Short Story 2: “The Future is Ours”

I love the sound of pennies falling on top of pennies, Vanessa thought, as she added another handful of coins into the giant jar on top of the kitchen cabinet. She had been saving her money for the World’s Fair ever since the city announced that the biggest World’s Fair in history would take place a few blocks from her own house in Queens, NY.

Vanessa remembered walking to school one morning, when she saw the paperboy toss a newspaper onto Giuseppi’s stoop. The headline read, “The Future is Ours: World’s Fair Coming to Flushing!” Vanessa opened Giuseppi’s newspaper and read about how the great pilot Howard Hughes would fly around the world to invite people to the fair, and that the theme of the fair was the future. Vanessa hoped the future would be better; 1938 was a hard year for her family and for other families on her block. Her mother had been working triple shifts at Uncle Joe’s Coffee Shop to make ends meet.

Vanessa worked hard that year. She read to Mr. Laugherty on 32nd Avenue. She bagged groceries at the corner store. She took out the neighbor’s trash each week. At the end of the year, she had saved enough money to take her mother with her to the World’s Fair. Vanessa wanted to give her mother hope for the future.

Every night she dreamed of a future that included smell-o-matic movies, something called air conditioning that made the air cold, even when it was summer, and photographs with color. The unthinkable was just around the corner, and she wanted to see it.

On April 28th, 1939, a few days before the World’s Fair opened, Vanessa woke up to a crash. Then, she heard the sound she loved—pennies falling on pennies. She could also hear shuffling, whispers and the front door opening. Vanessa ran downstairs as quickly as she could and found the front door wide open. Her penny jar was broken in pieces with no pennies anywhere to be seen.

Vanessa ran upstairs, jumped into bed and began to cry. Even though her mom knocked on her door, she refused to show her face. All of that hard work, for nothing, she thought to herself. Vanessa felt the future falling out from under her.

Two days later, Vanessa heard her mother through her bedroom door say, “Vanessa Lugones, stop moping and come downstairs for breakfast.” Vanessa called back, “No Ma! I don’t feel hungry!” When her mother started counting down, she knew there was no choice but to come out of her room.

“Come with me.”

Vanessa followed her mother past the breakfast table, which had no food on it and out the door.

“Where are we going, Ma?”

“You will see.”

Vanessa and her mother walked onto the street. After a few blocks, the streets filled with cars and families headed in the same direction. She realized they were walking toward the World’s Fair!

When they got to the entrance, Vanessa’s mother took crisp dollar bills out of her bag, and said, “Two please.” Vanessa looked up and asked, “But how?”

Vanessa’s mom hugged her and answered. “I work so hard because I believe in you, and I believe in the future. I want you to have hope. In fact, I have been saving up for this day ever since they announced ‘The Future is Ours!’”