Jet-Lag Induced Stupidity: A Day in the Life of an Exhausted Teen

This summer, after my 16-hour tail-bone-bruising flight home from China, all I wanted to do was nap.

I told Mom that napping would restore me to my previous nerd dominance.

She disagreed.

“If you take naps,” Mom lectured matter-of-factly, “you won’t ever get over your jet lag. It’ll be impossible to get anything done. Life will become more confusing than it already is to you. And judging by how you are normally, you’ll very likely end up doing something extremely dumb and embarrassing.”

Yeah. Okay. I do get that now. But, right then, just as I had always done before, I failed to see Mom’s point … until it was way too late.

So, back in school, napless, I fall asleep twice, coming just a hair away from getting kicked out of English. By the time I get home, the entire purpose of my existence is to sleep like a drunk.

But, vaguely remembering that Mom is always right, I take a cold shower, don my Spiderman jammies, and proceed to crack open my 300-pound pre-calc textbook.

About halfway through the first problem set, I note my efficiency rate, a speedy (not) ten minutes per problem. I am working as fast as a cheetah, a cheetah that is half dead and has only one leg.

Ultimately, I alone must decide: I can sleep for an hour then work proficiently afterwards, or I can make progress on my homework the way Mom’s five-year-old laptop processes updates.

My sleep-deprived body beginning to melt into the tile at her feet, I inform Mom of my decision, go upstairs, fall into bed, and black out. It is 5:27 PM.
Much later, my eyes pop open and I tumble onto the carpet, face to toe with two pink-socked feet. My sister Shirley stands over me, demonically baring her teeth to ridicule my long slumber.

"Get up, idiot," she says.

Ugh. I hate siblings.

And then, I notice the time.

7:28. What?! How can I have overslept that much? I have ten million math problems and a mountain of forms for my parents to sign.

109566432nd piece of advice from Mom: Don’t panic. It won’t get you anywhere. Calmly evaluate your situation. Conclude what will help most. Take action immediately.

It’s funny how I learn all these problem-solving strategies from adults, but when it comes to applying these skills in real life, my brain zombifies. In the end, I always depend on the adult who swoops in with an antidote for my befuddlement and solves the problem.

But this time will be different. I’ll apply all the decision-making skills I’ve ever learned to get my homework done and forms signed despite the fact that time is up.

After three minutes of trying to pull my still-exhausted cement-like body off the floor, I finally elbow past Shirley’s pink tootsies like a soldier maneuvering on the battlefield.

"Heads will roll," I mumble, pulling a random strand of hair off her foot as I pass.

She delivers a karate kick to my butt.

Ow.

Alas, there is no time to engage Shirley in combat. I’ll hurt her later. Now, I clutch the door handle, pull myself upright, and stumble down the stairs to pick up where I left off.
Seeing me awake, Dad looks up from watching TV (TV at 7:30 AM in the morning?) to tell me I need to eat. I tell him I’m not hungry. There’s no time for breakfast.

I sit at my desk in the kitchen and quickly wrap up the first section. Mom comes out of her room and tells me to eat.

When both my parents want me to do the same thing, saying no is like asking to be minced and fed to lions. Having no choice, I get some leftovers from the refrigerator, as we commonly do for breakfast. While I eat, Mom sits down across from me.

I decide I want to tell her what’s happened. She always helps.

Me: Mom, I’m going to fail math.

Mom: Why is that?

Me: I have three math assignments due in like 40 minutes. None of them are done.

Mom: That’s all right. You have time.

Me: No, I don’t! I’m going to fail.

Mom: You need to have confidence in yourself. Everything will be perfectly fine.

I start to panic again. How will Mom help if she doesn’t know what’s going on?

Me: Mom, I’m about to fail. Nothing is fine.

Mom: What?

I start to get seriously scared. Horrendous thoughts crawl into my head like slimy bugs. I am unnerved. I spaz.

Me: This’ll be the first math score I’ll get this year. If I bomb it, I’ll get an F and it’ll take me forever to pull up my grade and I’ll never get it to an A. My college applications will show ten million thousand B’s on my transcript. I’ll make some lackluster college like MCC and it’ll take me 10 years to graduate. I won’t be able to find a job after graduation because everything I
learned will be outdated. I’ll be poor and forced to live in a cardboard box for the rest of my life.

All because of this stupid math assignment!

Mom looks at me like I am speaking Plutonian.

She also looks sincerely concerned. After all, “fail,” “B,” and “MCC” are not words in my mother’s vocabulary.

Mom: Sweetie, is everything all right?

Me: No, Mom! Stop messing with me!

With the last bite of breakfast in my mouth, I toss the bowl in the sink and plop back down angrily in my chair to finish my math.

7:43 PM.

PM?

Stop mocking me.

Me, slapping my forehead: Oh balls … of fire. It’s 7:43 PM. Not AM.

Mom, nodding her head knowingly: Ah, I thought you burned your brain out. Then I remembered: That isn’t possible. You have no brain.

Um, yeah.

I just love it when she’s right.