

extra fingers

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I always have to say we're getting one

ISABELLA, on living in a house that doesn't have a TV: "Everyone thinks I'm weird because I don't have a TV. They say, 'You don't have a TV? That's so weird.' And then I have no friends."

DAD, scoffing: "Oh, you do not have no friends!"

ISABELLA: "No, they think I'm weird because they think I have a TV but it's hidden. That's what I told them. Nuh, just kidding. But I have to sort of say that we're getting one. Even though we never are."

All my friends talk about ads, Dad. Every kid does. And so now I know heaps of them. There's a wiggly eyebrow ad that I know, there's 'Down, down', 'Go Harvey Norman, go!' There are heaps of ads out there to talk about with your friends, Dad.

Age is no barrier to looking your age

HOLLY, regarding a yoga teacher who visited her school: "She was fifty-years-old, but looked about twenty-eight. That's how healthy she was."

DAD: "Did she?"

HOLLY: "Yeah."

ISABELLA: "Well, you look about twenty-eight too, Dad."

DAD: "You think so? Oh thanks, Issy. Why twenty-eight?"

ISABELLA: "Because I saw a twenty-seven person go by once and thought you looked about a year older than that. But when you laugh you look older than twenty-eight. Heaps older! I always see the roof of your mouth when you laugh and that's where there's lots of veins. You also have a gold tooth*. That makes you look really old. About forty-eight . . . easily."

*I don't. I have one silver amalgam left in my mouth but she insists on referring to it as a gold tooth.

It doesn't matter

ISABELLA, on the way to school, singing a Coles' supermarket ad set to the tune of

Petula Clark's *Downtown*: "Down, down. Prices are staying down. Down, down. They're not on special, they're down, down . . ."

DAD: "What was that? How on earth do you know that tune, Is? You don't even see ads."

ISABELLA: "Yeah, I know. But it doesn't matter. All the kids at my school watch 'em, so, I still get to know about them anyway."

HOLLY: "Yeah, same here."

ISABELLA: "All my friends talk about ads, Dad. Every kid does. And so now I know heaps of them. There's a wiggly eyebrow ad that I know, there's 'Down, down', 'Go Harvey Norman, go!' There are heaps of ads out there to talk about with your friends, Dad."

Amelie's note

AMELIE, regarding an award she was to receive at her school's assembly: "Dad, I've got a note for you. I think it's about an award I'm getting. I think."

DAD: "Oh that's good, Amelie. That's really good. Where's the note?"

AMELIE, nonchalantly: "Er, in my pocket."

DAD: "Okay. Can I see it please?"

AMELIE: “No, not really.”

DAD: “Why’s that?”

AMELIE: “Well, it’s jammed.”

DAD: “Jammed?”

AMELIE, casually, as she continued to play with one of her toys: “Yeah. I can’t get it out.”

And so it was. Something that presumably was the note was buried deep in the left pocket of her skirt under a phenomenal aggregate of Year Two detritus that included a soggy tissue, some decaying leaves and bits of an old lolly wrapper mauled in the zipper. The harder I tried to prise open the jaws of Amelie’s zipper, the more it resisted my efforts.

DAD: “Oh, it’ll just have to stay in there, Amelie. I can’t get the damn thing out.”

AMELIE: “All night? It’s going to have to stay in there all night?”

DAD: “Yes. And all the next day by the looks of things.”

AMELIE: “But I thought you were a good zipper person.”

DAD: “Nope. No better than anyone else, Ams.”

AMELIE: “Well, just come to Assembly anyway, Dad. I think you should.”

Making waves

DAD, as we were walking to her classroom: “Are you excited about getting your award?”

AMELIE: “Yes, and you’re going to stay at school until Assembly’s finished.”

DAD: “Yeah, I know. I’m going to be at the assembly and you’re going to look for me up where the parents sit, aren’t you?”

AMELIE: “Yep. I always spot you because you

always have the camera out. I always see that camera shooting at me.”

DAD: “Yes. Well, do you like that?”

AMELIE: “Well, yeah. Because then I can easily spot you. Because you’re the one with the black hair and the dull-coloured clothes when everyone else is wearing colourful clothes.”

DAD: “I’m not that dull, am I?”

ISABELLA: “You’ve got your head right down and there’s just this camera and I’m, like, *(with a roll of her eyes)* ‘There’s, Dad!’ And then, sometimes you wave and I’m, like, ‘That’s unnecessary!’”

DAD: “Well, that’s rather nice for your dad to wave at you when you’re getting an award, don’t you think? What’s wrong with your dad waving to you? At Assembly? Do you like that, Ams?”

ISABELLA: “Well, we’re not meant to wave back. And it sort of looks like you want a response, so . . .”

DAD: “Well, you don’t have to wave back if you feel a bit self-conscious.”

ISABELLA: “Someone got in trouble for waving.”

When does childhood end?

DAD: “You know what I really find fascinating? I wonder when the day is where a child goes from being a child to not a child. I really find that to be an incredibly interesting thing to think about.”

ISABELLA: “I think it changes the moment you tick thirteen and you’re a teenager.”

DAD: “No, no, no. I don’t believe it works like that at all. Like tonight, for example, you were playing an imaginary game with some toys and you were talking out their characters. Now, Holly doesn’t do that

anymore. There had to be a day when she was doing that and then the next day she wasn't but it wouldn't be a particular day that involves everyone like when everyone turns thirteen as you suggested."

ISABELLA, the lament in her voice palpable: "I remember when she always used to play with me and now she doesn't."

DAD: "That's right."

ISABELLA: "I don't know exactly when that is, but I think it's around when you turn thirteen. Because then you feel all (*stroppily*) grown up."

DAD: "Well, do you think that's going to happen to you? When you turn thirteen?"

ISABELLA: "Who knows?"

DAD: "That's my point. I don't think it necessarily happens when you turn thirteen. There's just a day when you were playing with your toys and you were inventing the characters and inventing words for them to say and then, on another day, you just went, 'Oh, I don't want to do that anymore.'"

ISABELLA: "Well, you know Lucy?"

DAD: "Yes."

ISABELLA: "She's thirteen and she still plays with 'Polly Pockets'."

DAD: "Well, that's my point. It's not about a particular age that you turn; it just happens to you and I don't know when that happens and I find it incredibly interesting to think about."

ISABELLA: "And I don't so can we change the topic?"

DAD: "Why don't you find it interesting?"

ISABELLA: "Because it's very annoying to think about it so can we please change the topic?"

DAD: "Would you be sad to—"

ISABELLA: "Yes. To leave my toys. Now, there you go. There's your answer. Let's change topics."

DAD: "Do you think it's sad that Holly won't play with you anymore?"

ISABELLA: "Dad! Shush! Please!"

DAD: "Is that sad? I just want to know."

ISABELLA: "Okay. As soon as I answer this you have to find another topic straight away. Promise?"

DAD: "Yes."

ISABELLA, talking very quickly: "I find it sad."

DAD: "Oh, that was just to get rid of me."

ISABELLA, in a serious tone: "It's the truth."

LAST WORD

When he walks, he runs

AMELIE to **ISABELLA**, talking about one of her school friend's dad: "He's even taller than Dad is. He's so tall that when he walks, he runs."