

fallout

A corporate office tower in McPherson Group's Central Business district. Ontario region—North America.

Oblivious to the sobbing girl behind her, the shocked gasps and panicked murmurs in the room, she fixates on the feed display without taking in any of it.

For now Apple can only think about how this is the place she will remember being when someone inevitably asks the question, "Where were you when you heard about Amsterdam?"

How humiliating.

Apple finishes her lunch quietly and leaves the break room, making her way past ashen men and women who stand silent in their cubicles, eyes glued to the feed.

She enters her small office and shuts the door, stopping by the narrow window.

Air traffic outside has dried up, while cars below have turned the streets into a parking lot, drivers grouping around larger screens.

The world is suddenly different now. This is something new. Something you wait a lifetime to see, always hoping you won't.

Still, she wonders why she doesn't feel any different.

Hovering over the oak desk, her display reads, '410 new Q-Mails, 409 marked urgent'.

Apple sits down, placing her PDA on the varnish.

"Call mom," she calmly tells it.

A digital voice says, "The subscriber you are attempting to call is not logged on."

"Call dad."

Her father's face appears onscreen almost instantly.

"Apple..."

"Is she okay?"

"I don't know. We have people in Rotterdam, but they can't get through the road blocks."

"Dad... is it really as bad as they're saying?"

"I think so."

An uncomfortable silence.

"Apple I have a lot going on here. As soon as I know anything, so will you."

"End," she says, leaning back in the leather chair.

A knock at the door then an analyst appears there—nose red, mascara running.

“Oh God... Ms. Zenith,” she says between sobs, “did you hear?”  
For some reason Apple shakes her head, offering the woman only a blank stare.

“Someone dropped a nuclear bomb on Amsterdam.”

“A bomb? How... bad is it?”

“It’s gone.” The analyst pads away tears with a makeup-stained handkerchief, struggling for composure. “They’re saying it’s all gone.”