

ONE WORD

by

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EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT

It's winter, in what could be called the late 1800s. Both the CITY and the night are a tepid collection of blues, greys and blacks. The cold wind whistles through the streets as the CITY gently crumbles, held together seemingly only by the faded POSTERS plastered to every brick wall, and the thick sense of despair. The POSTERS list decrees from the MAYOR, such as a 7pm curfew, or calls for information regarding "a hooded larcener" to be given to the Palace Guard.

A small group of CITIZENS - including an NICHOLAS (58) - are dressed in ragged clothes, and roam the cobblestone CITY STREETS. They scour the streets for DISCARDED PAPER, and search through bins for DISCARDED FOOD. These are thin, emaciated people, and seem to be struggling to stay upright in the cold wind just as much as some of the buildings.

THE ASSASSIN (V.O)

This is their city. Not yours.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT

NICHOLAS looks up from another BIN in which he has found nothing. Behind him, the other CITIZENS use the DISCARDED PAPER to start a fire in an EMPITED BIN.

THE ASSASSIN (V.O)

Every person, every brick of this city - they all have something to say to you.

NICHOLAS does not notice the fire - he is focused on the GOLDEN PALACE in the distance, the polished walls of which shine even on this bleak night.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY OUTSKIRTS - NIGHT

On the edge of the FOREST just outside the CITY, a FAMILY of poorly-clothes CITIZENS are tilling the earth late into the night.

THE ASSASSIN (V.O)

They work harder for you in an hour than you've ever worked in your life.

Beside them are shallow, crudely-marked GRAVES.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT

YASMIN (28) claws at the locked door of a neglected PHARMACY in the moonlight.

YASMIN
 (screaming)
 Please! My baby! Help my baby!

YASMIN's shrieks are matched in pitch and intensity by a clearly-ill INFANT in a filthy STROLLER next to her.

CUT TO:

INT. PHARMACY INTERIOR - NIGHT

YASMIN and the INFANT's blending screams echo dully through the PHARMACY's empty, dusty shelves.

THE ASSASSIN (V.O)
 And yet, you won't listen to them.

A RUSTY CHAIN secures the door from the inside, which rattles softly in time with the YASMIN's scratching. Next to the CASH REGISTER sits a letter. It reads, bluntly:

'This establishment is to be closed
 immediately, by order of his Grace
 the Mayor.'

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY ROOFTOPS - NIGHT

The ASSASSIN crouches motionless, obscured by their CLOAK and silhouetted by the moonlight. They are perched atop a slumping rooftop RAILING on one of the taller buildings overlooking the city. BULGES in their silhouette betray dozens of pockets and sheaths across their body.

THE ASSASSIN (V.O)
 They need to be heard. So I will
 speak for them. I will only need
 but a word.

The ASSASSIN drops from the RAILING, their arms outstretched like a saint. They are facing the sky, but their CLOAK'S HOOD obscures their face. A huddle of shorter buildings rushes up to meet them from behind, and they twist in the air to face the buildings.

They smoothly ROLL onto one of the building's ROOFTOP, coming up effortlessly into a RUN as the roofs creak under them. When they reach the rooftop's EDGE, they jump over to the next one.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY ALLEY - NIGHT

A washed-out ELECTION POSTER sits on the ALLEY WALL. It reads:

'Vote Mayor Chadler - for a
brighter future'

A picture of THE MAYOR (male, 40) - plump, yet cheerful - fills the POSTER, pushing this text to the edges, Still, most of the POSTER is obscured by the word 'LIAR' scrawled in faded paint over the top.

The ASSASSIN JUMPS between the ROOFTOPS overhead, casting a faint SHADOW over the POSTER before the resulting gust pulls the POSTER from the ALLEY WALL. Underneath, a once-colourful POSTER sees the moonlight for the first time in years. The faded text, encircling an image of a stylised SKYLINE barely recognisable as the CITY'S, carries a weak reminder:

'Visit HAPTON: the beating heart of the West'.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY ROOFTOPS - NIGHT

The ASSASSIN lands on another ROOFTOP, and quickly run over it. They go to jump, but stop at the ROOFTOP EDGE, noticing something below.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT

CLARA (female, 12) stands with a flintlock too big for her hands at the end of her extended arms. Like everyone else, CLARA is filthy - though she is utterly calm. Facing the weapon's front is JULIAN (Male, 36). He is dressed in considerably nicer clothes, though his brief time in the city has soiled them somewhat. He has a MESH BACKPACK, filled with FRUIT and DRIED PROVISIONS. On his THIGH, a DAGGER is sheathed. The ASSASSIN watches the scene motionlessly.

JULIAN

No! Please! You like sweets, don't
you, little girl? I have sweets!
What about toys? Toys? I can give
you toys! I can-

The MERCHANT's voice fades out in favour of the ASSASSIN'S.

THE ASSASSIN (V.O)

This merchant is about to die.
Because of you. His death will be
just another. Forgotten.
Insignificant. Expected.

The ASSASSIN walks away from the ROOFTOP EDGE. A GUNSHOT rings out, followed by the YOUNG GIRL'S CRY. The ASSASSIN's gait stiffens for a moment.

THE ASSASSIN (V.O)

This is why I will not let you go
unpunished. You will have my word.

before breaking into a running leap which delivers them to
the CITY STREETS.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT

The ASSASSIN hits the cobblestones rolling, their CLOAK
masking the sound like a shroud. After a short while
manoeuvring through the streets, the ASSASSIN reaches a
small SHACK next to some TALLER BUILDINGS, which they use to
return to the ROOFTOPS as a strong GUST OF WIND hits.
Halfway through scaling the SHACK WALL, they STOP.

