

Spent

Business



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Spent It is midnight.

Hunger drags the teenager out of its cave. In search of food, the teenager (a high schooler) skulks over to the kitchen where it stocks up on snacks for the rest of a long night of homework. When it opens the refrigerator an energy-efficient LED light blinds its eyes and burns its skin; the high schooler is unused to light as it sacrificed its days of sun long ago. No, the high schooler has no need for light. Only for food. Only for solitude.

Only for tranquility. But there is no peace to be found, not for the high schooler. Long hours of school and homework demand that the creature must never be at rest, not even in the dead of night when nature dictates that it sleep. A high schooler in motion must stay in motion forever lest it succumb to the cyclical waves of projects, papers, op-eds, tests, and quizzes. The moment a high schooler stops treading in the waves it drowns in them without a sound. But it won't notice that its screams are silent because it has grown used to never being heard.

It is the same story told time and time again, and yet nothing changes. Numbers like this: “ the American Psychological Association found that nearly half of all teens — 45 percent — said they were stressed by school pressures” (Neighmond), are not too memorable. That number is not even a big one. That is less than half of all teenagers. But hold it up to a new light; Mountain Vista has around 2, 500 kids, that's 1, 125 teenagers who are feeling the pressure and feeling it hard. If that may not seem like a problem then consider that stress can lead to “ sleep problems,” “ sadness or depression,” and “ drug or alcohol abuse,” More than that, “ Stress that's left

unchecked can contribute to many health problems, such as high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity and diabetes” (Mayo Clinic Staff).

It is not a game because when a student loses the answer isn't as simple as 'play a little smarter next time,' it's about the health and sanity of kids- many of which are fighting just to hold on to the hope that one day they will know what's worth fighting for. They fight for a degree. They fight for a GPA. They fight so they can have a future and yet somehow all of that is overshadowed by an expected work ethic which has warped into something that feels more like a trap than an opportunity. Kids will say how much is too much, but no one listens. Because they are kids.

They are kids that feel and think like adults, too young and inexperienced to be called adults. It is a tricky line that teenagers have to walk, half the time being treated like children, half the time being treated like the opposite when in reality they are neither. Sometimes teenagers act like kids while they are asking to be treated like adults, more often than not because they are tired of feeling incapable. It would seem like a healthy dose of homework is a good solution; it provides the opportunity for responsibility and accountability, a chance for these wire-walkers to prove themselves worthy of the significance they all crave. It is. Until there is too much.

Then it is more like letting them walk to the other side of the wire only to give them a forceful shove to ground. It becomes a trap. The high schooler accepts these traps with an astonishing spring in its step more often than not. Sure it'll complain (what teenager doesn't complain?) every step of the way, but it will refuse to fall. Instead it will take refuge in its cave where it

will chip its way through hours upon hours of work because it still believes there might be something on the other side, no matter how many times it is pushed down. Maybe one day it will not get back up after the fall, but until then it keeps walking, only taking breaks for food, water, and occasionally a bout of procrastination.

When it cries out it is not heard– nothing ever changes, so it keeps on doing what it has learned to do. The price may be health, or it could be the rest of a fleeting childhood, maybe it is even a sense of purpose. Somehow these creatures, these wire-walkers, these kids have found verity in long hours at school and long hours at home, even when it wears them down to little more than crumbling shells of themselves. Work may be a good thing, but when it moves beyond the territory of motivation and learning, it may be rather toxic indeed. Works Cited Mayo Clinic Staff.

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