

extra fingers

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HOW NOT TO GET INTO THE ARMY

I knew it

ISABELLA: "Dad, can anyone get into the army?"

DAD: "Oh, well, not really, no."

ISABELLA: "What if you were really really large? Like, you couldn't even run you were so large."

DAD: "No, you wouldn't get in then. You have to be reasonably fit to get in the army."

ISABELLA: "Oh, I know. What if you could squish up really small so that you could fit inside things and down, you know, really thin gaps between things?"

DAD: "Yeah, then you could. They'd easily take you then."

ISABELLA: "Good. That's good."

AMELIE, interrupting: "But not the very large people. You'd never get in if you were really large and you tipped a plane over? That would make them not put you in the army, wouldn't it?"

DAD: "Yeah, there's no chance then."

ISABELLA: "I knew it."

The trauma of long division

Multiplying a big number with another big number can be a pretty terrifying prospect. It's nothing, though, compared to the rocking back and forth and near collapse that long division can bring about in Isabella.

ISABELLA: "But, Dad. We have calculators! We've had them for ages. The inventing people made them ages ago, so why aren't we just allowed to use them? It'd be just so much simpler if we were."

I don't think he's doing it properly

AMELIE: "Dad, there's this boy in swimming and, you know the kickboard?"

DAD: "Yeah."

AMELIE: "Well, he hangs onto it with the end of his fingers."

DAD: "Does he?"

AMELIE: "Yeah. You know the real end of your fingers?"

DAD: "Yeah."

AMELIE: "Yeah. That part of his fingers. And his body just also goes right down in the water. Like, right, right down. It goes so far down, and straight. And it's like he could touch the bottom with his feet. But he doesn't. That's how he hangs on to his kickboard."

DAD: "Oh."

AMELIE: "And, Dad, he kicks so hard. You should see him kick! I just get out of his way. Like, you wouldn't believe how hard he kicks. It's incredible! And he splutters a lot. He does so much spluttering and coughing and spluttering and coughing and spluttering and that."

DAD: "Hmm-hmm."

AMELIE: "Hmm. *(Pausing for a few seconds and then frowning)* I don't think he's doing it properly."

The funniest thing about becoming old is that you become a prisoner

ISABELLA to **HOLLY:** "The funniest thing about becoming old is that you become a prisoner."

HOLLY: "A what?"

ISABELLA: "You know, a prisoner. We're doing it in S & E* as part of law."

HOLLY: "No, you don't. You don't become a prisoner. How do you become a prisoner?"

ISABELLA: "You do, Holly! I'm doing it in law. You know, in S & E. *(Short pause)* Oh, pensioner. You become a pensioner . . . whatever that is."

* Society and Environment, a school subject

Once we were so happy

AMELIE, talking about school: "Dad, once we were playing so happily in the morning. We were playing ball games and having fun and the bell hadn't even gone."

DAD: "Yeah."

AMELIE: "And Mrs Jones, the Drama teacher, says, 'Oh no, girls. You've got to go inside and get ready for school now. And I'm, like, 'The bell hasn't even gone for goodness sake!'"

DAD: "Well, what was going on?"

AMELIE: "Like, it was just before school and the bell hadn't even gone."

DAD: "Goodness me!"

AMELIE: "And we were having so much fun and I was nearly in King. No, I was in King and I just had to bounce the ball and then she said, 'Out!' You need to go out."

DAD: "Oh, you must have been so disappointed."

AMELIE: "I was, and everyone was so angry. With her."

DAD: "Doesn't she know that you don't stop plays like that? When someone's on King."

AMELIE: "Dad. We were so happy."

DAD: "Hmm."

AMELIE: "We were just doing our own thing. It wasn't bothering her."

DAD: "Yeah."

AMELIE: "So annoying!"

DAD: "Well, I don't know what to say. I think I would have let you keep playing."

AMELIE: "And then we had to give our ball back."

DAD: "Right."

AMELIE: "We had to put our ball back in our thing [a locker of some sort, presumably] and then we had to get ready for boring old school."

For the first time in your life you've actually managed to give me exactly no help whatsoever

ISABELLA: "Dad, how do you spell 'ecological'? I think I've got it right but I'm not completely sure."

DAD: "E-c-o-l-o-g."

ISABELLA: "Yeah."

DAD: "You've got that, have you?"

ISABELLA: "Yeah."

DAD: "Okay. Well, you should know the rest."

ISABELLA: "What! But that was the bit I knew already. I already knew the 'ecolog' part. I just don't know the other bit."

DAD: "Oh!"

ISABELLA: "I can't believe it! For the first time in your life you've actually managed to give me exactly no help whatsoever."

No offence

It had been a long night and I was getting very tired and, as Isabella still had a long way to go to be properly prepared for her maths test the next day, I'd also become a little tetchy. So I set about providing her with a problem I thought might help her to better understand metric conversions.

DAD: "Alright. Try this problem. And please concentrate Issy because I don't want to have to repeat myself. Okay, there's a fence. Right?"

