***The story so far:*** *Duke Fleed and Hikaru married and they live on Fleed as king and queen. They have had a son, Rex, of two months old. A mysterious being, the Dark One, has sent Jezabel, a powerful woman, who enters into the Royal Palace, killing several men and kidnapping Rex in front of Hikaru, who disappeared mysteriously. Now, Duke thinks that Hikaru and Rex are dead: but, after the funeral, a mysterious girl gives a message to the Great Vizier for Duke Fleed…*

Hadi, Hikaru’s servant, wakes up from a dreamless sleep. She looks around: she is in bed in a room that smells of disinfectant. An hospital. She looks at her arms: these are bandaged. Now she remembers. She was miraculously escaped from the explosion of the Royal Palace of Fleed, when Jezabel appeared. Before the flames flare up, she had broken a window and Fleed over the rooftops. But she was intoxicated and had burns. The other maids, Ryui and Sara, followed her. They were been reached by relief immediately, but the wounds were serious. Only Hadi had recovered recently and had told to an astonished Grand Vizier that Prince Rex must be still alive: that woman in black armor had taken away the baby from her arms with a simple push, but it was enough to send her to the other side of the room. And, before she could react, the woman had disappeared with teleportation. And to think that the funeral had already done for the Prince! If she could recover before ...

But Hadi, deep in her thought, only now realizes that there is someone sitting in front of her bed. Looking at his face, saw that the king, Duke Fleed himself, observes her with a smile.

"Are you okay, Hadi?"

"Majesty!" The servant left speechless for a moment.

"Do not move, Hadi. You went through a bad experience: your body and your spirit are still in shock. You need rest" adds Duke Fleed, taking her hands. After a pause, he continues:

"Thank you for letting me know that my son is alive. In fact, I now believe that even Hikaru is alive"

"The queen is alive? But how? She was involved in the midst of that explosion!"

"We were so stunned by the events that we have failed to notice the details. Your story has explained many things. We thought that the person who had entered the Royal Palace had planted a bomb, but it was not so"

"So, who caused the explosion?"

"Indirectly, I am the culprit"

Hadi does not understand. Duke Fleed resumes:

"In your story, you said that the woman Jezabel, was destroying the entrance door, right?"

"Exactly."

"And the debris of the door were all over, right? Some debris had to be pretty big"

"It’s true. But so what? "

"Well, there, in the throne room, there was the teleporter, the birthday present I had prepared for Hikaru. The debris hit the machine, damaging it and activating it. You had mentioned about a buzz in the room, right? "

"Yes, I had noticed."

"It was the teleporter damaged. It contained an enormous amount of energy, needed to allow transport by Fleed to the Earth, given their great distance. Theoretically, the machine was indestructible: the debris that damaged it had to go in terrible speed. It's a miracle if nothing happened to Hikaru at that moment, when she was right in front of the door"

"Maybe it was the safest place. I have seen that the debris were gone to all the sides of the throne room, not to the center. Maybe that Jezabel did a spell"

"Who knows? We still know little about our enemies. In addition, you told me that Jezabel took Hikaru and she has thrown her against the wall. The teleporter had to be right there"

Hadi tries to remember that moment. And comes to her mind that, in front of the wall where Hikaru had been thrown, there was a kind of machine that sent smoke and sparks.
"But ... if the teleporter exploded, I fear that the Queen..."

"No," says Duke Fleed, sure of himself "By a mysterious case, before it exploded, the teleporter is turned on by itself and it has led Hikaru elsewhere"

"Where?"

"I do not know"

"But are you sure?"

"I just received a communication from a person who seems to know many things. He had sent a mysterious little girl to the Grand Vizier to give him the message. Soon, I'm going to find him. But first I wanted to see you"

Hadi feels better. She does not insist more on the subject. After a moment of silence, she asks:

"And the other maids? Ryui, Sara?"

"They're still in intensive care, but I think it will be saved. You were very good, Hadi: your immediate reaction has saved the lives of you and all the others"

Seeing the embarrassment of Hadi, Duke Fleed changes the subject.

"Before going, I would like to ask you something."

