**Narrative**

**A grade**

***The Fugitive***

It’s such a cold night. The air is still and freezing and the streetlight provides no warmth, simply a

harsh pool of sterile light. Underneath the light she’s huddled, sucking as much heat as she can out of her only cigarette. Her hands shake as she brings it up to her pale lips, takes one last drag, and flicks it away. The cold extinguishes the glowing spark at once, and all that is left is the smoke, spiralling up past the light to mix with the night air. It starts to rain. Slowly at first, but gradually getting heavier. Eventually, she pads out of the light and down the street to where a derelict warehouse sits.

She’ll be dry there if not any warmer. Her eyes dart about between the dark, tangled locks of hair that covers most of her face. She’s looking for something, though she looks terrified of finding it. A man passes her in the street, giving her a brief smile before donning a pair of sunglasses. She gives it no further thought as the rain turns to hail, which stings as it collides with her head and neck. But just as she reaches the shelter of the warehouse, a thought crashes over her.

She knows that man. The man who wears sunglasses at night, who is always impeccable in a shirt and dinner jacket. She knows him all too well. Then she becomes aware of other things. The way the hail suddenly stops, and the soft click as a safety catch is removed from a gun. The warehouse is dark but she darts inside, feeling a relief at losing herself in the darkness. Her relief, however, is short lived. A shot screams out from a gun and the splintering of wood and a blossoming of pain tells her she’s been clipped by a bullet. She runs on into the darkness, melting away, just as a dozen black clad men and women move into the building, guns in hand, Their eyes are empty, merciless and they pad through the building without a sound, more shadow than human.

It’s a while before she is found. She’s on the crumbling roof, right on the edge. Below there is nothing, simply a deep abyss. She turns to face him as soon as he appears, her face hidden in shadow. Trees that were mere seeds when the warehouse was being built have swelled and grown to become giants.

She holds a smooth leafless branch on one hand, as much for comfort as support. He smiles quizzically, waiting for her to speak. Finally, the words come.

“I’m tired,” she whispers. “I’m so tired. Tired of running, tired of living.” She pauses for a moment,

letting her words twist and flow across the void between them. Only the white of his shirt is visible in the dark, and he looks like a ghost. She takes a shuddering breath and her voice grows in strength.

More people appear on the roof as she speaks, waiting, listening. Their guns hang by their sides,

almost but not quite forgotten.

“I didn’t do that. You know that, I know that. You just needed to wash the blood off your hands and

transfer it to mine.” Her voice takes on a resolute tone, as if something has been decided, and she

brushes her hair out of her face, showing them a young girl. The clouds have drifted away and the

moonlight bleaches everything into shades of white and black. She looks like a ghost.

“I can’t do this anymore. You’ll always be there, a few steps behind me. You’re my shadow and you’ll

never be gone. You’ll haunt me ‘til the day I die if you must.” She closes her eyes. She’s beautiful in the moonlight, a beautiful ghost. Already dead.

“I always loved the winter,” She whispers cryptically. “It’s when all the beautiful things die, or sleep.

But they’re always back. Always.” She pauses, turning her gaze down into the black. It’s lit up for a

second by the moonlight and she realises, at last, that this is the end. Not just the end of the hiding,

the pain and the terror. Her arm is raw where the bullet has clipped it and blood runs down her arm,

dripping and pooling on the floor. “But I’m not like the flowers,” she murmurs, her eyes on the blood, “and I won’t come back.” Leaving the men and women standing on the roof, she jumps.

When the morning sun finds her body, she looks asleep, her lips slightly parted and her eyes closed.

Beside her broken form is a tiny, exquisite flower, petals open to the winter sun.

(779 words)