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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.