

Visit to A Bright Future

By Cameryn Bates

“You’ve finally made it!” Kate said, wrapping her long, slender arms around Julie, her old roommate. They embraced in front of the train station as hordes of people rushed past.

“It’s been so long,” Julie said, pulling back and grinning up at her friend excitedly.

“You’re telling me!” said Kate. “It’s been what—four years?”

“Four and a half.”

“Way too long,” Kate agreed, throwing an arm over Julie’s shoulder. She was much taller than her friend, especially in platform heels, but that didn’t stop her from wearing them. She scooped up Julie’s travel bag and the two began making their way to the front where the car was parked.

“I have so much to show you, Jules. This city—it’s amazing.

“So I’ve heard,” Julie said with a grin.

She had heard many stories of the notorious Shining City. It had been deemed the cleanest, safest city in the world to live in. A feat that had taken years to accomplish, and the efforts of every person living within its limits. But they had done it. And now, around the world, more and more cities, and towns, both large and small, were following suit. Sometimes, all people really need is a good example of what change looks like. That and a reason to keep going.

The girls exited the station and Kate led her friend to the car. Julie blew out a low whistle as she took in the sight of it. It was new, matte black, and curvy.

“Like the whip?” Kate asked, loading the suitcases into the trunk.

“It’s incredible,” Julie said as she settled into the passenger’s side.

“Bought it last week with my raise,” Kate said donning a pair of dark sunglasses and rolling the windows down. “It’s solar charged, of course, and it’s *fast*.”

“You *have* always liked driving fast,” Julie agreed, clutching her bag to her chest in anticipation. Kate smirked and then took off, reaching 60 MPH in seconds. Beside her, Julie was laughing exuberantly, her hair blowing wildly in the wind. Kate whooped and hollered as they reached max speed, relishing the feeling of freedom that driving always brought her.

As they approached the top of the hill, she reluctantly slowed to a legal pace, wanting to give Julie a good first view. She rested her arm outside of the window and as the city came into view, she made a sweeping motion and said,

“Welcome to the Shining City, my friend.”

Julie’s jaw dropped and she gawked in awe. Before her was the most glorious place she had ever seen. Really, the pictures did not do it justice.

The Shining City had gotten its name because of the beautiful way the sun glinted off the buildings, like mirrors in the sun. And essentially, that’s what they were. The open walls allowed the sun to light the insides of the buildings by day. And by night, the remaining energy was recycled to ignite the place with vibrant, neon signs. Every building from the old city had been transformed into something better. The whole place had been reborn.

“If you think this looks cool, just wait until you see my apartment,” Kate said.

The drive to Kate’s place took them right into the heart of the city. Julie was surprised to see just how many trees there were.

“It’s mandatory to have a living plant at least every 30 feet,” Kate explained. “Even indoors.”

“They must have a lot of potted plants, then,” Julie noted, looking up at one of the buildings to her right, towering so high that it nearly disappeared into the clouds.

Kate just smiled and pulled her car into the parking garage. After plugging it in to the solar cable, positioned outside, she helped load her friend’s bags out of the car. They took a short elevator ride up to the main lobby. When the doors opened, Julie’s jaw dropped for a second time that day.

The room was bright, open, and full of greenery. Like most buildings in the city, the walls were made mostly of that thick, high tech solar glass which allowed all of the natural light of the sun to warm and light the interior, all the while converting the leftover solar energy into electricity for later. The ceiling was also made of glass, only it was stained in mosaic shapes, resembling a church window from the old days. Still, it lit the giant room with warm, buttery sunlight, casting rainbows in every direction.

The floor beneath Julie’s feet was a beautiful white tile. But built into it were small glass tunnels which wove expertly around the room, carrying streams of running water to the trees that were growing straight out of the floor.

Kate had to duck so as not to hit a low hanging branch as they walked beneath one of said trees. Julie reached up and caught a leaf between her fingers. It broke off into her palm and she examined it.

“Careful,” Kate cautioned. “If they catch you pulling the leaves off the trees, you could get fined.”

“It’s real,” Julie said, holding the leaf up to her friend in awe.”

“As real as any other tree,” Kate said, laughing. “They had them planted in here after the giant skylight was put in. It helps keep the air clean. Most buildings here have followed suit. The ones that haven’t still have plenty of *potted plants*,” Kate added with a smirk.

“You weren’t kidding,” Julie said, shaking her head in awe.

“Yep. The city takes its tree rules very seriously.”

Kate nodded jovially to a footman.

“How’s it going John?”

“Doing fine, Kate. And yourself?”

“Can’t complain,” she said with a grin.

“I see you have company,” John said, nodding politely to Julie.

“This is Julie, my friend from college. I’m showing her around the city for the next few days.”

John smiled politely. “You’ll have plenty to see, I’m sure. I hope you have a most enjoyable visit,” he said to Julie.

“Thanks,” she said with a grin.

The girls stepped into another elevator, this one made mostly out of glass as well, and Kate punched the button to the 85th floor.

“You’re not afraid of heights, are you?” she asked, one eyebrow arched.

“Guess we’ll find out,” Julie responded as the doors shut and the elevator zipped up at lightening speeds.

The elevator shot past the roof of the main lobby area and up to the tower which stood higher than the rest of the building, leaving them with a clear and open view of the whole city.

“Just look at this view,” Kate said as she climbed ever higher into the air. Julie felt her knees wobble slightly. It was nerve-racking knowing that the only thing keeping her from falling to her death was a thick layer of glass. But she trusted the engineers who had built this place. Besides, Kate was right, the view was outstanding. Almost enough to distract her from the fear of being so high above it. From up here, the city somehow looked even more serene and majestic.

When they reached Kate’s floor and stepped inside her apartment, Julie shook her head in awe. The place was open concept and decorated with simple, neutral furniture. It was cozy, but plenty big for just one person (and guest). She walked around, admiring Kate’s artwork and knick-knacks. She wasn’t at all surprised to find that the entire east wall was made completely out of glass. She stood before it, feeling warm and calm in the afternoon light. It wasn’t too bright or too hot because, according to Kate, the high-tech glass regulated the amount of sunlight allowed to pass through.

Everything really is perfect here, Julie thought to herself.

“What do you say we put off the unpacking ‘til later and go to a museum?” Kate suggested coming to stand beside her friend. Julie looked back at the small pile of luggage left deserted in the center of the room.

“I like that idea,” she said with a smile.

Kate took Julie to one of the oldest museums in the city. She found that, out of all of them, this one told the history of her city and the world better than most others because it showed how things had been before.

They watched a video being projected on a large screen displaying images of what the city had been like before the war, before the rebuilding. The pollution, the inequality, and the destruction was evident. Julie couldn't imagine what it must have been like to live in such a world. A world where there was so much uncertainty. So much discord.

She and Kate made their way through, walking, as if through history. She liked that about this particular museum. Liked watching the progress unfold right before her eyes. It started with small things. Like switching over to more environmentally friendly ways of producing energy. It moved onto bigger things, like the fight for equality and respect for all people in the world.

She knew what she was watching was a simplified version of what had really taken place. All that had been required. The blood, sweat and tears that so many people sacrificed in the name of a brighter, better future. She would never understand what it must have been like to be them, the people of the past. The true fighters. But she knew she could honor them by living a worthwhile life. One that would keep this dream of a brighter future moving ever forward.

The journey that had led to this city, in all its glory, had a long one, not without trials and setbacks. But Julie was proud that it hadn't stopped society from doing what needed to be done. Together, they'd made it.

At last.