in Ellezelles too. I walk through the same landscape in which you once lived. I see the hills, the fields, the roads between the houses. Of course the village has changed. Four centuries cannot simply be bridged. But sometimes there is a strange awareness that you too looked up at the sky here, watched the seasons come and go, grew older in the same place I now call home.

The final days of your life were recorded more carefully than the sixty years that came before them.

You were questioned for two days. Then came the sentence; corde et feu. On 26 October 1610 you were strangled and burned in Ellezelles. You died that day together with Agnès De Le Plache, Martine De Le Vigne, Quintine De Le Censserye, Evette Van Den Kerchove and Madeleine Lestarquy.

Six women from the same village.

By now I know your names well. I write them, speak them aloud, make something with my hands for each of you. Perhaps that is also why the distance of four hundred years sometimes feels smaller than I would expect.

For you, I knitted a sweater.

I chose seven colours. Wheat, grey, brown, anthracite, orange and black run in broad bands around the body. No colour remains. One gives way to the next and sometimes a colour returns later.

Between them I knitted moons.

A slender crescent grows into a full moon and then wanes again. Over and over. I did not place them neatly one above the other. They shift between the stripes, as though every cycle follows the same movement and yet is never quite the same.

The triple moon is my symbol, not yours. I do not want to give you beliefs or meanings that the sources do not tell us about. For me, it refers here to the different ages of a woman and to the passing of time; being born, growing into adulthood, growing older.

That last part touches me when I think of you.

Because sixty does not sound old when you have passed it yourself. It does not feel like a completed life. There is still curiosity. There are plans. There are things you still want to make, see and learn. There are people you love and ordinary days you expect will be followed by many more.

You were not given those days.

That is why I wanted to make something soft for you.

The sweater is light and warm and falls loosely around the body. The colours are earthy and sometimes dark, but between the grey and brown, warm orange suddenly appears.

And everywhere the moons keep returning.

When I knitted them, I was not thinking about magic. I was thinking about time.

About your sixty years and mine. About two women, separated by centuries, living in the same village. You at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and me here now, with your name between my stitches.

On 26 October 1610 your life ended.

The moon did not.

It became full again, waned again and began again. Above Ellezelles, over and over, for more than four hundred years.

And now I sit here, in that same Ellezelles, and write your name.

Catherine De Le Voye.

Not only beside a date.

But among seven colours and all those moons that keep coming and going.