

Eddie Rekks

It was nearly seven in the morning, and as usual, Tom Richardson was in his office, staring absently out the window. This high in the mountains, mornings were always cold and foggy, but today was especially so. Mist streamed off a wide distant river, spiralling into mountains of curlicues, and on the slopes above it, the trees were black and bare, their branches twisting out of the damp, heavy fog to trace their spiky handwriting against the sky in sharp, broken strokes of ink.

Tom raised his mug to his lips, then jerked back in surprise. His coffee was cold. He glared at it.

No response. Tom sighed and mumbled an incantation, and a violet haze appeared around the coffee, then dissipated into the air. Tom took a few gulps, then put the mug down and sighed again. The coffee was hot, at least, but now there was no excuse not to start working.

He tapped his “in” basket, and the first file immediately appeared, the burning lime green sigil on the cover rapidly evaporating and leaving behind just a plain beige manilla folder.

How was there a file already? It was far too early for the filing department have already finished compiling some poor soul’s magical plight. The sun hadn’t even fully risen yet. Still, work was work. He opened the file.

Huh. Someone needed help dodging a prophecy—and not a nice one either. Not nice at all.

Tom pressed a button on his phone, and it started humming as the gears inside clicked, grinding the spells infused in the plastic into action.

“Hey, Ari,” he said. “Send in—uh,”—Tom checked the file,—“Eddie Rekks.”

The staticky voice of his secretary fizzled out of the phone and said, “You really think anyone’ll be here already, Tom? It’s a long drive up the mountain to the office.”

“A prophecy-dodger in this much trouble is going to be here already, Ari, trust me. Send him in.”

Luckily Mr. Rekks was smart enough to seek a consultant. Many didn’t, especially the ones whose prophecies didn’t look so bad—saving the world, protecting their people. That sort of thing. So

many 'chosen ones' ended up living in the streets, loved ones gone, houses bare, hands bloody with the things they'd done, living only because fate wouldn't let them die until they were done. Destiny didn't care for humans, not like how humans cared for each other. It didn't want to *save* anyone. All it wanted was to happen. Sometimes, to be the one to save the world, you had to endanger it in the first place.

Tom had a prophecy of his own, and it wasn't a nice one either.

His office door opened, and a young, dark-haired man with a pale face, nauseous expression, and a heavy limp came in, wringing his hands slightly. "Hi," he offered. "I'm Eddie."

"Nice to meet you, Eddie. I'm Thomas Richardson, but you can call me Tom."

They shook hands, and Eddie sat down in the chair across from Tom. He said, "It's really awful out, isn't it? I was sure I was going to crash—only of course, there's the prophecy to fulfill, and I can't do that if I'm dead." He grinned anxiously. It didn't reach his eyes.

Tom leaned forward and said, "I'd like to warn you against that kind of thinking, Eddie. You'd be surprised what a dead man can do. As I'm sure you know, prophecies—"

"—don't care. I do know." Eddie looked straight at him, eyes flashing. "I've done my research, Mr. Richardson. It's been months. I'm not an expert, but I'm not an idiot either."

"My apologies, Mr. Rekks, I didn't mean to imply otherwise," Tom said, flattening out the file on his desk. He smiled reassuringly. The man was clearly terrified. He couldn't have been twenty years old.

"So! Let's talk about your prophecy. Do you want some coffee?"

Predictably, Eddie said, "No, thanks."

"Well, I'll have some. Tell me if you change your mind," Tom gestured slightly, and his familiar violet haze lifted his coffee pot into the air, floating it to his mug and pouring in steaming coffee. The mug was already mostly full, of course, but Eddie didn't need to know that. Tom didn't like showing off, not really, but expertise was expertise, and Eddie looked like he needed a little confidence.

"Let's see." Tom picked up the file. "Your prophecy is, if I'm reading this correctly—"

“Oh, I know it!” Eddie interrupted, a manic gleam in his eyes. “Word for word: *he will grow up to kill his father and sleep with his mother!* No one I’ve seen, not anyone, has been able to lift it!”

Tom said calmly, “Are those the exact words? Of your prophecy, I mean.”

“Mr. Richardson— *Tom*—I have had this tested nearly half a dozen times. I mean, I even moved from home, down from upstate New York to the city, just in case. *Yes*, that’s it exactly!”

“You’ve moved to New York City in response to the prophecy?” Tom repeated.

Eddie nodded. “It’s smart, isn’t it? I grew up near Corinth, you see, and I was going to go to Cornell over in Ithaca, but when I found out about the prophecy I decided to go to NYU instead. That way I won’t be anywhere near my parents. I’m going in the fall.”

Tom laced his fingers together and asked, “Eddie, are you adopted?”

“No,” Eddie said instantly. Then—“I mean, I don’t think so. Mom and Dad would’ve told me.”

Silently, Tom took an adoption certificate from the file and passed it to him.

Eddie’s eyes went wider as they traced the solid ink words. “I—I didn’t—oh. I didn’t know.”

