

Excuse the handwriting
I wanted to see if I
still had cursive
* Also forgot to indent,
my bad, so used to
typing on a computer

A Little Sacrifice

By: Dominic Carducci

1) Preface

The Sword of Destiny is a collection of short stories written by Andrzej Sapkowski, inspired by Slavic lore. These books were made popular by the infamous videogame series, and soon to be Netflix show, aptly called the Witcher. This is something of a pity because they are truly good books, but it is what it is and not worth complaining about. I hope it should go without saying, if you really want to explore the world our humble wither finds himself in, you should read the books and scorn both the games and the television show, especially the latter for pondering to the masses and just out to make a buck.

2) Introduction

This short story is one of the better ones I have read, and is one of those stories, in my opinion, worthy of being read multiple times, which is though a step down from one where you gain a new understanding on every read. This is the book that inspired me to read more,

A Little Sacrifice

and how ironic it was from a video game that made me want to be better, but such are the times. The author has a couple others ones too that I would like to mention before I get into the actual details, those being The Bounds of Reason, and The Last Wish, though I prefer the second one. Lastly, this may be a little controversial, I recommend skipping the series and only reading the short stories, which are miles ahead of the main story, those that is not to say their bad books. Enough of this though let us get into the story itself.

The story follows the adventures of the wither Geralt of Rivia, he is not actually from Rivia but has a Rivian accent. He was born a bastard, son of a sorceress unsuspecting that she could even become pregnant, so he was given over to the witchers, needless to say he does not hold his mother in very high regard. What are withers though? To grasp this you really have to understand the world. The first intelligent beings on the land which the events take place were the dwarves, then the elves, and lastly the humans, this is important to understand the relations between the races. You see the world is filled with the typical

A Little Sacrifice

beings you would expect in any good fantasy world, elves, dwarves, monsters, dragons, witches and wizards, nymphs, and many other fascinating creatures. When humans arrived they were met with a very dangerous and hostile world, and little by little, following the example of the withers they came both to dominate the land and other races.

> "We shall learn ~~whether~~ lead those steps. Further, we shall descend those steps. We shall find out what is on that side of the ocean, if there is anything there at all. And we shall draw from the ocean everything we can. And if not we, then our grandsons will do it, or our grandson's grandsons. It is just a matter of time. Yes, we shall do it, though the ocean will run red with blood. And you know it, Essi, O wise Essi, who writes the chronicles of humanity in your ballads. Life is not a ballad, O poor, little gorgeous-eyed poet, lost among her fine words. Life is a battle. and we were taught that struggle by these withers, whose worth is greater than ours. It was they who showed us the way, who paved the way for us. They strewn the path with the corpses of those who stood in the way of humans, and defended that world from us. We, Essi, are only continuing that battle. It is we, not your ballads,

a Little Sacrifice

who create the chronicles of humanity. And we no longer need witches, and now nothing will stop us. Nothing." (239-240)

A long quote but it encapsulates the world quite nicely. The witches are hired hands for those who wish to rid themselves of a monster. To even have the strength to combat these hostile creatures, they have special abilities and their bodies have undergone mutations to rise them to the prestige which their occupation demands. These abilities include both increased strength and regenerative functions, can drink potions that would be lethal to other people, see in the dark, and can cast small spells which helps them in combat. On top of that their expert swordsmen. These traits allow a witcher to best multiple men in combat. Their extraordinary abilities do not come without consequences though, boys are trained from a very young age and the majority do not see their training through. Even if they do they lose the ability to reproduce, on top of that is well their outcasts feared by society.

