

The Confession of my Life

As I walked back towards the house, with an ampulla filled with herbs and medicine for my father, I heard the neighing of the horses and the sweet songs of the thrushes and black birds. Entering the house, I saw my father lying still on the bench, his breath hanging heavy in the air.

I decided to leave him and head straight to my bedroom as I went in. Lying upon my bed was a small silver box engraved in a small, beautiful font. My brother Samuel burst in, his face pale and his throat dry and raspy.

“Madeline you won't believe it ... I... I...”. His eyes welled with tears. I had no idea what had happened. It must have been serious or Samuel wouldn't be crying.

“Samuel what is wrong? Calm down. Come and sit “. He came and sat next to me, took a deep breath and said “ all the pilgrims have returned back today so I went to greet Mother and waited all morning but she never came and when I asked the leader he said she had been lost on the way and wasn't found.” It was as though I had lost my tongue, like my voice had sunk down into my stomach.

I held Samuel in a hug and then ushered him out because I needed a minute. The box still intrigued me so I opened it and inside lay a beautiful gold locket with a thin chain and inside was a little painting of the family and a quote on the other side which read, “if I do not return, keep this in memory of me, mother”. It made me cry. I was overwhelmed. Mother was gone , Father was terribly ill, it felt like my world had been turned upside down. I needed a way to reflect and turn a new leaf of my life where all my dreams would become reality.

“Madeline, Madeline” I heard my Father calling. I ran down the stairs and got out the ampulla and handed it to him. ”Thank you my darling girl”. He looked at me with eyes of sorrow and grief, had he known? My family are religious and before my Father fell ill we used to go to church everyday but now I go on my own.

I am 12 now. I am an independent girl and I feel like the way to pave my future is to go on pilgrimage. I went out of the house into the village. The smell of smoke filled the air wafting from the bread house. Mrs Cray waved at me and I asked what view she had on pilgrimage, and she said when she was young she went. It was dangerous but definitely worth it. It was a once in a lifetime opportunity.

I made up my mind that I was going on pilgrimage and I was not turning back.

I packed my little leather satchel in my bedroom. Inside I put a small red leather covered bible, a scallop shell which Mother left in her cupboard, a china water bottle filled with small beer which Father absolutely loved, three candles one made out of beeswax that I had got for my christening, a horn book with our family prayers on 'the apostles creed', a thin black cloak which ran down to my ankles, a hood, my Fathers soft wide brimmed hat and two bright red fresh apples which I had picked this morning.

I went down the hall to Father and sat by his side. "Father, I have a question to ask you," I said, crossing my fingers tight behind my back. "What is it, my sweet little girl". I realised he was not going to expect what question I had in store. " Father, I want to go on pilgrimage". Silence fell in the air. I could see Father's utter shock and worry. He held my hands and said " I was not expecting this. I will let you go but you must promise me to return. You can't leave me like your mother did." I nodded my head and said good night. I had a little hop and a skip in my walk now and I was ready for all that was to come.

The next morning I picked up the bread for my Father, made the oats for the horses and kissed my family goodbye promising to return. I hung my rosary round my neck along with my locket and slipped on my over shoes. I felt proud that I was officially a pilgrim. I headed to the church. The sun was out and the breeze was warm and felt gorgeous on my skin. This was it, as we were all waved off ,the bells rang as if they had minds of their own. This was the start of my religious journey.

We had already walked for five hours and had about two more days of walking until we reached Walsingham, our destination. Our pilgrim leader wore his cloak, hat and hood. Along with this he was wielding a wooden staff and was singing psalms as we walked. Amongst all the people I saw another girl who seemed about my age and looked scared and clueless. We appeared like an army since we were all dressed the same as we marched along. I weaved my way towards the girl and said hello.

“Oh hello” she said. I think she seemed a bit surprised that a girl like me had spoken to her. All of a sudden everyone got really excited, even the girl and there it was Walsingham Abbey. It was an incredible sight. It was colossal with a gold plated roof that sparkled and shone in the sunlight. We walked towards a group of monks who blessed us all and before we could enter even more of this wondrous place took us to the bath and holy wells. The water was crystal clear. You could hear the trickling of water coming from the river. Inside the bath lay seven resting lepers. I didn't know whether to be cautious of them. “Please come to me, little girl” said the monk. Since I was the only little girl I guessed he was talking to me. I walked over to the monk who was dressed in clean white cloth with a large wooden cross hanging around his neck. He took a ladle from a stand and brought up some water from the well and told me to drink it so I did. It tasted like heaven. Then he blessed me and sprinkled the water upon my face. It felt so refreshing as though my old self had been washed away. I bid him goodbye and continued with my journey.