“The parents who raised you are your real parents, but your birth parents are parents, of a sort, and they currently live in New York City.” Tom passed a few more pieces of paper to him: names, addresses, all the background that the file department could get. “Prophecies want to come true. But I bet you don’t want it to, not even like this. And that, that’s where I come in.”

Eddie looked at him. He was desperate. Tom knew the feeling. He felt it too, sometimes. It was horrible, knowing you were playing into fate’s hands no matter what you did. That was why Tom was here, in a cold foggy office in the mountains, waking up at five and reporting in at seven every morning.

“Eddie, the thing to remember about prophecies is this: they’re not malevolent entities. They’re a force of nature, the world’s magic twisting people into nice, neat little circles. It’s not fun for those of us living in them, but they’re part of keeping order in the universe. You can’t have a beginning without an end, or a prophecy without it coming true. That’s why no one could lift it.”

"So it's hopeless?" Eddie cried out.

"No," Tom said patiently. "Eddie, the end of a prophecy isn't a situation. It's *words*. Only words."

Eddie clearly didn't understand, but that was fine. Tom got up and went to an ant farm in the far corner of the room. He delicately picked up an ant with a set of tweezers, and placed it on the desk right in front of Eddie. It waved its antennae helplessly. "Here," Tom said. "This is for you."

Eddie looked between Tom and the ant. "Is this a joke? Because I'm *not* in the mood for—"

"I don't joke," Tom said. "This ant is yours now. He has a name. 'Father.'" Eddie blinked in confusion. He'd get it soon enough. They always did. Tom continued: "So this is your ant, 'Father.' You know what you need to do."

Eddie turned to the desk, almost dreamily, and crushed the ant with the heel of his hand.

"Congrats. You just killed your Father. Now," Tom tossed a couch pillow at him, "this is yours."

Eddie carefully said, "Would this one happen to be named 'Mother'?"

Tom nodded.

Eddie suddenly smiled, and it was like sunshine had dawned for the first time that day. Tom clapped a hand on his shoulder, and said, "Eddie, I hope you have a good time at college. Any college you want."

Eddie abruptly hugged him, tears filling his eyes, and immediately, with a muffled "Thank you, thank you! Thank you so much!" he ran out of the room; probably to the payphones in the lobby.

Tom smiled a little and sat back in his chair, returning to the window. The fog was still there, holding the trees and the cliffs and the river in the distance together in a murky, unknowable fog, but there was a bright spot burning behind the clouds in the sky. Daylight was about to reach the mountains.

Tom had a prophecy too. *He will grow up to save a thousand souls and destroy a thousand lives.*

With a sigh, he brushed 'Father's' body into the trash, and it fell, silently, to the ants that had come before.

COSMOGONY

Once there was chaos, and nothing had yet formed, but instead there was only dust of what-was-yet-to-be scattered far and wide across empty voids. It was not black, for there was no light to call it colorless. It was not vast, for there was only dust, each minute speck spinning where it would, far away from any other, and nothing greater than that. It was not changing, for the spinning had led each mote far from the others, and in the chaos, no order, which would break up the endless empty wastes, could remain. And it was not for long, for there was no time when it had been otherwise, and a changeless time, where every moment is the same as another, is no time at all.

Then, by infinitesimal chance, the dust of stars-yet-to-be and earths-yet-to-be collided, and in the sparks of their striking, the Pullers-In were formed. As of yet, the Pullers-In knew naught but what they were, which was Pullers-In; and so they pulled-in the chaos, and pulled-in and pulled-in until all the dust of things-yet-to-be was packed in a dustball the size of a coin; and outside there was only emptiness, emptiness and the Pullers-In. But then the Pullers-In stopped, because they had seen the dust of yet-to-be and learned a thought that was more than what they were.

And one of the Pullers-In, who was named First-of-Us for it was the strongest puller-in and always spoke first, said, "Why do we pull-in this dust of yet-to-be, when there is so much that it is not, and so much that it could be?"

And another, who was named Second-of-Us, as it was not quite as strong as First-of-Us and always spoke secondly, said, "We did so because we are Pullers-In and that is all that we were. But I do not think it is all that we are now."

And Second-of-Us was right, for although they were Pullers-In, as they always had been, the thought they had created was something more. Now they were Pullers-In-with-a-thought, which is to say Universe-Creators-yet-to-be, and that was more than they had been.

Another Puller-In spoke, and it was named Third-of-Us for it was even weaker yet than First-of-Us and Second-of-Us, and always spoke thirdly. And Third-of-Us said, "I do not wish to pull-in and pull-in and pull-in until there is nothing left to pull-in, for what will we do then?"

And the fourth was named Last-of-Us, for none knew its strength. It was held the leader, for it always was apart and always was last of the four to speak. Though Last-of-Us was often silent, when it spoke, all the other Pullers-In fell quiet in respect. Now it thought for a moment, and the others gathered close in anticipation; and it said, "Let us for a moment no longer pull-in, but rather let this universe-yet-to-be form as it would."

