15 minutes.

15 more minutes. I ask, I take, I delay.
Sheets can be freshly washed or soaked in sweat—it makes little difference.
The mattress swallows me whole. It wraps blankets around my limbs and my chest and my bones.
“Do not move,” she orders. Sometimes fraudulent enough to claim that when time calls for me again, she’ll let me go.
On the next ring, you may rise. On the next ring, you may move.
Time passes and the sheets stain further and my eyes close.
The mattress swallows me whole.
I lie and become absorbed. Detached and distant from scowling voices and scornful glares. The mattress embraces me, to keep me safe from all the foes I cannot face.
15 more minutes, I say.
Allow me to remain here for a few moments more. Here where it’s warm and quiet and duty is mercifully absolved.
There are no meals to prepare here. No cutlery to be washed. No money to spend or people to take care of at all.
I am fifteen again. Naive and unburdened and moronic. I am allowed to be these things here.
I am allowed to not know, to not do, to cry and sulk when the greatest grief is a friend lost.
15 more minutes, I laugh.
The ridiculous petulance settles over me.
“Let me go!” I jest, waiting for the mattress to joke in return.
The mattress does not respond. It cannot.
Not because the filth from my pores muffled her voice.
But because as far as time can count, fillings of cotton and springs cannot speak at all.
The realization creeps in, whispering threats:
“Look at what you’ve done,” she says. “Don’t you know your age? Don’t you know mattresses can’t talk?”
15 more minutes, then.
One final respite before I have to face the truth. Before I need to claw my way out of this hole I’ve dug.
It used to be shallow, I recall. Nothing more than a dent; perhaps various ones if I dare allow myself grace.
But now it is a hole, cracking through surfaces until it bites down deep on the marrow of my soul.
How far can I dig before I can never again come up?
15 more minutes.
Time enough to brush my hair and teeth.
To read pages about visions and habits that make life obsolete.
To answer every text, every call and check the weather for the day.
15 more minutes.
How much of my own time can I steal before I have none left?
Get up.
Get up.
Get up.

– DCC 2026

