

In Word and Thread

A letter to

*Jean Cauchie*



MICCA

*Dear Jean,*

There are not sixty seven kilometres between us. Not even ten. From Ellezelles, I only have to cross a few hills to reach Flobecq, the village where you lived more than four centuries ago.

I try to imagine how small your world must have been then. Not small in meaning, but in distance. Roads you travelled on foot, villages close to one another, people who knew each other. Ellezelles, Flobecq, Acren, Enghien. Names that are familiar to me were also part of the map of your life. Only Mons lies a little farther away. And it was there, of all places, that you spent 47 days in prison.

You were 66 years old.

That number stays with me. Perhaps because I myself am not so much younger than you were then. At that age, you already have a whole life behind you. You have known people who are no longer there, watched things change, built habits, and gathered memories around certain places. You have a history far greater than the few lines that were ultimately preserved about you.

Yet I can find hardly anything of that life. Your name: Jean Cauchie. Your nickname: Brandon. Your age. Flobecq. And then the persecution takes over, as if everything that came before no longer mattered.

It is also recorded that a priest in Acren performed an exorcism on you. I linger over that single detail longer than I would like. Someone stood before you and tried to drive something out of you that he believed was living inside you. What were you thinking while it happened? Were you afraid? Angry? Exhausted? Or, after everything that had already happened, did you simply have no words left?

Then came the days in Mons.

Forty seven.

Long enough to wake every morning and realise all over again where you were. Long enough to listen to sounds outside your cell, to wait, perhaps to hope, and to understand that others were deciding over your life.

Years ago, when I designed a sweater for you, I chose Léttlopi. Sturdy Icelandic wool, warm and protective. Across the shoulders I placed red symbols that I composed from runes. I gave my bind runes three meanings: courage, strength and protection.

I know better now than I did then that we need to be careful about what we attribute to ancient symbols. The runes in your sweater are therefore not an attempt to reconstruct something from your time. They have nothing to do with you, Flobecq or your trial. They are mine.

Or perhaps I should say: they are for you.

Courage for the man who had to endure 47 days.

Strength for a 66 year old body that had to bear imprisonment, interrogation and fear.

And protection, precisely because no one gave you any.

On 30 September 1611, you were sentenced in Enghien to *corde et feu*. You were strangled and your body was then burned.

More than four centuries later, I can place nothing between you and that sentence. No warm sweater. No protective symbol. No hand on your shoulder.

All I can do is take your name and speak it again.

A man from Flobecq, 66 years old.

You were here.

*Jean Cauchie*