

## Sacrificed to the Dragon Prince

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### Sacrificed

[Millicent]

People always say, "Can you remember when the problem started?"

I'd like to say, "Yes, Sir. You see there was this one moment where everything went wrong..."

But I cannot. I don't even know who I am.

I was not born Millicent Walker. That name was gifted to me when I showed up in the village of Crimson, covered in bruises, burns, and blood. I have no parents, no family, and no memory of my life before the age of seven, or however old I am--nobody is quite sure. My strange gold hair and hazel eyes made it obvious to those who first met me on the dusty road from the East that I wasn't from anywhere near the town of Crimson, or anywhere else along the Emerald Shore where the locals were fair of skin and light of eye. To them I was different, and to people with small minds and smaller experiences, there is nothing scarier than different, except for maybe the unknown, and I was a living representation of both. I was, and remain, a mystery.

With no one to care for me and no one to guide me, I spent the few months of my remembered life roaming the streets, eating other people's leftovers, and wearing the scraps of fabric I arrived in. Eventually, somebody was able to trick me into the orphanage with the promise of a meal and a warm dry place to sleep, and while you'd think that would be a better place to land, you'd be wrong. It was the beginning of my real torture. I couldn't even speak when I arrived. Words made no sense, my tongue unable to make the shape of their sounds. Not that I needed to understand their words when their fists and feet could communicate quite clearly that I was unwanted, or that I needed to move faster, or that I was clumsy and stupid. I didn't talk for two years, and in that time they made sure I knew my place.

Once I began talking, I picked up the language quickly. They were amazed at how quickly. It's part of why most of the town didn't trust me. How could I go from being completely mute to ridiculously articulate within months of speaking? Anyone who met me would never assume I didn't speak a single word before the age of nine.

The rumors of my strangeness didn't stop with the mystery of my speech. Shortly after I began to talk, the orphanage began to farm me out to local households. Nobody wanted me anywhere near them, afraid that my brown skin and strange eyes were a disease they could catch. So I was given the lowest possible jobs, the ones farthest away from anyone else. Occasionally there would be someone who would offer me kindness, but then something strange would happen like a sick cow or a broken ankle, and people, looking for any reason to blame someone other than themselves, would look at me and see trouble. It wasn't long before anytime someone became ill or lost something, I was the one to blame if I was anywhere near the person when it happened. So I learned to keep out of sight, stick to the shadows, and look down at my feet lest anyone believe a sideways glance caused a plague.

So it shouldn't have been that big of a surprise to anyone that I ended up here. When the village asked the dragon for help to cure a blight, a blight that everyone just assumed I created by just existing, they offered me up as a sacrifice. They probably thought that they were getting the better end of the deal. The dragon cured the blight, at least for a little while, and in return he got me. He wanted a "young virgin maid of marriageable age," and I was the only girl that the town was willing to spare. I guess they decided I'd do, or maybe they were just hoping he'd be done with me so quickly he'd never know what a bad deal he had made.

Lucky me. The town finally thought I was good enough for something.

And that is how I find myself chained to this cart at the bottom of a hill looking up at the great stone castle of the local dragon prince, a beast no one has seen up close, a monster of legend no one has seen in the flesh, the only person with several days journey that is seen as being more of a mystery than myself. Nobody has ever seen him leave or enter his castle, not even his servants. Servants arrive, and servants leave, but when they come into town none of them can tell us anything about the lord they serve. The only evidence, they say, that they even have a lord to serve are the remains of his food, which he prefers alive.

A dark shadow, a black silhouette framed by the orange light of the full moon as it sets behind the dragon's castle, flies closer. My last thoughts as he approaches are about why he wanted a virgin. Why do dragons always ask for virgins? Is it because they want to devour them or defile them?

Not that it matters, chained as I am, there is nowhere for me to hide and no way for me to run.

I guess I'm about to find out the truth about all those rumors. Too bad I probably won't live long enough to tell anyone.

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