# Monday, April 8th, 2024

## I - Disturbance

You don’t feel okay. You haven’t felt okay in a while. At the suggestion of a co-worker, you decided to see a therapist.

The therapist suggested visiting a psychiatrist for an evaluation, and gives you a recommendation that’s on your health plan. You make an appointment for five weeks from now, hoping that seeing the psychiatrist can help.

Boredom, irritability, and anxiety have become persistent in your life. You recently got back together with your ex, [[Haley]]. She’s been supportive and understanding of your recent mood swings, and commends you for seeing a therapist. Jumping back into a relationship seems dicey right now, but you can’t stand being alone.

It’s about 8:30, and the two of you have just finished dinner. As you settle into the couch to watch TV, Haley prepares for work. You hear her humming in the distance as she applies makeup. You find it annoying and endearing at the same time. It seems remarkable at times that she can be so energetic all day.

“Try to take it easy, okay?” she says as she departs for work.

“Yeah,” you respond softly.

# Tuesday, April 9th, 2024

## II – Stagnant

It’s 7:30 AM. You stare down at your cereal bowl. It’s the same meal you’ve eaten for breakfast nearly every day for years, but today you don’t feel like eating.

You put on one of your button-up shirts. Looking in the mirror, you realize that you probably should have ironed it, but don’t really care.

You work as a financial analyst, and a recent increase in marketplace activity has meant more hours, and more stress at your job. Your boss, [[Inga]] has always amazed you with her work ethic. If not for her camaraderie, you would have given up long ago.

You finish up your morning routine and head to work.

You stare blankly at an open spreadsheet document. You find it somewhat difficult to concentrate on your work. You have been feeling anxious lately. Your breathing has been sharp and inconsistent, and everything seems somewhat surreal. You ignore your anxiety and continue working.

It's 11:15 AM, and you've been working diligently for a few hours. You head to the break room to fill up your coffee mug. You encounter your co-worker, [[Linus]]. You engage in small talk for a few minutes. Eventually, he expresses concern.

"Have you been feeling alright man? You seem a little spaced out lately."

You [[Tell him you're fine]]

Confiding in your friend Linus, you tell him that you have felt irritable, disconnected, and anxious lately. You tell him in confidence about your recent appointment with the psychologist, and your intent to get a psychiatric evaluation.

Linus offers his support.

"It's understandable that you've been stressed. Especially if [[Inga]] has been in one of her moods again lately."

You finish up your discussion with Linus and head back to your desk. You notice a missed call from your friend [[Eric]] and think to yourself "it's probably not important, I'll talk to him some other time."

After working for a few more hours you decide it's time to [[call it a day]]

You sit in bed and watch Netflix. You would normally see your girlfriend [[Haley]] tonight, but she's bartending and is quite busy. You feel indifferent about this.

You continue watching a TV show until you begin to experience an unusual onset of frustration.

“This show is stupid,” you say to yourself, turning off the television. It’s only 9:30 but you don’t feel much like staying up. You head to bed, lying wakefully for an hour or two until you eventually drift into sleep.

# Friday, April 12th, 2024

## III – Stolen Muse

Your workweek has been taxing, but you managed to make it to Friday somehow. Your phone buzzes. It’s Haley.

“Fridayyyyy!!!!! :) :)” the text reads.

You feel anxious. Haley works until closing time at the bar on Fridays. Usually you join her towards the end of the night, have a few drinks, and leave together. She will be expecting you, but you don’t feel like going.

Telling her that you don’t want to go doesn’t seem like an option. You feel the sting of guilt tapping incisively in your gut.

After a long, slow day of work, it’s finally 6:00. There’s not a soul left in the office. You should probably leave.

You grab your courier bag, head out to your car, and get in. As you sit in the driver’s seat, you encounter the same weekly dilemma: Haley doesn’t start work until 10:00.

“What the hell am I supposed to do for four hours?” you think to yourself.

Several minutes pass as you sit quietly in the driver’s seat. Eventually you decide to go home, fully aware of the fact that you will probably do nothing productive or meaningful for the next few hours.