CUT TO:

INT. THE SHACK - NIGHT

ALAN (10) STARES, through a HOLE in the SHACK WALL, directly
at the ASSASSIN with a mix of fear and wonder. The
ASSASSIN's obscured face keeps turning, panning around the
room as though they do not know where to keep their gaze.
They go to leave ALAN alone, but stop themselves short of
leaving THE HOLE each time they begin to.

The SHACK itself is a dark bedsit. At the back of the room
is a freshly-extinguished candle. ALAN picks it up, and
holds it toward the HOLE and the ASSASSIN. The ASSASSIN,
still holding themselves up on the SHACK WALL, reach into
one of their POUCHES and produce a MATCH. They strike it
against the SHACK WALL. In the BURST OF LIGHT, THREE
SHEATHED KNIVES glint on the ASSASSIN's chest. They light
ALAN'S CANDLE through the hole.

ALAN carefully walks his CANDLE back to its place. The new
light reveals a stolen POSTER above the CANDLE - it is one
of the ones calling for information about 'a hooded
larcener'. However, this poster is decorated with bright,
childish crayon drawings of a caped, faceless figure playing
with children. ALAN returns to the hole enthusiastically,
but only the dull moonlight greets him.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY ROOFTOPS - NIGHT

The ASSASSIN finished climbing the summit of a collapsing
CLOCK TOWER, which groans under the weight. The CITY's
miserable entirety sits below, contrasted entirely by the
GOLDEN PALACE. Seen clearly from this high up, its intricate
gothic architecture, polished gold walls and stained-glass
windows are very visible.

THE ASSASSIN (V.O)

You are a golden cyst on this city.
I will cut you out with a single
word.

Arms spread again, the ASSASSIN drops through the night to the rooftops below.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE HALLWAY - NIGHT

The HALLWAY is on the thirteenth floor, L-shaped, and has a DOOR on either end. Its walls are white with a gold trim. The red carpet is lavish, the colour of congealed blood. A HINGED STAINED-GLASS WINDOW tints the faint column of moonlight struggling against the room's darkness.

The ASSASSIN carefully opens this WINDOW, enters, and coaxes it to close silently. They slink toward the DOOR located at the end of the HALLWAY's longer section, but the WINDOW is re-opened by the wind, and begins to slap loudly against its frame. The ASSASSIN freezes, and retreats into the thick shadow of the HALLWAY's corner. The DOOR they were heading toward unlocks.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE HALLWAY - NIGHT

The DOOR, as it crawls open painfully slowly. Something pulls itself through the door, seemingly on willpower alone. It is so emaciated that human barely describes the PALACE SLAVE, which lugs itself toward the window, struggling to move its limbs and the CHAINED MANACLES that knock together loudly at the end of them. It wears a ruined servant's uniform, which flaps around its frail frame.

After battling the WINDOW, the PALACE SLAVE manages to lock it. It stops to take a few strained breaths, and then begins the arduous journey back to the DOOR. After what feels like an age, the PALACE SLAVE makes it through the door and forgets to lock it. Once the sounds of rattling manacles fades, the ASSASSIN emerges from the shadows, and leaves through the same DOOR - it just seems to lead to another hallway.

CUT TO:

EXT. PALACE BALCONY - NIGHT

It's now the cusp of twilight. The MAYOR leans on the BALCONY RAILING, silhouetted by the growing dawn as he faces the CITY. The ASSASSIN skulks out of the BALCONY DOOR, and calmly walks behind the MAYOR.

The ASSASSIN audibly draws one of the THREE SHEATHED KNIVES on their chest, and it glints in the twilight. The MAYOR jumps, and spins round at the sound. He is smaller than his

posters suggest. The ASSASSIN covers his mouth before he can scream, and pulls him into a tight embrace.

CUT TO:

EXT. PALACE BALCONY - NIGHT

The MAYOR sobs into the ASSASSIN's hand, while staring into the hooded darkness of thier face. The ASSASSIN leans in n whispers a single word, barely audible yet wholly unintelligible. The MAYOR's cries rapidly die down. He looks at them with puffy, wet eyes, and nods. He appears almost calm as he quietly flinches from the ASSASSIN's KNIFE ending his life.

THE ASSASSIN

The city asked for this, old friend.

Though there is apparent silence, the ASSASSIN's shoulders betray their own tears. Their sobs are quiet enough to seem imagined.

The sun has just about finished rising.

CUT TO:

EXT. PALACE BALCONY - NIGHT

The PALACE SLAVE stumbles through the BALCONY door, and points weakly toward the MAYOR and the ASSASSIN. Almost instantly, it is knocked over by three PALACE GUARDS storming through the door. Their pristine, lightly armoured uniforms barely fit around their guts, and their swords flop dangerously in their untrained hands.

PALACE GUARD #1

Hey you! Get away!

The ASSASSIN turns, revealing the BLOOD clinging to their cloak and clothes alike. Out of the three scabbards on their chest, one is empty. The ASSASSIN gently lays the MAYOR on his front, as a KNIFE stands proud in his back like a sundial. They then mount the BALCONY RAILING, and stand facing the PALACE GUARDS running toward them. With their arms outstretched, the ASSASSIN falls backward into the CITY below.

The PALACE GUARDS stagger as they try to stop themselves falling over the BALCONY RAILING, and look down below.

FADE TO BLACK

THE ASSASSIN (V.O)

What else was there to do?