I glanced back at the Abbey and saw a beautiful glass window double the size of my cottage. I was in awe. As I walked through the fern tree arch I saw a huge crowd of people all pushing and shoving to get in. Then I heard a shout “He is guilty!” coming from the courthouse. I slowly ran to the side of the girl again and she said “sorry I didn't get your name?”. I blushed and replied “it's Madeline”. The girl smiled and said “I'm Colette”. I was happy I had made a friend and I wasn't on my own. We entered the shrine through a set of large wooden gates engraved with the saints on them. We all heard the angelus ringing wildly and the birds seemed to sing their songs with them. It was awe inspiring.

I wandered into the shrine with Colette and an old couple behind me. The shrine smelled luxurious. It smelled of incense and freshly lit candles and there it was, The Holy House. It was the wonder of Walsingham. I entered the room, it was lovely and peaceful, with a soot black roof from the smoke of the candles and in the back lay the altar covered in beautiful cloths then I saw Our Lady, Mary. Sitting in all her pride it was almost as though she was speaking to me. Colette passed me a candle and said “if you light it and make a wish God may grant your hopes”, so I did as I was told . I prayed for the welfare of my Father and prayed that my Mother was fine wherever she was. I still had a belief that she could be alive but everyone would think I was crazy.

I closed my eyes and for the first time since arriving at Walsingham, I felt a genuine connection to the place, to the people, to the centuries of devotion that had soaked into the very stones. I didn't pray a specific prayer, but simply embraced the sense of quiet.

As I prayed it was like I saw a vision of my Mother. I reached out but my hand just swiped through the air. She was smiling at me, her eyes watering, her hands held out. “Madeline,Madeline”, I snapped out of my daze since I heard Colette and stared back as we walked out but mother was gone.

We had stayed three days at Walsingham and I was due to head back tomorrow. Everyone had set up their tents and were preparing for bed. I slipped my cloak on and walked to a bridge that hovered over the river.I stared at my reflection as though I had changed almost as if my old self had been changed with a brand new girl. I could hear the water, the ripples soft and the breeze calm.

This whole experience has forever changed my life and has changed who I am inside and out. I was so happy and was so grateful my father had granted me permission to come. I strolled back to the camp and headed into my tent. I lit my beeswax candle and wrapped myself up in my cloak. It was cold that night. It felt as though the cold was biting into my skin. I worried I was going to get frostbite. “What a day”, I thought to myself before I lay down to sleep and prepared myself to return home.

I woke early the next day and brushed my hair and tied it up in two plaits. I had eaten my two apples but Colette had given me a wooden tub of pottage so I drank that and quickly headed to the well. I filled three ampullas of the holy water and rubbed some onto my face. It really was a feeling like no other. I ran back to the Abbey for the last service run by Father John. We sang hymns and all prayed together as one. It was very different from my normal Sunday service. It finished and as we were leaving, a monk held my arm and beckoned me to wait.

He told me about my Mother and how he had known her. It made my soul sing. Then I realised he was Luke, my fathers best friend. I gave him my address and pleaded that he might write to us as I knew Father would adore to hear from him. I gave him a big hug and he wished me well on my journey home.

I grabbed my satchel and waved goodbye to the lush green foliage and beautiful flowers in all shades of the rainbow. The abbey remained strong and stunning standing proudly in all its glory. And then we headed off. The monks waved us away and that was the end of my Walsingham chapter.

I made it home. The journey was rough and I promised to keep in touch with Colette. Many people had not returned after the pilgrimage like my Mother, but I was fine, I had made it. What an achievement. The last mile before I reached home, I removed my shoes and walked the rest of the way barefoot to show my gratitude to God and Mary.

I opened the door of the cottage and shouted to my family. Samuel came sprinting at me and jumped into my arms. I swung him round and then I saw Mother – she was walking towards me, followed by my Father. Mother was alive! Father was not pale anymore, had he got better? I fell to my knees. My prayers had been granted! My pilgrimage had given me faith and now I was going to grab life with both hands surrounded by my whole family.

Willa