ISABELLA: "Hmm-hmm."

DAD: "And it's 1.72m high."

ISABELLA: "What?"

DAD: “Yes, ‘high’. What’s wrong with that?”

ISABELLA: “But how can it be high?”

DAD, a little perplexed: “What? Fences go up as well you know. They don’t just go along.”

ISABELLA: “Oh, fence! I thought you’d said ‘offence’.”

DAD: “What! But it’s maths we’re doing. We’ve been doing maths now for about an hour and a half. Why would I be suddenly saying the word ‘offence’ for if we’re doing maths?”

ISABELLA: “I don’t know. How should I know? It sounded pretty weird to me as well, you know. You were just a little bit grumpy when you said it so I thought it might’ve had something to do with that.”

The joy of being “smoothed out”

AMELIE, regarding the lines on my forehead: “Here. I’ll smooth them all out for you, Dad.”

DAD: “But I don’t need them smoothed out, Amelie. Everything’s fine with my forehead.”

AMELIE: “No, it’s not.

AMELIE proceeds to push firmly against my forehead.

AMELIE: “There. That’s much better. You look alright now, Dad.”

DAD: “You think so?”

AMELIE: “Hmm-hmm. You look pretty good now. But I’ve got to hold my hand here to keep you looking right. So it’s not that much fun for me.”

DAD: “Well, no one’s asking you—”

ISABELLA, interrupting: “Mum, look at the veins on the back of Dad’s hands.”

KARIN: “Do I have to?”

ISABELLA: “Hmm-hmm. Really look at them. And then compare them to mine. See? His are all up and out. (*Moving on to Karin*) Now show me yours. Yes, much better. Mum’s are a lot better than your veins are, Dad. They’re not as good as Amie’s or mine are. But they’re still much better than yours, Dad. You need to get veins like mine that stay in your hand.”

DAD: “What?”

ISABELLA: “Your veins. They need to stay in your hand. See how mine are flat and don’t bulge up and look all yucky?”

DAD: “Hmm-hmm.”

ISABELLA: “Well, that’s the sort you need.

Lucky we have science

DAD: “Ams, do you ever think much about how you got here?”

AMELIE: “Yeah.”

DAD: “And why you are here?”

AMELIE: “Yeah. And also how did the planet make us up.”

DAD: “Hmm. Now that is a good question. That is a great question. What do you think happened?”

AMELIE: “I don’t even know. Please tell me, Dad.”

DAD: “Well, I don’t think anyone has an absolutely certain answer to that. But there was a point where there wasn’t life and then, rather suddenly . . .”

AMELIE: “But, Dad, we’re very very very lucky to have science.”

DAD: “Right. Are we? Why’s that?”

AMELIE: “Because science always brings an

end to something. Like, the cracks in the sky. Everyone thought it was cracks in the sky from heaven.”

DAD: “You mean the stars?”

AMELIE: “Yeah.”

DAD: “Heaven’s light shining through cracks?”

AMELIE: “Yeah. That’s just crazy.”

DAD: “Yeah.”

AMELIE: “I mean, like you can see it’s stars. And stars are so massive.”

DAD: “Yeah, but not when you look up at our night sky. They look really small.”

AMELIE: “I know. Some people in my class say stars are actually very small. They say they bet they could touch one. I’m, like, actually, I don’t think you would be able to. They’re so far away.”

DAD: “And when you get closer they just turn into giant hot balls. That you can’t get near.”

AMELIE: “They’re bigger than the Sun.”

DAD: “Way bigger. Some of them. And the Sun is massive compared to the Earth.”

AMELIE: “I’d love to see one, though.”

Year Three birthday party invites

We were on our way home from a birthday to which Amelie had been invited.

DAD: “Was that an all-class party you went to?”

AMELIE: “No. There were only fourteen people invited.”

DAD: “Oh! Fourteen’s quite a lot though. Do you play with Isabelle [the girl hosting the party] a bit, do you?”

AMELIE: “No.”

DAD: “Okay. Well how did you get invited then?”

AMELIE: “I don’t know.”

DAD: “You don’t know?”

AMELIE: “I don’t know.”

DAD: “Well, you must have some idea. Do you like to say hello to her and . . .”

AMELIE: “Well, normally if she’s upset I comfort her.”

DAD: “Oh, okay. And if she’s not upset? What happens then?”

AMELIE: “I don’t play with her.”

DAD: “You don’t play with her?”

AMELIE: “No. I don’t know why. She’s always off and about and I can’t find her.”

DAD: “Oh, okay.”

AMELIE: “And I’m always playing four square and she doesn’t like four square.”

DAD: “So, basically, the only contact you have with her is if she’s hurt herself and you comfort her?”

AMELIE: “Yeah.”

DAD: “And that’s the only reason why you got invited to her party that you can think of?”

AMELIE: “Yeah. *(Half-laughing)* I don’t know.”

THE LAST WORD

Spring

DAD: “Amelie, do you like spring?”

AMELIE: “Um . . . what is spring? What does it do?”