It’s 11:45. As you pull into the parking lot of the bar, you feel heightened anxiety. It feels like someone is gripping your throat, pushing against it with every beat of your heart.

You take a few deep breaths, and then head in to find Haley. Swarmed with customers, it takes her several moments to notice you. When she does, she beams you a smile while pouring a drink.

There are no seats at the bar. The music is too loud, and quite shitty, in your opinion. You don’t know anyone here.

“God damn it, why am I here?” you wonder. The thought of having to wait several more weeks to see the psychiatrist is starting to feel unbearable.

You used to feel excited and alive every Friday when you would come to see Haley. Seeing her small and dexterous hands pouring drinks and filling pints used to impress you. You used to see her as a stunning, otherworldly spectacle of a woman. Now she seems common, familiar. It’s as if someone reached into your heart, and stole your desire.

One of Haley’s co-workers taps you on the shoulder. You turn around and he says something inaudible, smiling, as he hands you a pint.

You sit quietly at the less active bar and sip your pint. Your cynical thoughts are getting the best of you.

“Why does anybody drink this piss water?” you wonder.

Eventually, the bar closes and Haley approaches you cheerfully.

“Sorry I couldn’t talk much. It was really busy tonight!”

“No problem,” you say complacently.

As you walk towards your car together, you feel once again burdened by your lack of desire. As she interlaces her soft fingers with yours, you feel empty, and guilty that you don’t see her the way you used to.

# Saturday, April 13th, 2024

## IV – Push Comes to Shove

You awaken to a gentle prodding against your temple.

“Babe, it’s almost eleven.”

Haley continues poking you as you inhale deeply and slowly open your eyes. She smiles and leaves the room.

You sit up in bed. You feel drained, empty, and defeated, but not for any particular reason. All you can think about is going back to sleep, but your cheery better half won’t allow that.

The two of you made plans to go to a new microbrewery, but you don’t feel like leaving the house. Your workweek has left you feeling fatigued. As an introvert, it feels draining to be in populated environments. Having a bartender as a girlfriend has been challenging given your disdain of bars.

You are considering telling Haley that you feel too exhausted to go, but you wonder how she’ll react.

[[Tell Haley you’re not going]]

[[Go even though you don’t feel like it]]

Haley isn’t taking it well.

“What the fuck, Ken! We made plans to go today,” she says softly, with a look of disappointment.

She exhales with frustration and walks out to your balcony. You feel like an asshole, even though you feel your request was reasonable.

The rest of your day consists of napping, wasting time on the Internet, and a series of curt exchanges with Haley. She leaves for work at after dark, and you go to bed shortly after.

# Sunday, April 14th, 2024

## V. Substance

After getting some rest, you feel a bit rejuvenated. As much as you enjoy spending time with Haley, she wears you out sometimes.

Your friend Eric invited you to his housewarming party. Since it’s going to be a small party, and you know everyone attending, you feel comfortable.

It’s a breath of fresh air to see everyone’s familiar faces again. Conversation feels natural, and everybody seems to be having a good time.

After a couple of hours, it’s just you, Eric, and your friend Sean. While talking, Eric nonchalantly reveals a small orange bottle from his desk drawer. He casually gives one to Sean, and the two of them swallow their pills. You aren’t exactly sure what it is.

“Ken?”

Eric gesticulates towards you, inviting you to partake. You give him a puzzled look.

“This is [[clastrophene]]. I get it from my psychiatrist. It’s really a nice way to relax in the evening.”

You mention that you’ve scheduled an appointment with a psychiatrist in May and you’re having a tough time waiting. The three of you discuss work, stress, doctors, and a variety of other topics.

The allure of immediate relief from the pill is tempting, but you respectfully decline, as you don’t know much about this substance and its effects.

“When did Eric get into taking pills?” you think to yourself.

The party seems to have taken a strange turn, and you aren’t really comfortable with it. Eric’s new form of “recreation” only reminds you how long you have to wait until a psychiatrist can see you. You feel somewhat apprehensive about taking meds, but realize that you will probably have to.

The three of you watch a movie, and you decide to take off afterwards. You say goodbye to Eric and Sean then head back home.

