

Flash Forward: Sushi Dinner Foreshadows Family's Future

I glanced at their table only a few sips in to my first half-priced pint of the night. When I'm waiting on someone to arrive or something to happen, I notoriously people watch. People sometimes catch me watching them. I don't care. They should be flattered that I want to study them so.

When I look at them, I wonder what else they thought about wearing that morning when they got dressed. I wonder if they're coming or going. I think about what else they wish they were doing. Whether it's an airport, a restaurant, a traffic light or a conference, I'm always curious.

They sat down across the table from each other. There were only two menus on the table so no one else was joining them.

Her dress was striped - black and white - and was worn on top of black hose. Her hair was dyed blonde. If it were 10 years ago, you'd say she was rocking a grunge look. If it were five years ago, you'd say she was goth. She ultimately was neither. She just woke up that morning and got dressed for class in what she thought she looked best in.

His wardrobe came from a combination of Target and the local sporting goods store. Jeans, tennis shoes and a sweatshirt with the name of a large university on it. A white T-shirt was underneath, poking its collar out just barely, as if it, too, were curious about this pair.

I had arrived well before my company for the evening, so I kept working on my Fat Tire.

When they started talking, I listened. I looked away but was fixated on what they were discussing. He was her dad, in town on business, and had decided to take

his freshman daughter out to dinner at a restaurant of her choosing. He was glad he got to see her.

They were only separated by three hours, but sharing tapas and sushi beat talking, texting and emailing. And, unlike those three mediums, she talked much more when they were in person. I snuck a quick look over, and he was smiling as she spoke.

She talked about finding diet pills in her roommate's dresser. She talked about her first classes and the handful of people she'd met. She was excited about fall break but nervous about her midterms. She'd seen some great shows in her time in Nashville and was looking forward to one next week.

And her dad just took it all in. He seemed to marvel at the fact that they'd made it this far. Here was his daughter - grown up, responsible, independent. She didn't need him anymore, except to cover the check later.

Matt walked in, shaking me back to my present. I had been so intently listening to and pondering my future - the time when 20 years from now I'll be ordering sushi and picking up the check while my daughter rambles and opines about college and anything else in her world. I realized that I, too, would hope to pass through her town in order to meet for dinner in my crummy blue jeans and running shoes.

I, too, would soak up every word about music or school or friends.

But that's still a ways off. Matt orders and then we launch into our current plans related to social entrepreneurship, nonprofit leadership and community change. We share what we've found recently that's inspired us and imagine how we can take ideas we see elsewhere and bring them to reality in our own worlds.

The father and daughter pay and leave, and I see nearly perfectly the juxtaposition of a present and a future. Our lives are best lived when we're in the moment, but have a keen eye on what's ahead. Sometimes, all it takes is cheap sushi, a girl in a striped dress and a few spare moments to be reminded of that.

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