

The Art Of Confessions

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KRAMER, Jillian Elizabeth ©
A NOVEL, Romantic Fiction
'THE ART OF CONFESSIONS'

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LOVE isn't always perfect.
It isn't a fairytale or a story book.
And it doesn't come easy.
Love is overcoming obstacles,
Facing challenges, fighting to be
Together, holding on & never
Letting go. It is a short word, easy to
Spell, difficult to define. Love is
Work, but most of all Love is
Realizing that every hour, every minute
& every second was worth it,
because you did it together.

Source: unknown

INTRODUCTION

Little did Joanna Taylor-Broome know when she decided to organize an art retreat in Devon, England, that her advertisement would attract the attention of seven people (eight including herself) from all over the country and even the world. It had been her dream to do this for a long time, together with her daughter Rosie, who would help her with the catering.

Joanna had been a keen artist all her life, but she was surprised as the seven totally different people arrive to take part. How each and every person in the group has a story to tell and how they all bond together.

Devon cream teas, sunshine, beaches, deckchairs, sea and sand, all the perfect ingredients for a week's retreat. On the Sunday afternoon, after a roast lunch at the pub, the first guest arrives and Joanna realizes she is going to really have her hands full ... much more than she thought.

Read on....

PROLOGUE

Seven Women and one man, all together in a house called the Lemon Tree, perched up on the cliffs overlooking the sweeping bay of Woolacombe. They all came from all over the country, one of them from another continent. But in some or other way, they had all caught sight of the advertisement for an Art Retreat, for a special reason. It would be run by Joanna, an art therapist. It was the first time she had ever done this. Normally her workshops would be one-day events, but this was a whole week with a very mixed bunch of people. Two of them, she did know, two old school friends, who she too had met on several holidays in her summer cottage over the years.

To say she was a bit nervous, would be an understatement and she knew of course that as they and the week progressed, a lot would come up. That was the nature of her entire course, allowing people to express themselves through art. And even more important bring things to the surface that had been held within each and everyone of them, in their individual lives. Confessions, secrets, things that they did not really want to tell about themselves, especially to complete strangers.

As the week went on, around that well-worn wooden table in the kitchen in the Lemon Tree, it would of course all come up whether they wanted it to or not. What would come to the surface in Joanna herself? Even though she could distance herself to some extent from the group as she was organizing it, but deep in her heart she knew that events like this were ones where you could not really make plans at all! It just evolved. Apart from a basic idea what they were going to do each and every day, the art would create the opportunities. Some would blossom, others would literally run away when things became too confronting, which they could not and would not cope with anymore.

Well, everything was ready; she had everything packed and a fairly long drive down into the western corner of the United Kingdom, to one of the best-loved counties in the kingdom. Rugged coast on the northern shores, two wild moorlands, famous for the ponies that roamed freely there and the sandy coves and Riviera type resorts, which people have been flocking to for years, for a breath of sea air. Where palm trees could be found along the southern shores, thanks for the warm Gulf Stream in the Atlantic. Quaint chocolate box thatched cottages dotted on the hillsides.

Yes, Joanna was looking forward to the entire week, who was coming; she only knew some of them by name. And a man too, that was very interesting, not of lot of men actually enrolled for her events. An American too, he had sounded really nice on the phone.

Starting her car, together with daughter Rosie, they set off, chatting along the way. Leaving the busy main motorway leading away from big cities to the West Country. Along secluded lanes, they finally drew up in the car park at the Lemon Tree.

It looked a lovely house, inviting, cosy and a beautiful garden to the rear. Yes, Joana thought as she stepped out onto the gravel, this was going to be a very interesting week for sure.

'The purpose of art is washing the dust of daily life off our souls'

Pablo Picasso

CHAPTER 1

JOANNA

Joanne Taylor-Broome often wondered if she had actually been born with a set of paintbrushes and tubes of paint in her hands. She was the eldest daughter of Tom and Jane and had two sisters. She was born in the beautiful town of Buxton in the Peak District in Derbyshire.

A happy childhood in the beginning, loving parents and siblings she could get on with, but 'JoJo' (much to her annoyance) as everyone called her, spent the majority of her time from a very early age in front of an easel, either drawing or painting. She loved everything, from oils, to watercolours, pastels and even charcoal. Her swift little hands could produce an image of anyone in minutes. It was her passion, her calling.