You text with Haley a bit while watching the news, then head off to bed. As usual, you experience difficulty falling asleep.

# Wednesday, April 17th, 2024

## VI. The Soft-spoken and the Outspoken

It’s halfway through the week, and your anxiety is beginning to impact your life more severely. The world feels surreal and distorted.

You had a short meeting with Inga earlier about a potential project you might be working on in the future. Even though you just sat down from your meeting, you barely remember anything that was discussed.

You sit at your desk, staring blankly at your monitor. Today, the subtle office noises you hear seem overwhelming. The sounds of typing, co-workers chattering, and phones ringing incessantly is particularly irritating today.

Linus wanders in your cubicle after lunch. He begins talking about his one year-old daughter. Being completely honest with yourself, you don’t really give a damn about how his kid is doing. You sit impatiently as Linus continues to babble about his drooling toddler.

He begins to sense your lack of interest. Your friendship hasn’t been a priority since he got married.

“Anyways, I gotta get back to work. Tell Haley I said ‘hi.’”

After a few more agonizing hours, work is over.

You spot a bizarre billboard on the way home. It reads: “DIE” with no other text visible. You believe you may have misread it as you only glanced at it in passing.

You sit lethargically in front of your computer. Haley comes over in two hours and you aren’t really sure what to do until then. The artificial glow of your monitor feels hostile.

It bothers you that you feel unhappy regardless of where you are, or what you’re doing. You head to the couch and lay wrapped in a blanket until you are awakened by a knock. Your eyes pan to the door. That must be Haley.

After a few seconds, she knocks again impatiently.

“Hold your fucking horses,” you think to yourself, as you rise sluggishly from your couch.

You open the door. As your eyes meet with Haley’s, you briefly feel the warm, romantic sentiment you used to enjoy. In a moment, it fades, and you return to lethargy. She steps in, smiling thinly.

“Hey… are we okay?” she asks.

“What do you mean?”

“Like, are you mad at me or something?”

You assure her that you’re not mad, but explain that you’re feeling anxious. She asks whether or not she should leave. You explain that you’d prefer her to stay.

It’s becoming obvious that Haley doesn’t really understand. It’s so easy for her. She’s always energetic and bubbly. She just doesn’t get it.

Haley sits cross-legged on the floor of your room, practicing some guitar chords. You sit with your eyes closed, listening and trying not to think about anything. As you begin to release your thoughts, your voice of intuition begins to speak.

You sometimes experience internal dialogue, which seems to guide you in making decisions. Today, your intuition seems uncharacteristically strong.

“It’s time to move on to bigger and better things, Ken,” your intuition tells you.

You feel dissatisfied with life. You begin to wonder if you’d be happier with a different job, or different girlfriend. Looking at Haley, you feel ambivalent. You can’t stand the idea of being lonely, but you wonder if she’s right for you. You have dated on and off for years, but the two of you seem to end up together time and time again.

Haley rests with her head on your shoulder, drifting into sleep. You stare blankly at the TV screen. You’ve seen this show numerous times. This same episode in fact. But for some reason, it seems otherworldly; surreal.

The characters and scenes on the television begin to lose meaning. Suddenly, it’s as if you’re looking at meaningless shapes and colors. You feel disconnected…

Not wanting to wake Haley, you turn off the TV and try to fall asleep without moving her from her comfortable position. You sit in the dark, silently staring into nothingness. Your thoughts race wildly, and you feel unable to do anything.

Your intuition begins to speak again.

“Don’t be a victim, Ken.”

You ignore your intuition and lie patiently until you manage to fall asleep.

# Thursday, April 18th, 2024

## VII. Until the Dust Settles

It’s time to go to work. You place your half-finished cereal bowl in the sink, and kiss Haley goodbye as she leaves. You have been up since 5:00, pacing quietly around your apartment. It bothers you that Haley seems so well rested and energetic all the time.

You are absolutely sick of work. You have been shirking some of your responsibilities onto another co-workers, and have been disengaged from your colleagues.

“I should have reconciled these accounts days ago…” you think to yourself. You are fully aware that you have not been performing adequately, but you just don’t care.

Your worst fear becomes a reality. Inga approaches you.

