



## Once Upon a Time

The story springs to life. Bullets cut through the air, narrowly missing me. Here I am, trapped on the top floor of a ruined hotel. It was once an icon of beauty, but now all that remains is a vista of chaos and destruction.

From the eighth floor of this abandoned building, I stare out of a shattered window and behold a landscape drenched in the horrors of a terrible war. It's as if the gates of hell have opened, unleashing fiery demons upon the earth. In the distance, the ruins of once-majestic buildings glow like ghostly remnants from a long-lost era. The streets are strewn with the destruction wrought by relentless violence. Broken walls rise like battered giants. Fragments of concrete and steel form a maze of devastation. The air is thick with the stifling stench of burning debris and human suffering. I breathe heavily and watch as thick clouds of smoke slowly rise, like a sinister veil smothering all hope. It feels as though the atmosphere itself has been scarred by the terrifying events that unfolded here.

In the dark alleyways and behind the shattered windows, death lurks as an unseen presence. I can hear the faint whispers, lost in the wind, like echoes of lives abruptly cut short. The silence between explosions is suffocating, filled with an oppressive tension. It's an invisible barrier that only amplifies the cruelty of this place. I see people—shadows of their former selves—passing by in a continuous stream of fear and despair.

Their eyes, once sparkling with hope and vitality, are now filled with the harsh reality of the present. They move like marionettes in a macabre dance of survival. Their faces carry stories too horrific to speak aloud. Stories that belong in the darkest corners of the human mind. Stories of mistakes, and stories with mistakes.

Here, from this detached height, I feel like a spectator in a mythical play, where the gods have decided to show their most merciless side. I feel insignificant, like an innocent being lost in the waves of chaos that flood this war zone. It is in the heavy silence between the continuous eruptions of violence that the true nature of this hell on earth reveals itself. In that silence, where the echoes of lost lives still resonate, my heart is filled with a deep, unspeakable fear. Fear of the unknown consequences of this human madness, fear of the lost innocence, and fear of the dark path humanity seems to have chosen.

“Why am I here?”

It seemed like hours ago. The city lay in total ruin. The air was dark gray with smoke. People wandered in shock; some wept, others simply stared at the ground. This was the end of times, there was no doubt about it. As I stood there, witnessing the destruction and oppression in this war zone, I saw people holding their children in their arms, begging for mercy. Others clung to their last possessions, waiting for a sign of hope. There were those who stared silently ahead, perhaps searching for answers in their faith. I had always, especially lately, kept a subtle distance from others, but now I realized that everyone was searching for something, an explanation, a reason for all of this. I moved through the misery, not knowing where to go, but aware that I had to do something. In the distance, I saw a group of people gathering near a tall building. They seemed to have found some peace in the shadows, and I decided to follow them. I entered and found an old man sitting in meditation. I felt drawn to him, as if he had answers. He opened his eyes and looked at me without saying a word. I went upstairs.

Now I am trapped at the top of the shelled hotel. The once-beautiful view had drawn me to this place. It offers me the perspective I seek. I see much, but I made a mistake, a big mistake. I hear voices on the floors below. Voices I have no desire to hear. The sound of my pursuers, who have been searching for me for some time. I traded perspective for a strategic blunder.

“How did I get caught up in this? Was I too eager or overconfident?” I ask myself.

It’s nice to have a conversation with yourself, but now I need to act.

“Have I been lured into a trap? A trap set specifically for me, or is it pure coincidence?”

While I thought I was on the right path, I now realize that I did exactly what my opponent expected of me.

“How did I become so predictable?” flashes through my mind.