The family lived in a large red-bricked house, high up on a hill, surrounded by the peaks, which made the district famous. At the little local school Joanna was a hero, she would draw pictures of her classmates and teachers, she just had so much talent. She was a happy cheerful child and everyone loved her.

The front door of the house opened into a large central hall with a black and white tiled floor. A kitchen on the left and a dining room which is where the entire family always could be found, the official lounge only used on Sundays and special occasions. Upstairs there were four big bedrooms and a bathroom, as well as a huge upstairs attic where boxes and chests were stored and the most marvellous place to play hide and seek. A large garden around the house, with views across the Peak District, one of England's areas of outstanding natural beauty.

It was just after her third sister was born and a young baby that dramatic changes happened in Joanna's life. Her parents did not love one another anymore and they divorced. Leaving Joanna and her sisters with her mother who ran the local flower shop. She missed her father, and over the next few years, met a steady procession of men (each one just awful) in her mother's life. Suddenly she was a troubled teenager and young woman, who could not wait to leave home and study further.

It was one normal Saturday afternoon when she was obliging by helping her mother in the shop, that a shy man called in. He had come to collect flowers for his mother, something he often did on a Saturday. Joanna had not taken much notice of him before, because she did not always work on the Saturday, her other sisters did their share too, but something happened this day. He was so very shy and Joanna being a more extrovert type of person asked him, as he paid for the flowers; "Well are you every going to ask me out on a date?"

He blushed from head to toe and just managed to stammer the words: "Dinner next Friday at 8pm". "Yes love to" Joanna replied. He said he would pick her up here at 7.30 pm.

Her heart missed a beat, as he left the shop and got into a very flash sports car and roared off.

She would definitely have to buy a new dress to wear and have her hair done.

It was the beginning of a deep love, he was the only son of people who were well known in the area with a thriving business and Joanna and he were immediately a couple. He was tall and thin like her and they looked attractive together. It did not take long for him to propose. Joanna had just finished her studies and was about to embark on her career.

A huge, well-attended wedding, with all the local gentry present and they moved into their own home. Joanna fell pregnant fairly quickly; their first son was born, followed four years later by a girl and then finally another boy to complete the family.

Joanna was so busy with her family and her home there was little time for anything else. Despite the fact that she had three young children to contend with and a husband, she still managed to spend time with her art.

When the children had grown older and left primary and later secondary school, Joanna enrolled for a special course. She wanted to coach children and adults too, using her art.

It worked well, now the children did not need her so much and her husbands business had grown so much and he had many hobbies too to keep him occupied. Joanna loved her course and made friends with all the other participants. She loved the challenges and the exercises, she was a natural talent, so it all came easily to her and she would often find herself helping the others too. The teachers noticed and talked to her about making this a career. Three years later she graduated and set up her own practice at home.

Luckily she had a lot of help in her home, a gardener and a cleaner so she had so much free time these days. Clients got to know her by word of mouth and soon her diary was full.

It was early that summer, sitting in the garden with her afternoon tea (she loved tea) on the wooden bench; she had the idea of maybe doing a retreat. She went inside and

surfing the net for a suitable location. The Lemon Tree, Woolacombe Bay in Devon, perched on the cliffs overlooking the sea, looked perfect.

She put an advertisement in the local papers all over the country and also on all social media. You could do so much online these days! Much to her amazement it was fully booked in just a few days and the lovely thing was that two friends would be there, old school friends Sally and Libby, both of whom she had not seen for a long time.

She started making notes that evening. Having checked all the diaries, which was no mean feat in such a big family, the week worked out really well for everyone. She had only ever done one to one consults and a day workshop, but a whole week and all staying in the same place asked for a different approach. She decided she would do several different things and also give them all a free afternoon off.

The ringing of her phone inside made her stop daydreaming and get up to answer. A man, enrolling for her retreat, now that was something she really had not expected. He sounded very nice though and it would be interesting to see who else was going to join in.

Over the next few weeks, she ordered canvasses, paint, brushes, pencils, coloured pencils, pens and ink, everything she needed and then sat down working out a programme with Rosie about the food each day and what they would do. Rosie was such a keen cook like Joanna was too, it was fun to get out the books for inspiration and so far there was only one person with special dietary needs, so it would be plain sailing, that is what they hoped!

