

# ANCIENT PACT

*Volume 1: The Element of Air*



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*Good Spirited Company*

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Your unconditional love provides  
the foundation for my strength and courage.*

# Introduction



**F**OR ALMOST TWO DECADES I DREAMED ABOUT WRITING A SERIES OF MYSTICAL ADVENTURE STORIES featuring spiritual women and men. An assortment of fears and excuses stopped me from following that dream. Then, during a particularly powerful meditation, I understood what I wanted to do with my life. I knew I had to tell this story about the Elemental Council and the pact they made.

One sunny day in June I started writing and did not stop until the story was recorded into my computer. I worked for up to eighteen hours a day with ice packs strapped to my wrists and elbows. It was as if the ancient ones had decided the time had come to introduce them to their current incarnations.

I want this story to be a catalyst for humanity to learn a better way of co-existing with other humans and with our planet. Hopefully, more women will assume leadership roles because I believe women are more likely to seek peaceful solutions for conflicts, and avoid the needless murder and misery that war entails. The innate power of women has been suppressed for thousands of years resulting in a manic imbalance in the way humans treat life and resources.

Only with women, men, and children working together will we be able to return human kindness to humankind.

Without any doubt I believe the ancient tribe existed. I believe they made a promise to be guardians, and they intended for humans to act in ways that reflect our divinely spiritual nature.

I also believe the council is alive again today. Perhaps they are restless and searching for a life purpose. Maybe bizarre dreams or memories they can't explain wake them at night. They may even be noticing that strangers seem oddly familiar, like long-lost family members.

Educated people may say it is impossible for the ancient tribe to have existed and even more unlikely that they made a spiritual pact. They could be right.

But my question is this: Would the world be a better place if we all believed in a pact to be guardians of all life on the planet and were willing to honor it?

*To My Future Self:  
May you read this book early in your life  
and remember what you are.*

# The Element of Air



*All Is One*

*Only A Free Mind  
Knows Reality*

*Reality Is Greater  
Than Perception*

*Karma Rules Until  
Free Will Changes It*



# One



**D**ESPITE THE WARM SUNNY DAY, MY SKIN IS DAMP WITH COLD SWEAT. I wonder how my life would be different if I had run when I had the chance. But now, with the procession about to begin, I know it is too late.

Hundreds of people line both sides of the cobblestone path leading away from the soaring white temple beside me. They silently push against one another for the best view. Most of them are peasants from the outlying regions, but a few are members of the local aristocracy. Today, the ones wearing dusty rags rub shoulders with those wearing soft white linen.

I am supposed to start walking, but my shaking legs refuse to cooperate. To calm myself, I absorb every detail of the world around me.

Rows of fluted columns shoot up from the earth to support the temple's roof. Hot white light bounces off the marble, obscuring the stories carved into their bases.

Four bronze Amazons guard the inner temple, their bodies frozen in fierce stances. Cast by famous craftsmen from around the world, the imposing female warriors represent my heritage.

*I imagine them shaking off their stiff metal coating as one of them gathers me into her arms, then whisks me to the safety of a secret cave. The fantasy provides only fleeting comfort.*

*The tall girl to my left tugs lightly on my elbow, motioning for me to join her. A final imploring glance confirms that the grand fighting women will not come to my rescue—nor will my Goddess, Artemis.*

*Mother Priestess leads our somber group past the gaping observers and away from the temple. Balancing on her head is a garish headdress made entirely of gold. She depends heavily upon her wooden staff.*

*Her assistant carries a tray with a bowl of olive oil, a loaf of fresh bread, and a bronze pitcher filled with water. The young woman looks at me over her shoulder, her smile reassuring but feeble. I can tell she is glad this is not happening to her.*

*Delicate bees have been carefully rendered on the gold armlets pushed high above my elbows. Ankle bracelets of gold festooned with bee charms jingle with my every step. When I stumble on a loose stone, the charms respond with an angry clangor. A female spectator exhales, “Oh,” and instinctively reaches out as if to catch me, even though she is too far away to be of any help.*

*Behind me, three lines of four girls tread wordlessly. The girl to my left takes my hand and whispers, “This is not the end of you, but a new beginning.” Too preoccupied with my immediate future, I simply nod. When she releases her grip, my hand feels cold and abandoned.*

