

In Word and Thread

Restoring the Honour of Magdelaine Lestarquy

Dear Magdelaine,

Today, a black sweater rests on my lap. Still empty. There is only the wool, the needles, and the silence. Yet I know that this silence is deceptive. It seems peaceful, but it carries the echo of names that went almost unspoken for centuries. Yours is one of them.

Magdelaine Lestarquy.

Sixty-five years old. Born in Ellezelles. You spent your entire life there. You were the wife of Gilles Le Sure. The archives tell us little more. As though a human life could be reduced to a handful of lines before giving way to accusations.

In October 1610, the witch hunts reached your village as well. Not like a sudden storm, but like a fire spreading slowly from house to house. First came the rumours. Then the suspicions. Then the arrests. In the end, no one asked whether the accusations were true. Only a confession mattered. And that confession was forced from you.

For two days you were interrogated. Two days during which truth no longer had any meaning. Fourteen days of imprisonment followed. On 26 October 1610, the sentence was carried out. You were strangled and then burned alongside Agnès de le Plache, Martine de le Vigne, Catherine de le Voye, Quintine de le Censserye, and Evette Van Den Kerchove.

As I embroider the first spiral, I think about the meaning people have given this symbol for thousands of years. The spiral is older than the witch trials, older than churches, perhaps even older than the language in which your name was first spoken. It tells of life in constant motion, of returning, of remembering.

I choose not to draw the spirals beforehand. I let them grow as memories grow. No two are perfectly round. No two follow exactly the same path. Just as no human life can ever be contained within the pages of a trial record.

Today, there is no longer a court that condemns your name. There are only people who choose to speak it again. People who want to preserve your story, not because you were extraordinary, but because you were so wonderfully ordinary. A woman from Ellezelles. A neighbour. A wife. Someone who never wished to become a symbol.

That is why I do not embroider a stake upon this sweater. No ropes. No flames. Only spirals. They cannot turn back time or change what happened. But they do return, again and again, to your name, so that it will never be lost again.

Rest now, Magdelaine. Your name has been woven back into the fabric of history. No longer as an accused woman, but as a human being.

With respect and love,

Micca