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### Five Minutes

My eyes struggle to blink back to life. *Where am I?* The confusion washes over me when I realize, *oh no*. I fell asleep. I wasn't supposed to fall asleep. I'm supposed to be at home by now, not on my boyfriend's couch. My mom is going to kill me. *Where's my phone?* I need to find my phone. There it is, wedged between the slightly withered cushions I was just previously sleeping on.

#### **3 new messages from Mom:**

Mia, when are you coming home?

It's past your curfew... Where are you?

I'm starting to worry, why aren't you answering your phone?

*Oh no*. That seems to be the only thought my scrambled mind can gather. I'm exhausted and can barely keep my eyes open. But I have to get home. If I'm not back by morning I'll be grounded for life.

#### **4 missed calls from Dad:**

1 new voicemail

*Should I stay the night and deal with the consequences later?* No, I messed up and the only way to fix this is to get home as soon as I can. I just need to stay awake for the ten minutes it takes to drive from here to my house. No big deal. I'll sneak out the front door and no one will

know I overstayed my visit. My steps towards the car are nearly silent, but the journey to enter the front seat with just my hands to guide me through the darkness makes it much harder to remain discreet. The eerie silence is dreadful; it's as if I'm being suffocated by the endless space surrounding me. I struggle to find my keys because I refuse to turn on any lights. Before starting the rattling ignition that would surely wake everyone in the house up, I manage to type out a poorly written message that reads, "on way home, sorry be soon". Hopefully my parents will ignore my flawed grammar and understand the gist of my extremely rushed but genuine gesture.

The spare energy I thought I still possessed seems to have depleted during my quest from the couch to my car. I aggressively rub my eyes with the palms of my hands and give my cheek a couple quick flicks with hopes that the pain will wake me up. The batting of my eyes only becomes slower the more I fight to stay awake.

They are burning, craving the moist barrier that shelters them. A few times my vision goes blank due to the heaviness of my eyelids. They are too strong for my weak body and I'm stripped of any control I still have over them as they force their way shut. Resisting rest, my head pulses with anger. I feel like I've been driving for hours but really it's only been five minutes. I can feel the unsteadiness of my car, its inability to stay in one lane due to my lack of concentration. *Maybe I should pull over?* No, that means I would get home even later. I can do this, *turn up the music and it'll wake you up.* Just five more minutes.

I'm mouthing the lyrics to my favorite song when I feel my body go limp. My eyes have completely shut now yet I am still aware that I'm driving a car. I ignore the vibration that ripples through me caused by the rumble strips on the side of the road, not because I want to, but because I physically can't make myself move. My hands slide down the rough finish of the steering wheel and my head jolts to the right, following the path my car has abruptly decided to

take. Darkness. I am filled with a faint odor that isn't smoke, or blood, but maybe a little bit of both. I hear nothing but the beating of my heart. My body must be numb because I can't feel anything, and my eyes must be closed because I can't see anything. The rhythmic thumping erupting from my chest envelopes me. Darkness. *Has it been five minutes yet?*

**There's always another option:**

**Choice 1:** Had Mia chosen to spend the night, she would have to face the disappointed faces of her parents the following day, along with any punishments they decide for her. However, rather than being safe and facing the consequences of her actions, she chose to drive when she clearly was not capable of doing so and therefore will face far more severe consequences such as spending her years as a teenager severely injured or even deceased.

**Choice 2:** Mia had the opportunity to pull over on the side of the road on her way home. This would have given her a chance to send a quick message to her parents informing them that she was too drowsy to drive and ask if they could pick her up. Although, getting home as fast as possible seemed like a better alternative. This decision did not prove to be any more beneficial when she fell asleep behind the wheel causing her to lose control of the car and sacrificing her own safety.

**Authors note:** There are always options to avoid distracted driving. Choose the safest one to protect yourself and others. Everyday is a new opportunity to save a life. Be smart, arrive alive.