

They should have done it by now

AMELIE: "Dad, are they going to heat up Mars?"

DAD: "Heat up Mars?"

AMELIE: "Yeah. Like, put air conditioning on it or something?"

ISABELLA, interrupting: "She means, 'are they going to make Mars right for human beings?'"

DAD: "Oh, make Mars hospitable for humans?"

AMELIE: "No, not hospitals."

DAD: "No I mean—"

AMELIE: "Dad, moving on please."

DAD: "Oh, okay."

AMELIE: "I think they should."

DAD: "Do you? Why?"

AMELIE: "Dad, isn't it obvious? No one wants to walk around in a spacesuit all day. People'll get uncomfortable after a while."

DAD: "Hmm. I see."

AMELIE: "You think about it. It'd be terrible! I think they need to get some builders up there."

ISABELLA, interrupting again: "Oh yeah, just like that. How are they going to get builders up there? That's so stupid!"

AMELIE: "Easy. Same way the astronauts got there. You fly them up."

ISABELLA: "Oh yeah, just like that."

AMELIE, unperturbed by Isabella's scepticism:

"Hmm. They could do it really fast."

ISABELLA: "What! How?"

AMELIE: "Go at the speed of light."

ISABELLA: "Do you know how fast the speed of light is?"

AMELIE: "Hmm-hmm. You get to places in less than a day."

ISABELLA: "Ah, much faster than that. Try in less than a minute; I mean in less than a second."

AMELIE: "What! Then that's definitely how they should send builders up."

ISABELLA: "Yeah but they haven't worked out how to do it yet."

AMELIE: "I know. I know, Issy. But they should. It's so obvious."

DAD: "Yes, but as Issy said, 'they haven't worked out how to do it yet.'"

AMELIE: "Why not?"

DAD: "Well, why haven't you done it?"

AMELIE: "Because I can't. I'm not that smart but they are. They're really smart so they should have done it by now."

So rude

AMELIE: Dad, who's that king in the Bible? King, um . . ."

DAD: "Solomon?"

AMELIE: "Yeah, Solomon. Anyway, he killed all these babies, didn't he?"

DAD: "Yes, that's right. Children under two I think. No, hang on, hang on, hang on, that's King Herod."

Would they have comedians?

AMELIE: "Dad, don't you think comedians are really incredible? I can't believe how clever they are at making you laugh."

DAD: "Yeah I know."

AMELIE: "I'm not funny."

DAD: "Aren't you?"

AMELIE: "No."

DAD: "What about me? Do you think I'm funny?"

AMELIE, quick as a flash: "No."

DAD: "Oh."

AMELIE: "What about the terrorist people? Would they have any comedians? They can't be serious all the time."

AMELIE: "Yeah. King Herod. Anyway, I thought this was a bit rude. All these angels came down and said to Joseph and Mary 'Get out of here. Quick! Get out of here. And take baby Jesus with you!' But, that's all they said. They didn't save the rest of the babies. That is so rude!"

It's just dirt

ISABELLA, enquiring as to who Don Bradman was: "Wait. Is he a sport player?"

DAD: "Well, he was. But he's dead now."

ISABELLA: "What! He's dead?"

DAD: "Yeah."

AMELIE: "I thought he was like Donald, the duck or something."

DAD: "No, he wasn't a cartoon character. He was a real person. A cricketer who was held in the highest regard not just in this country but all throughout the world."

KARIN: "They even knew about him in India."

AMELIE: "India! But they don't even play cricket there. It's dirt."

FROM A TRIP TO LONDON

Hard lettuce

AMELIE, at a restaurant: "I'm not eating that?"

DAD: "What?"

AMELIE: That! The hard lettuce. It's like onion."

She was referring to cabbage.

You would be hated

AMELIE, approaching Buckingham Palace: "How much trouble would you get into if you killed the Queen? I bet everyone would hate you?"

She's got enough space

ISABELLA, as we passed 10 Downing Street: "Does the Prime Minister ever come out? Because he's got to come out for UV and exercise. Where does he live? Does he live with the Queen? Because she's got enough space."

What do visitors do?

ISABELLA, referring to Cambridge University: "What do you do there [as a visitor]? Do you look at people studying?"

Just the ones of me

ISABELLA: "Dad, can I have the photos?"

DAD: "Yeah, sure. Do you want them all?"

ISABELLA: "No, just the ones of me. Because what's the point of having all your other ones? I can get nature shots and all the old buildings off the internet. I'd never look back on those."

Adults don't have a life

HOLLY, referring to some photos she posted on social media: "I've had fifty likes."

ISABELLA: "What? But that was peak hour when you sent them. You only got fifty likes after a whole day?"

KARIN: "What's peak hour?"

ISABELLA: "It's about six o'clock in the evening. I get fifty likes in twenty-three minutes during peak hour. Easily."

KARIN: "Six o'clock? But that's when I'm doing the cooking."

ISABELLA: "Yeah, well, all the time is peak hour for adults because they don't have a life."

Not for old people

DAD, at the Natural History Museum and pointing to a modern human hominid: "Amelie, see how we're much more upright than a chimpanzee?"

AMELIE, pointing to a chimpanzee: "Not for old people. They're more like that."

If it passes the Amelie test

DAD: "Issy, do you want to go to the National Portrait Gallery one day?"

ISABELLA: "Well, um, if Amelie says she'll like it then I'll definitely like it because she's so hard to please. She only likes horses, farms, snow, or lunch."

If it sounds too good . . .

We had been discussing advertising on our way back from the British Library.

DAD: "Issy, there's an old adage and it goes like this: 'If it sounds too good to be true then it probably is'."

ISABELLA: "Ah . . . McDonald's, Dad. Aren't you forgetting something? When they say their lunches are a dollar, they're a dollar."



I just forgot to ask

AMELIE: "Dad, how's your tooth?"

DAD: "The one that was sore?"

AMELIE: "Yeah."

DAD: "It's fine now. That was about nine months ago that it was sore, Ams."

AMELIE: "Oh. And what about your ear?"

DAD: "Three months ago. That's unblocked now and working just fine."

AMELIE: "Oh. Good. I just forgot to ask."

They can't even hug you

I was telling Amelie about a time at school when a teacher deliberately struck my forehead with his knuckle.

AMELIE: "That was so mean. Teachers aren't allowed to do anything to us. They can't even hug you. I sometimes hug them though. Not that they seem to like it. Some look really worried. Like they're going to get fired."



It's not before dinner yet

Because the previous night's cello practice had been too difficult for Amelie to do in one long stretch, she promised me she'd definitely do half her practice the next night before dinner. "What a very good idea," I said encouragingly, "Now you're thinking." Amelie promptly retired with her iPod to her bedroom and closed the door. Just a few moments later I noticed the house was suspiciously silent. I thought I'd best investigate.

DAD: "Amelie?"

AMELIE, on her bed and staring absentmindedly into her iPod: "Hmm-hmm?"

DAD: "Well?"

AMELIE: "Oh! Yeah! . . . But, Dad."

DAD, feigning vagueness: "Hmm?"

AMELIE: "It's not before dinner yet."

How would they have known if it was off?

AMELIE, referring to food going 'off' before there were expiry dates: "Was there a time when people wouldn't have known when things were old?"

LAST WORD

I'd hate to be a dad

AMELIE, "I'd hate to be a dad. You've got to be brave, get all the cockroaches out and eat all the food that no one else can. If you want to save money, that is."