“Ken, we need to talk about the Genelba contract. Let’s meet in 104 at 9:30.”

“Okay.”

Your heart races. You know you’re going to be criticized. Inga is not diplomatic in her criticism, and you don’t always handle it well. Anxiety claws at you, placing its bitter stranglehold on your mind.

Inga sits down across from you. You are visibly anxious. As anticipated, Inga initiates a discussion about your lack of occupational involvement. She is unusually diplomatic today. She appears kind and speaks to you gingerly, even though you’ve been wasting space around the office for the past week and a half.

“I am so fucked. I am SO fucked.” you tell yourself. Your breathing quickens. The corners of your eyes tear as you attempt to maintain your composure.

“Is everything alright, Ken?”

Inga has picked up on your emotional distress. She is surprisingly sympathetic. You explain your recent feelings. She nods and listens. Suddenly, the voice of intuition begins to speak.

”You must tell her. Tell her that you’re done here.”

You want to “talk back” to your intuition, but it gets louder and clearer every day.

You are paralyzed with fear, unsure how to proceed. Thankfully, Inga is sympathetic to your needs.

“Listen, why don’t you take the rest of the week off? I can train Tanya to work on the Genelba contract until you get back.”

You are taken aback by her willingness to accommodate you. It seems that Inga truly values you as a co-worker. As much as you want to leave and never come back, you tell her that you’ll be back Monday. You thank her profusely for her understanding.

Inga embraces you.

“A lot of people don’t make it this far, Ken. You’re doing fine. Just get some rest and we’ll pick up on Monday.”

Her embrace means a lot to you. Inga is not normally this tender and emotive. Her managerial skills have improved a lot since you began working with her. You take a moment to realize that you have a strong bond with Inga through your work.

As she walks back to her cubicle, you examine her figure. She has been losing weight since her divorce. You wish you had the kind of drive and motivation Inga does.

As you drive back home, you can’t stop thinking about what’s going to happen. Can you really keep this job? How are you going to explain to Haley why you’re not working? Why is Inga so nice all of a sudden?

You don’t know how to handle all of this leisure time you suddenly have. It’s the middle of the day and you aren’t working. You thought you would feel better after going home, but you still feel uneasy.

You pick up the novel you’ve been reading, and try to relax. As you read, you take interest in a certain passage:

*The jailhouse dust does not bother me. I dance with the dust every day.*

*It is my friend, my enemy, my lover.*

You feel strangely driven by this text. This passage seems nonsensical, but inspiring all the same. Suddenly, you begin to feel a surge of energy and motivation. You put the book down, stand and begin pacing.

These words speak to a different part of you. Intuition takes hold again.

“Go. You know you have work to do.”

You feel consumed by a burning desire.

You rush into your car and start the engine. Unsure where you’re going, you only know that you are about to depart for an important destination. You feel a sense of purpose. You feel alive for the first time in ages.

Your car roars out of the driveway, and you speed towards the freeway. You realize now that you are driving to Boulder, about forty miles away. It’s as if an unseen force drives you.

Your mind continues racing. You can barely contain yourself as you exit the freeway. As if by instinct, you drive to the nearest mall and park. Entering the mall, you take pleasure in this feeling of aliveness.

The mall enchants you. The incredible array of merchandise illuminates itself to you, drawing you inward. Impulsively, you begin to shop. You’ve needed to buy some things for a while.

You purchase a new watch, some cologne, and several pairs of shoes. You run to your car to place the merchandise inside. Then you rush back in and repeat the process. You are drawn helplessly to the allure of buying. Every time you swipe your credit card, a surge of excitement rushes through you.

As you walk throughout the mall, you begin to notice the striking young women surrounding you. Everywhere you look, gorgeous women seem to abound. You think of Haley.

You set down your shopping bags and pull out your phone. For the first time in a while, you initiate a text conversation with her.

“What’s up?”

“I’m about to go to work. How was your day? Feeling any better?”

You are unsure how to respond. You figure it’s probably not a good idea to tell Haley about what happened at work yet.

You feel euphoric, but slightly anxious. Anxious that the feeling will stop. You continue texting with Haley, and suddenly decide to make a bold move.

