

## **Skyward Exodus**

### **Ch 1 Invitation**

Clementine offers a black coffee to her friend, Fitzy. She's happy it's her because she didn't need to be socially awkward like she does to every other customer that comes in, even though she takes all the orders. The coffee shop where Clementine works is in the sky. Smack in the south side of the big City, Kei. The building is split into three sections. The first third is the customer space, brightly lit with the front wall and the wall to its right filled with glass allowing the bright sun to illuminate the entire section and bleeding into the second third. Most can't see the last third in the back of the building because it's behind closed doors and walls.

The sunlight bounces off the floor as well, causing a sort of sparkle effect in the air for the customers. Clementine's area lacks that because of the counter but there are some low hanging lights with nice dim orange lighting to brighten the work area.

Fitzy grasped the cup of black coffee with her left hand, placing it just over Clementine's hand. Even through the yellow coaster, with the emblem of a white swirly pattern representing the shop being covered by Fitzy's hand, she could feel the warmth of the coffee melding with her own heat. In this same

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motion, Fitzzy threw out an unexpected invitation towards Clementine. "Clemy, would you like to attend the gala with me? Light sip." She always narrated her actions. She tilted her drink to reach her mouth while maintaining eye contact.

As the sweet bitter taste of the liquified dark roast flowed over her tongue, she found a striking similarity between it and Clementine. Clementine's reddish-brown shoulder length hair flowed towards her left side, protruding from under her black hat, with the same yellow and white circular spiral pattern of the shop engraved onto the center of her hat. Her cheeks always somehow maintain the appearance of being flushed red upon her lightly tanned skin. Her long eyelashes bearing the appearance of an angel's wings, exaggerating her hazel eyes that always seem to absorb as much light as it reflected. Yes, to Fitzzy she was very similar to coffee excluding her unique eyes.

"Oh, no I couldn't." Clementine politely refused by raising up her hands to wave them and her head. The gala gathering was a pretty big deal. She wouldn't even be able to match the richness look that would be present. It wasn't her style and the only clothing she thought was decent enough was her black uniform with her yellow apron and tie. She would also continue to smell like coffee beans from the constant exposure.

Fitzy maintained her smile with her head now tilted slightly to the right, but her eyes continued to blink as though doing so would allow them to change Clementine's response. "Oh, you definitely could." Fitzy said reassuringly, in hopes to spark some confidence back in Clementine. "There is nothing to worry about. Once you've gone to one it's not all that exciting. Plus... leaning." Fitzy leaned in closer. Her face now only inches away from Clementine's as Fitzy dragged her body over the counter.

Clementine could now clearly see Fitzy's fair skin and emerald eyes. Each individual strand of silver hair becoming clearer. Parting just enough to reveal her face. Her violet open sweater veiling over herself and the white countertop. Her black undershirt being the only piece of clothing that clings on to her in a comfortably tight way.

"We could keep each other company. To not be bored of course. Light sip." Fitzy took one more up-close sip, still maintaining her eye contact. Now close enough for both of them to smell the aroma of the black dark roast coffee.

"When will my turn to order come?" A man behind Fitzy announced. On that note, she leaned back.

"Let me know later if you decide to come." Fitzy announced before leaving through the brightly lit doors.

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Clementine clocks out, scanning her employee ID card on the device right next to the exit door. Making sure to cover her photo ID with her thumb as to not see her embarrassing photo being ruined by someone who missed the trash bin with their dirty tissue.

She stepped out into the night. The sky was a mixture of endless black with a faint tint of the darkest blue veiling over it. She could see every bright star in the sky as if they were little grains of sugar.

By this time the white, fluorescent streetlights remained on until the next dawn. Clementine removed her hat and apron, exchanging them in her bag for her brown windbreaker. Without the warmth of the sun, the chilling weather was quick to come in.

Clementine continued down the city towards the stairs on the sidewalk heading up to the train station elevated above the standard streets below. As she approached the edge of the platform, the speeding train halted as soon as it came. A blur of silver manifesting into a locomotive with eight carts behind it. As the doors peeled open, Clementine simply crossed to the closed doors on the opposite side of the train. She always

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preferred to stand, as she felt guilty taking a seat that someone else could be using instead.

As the opened doors shut again, the train took off at high speeds, but its speed seemed to have little effect on it's passengers. Clementine seemed almost motionless standing by the door, her right hand holding on to the plastic bands hanging above. Her eyes wandered towards the ad placements lined up just above the doors and windows of the train.

The first ad was a blue one with the picture of a white guy in a black suit with the image of a cloud on his right side with text reading, "COME ON AND JOIN THE CLOUD MANUFACTURING BUISNESS! THE LARGEST GROWING INDUSTRY IN THE PAST 60 YEARS!" Clementine then thought to herself.

*How is it even legal to have a monopoly in that industry? Only one person and their company has the means to keep us all living in the sky. Forget a monopoly, we basically have our entire lives in their hands. What about the next ad?*

As her eyes wandered on to the next ad, it contained a dark green background with an image of crossroad pickaxes next to bolded red letters that said, "COME JOIN THE EXCAVATION TEAMS DOWN ON THE SURFACE! NOW OFFERING A BASE SALARY OF \$80,000!"

All of this brought back some worries that she didn't need to feel right now. She always believed that it was too risky for any individual to go down to the surface and be exposed to the harsh environment. In her eyes, civilization has developed so much up here in the sky that society has been moving just fine. There are plenty of opportunities for people of all kinds to have up here. Despite these feelings she had, she was unable to change the mind of her brother, who went ahead and took this exact job just eight months prior. Now that he was on her mind, she was reminded about how long it had been since she last saw him. It's been five months. He told her before that the job only requires him to work down on the surface six months out of the year. Were they would have to have specialized suits to protect them from the environment down on the surface and up to tens of thousands of feet below it as well. No matter what though, Clementine was ready to see his face again next month and not have to worry too much about his safety.