*Troubled winds carry the earthy scent of the aromatic herbs that have been braided into my hair. Sprigs of bay laurel, lemon balm, and thyme were chosen for their metaphysical properties.*

*Each priestess, young and old, is wearing a creamy white, ankle-length dress. My dress is identical except for the color, which reminds me of the blood I saw once, oozing from the calf Papa killed on my last night with my first family.*

*Though I was only three, I remember it well. After that night, I was taken from them to live in the temple. As an initiate, I brought honor and social status to my humble family.*

*Now, only thirteen years later, I’m being led away from my family of priestesses. This time, I’m going to a place that is dark and lonely.*

*A younger girl walks haltingly at my right side. Between whimpers, she says, “This isn’t supposed to be. You didn’t do nothing wrong.” In her hand she twirls a wad of her gown, as if it will bring her comfort.*

*Normally I would correct her grammar, but not today. When she looks up at me, I smile. I do not want my little sister to sense my fear.*

*Low buzzing inside my head prevents me from hearing the sacred chant the priestesses have begun to sing. The tones open a blessed portal to my next lifetime. Lips move, but it is buzzing I hear—only buzzing.*

*The procession halts in front of a cave-like hole that has been dug into a mound. One of the older girls takes the tray from Mother’s assistant. She disappears briefly and then quickly resumes her position behind Mother.*

*Dizzy from panting, I feel as if my head is floating above my body. To steady myself, I extend my hand. My sister grabs it. Her strength surprises me.*

*Mother turns and scans the crowd with eyes rimmed in red. Her gaze avoids me, and I telepathically implore her to acknowledge me. Locking her eyes on the older girl beside me, her nod is nearly imperceptible.*

*Frantically, my mind searches for a logical explanation for what is about to happen to me. I know Mother made a mistake by trusting the foreign men.*

*Holding my elbows, the older girl and my sister guide me gently toward the hole. My chest refuses to expand to allow me to breathe. I desperately want to run, but there is nowhere to go. The people would stop me.*

*The older girl whispers, “Before she died, Diana asked me to say special words to you when this time came.”*

*“She knew this would happen?” The words sound garbled, barely able to escape my constricted throat.*

*“Diana knew many things.” An oddly peaceful smile lifts her face. “She wanted me to tell you this: ‘May you always remember what you are.’”*

*Both girls release my arms, and I stoop to enter the earth. Once inside, I am unable to stand. The air smells like freshly shoveled garden soil.*

*Moving with my hands in front of me, I hastily recoil from the slimy wall. My rapid breathing becomes louder, and I lunge for the opening. I am not thinking, just reacting.*

*A foot tangles in my gown and I fall—hard. With a nerve-shaking crash, my forehead slams against the tray. As the water pitcher tumbles over, the bread—intended to sustain me in the afterlife—draws in moisture like a thirsty sponge.*

*Once the grass mat is placed over the doorway, my tomb becomes completely shrouded in darkness. The buzzing in my ears grows louder. Curling into a ball, I drag my hands over my face. Only then do I notice a painful bump on my left brow. Marius promised to protect me, but where is he now? And why did Diana send the strange message?*

*“Remember what you are.’ What does that mean, Diana?” I rail at the spirit of my dead friend. My instructions are to be brave as I enter the nonphysical world. Terrified of the present world, I begin to sob as more earth is added to my prison.*

Waking with a jolt, I kick sweaty sheets away into a pile and turn on the light. My arms ache as if they have been tensed for too long. Ignoring the throbbing pain in my forehead, I reach for my journal and pen. I begin by writing June 4 at 4:44 a.m.

Journaling has been part of my daily ritual for two decades, since I was eight. However, recent dreams are uncomfortably realistic and less abstract than they once were. If they carry a special message, I don’t understand the clues.

Circling the numbers at the top of the page, I wonder about the significance of something else. Starting a month ago, I always wake at 4:44 a.m. After recording this observation, I place the book on the table, change the sheets, and make my bed.

Two months ago, my physician recommended I do meditation or yoga. Until I can minimize work-related stress, she suggested that the mental and physical exercise might ease my neck pain and slow the onset of an ulcer.

Never one to do things halfway, I immediately signed up for meditation and yoga classes. Since then, I have begun each day with these practices.