"Yes?"
"You have dealt a serious danger, risking your life, in part because of us, who have involved you. Maybe it's better if you find an activity more secure, where you will not ever make these experiences. There are many enemies around me and to Hikaru. Dangerous and ruthless enemies. What do you think? No need to worry about money"

Hadi did not expect this speech. Stay away from the queen Hikaru? And Rex? For a moment, she is puzzled. Then, she answers:

"Your Majesty, I have seen the invasion of Vega. I could almost say that in comparison, what happened to me is now a picnic. Forgive me, but I prefer to stand near the queen until the end"

She stands in the middle of the bed and firmly grasps the hands of Duke Fleed, despite the arms bandaged.

"Your Majesty – she continues - I'm sure you will be able to find Hikaru...I mean the queen, and bring the child here. Yes, I know you will succeed! "

Duke Fleed is surprised by Hadi’s safeness and understands that it is useless to insist.

He gets up and helps the servant to lie down on the bed, saying:

"I hope so. I promise however that I will do everything possible and more. Now, I have to go meet the person you spoke. "

"Who is this person, Your Mayesty?"

"He calls himself the Ancient One"

Hadi had already heard of him, but she thought it was a legend.

"The Ancient One? And where do you meet him? "

"At *Tanzin Boche*."

The servant is speechless. *Tanzin Boche*? In Fleedian tongue, it indicates the planet's most inhospitable region: the Land of Starvation.

The spacecraft lands without a sound. It is an anonymous spaceship, perfect for those who want to travel in incognito. Duke Fleed goes out of the door, looking around. He looks a boundless desert, with faded horizon, almost as if he was looking through a mist, and the sun fills with a terrible light over everything. Even inside his costume insulation, Duke Fleed feels the terrible temperature.

*It really deserves this name* - thinks – *Tanzin Boche, the Land of Starvation.*

Until from the beginning of Fleed’s history, this place was always the most inhospitable of the planet. Even Vegans did not want to cross it, and they were not interested: the subsoil contains no wealth to be extracted, and it has not even the smallest possibility of cultivation. Just sand, sand and sand. No living being within hundreds of miles. And he has had a message that was really left from here, no matter how absurd.

Duke Fleed still thinks about that message that the mysterious girl had given to the Grand Vizier: a common graph paper in a notebook for school children, folded in four and a write-ordered with a perfect calligraphy. It was written:

*"Courage, my king! The queen is alive, do not worry about her. You must think about the son. Come to me. The Ancient One "*

Nothing else was written. Only after careful laboratory analysis, it was concluded that the message was left from Tanzin Boche. This result is illogical, but it had been confirmed by tests repeated several times. And more precisely, from this point of the Land of Starvation. In the middle of nowhere.

*This Ancient One, who is him? My father once told me about him, describing him as a very old wise man, who once he consulted. Even my grandfather had consulted him. But how old is he? And is he the same person?*

For a moment, Duke Fleed thinks: *I must be stupid. With everything to do with this mysterious Dark One, I’m going to meet someone I don’t know in the middle of nowhere!.* He looks around again, and hears only the stifling wind of the desert. He descends from the ship, following the steps, watching to see if it finds a trace, something.
*But what I hope to find? A sign saying "Home of the Ancient One?"*

"It’s better if you hurry, my king"

Duke Fleed whirls. A boy, holding a spear, which is tied with a red ribbon, had spoken to him.

*From where come he? Nobody was there a moment ago!*

Looking him good, Duke Fleed realizes that the boy is dressed with simple and poor clothes, with nothing on his feet. On the burning sand. Yet he shows no discomfort.

"It smells of copper in the air, you feel it?" continues the boy.

Duke Fleed notices it now, whereas before he had not noticed: a pungent, metallic odor.

"What do you mean?" asks, bewildered.

"Here comes the *simun.*"

Te *simun* is the name of the sandstorm in the desert: a hell where there you cannot define the sky from earth and you die in an atrocious way, if you do not find shelter immediately. Duke Fleed looks at the horizon, and sees that it is becoming Dark One, not as transparent as before. Not even his helmet would be able to protect him from such a fury. Duke Fleed, frightened, says to the boy:

"Come with me, quick! Let’s climb on the ship and go away! "

But the mysterious boy, with authority, blocks him the passage to the ship, using the spear, and motioning with his head in denial. Then, still with the spear, he indicates a precise point. A cave in the middle of a block of rocks, which strangely Duke Fleed had not noticed before. He understand that he must go there. The *simun* comes with violence and Duke Fleed search the boy's hand, before heading towards the mysterious cave, but he disappeared. Duke has no longer time: the terrible dust storm is intensifying and he starts to see no more the ship. If he does not quickly reaches the cave, he will lose direction and will be the end for him. He rushes with great difficulty, despite the scary wind obstacles him and he reaches the interior of the cave. He takes off his helmet, coughing forcefully: the sand was able to penetrate even there. But at least now he is safe.

