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## The Sacrificial Goat

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SUSAN L. MILLER

*The Sacrificial Goat*

It is said he moaned quietly, but did not fight  
when the knife pierced his breast. Doped

by the villagers' dancing, having watched  
his brother paraded on their shoulders,

crowned with fresh flowers, he might  
have expected similar celebration. The village

was like that: a group of them  
always preparing for some festival.

The women scrubbed pots until they shone,  
then prepared vats of chocolate and cinnamon.

The men chopped wood, hammered  
scaffolding. Even the children, who loved

to pat his neck or climb his back  
before he knocked them off, beheaded

dozens of marigolds and strung them  
into garlands. Had he learned to distinguish

the scratch of the sharpening-stone, the smell  
of oil—but not even the straw mats, laid end

to end to hold the slaughtered, or the old women,  
lined up with their mugs, frightened him. Who

would give his life like this, calm, lamenting  
only the pain as it entered the body,

trusting the hands that had tended to him  
even when they carried the blade? And then

he was only one of many, each in his turn  
patiently watching the blood pool at his feet.