

Homework

"Have you done your homework?"

"Oh mom!"

"Quit playing with the dog and get in that bedroom and do your homework!"

Jason reluctantly released the sock that he had been pulling from Cocoa's mouth and the dog stood there in silence, waiting for her master to return to playing their game of tug-of-war.

"Can't a kid have some fun?"

"You've had enough fun today. Right now, it's time for your homework."

"Listen to your mother," the father insisted. "I told you how important your homework is."

"Oh yeah, like my whole life's gonna end if I don't do my stupid homework."

"Hey, young man, you watch your mouth!" The father had been reading the evening paper from the family room couch but now he directed his full attention to his sarcastic son. Jason remained on the floor near Cocoa, fully expecting a tongue-lashing by his father. He was determined to remain defiant, but his father's large imposing stature and the swiftness with which he was capable of pulling out his belt, quickly diminished his boldness. "We've been too lenient on you this year and your grades are down. But that's gonna change. From now on I want you to automatically do that homework of yours after dinner. And I don't want to have to tell you about it, again."

Jason slammed his fist into the soft, carpeted floor before rising. He was aware of his disobedience, yet he wished to make a stand. "I don't know what the big deal is," he sharply replied.

"The big deal is: we want you to have a future."

"I don't understand what's wrong with you kids today," the mother chided him. "They can't make it any easier for you."

"Oh right, like it was so much harder when YOU were kids." Jason's insolent response surprised even him.

"You're damn right it was," the father argued. He hopped off the couch

and approached his defiant son. "We didn't have all the luxuries like you kids have today. And we didn't talk back to our parents the way you kids do."

"It's tougher being a kid today," Jason declared, slowly backing away from his father. "You didn't have all the problems we have. We have a lot more pressure today."

"All right, just for that, you're grounded! Now get in that room of yours and do your homework! And stay there for the rest of the night."

"What did I do?" Jason cried out in surprise.

"You know very well what you did! You better start watching that mouth of yours, boy, 'cause I've about had it with your sarcastic remarks!"

Jason stormed out of the family room and headed down the hallway to his bedroom. Cocoa loyally followed him, wagging her tail.

The mother and father gazed at each other in silence for several lingering moments. Their son's laziness was becoming a growing problem and they were uncertain how to handle it. His behavior baffled them because they had always stressed the importance of work to their son. Where had he developed such apathy? They shook their heads in dismay before resuming their prior activities.

The father returned his attention to the evening paper which was displayed on the family room ceiling-viewer. He floated comfortably two feet above the flat, bed-shaped, anti-gravity couch, with his arms folded casually behind his head. "Turn to Sports," he commanded. Page one of the Sports' section instantly appeared on the ceiling-viewer.

The mother reclined on the shape-shifting rocking chair, which naturally altered its shape to provide the maximum comfort to its host. She reached over to the house's computer control panel, pressed a red button and ordered, "Othello, please." Colorful, life-like, computer-generated, hologram actors suddenly appeared in their family room and began to act out Shakespeare's classical play. Her left hand tightly gripped her Tension-Ball, which absorbed all the stress and anxiety from her mind and body.

"I hope we aren't pushing him too much," the mother noted worriedly. "You know, it's not good to push a child too much, either."

"The boy's got to learn that life's not easy," the father firmly replied. "No one's gonna hand you anything today. You have to work for it." He reached out and grabbed a snack made, and served to him on a tray, by their government-issued robot.

"Rays, please," he commanded, as he munched on his delectable after-dinner snack. An invisible beam was instantly emitted from the anti-gravity couch and was directed at its occupant. Gentle bursts of stress-relieving heat and comforting waves of inaudible sound, vibrated and massaged his aching back and his stiff neck. "These four-hour work days are killing me," he mumbled to himself.

"I hope we're doing the right thing."

"That boy's taking everything for granted," the father abruptly added in anger. "And we've got to put a stop to it right now."

"I guess so," the mother softly replied. Her eyes were already closed – her mind and body drained of all the anxiety that was the result of the previous argument. She was beginning to drift into a deep, relaxing sleep.###

Jason was fuming in his bedroom. He hurled his pillow against the wall in indignation before brusquely grabbing his homework assignment for the night.

"They don't understand," he bitterly complained, directing his comments to Cocoa. "Things are tougher today. They don't have any idea what it's like being a kid."

But since no reasonable alternative to his problem existed, he reluctantly placed aside his resentment and began to work. He inserted the homework disk into his player, grabbed the long connecting cord, and inserted its metal end into the socket in the back of his head. Like everyone else, his cerebral socket had been implanted at birth.

Jason always hated downloading his homework into his brain. He swore it was the longest two minutes of the day.