

The 221<sup>st</sup> floor of an employee housing complex in McPherson Group's Three district. Ontario region—North America.

Apple drops her PDA on the kitchen bench and opens the fridge, kicking off her work shoes.

“Infotainment, something light.”

The display pops up in one corner of the adjoining living room. On feed a talk show returns from commercial.

The host says to camera, “You’re watching Vanderbolt. We’re talking with Ennis Pryce, the man who gained notoriety—quite literally overnight—when he leveled Amsterdam with a hundred or so megatons of nuclear fire, one year ago today.”

On B camera Ennis says, “That is a colorful introduction Kirk.”

Apple closes the fridge, absently staring at the display. She’s seen photos of Ennis Pryce, but never heard his voice.

His quiet, soft-spoken manner somehow surprises her.

The body language is unusual, even for a talk show guest.

To Apple, Ennis seems almost... whimsical. At ease with himself, and his place in the universe.

This man—this genocidal maniac—intrigues her.

“Lobbyists for the extreme left continue to push for an MoD-sanctioned trial,” says the host, “while unionists and universalists alike insist that Amsterdam be classified a rogue state, posthumously as it were.”

Ennis cocks his head, looking somewhere off-camera. “Let’s be clear... Amsterdam was no Islamiyah. Amsterdam may have rejected the unilateral ambitions of MoD and corporate unionists, but it never tried to push that ideology beyond its borders.”

“True,” says Kirk Vanderbolt.

“It’s important that people out there understand *why* the whole Amsterdam thing happened.”

Apple steps closer to the display.

“And... why is that?”

“Not to be admired by anyone...”

For the first time since her mother died, she feels something other than cold.

“It happened,” says Ennis, “because a misguided piece of shit who clearly should never have been given nuclear capabilities... in an unfocused moment clouded by *bitter* disenchantment... pushed the instant revenge button in his hand. And, as an afterthought, ended the lives of more than a million people.”

“Are you a... religious man?” Kirk asks.

“I was raised Catholic. I’ve lapsed, of course.”

“And if it’s not too personal... legality of your actions aside, how do you ask God to forgive you for all those deaths?”

Ennis looks silently at the floor, his eyes hidden in shadow.

“You don’t. Mortal sin is a binary thing. You’ve either killed a guy, or you haven’t. What’s another million at that point?”

Apple gags on the warm alkaline taste.

She embraces it a moment, trying it on, letting the sensation fuel a fire that rises in her like an urge to both laugh and cry.

“Then again,” says Ennis on the feed, “maybe that’s just some fucking bullshit anyway.”

“What’s the one thing you would hope the world at large could learn from your experience?”

“Don’t blow shit up without a damn good reason. Maybe even, just don’t blow shit up. At least sleep on it.”

What really pisses her off about this guy is that he thinks he got away with it.

She can’t believe someone hasn’t already tried to take him out.

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She sits in the back letting them read their minutes and get their localist grass-roots political shit out of the way, patiently listening while four speakers share their palm card wisdom with the crowd.

When the chairman calls out, “Any other business?” Apple stands, making her way downstairs to the front of their borrowed lecture theatre.

The chairman covers his podium mic, asking her, “What’s your name?”

“Apple Zenith.”

He looks at her for a long moment. “Seriously.”

She sighs. “You wanna see some ID, mister?”

Into his mic the chairman says, “Apple Zenith ladies and gentlemen.”

A few people clap, half-hearted. Most just stare.

Apple takes the mic, adjusting it.

“Hi. Some of you may have heard... they blew up Amsterdam last year. Well I say ‘they’, but that’s only because we all got so used to saying it. A lot of people don’t believe that just the one guy could be responsible for an atrocity like Amsterdam. They’ll try to tell you he’s a patsy for the larger conspiracy of One Worlders.”

In the audience of ninety leftist Green/Peace employees, someone coughs.

“But the truth is... he did act alone. He was responsible for every part of the tragedy, from delivering the payload to pushing the button. MoD will never sanction the war crimes trial of this man because unofficially, he’s kind of their hero. All of a sudden he’s dining with their board and attending the big parties? Huh. Proof to the world at large that mass murder can bump you into a higher social bracket. The man who destroyed a million families is untouchable now because of who he knows and what he did for them without even meaning to.”

Apple takes a moment to compose, doing her best to suppress the emotion becoming evident in her tone.

“And so the world remains indifferent. Long before the region becomes inhabitable again, people will forget the way it all went down.”

She takes a sip from the chairman’s water.

“My mother died in Amsterdam, leaving me a hundred billion-euro art empire with no real focus or long-term goals until late last night. I now intend to use those resources to pursue Ennis Pryce, through means legal and otherwise, with the aim of making him a public example—a footnote in the history books that will serve as a reminder to any future nutjobs thinking of nuking our cities that it’s *not* fucking cool.”

Apple writes her q-mail address on the darkboard before returning to the mic.

“If anyone wants to be a part of that, get in touch tomorrow morning. Thanks for your time.”

She nods to the chairman then exits through a fire door, setting off an alarm.