"But surely," First-of-Us said, "it will form only chaos and dust, as it was before."

Second-of-Us said, "Perhaps we may pull-in the dust into the shape of what it may be."

"Yet there is still a problem," said Third-of-Us. "We four are Pullers-In. There must be a Puller-Out if we can let this dust, which we have collected into the size of a coin, form the universe-yet-to-be that we see that it can be."

Then the three Pullers-In fell silent, though they were burning with confusion, for it was the turn of Last-of-Us to speak.

And Last-of-Us said, "We are Pullers-In, and we are more, for we can see the universe-yet-to-be hidden in the dust. I too am a Puller-In and more, but now I will be a Puller-Out and more, and so let you three pull-in and give shape to the universe-yet-to-be."

And with that, the universe-yet-to-be the size of a coin exploded forth into dust, and the three Pullers-In and one Puller-Out shaped it into the stars-that-are and the earths-that-are.

And since they were no longer merely pulling-in and pulling-out dust-that-might-yet-be, but now were giving shape to things-that-are, they gave themselves new names, and were called the Forces. First-of-Us called itself the Strong Force, Second-of-Us called itself the Electromagnetic Force, Third-of-Us

called itself the Gravitational Force, and Last-of-Us, the Puller-Out who gave its old self up to create the universe-that-is, called itself the Weak Force.

The Strong Force pulls the dust together into atoms, which make up the worlds we know; and the Electromagnetic Force pulls charges together and apart in every which way; and the Gravitational Force pulls atoms together, into things large and small; but it is the Weak Force of nuclear decay that powers our nuclear engines, and lets us live in warmth and light and fly out through the void to see the stars-that-are and the earths-that-are, which we account our own, and so it is accounted by our people greatest and most blessed of the Four Fundamental Forces.

Let us be off now, child. I have told you my tale and now it is time to leave. The suns are sinking to the horizon, and the pull of gravity wearies.

WORLD'S END

My friend Peter has seen all there is (so he said)--
pebbles smoothed by the ocean, three bullets, some red
scratched-chipped-up glass he found digging in mud;
seven staples; a pearl-inlaid jacket-sleeve stud;

everything that there is to be seen here inside
the horizon's sharp blackness that stretches world-wide.
There's the horizon, its darkness, within it the sky
and our world sits beneath it, its vastness a lie.

One time when night swallowed the air, he and I
crouched in darkness and counted each star in the sky.
A hundred forty-three and a half--one, unfixed,
fell from the heavens. How many once were affixed?

Even Peter can't know. The past cannot be seen.
But what there is, he knows; he's watched every scene
that's here on the world's humble stage. --not the dark,
which yet glows on the sky's edge, mysterious and stark.

Nothing that *is* was left hidden beyond Peter's eye--
no more worlds left to conquer, he told me with a sigh.
He's biked 'round the fence that's the edge of our world
and looked in cracks to beyond, where the dark unfurled.

To him the world's small; it's tight even for I.
So many houses are empty, but although I try
to piece together their pasts by the things on the floor,
there's only so many; one town, and no more.

When I'm through, like Peter--and it could be soon--
what else will be here, beneath our dimming moon?
There's the town and the dark beyond the fence, and that's all.
We disappear one by one. The stars relentlessly fall.

Last night when the horizon ate the sky, a star fell.
Where to, I don't know; but Peter left as well.
We went to the fence and the dark, and he climbed,
and he told me to follow, when I'd seen what's behind.

Now there's a new house left for me to explore.
One more--Peter's house, that's all, and no more.
One-hundred and forty-two stars up above,
and a world that's too tight, like a too-small glove.

TIME AND TIDE

time and tide wait for no man, and the waves crash
 against the shore, a clap, a crack—wild thunder,
 Zeus wearing a cloud, a gray water-coat—
 in a massive, immoveable momentum
 to the constant soft *tick tick tick*
 of a slowly unwinding clock
 running out of time
 as the wet rocks
 are grated to
 sand.

 sand
 pours into
 the hourglass
 in a constant flow
 like a river to the sea,
 twisting, hissing, churning,
 time running, the Danaids' sieves
 losing eternity drop by drop, drip by drip;
 grains of sand that pile up in an unassailable hill
 which Sisyphus always climbs, but never overcomes.

INFERNO
a villanelle

An inferno rages in the sun;
young hands held reins, sparks burned his eye,
and Phaëthon's life had come unspun.

There was nothing to be won;
he burned and all he did was die.
An inferno rages in the sun.

The tale of the sun-god's favored son.
The sky was scarred when he tried to fly
and Phaëthon's life had come unspun.

His family's fate could not be outrun,
to be consumed by flame while up too high.
An inferno rages in the Sun.

"There's a lesson here for everyone,
don't rise above." If you don't ask *why*,
then Phaëthon's life has come undone.

The Fates weave threads of ash for some.
For Helios, too. He doesn't cry.
An inferno rages in the sun,
and Phaëthon's life has come unspun.