After parking in my reserved stall at Banks Marketing and Advertising, I take the elevator to the twelfth floor. Elegant letters on a brass plate next to my office door read “Karan Coleman – Vice President.”

My office definitely looks presidential. The mahogany desk faces a long wall adorned with expensive oil paintings. To the left of the desk, the west wall is made entirely of glass and affords a bird’s-eye view of the green trees of suburban St. Louis, Missouri.

My secretary is attending to the plants in my office. She is bent over a fern, watering can in her hand. Emma is in her early twenties and resembles Sandra Bullock with a country-western, highly teased hairstyle. Dressed in designer clothes she purchases at secondhand shops, she almost manages the classy appearance of an executive’s assistant. However, her cotton candy hair and scuffed pumps defeat the desired outcome.

“Good morning, Emma.”

“I was having a good morning until Jim showed up.” Surreptitiously, she casts her eyes in the direction of my boss’s office. After a subtle scan of my attire, she appears to find my practical navy suit disagreeable. It’s one size too big, to avoid revealing any of my body’s curves. “He told me to let him know as soon as you got in.”

As water floods into the tray under the plant, Emma stands upright, wincing. A neck brace keeps her head unnaturally immobile. It’s been a month since a shellfish distributor’s truck ran a red light and struck her car. Since the collision, she moves like an elderly woman who has misplaced her cane.

“So early?” I groan, genuinely surprised. Jim Satarsus’s routine is to arrive between nine and ten and depart no later than four.

Emma shrugs and widens her eyes. With her free hand, she smooths the skirt of her snug lavender dress. My first day on the job, she asked me to help her. She was bored in her position as a data entry clerk and convinced me she would be a competent administrative assistant. I filed the inter-department transfer request because she seemed like a motivated person who was desperate to escape a dead-end job.

“Would you let him know I’m in?”

“Is this really the way you want to start your day?” She grins and strolls to her desk. After stowing the watering can, she reaches for the phone. Situated near the door to my office, Emma’s desk sits next to the one occupied by Jim’s secretary and between Jim’s suite and mine.

Leaving the door barely cracked, I place my leather briefcase on the desk and remove a bundle of documents. After removing my suit jacket, I’m hanging it on the back of the door when Jim barges in pushing brown bangs off his forehead. Trimmed in a trendy style, his hair is more suitable for a teenager than a fifty-year-old executive. Plus, it highlights his bald spot.

Motioning toward the two beige chairs on the other side of my desk, I ease into my chair. “Good morning, Jim. Emma said you—”

“I got a disturbing call from Martin Alwan last night. He said you refused to have dinner with him.” His tone is accusatory. “This is one more example of your unprofessional behavior.”

“What?” Caught completely off guard, I switch my mental train to a new track. “W-w-why would Martin call you?” *Darn my wretched stammer!* “He’s never even met you.”

Martin Alwan is the recently installed president of YRA Manufacturing Technologies. Seeing himself as a corporate Superman chosen to lead the floundering company to a profitable future, he hired our firm to design an innovative global marketing campaign.

When Jim first pushed open my door I had expected words of congratulations, not this slap at my performance. Uncomfortable with the silence and his abnormally combative conduct, I blabber defensively, “M-my team is ahead of schedule on the account. In a matter of days, our firm will receive an installment of \$2.2 million.”

I rub my face with my hands. “M-Martin mentioned he wants to meet for dinner, but I assumed he meant on my next trip to San Francisco, w-which is next week. I told him I would take him to lunch then.”

“He’s your—our—biggest client.” Taking two menacing steps closer to me, Jim lowers his voice. “If he wants you to have dinner with him Friday night, you will do it.”

Struggling to maintain a calm tone to my voice, I say, “Y-y-you are right. His company is BMA’s biggest client. We have them because I know how to treat my clients. I can handle him without your interference.”

Unable to resist the need to drop my eyes from his penetrating glare, I straighten the stack of papers on my desk. I could have asserted myself more kindly, but I didn’t feel like being nice.

Looking up again, I decide to try a different approach. “When did he call?”

“Um...” Jim’s ferret-like brown eyes blink rapidly. His face is round and unnaturally creaseless, the result of consuming too many candies. He carries a plastic bag filled with unwrapped chocolates in his briefcase and brags that he makes his wife remove the foil wrappers so he won’t have to bother doing it himself. “That’s not important.”