With only a couple of weeks to go, Joanna made sure that everything was organized so that she and Rosie could be away. Stocked the freezer and also the cupboards with easy meals for those who would be staying at home.

She was excited, it was something completely new and she was so curious about who would turn up on Sunday next at 3pm in Woolacombe Bay!

As she and Rosie set off early on Saturday morning, her large SUV was packed up to the hilt. They were arriving a day early and Libby and Sally would be there too on Saturday. Give them all a chance to catch up before the rest arrived.

She was so looking forward to the forthcoming week. Rosie too!

'Every child is an artist, the problem is how to remain one when we grow up'

Pablo Picasso

CHAPTER 2

Sally

Sally and Libby had actually been friends ever since school days. They had both been to all girls' Grammar School in Surrey. They used to catch the train to school together and walk all the way up to school every morning and down in the afternoon. They remained friends all through the years and still to this day, even though they lived miles away from one another. Social media had enabled them to chatter on regularly with one another.

Sally was such great fun, always laughing. She had come from quite a large family, two brothers and two sisters and lived in huge house. Her father was a fashion designer for one of the largest chain stores in the country. Libby used to love to go and stay with her, it was a big bustling house, where so much was going on, lots of people, meals around a huge table, just loads of fun. Her sisters went to the same school and the brothers to the boys' grammar school in the same village. So everyone already knew one another.

Sally's mother was used to cooking and dealing with a load at the table and there was so much space in the house for everyone. Sally herself was not only hilariously funny but talented at everything. She could draw, play the piano, make cartoons of everyone and talked and laughed non-stop about everything.

As the years passed by and after school and all the pranks they used to get up to, Libby lived down south and Sally had moved up north. They wrote or rang one another, but once social media appeared they would often talk for hours on the phone reminiscing about old school stories and how awful the teachers actually were. Not to mention the spinster headmistress (Sparky as they called her for short) who always cried; was the one they laughed about the most. Thought now they were grown up how unsuitable she had actually been to be head of an all girls' school. Sally would draw cartoons of her, wandering, or rather floating around the school in her gown, constantly wiping her eyes because she had had to discipline someone about something. All those teenager girls all in one single place all coping with puberty, boys etc and then someone like her, who had probably never even kissed a boy in her entire life!

She and Sally had done the school magazine with a stupid name: Polyglot. Whoever had come up with that name they asked themselves? In it with Libby's witty words and Sally's cartoons, they had the whole school laughing about the teachers all of whom had code names. Absolutely everyone could guess who they were talking about.

Sally and Joanna had met during many summers, when Joanna stayed at her summer cottage next to Libby's. When Joanna phoned to tell her about the idea of the retreat, Sally had jumped at the idea. And of course she hoped that Libby would be coming too. A real reunion then.

Sally who was going through a difficult patch in her marriage, was so pleased at the idea of having a break. And Devon, in the summer, sounded just the ticket.

Sally's health had not been good recently, two bouts of flu followed by a lung infection. Some sea air would do her good. She was in a sort of rut at home, the children all grown up and gone and her husband out of work and to be honest he did nothing but get under her feet. Even though she kept herself busy during the days either with her horses or dogs. She was to be honest bored to death. And even more so with him.

When she approached the subject with him later that evening, as expected the first thing he had said was: 'who will take care of the horses and dogs?' Sally was prepared for that because she had already asked one of the stable girls to come and stay in the loft apartment and take over for her.

So plans were made, Sally really was looking forward to not only a week with one of her oldest friends, but the idea of standing on a beach with an easel and paintbrushes sounded like heaven. She knew the area, and of course, both she and Libby would never resist the famous Devon cream teas.

She packed her bags and put them into the car and then set off on the long drive down to Woolacombe Bay, on the north Devon coast.

This was going to be great! As the car pulled onto the road, Sally put on her radio and sang along with it. Freedom for a week and she, Libby and Joanna could catch up on the news as they had already agreed to share a room (if possible) in the place everyone would stay.

It was wonderful that Joanna had been able to book this amazing converted barn, perched up high on the cliffs overlooking the bay. An absolutely perfect and inspiring venue with a great name: The Lemon Tree.

Sally made her way along the long motorway and then eventually left the M5 and drove along the coastline, past Lynton and Lynmouth, across to Woolacombe Bay. She was there in plenty of time and the first thing she saw when she parked her car was