

Who Do You Want To Live With?

by Jennifer Donnell

It was my idea. Trying to solicit sleepiness in the children, as the clock neared eight thirty p.m., I asked my first question, "Name somewhere in the world you'd like to visit."

The children chimed in all at once, "Greece, England, Finland, New York!" I closed the curtains and opened the window, just a crack, securing two metal locks to keep it in place.

"New York?" the oldest demanded of the youngest. "Why do you want to visit *there*? You don't know anything about *New York*," he continued, dismissively.

"He does." I affirmed, before my youngest could shriek in defensive retort, "He sees New York in movies all the time."

"Yeah, but that's not *all* of New York. What would he do in New York?" the oldest argued, turning the bedside fan on high and then to low again.

"New York is cool." I said, confidently, "There are lots of things to do there, it's considered one of the coolest cities in the world."

Perhaps my overuse of the word 'cool' was convincing, as he let out a more agreeable, "Yeah....".

I thought about asking what their absolute favorite dessert in the entire world is, but figured that would make them hungry. "Mom, I'm still hungry." my middle child, going through a growth spurt, had insisted earlier... after eating two helpings of dinner, three pieces of toast, a yogurt, and a banana... and already brushing her teeth.

We went through a series of fun, animated questions, before I asked,

“What are you most scared of?” I figured it might be failing a test or my daughter's lingering fear of giants.

“Knives!” the oldest said, immediately, as if it were waiting on the tip of his tongue.

“Bad guys, killing me.” the youngest admitted and then giggled at the serious sound of it.

“Not being able to scream.” the middle child exclaimed, erupting in her own giggles.

“Wait, now I'm scared!” my oldest son vocalized as the others agreed. He suddenly seemed half his age, my question obviously backfiring. We switched to talking about our favorite board games and holidays.

Sleep was already beginning to feel further away, when he asked,

“Guys, who would you rather live with.... Mom... or Dad.”

His younger siblings giggled in shock, not that they hadn't thought about it... *apparently*.

"You know I'm right here..." I joked, waving at them.

“I'd rather live with mom.” the question-asker said, which wasn't really a surprise to anyone. He's a little tightly wired and I'm the best at diffusing him.

"I'd live with dad!" the youngest called out, still laughing, affirming a devotion to his dad that I'd always suspected.

Meanwhile, my daughter turned and hid under her covers, mute, not wanting to answer.

The youngest explained his rationale, "Dad has more money." he admitted, as they all burst into laughter again, even my daughter. I hugged my daughter tight and told her she didn't need to answer.

This didn't appease her oldest brother, who demanded, "What about you, sis?"

After a few seconds of thought, she untucked herself and spoke up,

"Well, first of all, dad would be working all the time and we probably wouldn't be able to go with him.... and mom would have to take a job, so she'd be working a lot too."

Her brow furrowed as there was no good answer.

"Sissy just wants her mom and dad together." I concluded, on her behalf, "She knows it's nicest when your parents are together." I continued, feeling as if I was vocalizing an anti-divorce commercial.

It was a far cry from ten year old me, a child of divorce, cheeky and tough as boots. I frequently went around pointedly telling people, in an English tinged accent, that I wanted to, "get divorced at least twice." I really did, as it sounded colorful and feministic. I figured it would be fuel for the book I'd write, when I lived somewhere cool, like New York.