I concentrate to keep from stammering and rub my sweating palms on my slacks. “He’s my client, yet he called you to complain?”

“Martin said you’re not providing good customer service.” Still blinking excessively, he flicks an invisible piece of lint from his jacket.

“Even if my crazy schedule would allow it, I would rather have lunch with him than dinner.” I shudder as I recall an incident during our last meeting.

Martin slid a hand down my back as I was leaving his office. With a wink he said, “A girl like you should sample San Francisco’s finest sourdough buns.” Pursing his lips, he made a sucking sound through the slight gap in his front teeth as he dropped his eyes to my chest.

To preserve my client’s ego and my dignity, I glibly responded, “Ah, too bad. I prefer whole wheat bread products.” Quickly, I shook his hand and made for the door.

“The project is moving ahead as scheduled. Yesterday morning Emma faxed a comprehensive update to Martin. When I spoke with him, he was pleased with everything and looking forward to our lunch.”

“But now he wants to go over the implementation with you, in person, Friday night,” Jim says in a pious tone, a preacher to the ignorant heathen. Tugging at the neck of his shirt, he glues his eyes on me. Despite his effort, lazy skin spills over the top of his collar.

“That’s odd. Martin never mentioned any of this to me.” Making another stab at uncovering the truth, I ask, “How did he transition from being happy with lunch to demanding dinner Friday night?”

“Are you questioning my word?” He thrusts his chin forward and stares down his nose at me.

Involuntarily, I drop my eyes so I can think. I don’t want to be distracted by his unusual fidgeting. While his behavior seems like a personal attack on me, I feel something else is motivating him. A vaguely familiar sense of it hovers just beyond my ability to wrap words around it.

Heavy silence is interrupted by a faint scratching sound. I glance up from my knotted hands to see him picking at more imaginary lint. He never removes his jackets.

Perhaps I should have seen this coming. After Frank Banks, the president of BMA, hired me, Jim invited me to lunch to “get to know each other.” We dined at the Zeus Club, an exclusive organization for up-and-coming male business or community leaders in St. Louis. On certain days, during lunch, women are allowed to accompany a member into the club’s restaurant.

As soon as we were seated, he said, “Just so you know, Frank may have hired you but I’m your boss.”

Since his pronouncement was news to me, I hid my reaction by studying *Today’s Selections* on the menu. Frank had told me that I reported directly to him. While we were reviewing our choices in starchy silence, another member of the club approached.

“Your cigar party impressed the right people.” Smirking, the elegant white-haired man added, “Did you get a raise at BMA?”

Jim paled slightly and shot a nervous look at me before punching the man on the shoulder. The blow landed with more force than I think he expected to deliver. He winked, and said, “Men have to look out for each other, right, Phillip?”

The man puffed out his cheeks and glanced at his shiny shoes. Jim watched him as if he expected an answer. Jim’s words seemed to imply a return favor. Instead of exploring the issue, Phillip turned his hard, gray eyes to me.

“What do we have here—another woman invading the last sacred domain of mankind?”

“Come on, Phil, you know they all have their place. Besides, a pretty VP can’t hurt the BMA bottom line.” Jim reached over and draped his soggy arm around my rigid shoulders. I quickly shrugged off the offensive appendage, mustering a convincing artificial smile.

Repulsed, yet clinging pathetically to the notion that I could be accepted as a worthy professional, I smiled and said, “Maybe I can even improve the bottom line with my intelligence and skill.” The men laughed as if there was a joke hidden among my words.

Jim isn’t laughing now. I can’t believe he is demanding I have sex with a client! Maybe I misunderstood him.

Jim shakes his head so quickly his flabby chin quivers. “Why are you sitting there doing nothing?” He advances a few steps closer, pressing his thigh against the edge of my desk. “Call him now.”

“Jim, it’s six a.m. in San Francisco.”

His face turns an unusual shade of purple, so I quickly soften my tone and add, “I’m sure you know I’m leaving tomorrow morning for Denver and then to Los Angeles on Thursday. Friday I’m scheduled to be in Seattle. My last meeting starts at three, so I can’t possibly make it to San Francisco for dinner.”

“We all have work to do, honey.” His voice booms in my ear. Looking down at me, he carefully enunciates every syllable. “Tell him you will do whatever it takes to please him. Do you understand me?”

