



PROMPT #2: You've been raised all your life to fulfill a prophecy, only for the seer to realize they were mistaken — you have no great destiny after all. What do you do now?

Eleven A.M.

by **Laura Dixson**

According to the seers, humanity would drown at 11 a.m., so Ki did the sensible thing and got a job as a barista.

Steam rose from the mocha. At seven, the tables were empty, but by nine the coffeehouse teemed with activity. An IT man studied the menu, acting as if he wasn't going to order the same thing he did every morning. Cappuccino with three pumps of espresso, and no milk. It was really just an oversized espresso, but he got offended when confronted. He was always right, even when he blamed his tardiness on traffic rather than his caffeine addiction. In truth, his boss didn't care — no one cared.

A single mom wrangled two of her kids in the back of the shop. She stuffed crayons and books into their hands, wishing for a few moments of silence with her morning latte. It didn't work. The children wailed for constant attention. While the late IT shot an impatient glare at the mom, he did so as he was leaving. No one really cared.

Then, of course, there was the steam.

Hot to the touch like smoke erupting from a mini-swirling fire that burned homes and mouths. It tore through calm air with eccentric, uncontrolled energy, matching the jitteriness of the one who would drink it.

"Thanks for the mocha!" The college girl exclaimed with the alertness of a definite morning person. She wondered off to the class she claimed to *adore*.

Ki hated it. The meaningless, carelessness of it all. More so, he hated that he was trapped within the chaos. Not long ago, he stood above it — everything perfectly clear. He had the motive. He had the skill.

Not one of them would have believed that the world would end today. They carried on with their lives during the greatest scandal of all time without heed to their own doom. Perhaps they could have survived if the seers hadn't messed up so tragically.

"If its not foretold, then its not in our future." Now that Ki was removed from them, he saw the pathetic nature of their decisiveness. They spent all their time and energy training the *wrong person*. It would have been laughable if it hadn't been a world ending calamity.

Those times were gone now. No more slaying invisible beasts or branding innocents with protective sigils. No more playing the unsung hero.

Now, Ki was a barista at a very underwhelming coffeehouse that served beverages that tasted more like oil grease than coffee. Even better, he got paid \$12 an hour for his labor and toil. Still...

He pumped chocolate syrup into the mixer. One. Two. "Three! Make it three!" The pumps dripped from the nozzle. Tick-tocking like blood from the floor. He blinked — then hesitated. Dark brown, like thick half-dried blood from a slain beast. He clenched his jaw, and his hand searched for the knife at his belt. Time seemed to freeze.

Tick-tock. Tick-tock.

Be real quick...

Tick-tock. Tick-tock.

Find the thing...

Tick-tock. Tick-tock.

Hold your breath...

Tick-tock. Tick-tock.

Living red.

Phantoms crawled out of the tiles on the floor — ones without faces or features of any kind, resembling blood. He sighed, knowing these weren't real. It was just his imagination playing tricks on him again. He relaxed, leaving his knife alone. After a lifetime of killing the things, they seemed to be imprinted on his psyche. He blinked. Then, the puddle disappeared.

The things weren't truly phantoms or ghosts — not even demons. Ki didn't think anyone knew what they were. Not even the seers. But you didn't need to know the animal with fangs

was a lion to understand it was dangerous.

“Three! I said *three* pumps of chocolate!” The woman in front of him said. Ki blinked. “Are you deaf?”

He turned and squirted another pump into the — whatever it was — and handed it to her. He rested his back against the counter, closing his eyes and taking a deep breath.

The world was ending. He couldn’t do anything about it. That was fine.

Fine.

“*If its not foretold, then its not in our future.*” Turns out, his future wasn’t saving humanity. It was scraping by just above minimum wage, wondering what he did to deserve being thrown aside like refuse.

Ki sighed and checked his watch. Not that the betrayal mattered anymore. It was 10:30 a.m. *Humanity will drown in half an hour, and I spend it brewing bad coffee.*

He pushed himself up and started the next order. Tea. Simple and easy. He poured the boiling water into a mug, watching the steam yet again. It twisted upward, and he felt something crawl along his back. The steam grew larger, heavier like mist on a cool morning.

Its not real, he told himself. But it was. He felt the strange energy growing behind him. This was no phantom. He turned to find the room frozen — the woman with three pumps held the door ajar. The mother was standing before the trash can — her cup hanging in midair.

Finally, he saw the creature crouched on the counter. That’s exactly what it was — a *creature*. Not an animal or an alien. Long claws hooked around the edge of the counter. It had a head with a mouth and eyes and nose, and Ki could see every feature. Yet, it was featureless. Its expressions blurred together like a grainy photograph. A seer.

He grunted. “Its a little late for my compensation.”

“We require your assistance,” the seer chirped.

“Did your alternative champion hurt himself?” Ki said turning back to the tea he was making. The steam froze in the air, along with the water he had been pouring. Sighing, he let go of the mug and let it float there.

“Why do you make coffee?” The seer asked, crouching closer to Ki. It lifted its head to his face, but the thing didn’t breathe. In fact, it couldn’t even speak. Its mouth was sown shut,

yet its voice was clear as day. It tilted its head. “It is bitter.”

