

Second Place – High School/ Fiction

Sacrifice

By Josh Good

He hung below a decorative gargoyle in a position that most people would find extremely difficult to maintain for half a minute, let alone the several hours that he'd been there. He had... advantages that others didn't. One of them was a Mark, which gave him many abilities and powers that others had only heard of.

Another advantage he had was a grappling hook right above him.

Objectives: Destruction of Marles Manor is imperative. Survival of any of the members of the Marles family is intolerable. If possible, do as much damage to the Marles family's staff as possible.

The mission had come in only a few weeks before, sealed with the crest of a well-known noble family on the front of the letter, courtesy of a special courier.

If any Mark-bearing individuals allied with the Marles are discovered, they are to be killed on sight.

He had accepted the job in a heartbeat when he saw the amount of money the family was willing to spend for the complete annihilation of the Marles family.

He wasn't particularly worried about the Marles' security service. He was a member of the Guild. It didn't have the name of an occupation before the capital G, as that would cause the namers to devolve to semantics to avoid putting things too bluntly. It was just... the Guild. Anyone who needed the Guild knew who the guild was. They were legendary for their work in jobs that other organizations would shy away from, for practical reasons or moral ones.

He looked out. No one around. Night was falling. Time to move.

He slipped out of the shadow of the gargoyle with cat-like ease.

After drawing a small, black pistol from the pocket of his trousers, he stole inside through a window that had been rather fiendishly locked, but once again, his abilities easily bypassing both the locks and the magic barrier that would have otherwise alerted the occupants of Marle Manor of his entry.

It took him a second to realize that he was now standing in a nursery. No threat here then. He had yet to find a mother that would let guards disturb a baby's sleep. He glanced over at the crib, and saw a sleeping baby there. He gave a slight nod of acknowledgement, and made to leave.

He moved towards the door, and just as his hands brushed the doorknob, he saw it.

A Mark on the baby's shoulder.

The Marle Mark. Marks were passed down from generation to generation, and he had made a point of memorizing what the Marles' Mark looked like.

If any Mark-bearing individuals allied with the Marles are discovered, they are to be killed on sight.

He would have to kill it. It was a member of the Marle family.

It was his job. He had done things before that definitely weren't moral while in the Guild, but this...

No.

To disobey such a clear order was death in the Guild.

So be it. Let the Guild come.

He turned. He had to get out of here-

"Going so soon, Escalon?" said a voice from further inside the room, using the other's codename.

Another man stepped out with an arrogant, confident smile, and, more importantly to Escalon, a revolver pointed straight at the babe.

"We've been rather suspicious of your loyalty to the guild for a while, Escalon. Looks like our suspicion wasn't unfounded after all. I've been following you for a while, you know. Almost a month. And now you've stepped out of line. So now, I'll be finishing you... and your job."

Escalon saw the gunshots almost before they happened. He leapt with energy born of desperation and anger, both at himself and at this man, right between the gun and the suddenly wakened, crying babe. He felt three loud whumps rock his body as the bullets slammed into him. The punched through his vest, probably magically enhanced.

"Well, that was idiotic," the other man said. "Now that you're out, I can just do your job anyways."

Escalon looked up at the man with bitter hatred in his eyes... and also resolve. Taking a few drops of blood from his wounds with his last bit of strength, he reached over to the baby, and smeared a bit of his blood across the Marles Mark.

Escalon's own Mark glowed in tandem with the baby's. And then, his Mark faded, and the baby's Mark grew in size.

"You cannot touch this one now."

The other man's eyes blazed. "Why? You don't know this family, let alone the child. Why would you sacrifice your own Mark to--"

"So that my sacrifice would not be in vain."

Then, darkness came, and the world faded.