You abruptly change the topic of your text conversation.

“I want you, now.”

A few minutes pass, and there is no response. You’re having second thoughts about the text you just sent. Eventually, you receive a response.

“hah, I was just thinking the same thing :) I’m not doing anything right now. You should come over!!”

You are confused as to why you are suddenly “in the mood.” You haven’t been very physical with Haley lately. The anticipation of seeing her delights you, and squelches your concerns about your mood change.

Haley is confused when you explain that you’re at a shopping mall almost an hour away. However, she seems more pleased than concerned about your recent mood change. She probably hasn’t felt satisfied in a while.

You carry your shopping bags back to your car. You start the car and drive haphazardly back into town.

“That was incredible.”

You wipe the sweat from your forehead, and then light a cigarette. You’re not much of a smoker, but picked up some cigs earlier while you were over by the mall.

“Gimme one,” Haley says, clawing at your chest playfully. The two of you lay peacefully in her bed.

You light her cigarette, and decide to tell her about what happened at work. You were worried she might be upset, but she actually seems understanding and pleased with your recent change in demeanor.

After the two of you finish smoking, you place your hand around her waste and pull her towards you.

“Whoa! You want to go again?” she is surprised, almost disturbed, by your recent change in sex drive.

She explains that she’d rather wait until tomorrow. Though you feel unsatisfied, you realize that it’s now 1:00 in the morning. You’ve been up about 20 hours and realize that she’s right.

# Friday, April 19th, 2024

## VIII. About Face

After a couple hours of trying to sleep, you decide it was a waste of time. You are enjoying your recent new burst of energy. You haven’t thought about your upcoming psychiatrist appointment. Now you feel as though you probably don’t even need to go.

While your girlfriend was sleeping, you’ve written nine pages of a short story you’ve been working on, learned a few dozen new words in Spanish, and ordered some things from Amazon.

Haley awakens and greets you pleasantly. She seems to be in a pleasant mood. You find her more enticing than usual. You begin kissing her, and try to escalate things physically. She stops you.

“I just got up… I really want to eat some breakfast.”

You feel frustrated. You want sex now.

“You don’t need her,” your voice of intuition tells you.

You stand silently as she prepares breakfast. She sits down, stifles a morning sneeze, and begins eating.

After another minute or two, you wrap your arms around her, and try to kiss her again.

“Jesus, calm down! I haven’t even brushed my teeth yet,” she snaps at you. “What is with you, Ken? You’re not acting normal.”

“She doesn’t know what she’s talking about,” your intuition says.

You feel frustrated and rejected. A slow, burning anger fills you gradually. You and Haley begin to argue verbally. You accuse her of rejecting you.

“You’re acting irrational,” she says. Your face contorts into a look of disgust.

Irrational? You are a seasoned financial analyst, for Christ’ sake. She is clearly the one acting irrational. You feel it’s not worth trying to reason with her.

“I don’t need to be lectured by a bartender with a High School education.”

“Fuck you, Ken.”

You stare at one another for half a minute, which feels like an eternity. Unable to contain her tears, she buries her face in her hands and sobs quietly. Unwilling to participate in this drama, you grab your keys and head out.

The Voice of Intuition is strong today.

“You made the right decision, Ken. Do not accept mediocrity.”

As you speed down the highway with no particular destination in mind, you receive a text from Inga.

“Hope you’re doing better today, kiddo.”

You think about Inga. You are still hopelessly overwhelmed with lust. Even though you have a long-standing professional relationship, you can’t help but fantasize about her.

You light a cigarette as you continue speeding down the highway. After driving aimlessly for another hour, you head back home.

During the rest of the weekend, the voice of intuition grows louder and clearer. You begin respond more readily to it.

On Sunday evening, the voice warns you that you will face danger at work tomorrow. Since breaking things off with Haley, you feel a sense of divine purpose. You feel entitled, ethereal, and enamored with your recent burst of energy. The thought of seeing a psychiatrist seems pointless.

You don’t feel like sleeping. You must remain vigilant. The voice has told you so.

