

In Word and Thread

A letter to

Quintine De Le Censserye



MICCA

Dear Quintine,

More than four centuries lie between us, and yet I live where you lived. I walk through the same Ellezelles, over the hills and along the fields. The village I know is no longer the village you knew. Houses came and went, roads changed, generations followed one another. But the landscape still folds around the same hills, and the ground beneath our feet is the same.

Perhaps that is why your name has never become just a name in an old register to me.

Quintine De Le Censserye. Thirty eight years old. Two days of interrogation. Fourteen days of imprisonment. On 26 October 1610, sentenced to *corde et feu*. Strangled and then burned, together with five other women from Ellezelles.

So few words for a human life.

I have given you a voice before. In *Around the Table*, I let you enter my home, together with Evette, Catherine, Martine, Agnesse and Magdelaine. I made tea and let you talk. The Quintine who sat at that table was my Quintine, and I knew that. I imagined you young and full of life, a little bold even, someone who would not easily be silenced. None of that was written in the archives. It was my way of trying to see a woman again behind those few surviving facts. Because once, you were so much more than what remains of you on paper today.

Since I have lived in Ellezelles, you have come closer. During my walks, I look towards the hill that became so important in my search for your stories. In my book, I wrote that from my hill I look towards yours, and that MICCA was born there. That is still true.

Witches are still spoken of often here. They are part of the folklore of the village. There are celebrations, stories and references to magic. Even a beer bears your name. But behind that witch was you. Not a symbol, not a figure from a legend, but a woman who lived here and who one day was taken from her ordinary life.

That is why I wanted to connect your name once more to something tangible.

I knitted a cape for you. Soft and warm, in dark shades of grey, with the three phases of the moon returning again and again. The waxing moon, the full moon and the waning moon. The Triple Moon did not belong to you. I do not even know whether you ever consciously watched those three phases of the moon. It is my symbol, not yours.

For me, it is about time. About being young, growing older and being given the chance to pass through all the seasons of a human life. You were thirty eight. Your cycle was cut short.

That is why I wanted the moon to continue for you.

It becomes full and wanes again. It disappears and returns. Row after row, the same rhythm returns in the knitting. Not to pretend that time can repair anything, because what was done to you cannot be repaired. But because a name can return when someone speaks it again.

And your name is being spoken again.

When someone knits the Quintine Cape, your name stands above the pattern. When someone asks who Quintine was, your story begins again. Perhaps at a table here in Belgium, perhaps somewhere on the other side of the world. Someone casts on stitches and carries your name in her hands.

I find that a beautiful thought.

We are fellow villagers, Quintine. Four centuries apart, yet connected by the same small piece of earth. You could not have known that one day a woman would live here who would place your name between her stitches. I could not have known that moving to Ellezelles would eventually lead me to you and the five other women.

But that is how it happened.

I cannot give you your life back. I can only refuse to let you disappear into a table of names and dates.

So I knit.

And as long as the yarn runs through my hands, you walk a little way with me.

Mieke