2.1 Race Relations

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a Little Sacrifice

I only mention this, not so relevant to the story, because I find their conflicts so interesting you got to mention it, also I believe it teaches a valuable lesson. I said that humans were the first to arrive, before they came the elves ruled supreme, their qualities which their nature gives them are that their intelligent and calm in reserve. The more physical aspects of the elves are that they're nimble, live much longer than humans, though only their youth can reproduce, and that their very beautiful, which probably contributes to their pride. Also they have all the pitfalls that most intelligent people seem to have. The humans slowly drove the elves out, resulting in their young queen declaring war on the humans, against all odds and against the advice of her counsel. The result was a massacre, the elves never stood a chance, condemning the survivors, their youth depleted to a slow, pitiful death, the worst kind. There is another short story in the book where it deals with the state of the elves, and the wise witcher pitied them,

>"And with that mission of yours which is supposed to turn your thoughts from

a Little Sacrifice

imminent annihilation. Because you know this is the end. Nothing will sprout or yield crops on the plateaux, nothing will save you now. But you live long, and you will live very long in arrogant isolation, fewer and fewer of you, growing weaker and weaker, more and more bitter. And you know what'll happen then, Filavandriel. You know that desperate young men with the eyes of hundred-year-old men and withered, barren, and sick girls like Torwiel will lead those who can still hold a sword and bow in their hands, down into the valleys. You'll come into the blossoming valleys to meet death, wanting to die honorably, in battle, and not in sick beds of misery, where anaemia, tuberculosis and scum will send you. Then long-living Aen Sidhe, you'll remember me. You'll remember that I pitied you. And you'll understand that I was right." (199)

Reminds me of the lesson I learned a good bit ago now, the most wise are in many cases the least bitter.

3 The Story itself

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A Little Sacrifice

I do not think very many story tellers would have the ability to pull a story like this off, but he did and we get to talk about it. The main storyline is between the witcher, and a young, beautiful, articulate poet. It goes something like this: the witcher, and his companion, Dandelion, who is also a poet, are low on money so Dandelion is forced to play on the stage with another poet, Essi Daven, which he usually sticks up his nose at. They meet her, Geralt blunders, she falls in love, the witcher is confused, they do it, they separate never to meet again, Essi dies a few years later with the plague, only Dandelion at her side to bury her, he then composes a ballad, though idealized, because the real story would not have moved anyone. It is hard to do it justice and cover all the intricacies of the plot, if it sounds any bit interesting I recommend just reading it for yourself. Also, it is hard not to love a story that begins with this,

> "Shove it!"

and

> "Kiss a dog's arse!"

A Little Sacrifice

Oh, I bet it just made you cringe, same here, same here. I am going to attempt to give a full summary, not easily done.

The tale begins with Geralt who was hired to translate for a duke who, God knows why, was courting a mermaid. Here is the description the author gives,

"Geralt saw that she had gorgeous, utterly perfect breasts. Only the colour spoiled the effect; the nipples were dark green and the areolae around them only a little bit lighter." (183)

I should really stop with this shouldn't I? Nothing comes of the encounter so the duke doesn't feel the need to pay. After that the next chapter is on horseback and it is revealed that the pair have no money because of Dandelion's antics, he even goes on to explain a man's needs,

"From time to time, the bard maintained, a chap has to meet other people in a place where he can have a laugh and a singsong, gorge himself on kebabs and pierogis, drunk beer, listen to some music, and squeeze a girl as he swung her around in a dance." (188)

a Little Sacrifice

He goes on to say that every lad has an innate need for this, and this is the reason that holidays were invented. To this the witcher quietly retorted to himself that

> "taking part in festivities occupied a very low position on the list of his own profound and natural deeds." / 188

If you haven't caught on these stories are very playful indeed, what gives it a lot of its charm. They are then greeted by a tradesman who is celebrating his daughter's betrothal, he asks the poet if he will perform, promising pay and lodging. Dandelion accepts and we now go into the next chapter where Geralt meets Essi.

Essi is one of Dandelion's close friends, she has known him since her childhood. When asked to introduce the witcher he said this witty thing,

> "Save us, O Gods... He, poppet, has no voice or ear, and can only rhyme 'beer' with 'beer'."

Then the party begins and the poets sing their sweet melodies. After a while Essi slips

A Little Sacrifice

and Gercalt decides to follow her. They then have a conversation and the witcher abruptly attempts to kiss the poet, she lets him but then quickly retreats. Later that evening the same duke comes back with another job, this time to track down and kill whatever spilled the blood on one of his people diving cogs. He accepts it with little complaint.