# Monday, April 22nd, 2024

## IX. Horizons

Your body feels fatigued, but you don’t care. The voice of intuition reminds you that you must stay alert; anything could happen today. You light a cigarette as you drive out of your apartment complex.

“Be ready, Ken.”

You walk into work steady and alert. As co-workers greet you, your face remains in a fixed gaze. You must always listen carefully to your voice of intuition. You feel that the voice will not lead you astray.

Inga spots you as you set your courier bag down in your cubicle.

“Hey! It’s great to see you again. And you’re early, too!” Inga says with a warm smile on her face.

You assess her visually, remaining cautious. You don’t know what she might be plotting. The voice says nothing, and you feel it is safe to interact with her.

“I’m feeling so much better!” you say. You grin crookedly as you stare penetratingly at Inga.

She seems slightly uncomfortable.

“Are you sure you’re ready to come back to work? I can make arrangements for you to work from home if you don’t feel up to it,” she says. Her offer is considerate and accomodating… You consider accepting.

“No,” the voice tells you, “it could be a trick. Stay alert.”

You decline Inga’s offer and assure her that you’re feeling well.

You begin to work, remaining cautious of your surroundings. You feel as though you could be in imminent danger. As the workday progresses, the faces of your colleagues appear more sinister.

Suddenly, you feel overwhelmed by unearthly fear. The world around you begins to darken. As you sift through financial data, you encounter hidden messages.

BEWARE THE POISON BEWARE THE POISON

BEWARE THE POISON BEWARE THE POISON

The walls of your cubicle scream silently at you. Thankfully, your voice of intuition guides you.

“Don’t stay here. It’s dangerous.”

You are extremely uncomfortable. The air feels like sandpaper against your skin. You listen to the voice, and rush out of your cubicle. The restroom seems like a safe place.

You use the restroom, and go to wash your hands. As you turn the faucet, the water sputters as it flows out with strange consistency. You quickly notice that it is not water. You stand frozen in disbelief of what you’re seeing. A bubbling, caustic black liquid oozes out, eating away at the ceramic basin of the sink.

You recoil in fear and rush out of the bathroom. Almost running, you hurry to the break room. You stop for a moment to catch your breath.

You see Linus pouring what appears to be coffee. He looks at you with concern.

“Hey bud… Are you doing okay?” he asks hesitatively.

You do not respond. The voice has your attention.

“The poison! Don’t let him drink the poison!”

In an instant, your purpose becomes clear. You can’t allow Linus to consume the poison. You are filled with a brazen, otherworldly courage.

“STOP! Don’t drink that!”

“What? This?” he asks, looking down at the poison in his coffee mug.

“STOP HIM!” the voice yells, booming inside of your skull.

In one quick motion, you lunge at Linus and slap the coffee mug from his hand. It shatters against the wall, spilling poison everywhere. You have never seen this look on Linus’ face before. He is utterly stupefied.

“You almost died! That was poison. POISON, Linus!” you try to reason with him. He clearly does not understand your heroic execution in saving him.

The two of you stand rigidly and without movement. Eventually, Linus speaks.

“Hey man. It’s okay. Everything is okay.”

“No, no, no. You don’t understand. You don’t get it, Linus.”

You try to reason with him.

He slowly approaches you, and places his hands on your shaking shoulders. You calm down a bit and make eye contact with him.

“It’s okay, Ken.”

With his hands still on you, he walks you slowly out of the break room. For the first time in a while, the voice has stopped.

All of your co-workers gawk as Linus comforts you. He tells you to close your eyes and breathe slowly.

You hear Inga a few feet away, speaking softly on the phone.

“Four five, four two one…” she appears to be giving your workplace address to someone on the other line.

You feel at peace. You begin to choke up with tears as Linus consoles you. After Inga finishes talking on the phone, she comforts you alongside Linus.

You sob as you explain try to explain to them.

“The poison… Th-the poison. I’m so sorry, Linus. I’m so sorry I didn’t come sooner.”

After a few minutes, a man approaches you. Two police officers stand behind him. He smiles at you.

“Ken Spiegel?”

“Yes?”

# Tuesday, April 23rd, 2024

## X. Epilogue

You