“Jim, w-what’s going on here?” I push myself up from my chair so I can meet his piercing gaze on the same level. He’s still taller by more than a head. My knees are shaking, threatening to give way. I steady myself by pressing my palms firmly against the top of my desk. “Y-y-you know he doesn’t want to have ‘dinner.’”

He frowns and looks away. In a surprisingly bewildered voice he says, “I don’t know what is making me act so...” Twitching his head to look at me again, he hardens his face. “I didn’t come in here to argue with you, Karan. You’ve been warned.”

I'm puzzling over his odd behavior when he turns and takes a few steps toward the door. Spinning around quickly, he places his hands on his hips.

My breakfast shifts mischievously in my abdomen. Low thrumming inside my head makes me feel lightheaded. The rhythmic intonation grows louder as *déjà vu* sweeps over me.

*I've seen him like this before, but when?* Though I'm momentarily disoriented, I know something bad is going to happen.

"By the way, honey, you've been late to work several days this month." Jim's words march one after another. "Don't let it happen again."

"Jim, my name is not 'honey.'" I speak slowly to match his cadence, but mostly to avoid any stammers. "And you know I've never been late."

"Do everything your client asks. I'm watching you."

While his face is still rigid, I see an incongruent emotion in his eyes—fear. Less concerned for his mental state than about his aggression toward me, I raise my voice to his level. "Don't threaten me! If you're really watching—"

Before I can finish my sentence, he rolls his eyes, waves a dismissive hand in my direction, and walks out. A loud bang confirms he's behind the closed door of his office.



As soon as Jim disappears, Emma jumps from her chair as if she's been shocked with a cattle prod. "I'll get you a latte."

Biting my lower lip, I nod and rush to close my door. Tears of anger and frustration threaten to prove my weakness. *Men don't cry at work. Only emotional, vulnerable women cry on the job. Well, I'm not going to be one of them*, I tell myself.

Leaning against the door for support, I hope no one else heard Jim's outburst. He has a hidden agenda and I can't figure it out, though I have my suspicions.

Embarrassed that my stuttering made me sound stupid and insecure, I squeeze my eyes shut. Just as I did as a child, I pinch myself as punishment for my verbal dribbling.

Emma quietly knocks at the door and, now in better control of my emotions, I let her in. Wobbling to my chair on unsteady legs, I focus intently on each step to give the impression that I'm an executive in control of her world. I doubt I fool anyone, especially Emma.

With her foot she eases the door shut behind her, slides a steaming cup across my desk, and places hers on a coaster. Cringing as if the movement hurts, she slowly sinks into her chair.

"Do ya want me to make the changes to your itinerary?" Emma cautiously rubs her injured neck with one hand while twirling a wad of hair in the other. Whenever her world goes awry, she tugs at her hair or clothes. Her speech also slips into a countrified vernacular.

"So you heard?"

"All of it. I'm sorry. I tried not to listen, but he was hollerin'" Emma is impressively connected to the information channels in the BMA kingdom. She would gladly put her ear to any closed door if she thought she might get away with it.

"No, I'm glad you heard. Now I know I'm not making it up. None of his behavior makes sense to me. Even he seemed troubled by it for a brief moment."

I grasp my mug with both hands. "Last night I brought my groceries home and set the box on the table. I didn't notice the box was half on-half off the table. My cat, Herman, jumped into the box and began to play with an imaginary mouse. He was so exuberant, I laughed out loud. Suddenly the box tipped off the table. He had no chance to right himself before hitting the floor."

Raising my shoulders, I roll them backward. "I feel like a kitty in a box, too busy with my job to see that my box is precariously balanced."

Emma nods, indicating she understands. In addition to her superb secretarial skills, she's a gifted listener.

Most of my staff disapproves of my relationship with Emma. They claim I should keep a "professional distance" to avoid blurring the distinction between lowly staff and lofty executive. To me, this attitude smacks of a false sense of superiority.

By having a more open relationship with a person I genuinely like, I'm rewarded with a concerned associate who goes well beyond her job description to assist me.

"So tell me what's going on." I try not to sound as desperate as I feel. "I've been out of the office so much lately, I may have missed an important play in the office political game."