After the party at night the witcher was fuming, though I don't think he knew why, he got into an argument with the bard and he saw right through him.

>"You wrongfully thought, Gercalt, that Little Eye was interested in you out of morbid, downright curiosity, that she looks at you as though you were a queer fish, a two-headed calf or a salamander in a menagerie. And you immediately became annoyed, gave her a rude, undeserved reprimand at the first opportunity, struck back at a blow she had never dealt." (207)

He goes on and reaches his conclusion,

>"You tried to learn if it was possible to bed her in the hay, if she was curious to find out what its like to make

a Little Sacrifice

love with a misfit with a witcher.
Fortunately, Essi turned out to be
smarter than you and generously
took pity on your stupidity, having
understood its cause. (208)

I'm going to fast forward because
I'm running out of time to write this,
but essentially what happens in the next
few chapters is that Essi meets the witcher
while he's scoping out his contract, they
talk; after that Dandelion goes wading
in the ocean, with Geralt of course,
and the witcher manages to get
injured but they do accomplish something,
finding a pearl for the female
bard. Essi comes running when she
hears the news, Dandelion plays the
fool with the gift and exits the house.
That's when she breaks down and
confesses her pathetic, futile love for
our poor witcher.

"Make me go, Geralt. Order me to
leave here, go to the city, to a tavern... I
want to have my revenge on you for my
shame, for the humiliation, I'll go to the first
man I find..."

The witcher is struck dumb he can
handle a struggle, but not this.

that's a monster

a Little Sacrifice

The next chapter is only worth mentioning because Essi makes a pretty, little speech on his behalf, in this one they go to collect the reward from the duke, but who unsurprisingly refuses to pay again.

> "You delight in the contempt you ^{can} show the witcher, who is prepared to risk his neck for your money. You should know the Witcher mocks your contempt and slights, that they do not make the faintest impression on him. He doesn't even notice them. No, the witcher does not even feel what your servants and subjects, Zelest and Drouhard, feel, and they feel shame, deep, burning shame... Do you know why that is Agloval? I'll tell you. The witcher knows he is superior. He is worthier than you. And that gives him strength." (237-238)

Another pretty speech that is. Also in this chapter the mermaid gets legs from a sea witch because lovers need to give a little sacrifice, and even that is everything in the world.

The three ride out of town, Geralt not able to bare to look Essi in the eye. Eventually Dandelion got tired of this and intervened. He shamed Geralt into talking,

A Little Sacrifice

a little sacrifice, and despite everything they understood each other and had sex. As I said earlier what happens after this is that they have a little feast, and it ends with those heart-breaking lines.

7" Several years later, Tandellion could have changed the contents of the ballad and written about what had actually occurred. He did not. For the true story would not have moved anyone. Who would have wanted to hear that the Witcher and Little Eye parted and never, ever, saw each other again? About how four years later Little Eye died of the small pox during an epidemic raging in Vizima? About how he, Tandellion, had carried her out in his arms between corpses being cremated on funeral pyres and had buried her far from the city, in the forest, alone and peaceful, and as she had asked, buried two things with her: her lute and her sky blue pearl. The pearl from which she was never parted."

How sad! No wonder the poet's ballad ended in a happily ever after.

4) The Lesson Which we should Derive

A Little Sacrifice

Honestly I'm not sure I've got a good answer. Maybe this: don't expect the world from someone. If you do you're probably just going to end up disappointed. She will only be intimidated living up to impossible expectations.

5) Conclusion

I guess I'll list some critiques about the book and reflect. It's a good book, not much to criticize except wishing that the author continued writing these, I found Ciri's tale quite boring. Also, though he jumped around in perspective, the problem was that none of them could hold a flame to our wisecracking witcher. If you're an author and your main character is somewhat interesting, hopefully she is, don't do this!

Geralt has got to be up there on my favorite protagonists. He's such an interesting character, complex too. Yennefer is also a fascinating character, very much of an ice queen though, though she becomes more compassionate in the later books. That wouldn't have made any sense if you haven't read the books.

a Little Sacrifice

That's it, hopefully it wasn't too much of a mess.

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