Ki sighed and stepped away from the creature. “Well, jobs are difficult to come by with only a GED and a lifetime of fighting invisible monsters.”

The thing sniffed him. “You ran away —”

“You threw me out.” He snarled. “I worked for you for *years*. Only for you to realize. Oops we didn’t realize you were born in June, not August? Too bad your real champion is a what?” Ki smiled and leaned closer to the creature. “A rude IT who can’t have enough caffeine? Must be difficult. Knowing the future yet being so dim-witted.”

The seer gave a sharp shrill. “Do not disrespect us.”

“Or what?” Ki smirked. “You’ll kill me?”

“Yes.”

Ki hesitated and met the creature’s black eyes. Seers were blind, yet the thing seemed to be glaring into his soul. Its lips pulled back into a wonky grin. “We foresee things, but things are difficult to understand.” It lifted its clawed hand.

Tick-tock. Tick-tock.

It whistled like a kettle. “Only one human will drown today.”

Be real quick.

Blood boiled up from the floor. At first, Ki took a deep breath. In. Out. Like he always did to forget the horrendous sight. This time, when he opened his eyes, he felt his ankles become wet with blood.

His instincts kicked in. He lunged for the seer — still not quite understanding what was happening. The thing jumped. Idiot. Ki thought. What was he going to do? Strangle it?

He pulled his knife from his belt. “Sorry,” he said, heaving. “I don’t understand what you mean, but I’m not going to let you kill me.” As he spoke, he spared a worrisome glance at the rising blood on the floor.

Tick-tock. Tick-tock.

It came to his mid-calf.

Catch the thing.

The seer cackled. “If we are dim-wit, what are you?” It crawled along the counter, then finally crouched atop the freezer. “Dimmer-wit!”

The blood reached his knees. It didn’t make sense. “Seers can’t control the phantom —”

“We are neighbors.” The seer replied. It swung its feet over the side of the freezer. “They are terrible neighbors, so we kill them. Seer cannot kill phantom. Only powerful living blood can do that. Dimmer-wit!”

Ki blinked. There was never a prophecy about saving humanity? “You lied,” he whispered. The phantoms weren’t planning on drowning humanity. The seer were planning on killing the phantom, but they couldn’t do it alone. *I’m their weapon.*

“You have powerful living blood.” The seer said. “Kill a man who bested a phantom, and all phantom die.”

Every time Ki defeated one, its power clung to him. Ki knew those effects all too well. Phantoms growing at the corner of his eye. Seeing vapor as smoke. Watching blood erupt from the floor...

He didn’t realize he was making himself into a paranormal bomb.

Luckily, it didn’t seem like the fuse had been lit yet. The seer kept its distance, watching as the blood made it to his hips. Grunting, Ki lifted his knife and slit his wrists.

The seer chuckled. “Draining yourself won’t save —”

“You and the phantom are from the same place, eh?” Ki said lounging upward. The seer screeched, scratching Ki’s face. Its claws sunk into his skin— not cutting his flesh, but something deeper. He recoiled as his energy left him. Gasping, he wrangled the creature.

It laughed, dragging him under the blood. It wasn’t thick like a human’s, but runny like water. He resisted gasping.

Tick-tock. Tick-tock.

Hold your breath...

The seer twisted, jamming his head under the liquid to drown him. He kicked the creature until eventually he got above it. He stood, finding it now chest deep. To his chin — it was rising quicker now.

The seer snickered. “Good-bye, Kieran.”

His eyes went wide as blood rose above his head. He tried swimming, but of course it was useless. It wasn't *really* there, but he could drown all the same.

Still, he held the seer. The thing finally stopped cackling when he ripped the stitches from the seer's mouth. It screeched.

Resisting gasps, he jammed his slit wrist into the thing's mouth. Drowning it. They both froze for moment — wondering who would give out first.

It would be the liar— even the creature knew it. Phantoms didn't need to breathe, but inhaling living blood was lethal to them. Luckily, it seemed seers had the same bane.

Tick-tock. Tick-tock.

Living red.

The cup shattered.

Hot water scalded his hand. Ki blinked. The mist was gone. The blood, gone. He rubbed his wrists — they weren't injured at all, and his knife was safely in his pocket. His coworker's eyes grew when she saw his burn. “You alright?”

He nodded and scooped up the broken shards. “Don't worry, it's not the end of the world.” He paused and glanced back at his watch. 10:30.

10:34

10:35

10:37

10:42

10:43

10:45

10:47

11:00

“Would you look at that,” he murmured. The seers didn’t come back, but there was more than the one he killed. *They can’t kill me now. They said if a man who bests a phantom is killed, then all phantoms die.* If that extended to seers, they wouldn’t dare kill him, least they kill themselves in the process. They would need to start over with another human.

Ki looked up at the stacks of bitter coffee beans. The seer was right about one thing. He hated coffee. “Screw this,” he muttered, tossing his apron onto the counter. He spent enough of his life playing someone else’s game. “I quit!”

He’d find something better to do with his life. Like get a degree to be an IT man with a rightfully boring job. Marry, have kids, and die as an old man. After chasing an outlandish lie for so long, a boring life seemed far more appealing.