I cross my legs and drop back in my chair. Wishing the mug's warmth could comfort me, I roll it between my hands.

"Honestly, I think Jim's jealous. You landed the YRA account in only three months after he'd been trying for five years. He gave you that account so you would fail to meet your quota."

"That's my theory as well."

She peeks over her shoulder to make sure the door is still firmly closed. "Jim never held a job for more than a year or two—until Frank hired him, a favor for a fraternity brother."

"So why does he get promoted? He's an executive vice president."

"I've heard Frank wants to restructure the computer programming department. He wants Jim to run it." Emma shrugs and then immediately seems to regret it. Holding her neck, she adds, "He's actually a gifted programmer."

She's right, though I don't want to admit anything good about Jim so soon after his outburst. Just last week, the *Midwest Business Monthly* featured a story about his innovative redesign of the Zeus Club's website. He's also written several insightful articles for the local newspaper.

"If only Jim could handle 'girls,'" I double-pump my forefingers in the air to indicate the quotation marks as coffee sloshes in my cup, "as well as he manages URLs."

"Yeah. He tries to motivate staff by dominating them." Emma purses her lips to gently blow into her mug. "Frank knows Jim is a disaster waiting to happen. If Frank hadn't had a heart attack, Jim would already be running the new department."

We sit quietly, staring out the window. I imagine a workday without Jim prowling in the office next to mine. My mind is circling back to Jim's

outburst when Emma nervously begins to fuss with her neck brace. Again she checks the door before scooting forward in her chair.

“He’s also involved Frank in a secret real estate group. It’s a gang of the good ol’ boys from his men’s club.” Her secret divulged, she twists awkwardly back into her chair.

“That doesn’t surprise me. Those men travel in a tight pack.” Growing impatient with the conversational tangent, I return to a topic more to my liking. “Why do you think Jim is after me now?”

“I think it’s more than jealousy. You threaten him. You’re the only female executive and you’re out-performin’ your male counterparts. Your staff raves about you while slammin’ Jim in the same breath.”

Jim’s muffled voice floats into my office as he invites someone to sample the bread he made last night. Holding my breath, I watch the door. Emma watches too. Continuing to extol the virtues of his bread-making skills, his voice recedes in the direction of the snack bar.

“But they stop complaining when he brings garlic flatbread.”

Emma laughs. “He only bakes when he’s been really mean to one of us. It’s weird, but it seems important to him that we like him—at least some of the time.” Her smile fades. “Frank hired you without consulting Jim. You were doomed before your tushie ever hit your chair.”

I uncross my legs and lean forward to shorten the distance between us. In a conspiratorial tone I say, “Between you and me, I only want to stay long enough to get my commission from this project. With that money, I can start my own agency.”

“Yeah, with your commission I could retire.” Emma nods while holding on to one of the hair coils she’s formed with her busy fingers. “I wouldn’t stick around if I were you.”

I know she would leave if her finances would permit it. Certainly this job contributes to the fine wrinkles on her face.

“Looks like I’m going to the Bay Area. Martin better not try to get personal with me. Big commission or not, I’m in no mood for this mess.”

I’m resigning to my fate just as a crazy question presents itself. “Do Jim and Martin know each other?”

She nods and looks down at her hands. “Jim told his secretary not to mention his trip to anyone. Of course, she told me.”

Emma pauses and scrunches her lips to one side, as if carefully choosing her next words. “Last week, while you were in Portland, he flew to San Francisco. He delivered his expense report to accounting himself. That’s really unusual. I’ll bet he met with Martin and didn’t want anyone to know. I would have told you sooner, but I didn’t think it was important.”

The jangling of the phone makes us both jump. Emma rises to answer the call. “Oh, Mr. Alwan.”

When Emma queries me with her eyes I shake my head and whisper, “No”. I’m not ready to confront my client or his inappropriate request.

“She’s in a meeting. May I take a message? Yes, I’ll tell her you’re making reservations for dinner Friday night at the Post Trio.” She scowls, says goodbye, and hangs up.

Since it’s 6:30 a.m. on the West Coast, the man must be quite eager for whatever he has planned. The fire in my stomach rages, and I swallow a deepening sense of helplessness. My doctor warned me that my “irritated stomach” would become an ulcer unless I learn to relax. If things don’t improve, stress will soon be eating me alive.

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