Once she had had enough of looking at ads and thinking, Clementine popped in her earbuds. She played her heavy metal playlist, a classic she can always fall back on her commutes back home. She knew it was a stark contrast to her personality, but it was the music she likes and always listens to. She admired how much passion and energy was put into the creation of

these songs. She felt as though it provided her with the energy that she lacked most of the time. A sense of drive and passion. A feeling as though she could do more, but something within her stops her from becoming that overachiever. But at least she could feel like a different person in the moment, during the rush of the music.

She spent her time lightly nodding her head to the rhythm of the music until the train arrived at her stop on Zeamor drive.

As she stepped out onto the light blue lit platform in her neighborhood, this station was already on ground level somewhat. Clementine stepped down the few stairs that brought her back onto the sidewalk. As she looked around, she noticed the familiarity of the homeless people chilling on the black metal benches outside the station. Although, they were never the same faces as the night before. Almost like there was some sort of rotation or cycle happening that she wasn't aware of.

Her walk from the train station to her apartment was only about five blocks. In contrast to the city, this part of her neighborhood was more closely aligned to the ghetto but not quite there yet. The building and store hybrids always bore neon blue, pink, and orange signs and lights to grab customers attention. But since everyone was doing, all they did was make a

part of the map seem as though colors were thrown up here and no one bothered to clean out the suffocating mess. About a block and a half down, she walked by the neighborhood ma and pop shop. Owned and run by Mr and Ms Wilks. She always appreciated them and was reminded of that every time she walked by. It was her first job when she moved into her apartment here and they were very supportive of her when she went ahead and got her current job.

Once she got to the front door of her apartment building, she saw the sudden movement of a small creature approach beside her in her peripherals. It was Squibbles. The name she decided to give to the black cat that always wandered around here. They are a stray, but they learned Clementine's daily schedule and always caught her on her way back home.

Squibbles on the other hand couldn't have bothered less to learn about Clementine's name. Their unique mind simply referred to her as the creature that feeds them. As Clementine unlocked the door to her apartment building, Squibbles decided to go meet her by her apartment window. As Clementine stepped inside to walk up four flights of stairs, Squibbles decided to climb up the side of the apartment building using the AC units, fire escape, and exterior pipes that provided great handles for their ascension. Squibbles was well experience in climbing most

things, and Clementine's apartment was basically its playground as by now they could basically climb the side of the building with their eyes closed.

Cursed with speed, Squibbles as usual got to Clementine's windowsill before her. At least they were able to take this time to sit down and get a good look at the neighborhood. They adored the colorful cement playground lit up with pleasant blue, pink, and orange lights. It preferred this variety of colors compared to the city's bright white and dim orange lights.

*Shtunk*

Clementine opened the window while Squibbles was distracted. She left a bowl of water and a plate with her leftover rice and chicken from her lunch earlier. Although, to Squibbles' point of view, this was a meal fitting for royalty.

They didn't wait a second to begin indulging in their meal, but once they did, they were quick to notice that their feeder wasn't awkwardly staring at them eating. Clementine went to sit on her paper white couch. She was sat forwards, phone in both hands, starring at a text message she received from Fitzy during her walk, once again inviting her to the Gala.

From Squibbles' view, they recognized that look on Clementine's face. It was the look most people had when deciding

between two delicious treats such as a chocolate donut or a strawberry donut. They didn't want to linger on her weird behavior any more than it needed to. At least now they could actually eat in peace for once.

After a few minutes had passed, Squibbles raised its head to the sound of rapid typing from Clementine's fingers against her phone screen. Once she finished, Clementine disappeared heading towards her hallway in haste. Squibbles followed her movement while staying by the window to eat their food. Once she was out of their line of sight, all Squibbles could hear was the sound of drawers opening, and clothes being ruffled through.

Squibbles proceeded with their meal, but worried if she had gone crazy. The last thing they want a creature that feeds them so well is to end up out on the streets like the other crazies. Only to eventually be caught and taken by those creatures in suits. They never fail to take any crazy out off the streets. Squibbles didn't need her to go either.

"Squibbles." Clementine called from down the hallway.

Squibbles perked its head up. Every time she said "Squibbles" it was always followed with her voice continuing to be direct towards themselves. Then they saw her emerge from the hallway with two outfits in hand.

"Do you think I should go with this red suit or purple one?" She asked Squibbles while presenting them one at a time.

"Meow." Squibbles responded to unintelligible words.

"Your right I should go with the purple one. I wouldn't want to stick out too much." Clementine fled back down the hallway with suits in hand, while Squibbles had already finished their meal. They went ahead and knocked the bowl back down into the apartment before departing. During which, the bowl struck the remote, turning on the television in the living room.

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Oct 3, 2326

Today Fitzy invited me to go to the gala. I don't know why now; she's gone plenty of times years before and didn't invite me. I mean it's not like I wanted to go; I don't have anything to contribute like those other more successful people have. All I did know was that Fitzy's family was always very wealthy so she would attend by proxy because of them. Maybe she really was bored. I mean it wouldn't hurt her to not attend one for a year, but maybe it's still important to her.

Which is why I came to the conclusion that if it's something important to, Fitzy and she invited me, then what friend would I be if I didn't accept. Luckily, I actually do

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have some pretty decent outfits from high school, I just hope the style isn't outdated.

Now that I think about it, I only have these outfits because of Fitzy. She wanted me to accompany her during dances and proms, I wouldn't have gone voluntarily but I knew it would be a fun time if she was around. She always had that charisma about her.

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