"Hail, my king"

Duke Fleed is directed toward the voice: in front of a fire, a very old man, dressed in rags, is sitting cross-legged. He's holding a stick. Looking into his eyes, he realizes that he is blind.

"Are you…the Ancient One?"

The old man nods, with a slight smile.

"They call me that. I have forgotten my real name a long time ago. I am a hermit, who lives here for a lot of years in prayer. But I beg you, my king, sit down. You must be tired. This fish is good, and this water is fresh. Eat and drink: you have to recover"

Duke Fleed, looking closely at the fire, observes three fishes skewered and fried, ready to eat, and a jug of fresh water with a glass.

*Fish and water? In the desert? More and more absurd.*

He sits, thinking that perhaps it is all a dream. He reaches out the hand to touch the fish, and he realizes that it is solid. It also tastes good. At that time, Duke Fleed realizes that since several days he has hardly eaten something. Suddenly, he feels hungry and, sitting cross-legged, eats fish with great pleasure, drinking a water with an incredible freshness. He feels full and in good shape. Then he turns to the elderly, who remained all the time in silence, and says, with a bow:

"I thank you for your kindness and hospitality. Forgive me if I have not yet submitted, even if you know who I am. I'm the king of Fleed, Duke Fleed: sometimes people call me Daisuke Umon"

"I know. And it is the name Professor Umon gave you, right? He is a very good person. It was a great grace for you to have met him. Without him, your story would finished before it even begins. You are right to call him father"

Duke Fleed is surprised: he realizes that the elder knows everything about him, even the most hidden thing.

"What should I call you?" asks Duke Fleed.

"Ancient One is good, it is not a problem. You have read my message, Duke Fleed, and you came. You have done well, because I have many things to tell you upon the threat of the Dark One "

"How do you know these things?"

"I had the grace to know. For example, there is a prophecy that speaks of you and the Dark One:

*When aligning the seven fixed stars*

*the Apocalypse the Dark One will start*

*if innocent’s blood*

*will be cruelly shed.*

*Can stop him only the Great King,*

*if he will have seven knights on the battle ring,*

*if seven crystal he will light,*

*if seven colors he will meet right.*

You and the Dark One must face one to another, and only one of you will survive"

Duke Fleed is without words.

The fire crackles, illuminating the interior of the cave with its changing light. Outside, the sand raised by the impetuous *simun* passes, howling. But the two men, sit at the opposite each other, cannot hear its voice, watching one to another in silence. Then Duke Fleed is the first to speak:

"But the Dark One, who is? Where he come from? What he wants?"

The Ancient One begins to respond: "A long time ago, in a galaxy far away..."

*I must have already heard that phrase somewhere,* thinks Duke Fleed.

"...there was a wise and just. His name does not matter, it is now forgotten. You need to know that the beginning of his kingdom was happy. But, after, he began to come to terms with his conscience to get immediate results. He got these results - or so he thought - but at cost of a part of his soul, which had become less sensitive to the good. Slowly, he became evil: one step at a time, a concession at a time, before saying that the end justifies the means, then saying that only the end is important. Good and evil became toys in his hands, with which he could share and play what he wanted. Coming to explore every possible evil in order to gain more power, eventually became the Dark One. "

"All this because he wanted to become powerful?"

"Even this. But happened a special event that has accelerated his road to evil"

"What event?"

"I'll tell you soon. Know that his goal for now is to make a new creation"

"A…new creation? And we, what have to do with that? Why he attacked us and kidnapped my son Rex? "

"The Dark One has an immense pride: for him, all creation is a mistake, and he wants to make it right, that is, as he wants. This is his goal. I cannot explain why, but he will get it, if he will kill your son on the altar, when the seven fixed stars of the prophecy are aligned "

"If these stars are fixed, how do they align?"

"It happens once every ten thousand years. Ask to the Fleed astronomer, Larus, to look from Jibera telescope the direction of the Hand of Darkness. You'll find that it tends to an area of ​​space where seven stars, which are normally fixed, start to move"

"But why Rex? Why him? "

"Because Fleed and Earth are important. Even if they are located on the edge of the universe, in reality they are the pillars of everything. Do not ask me why: it is so. And your son, yours and Hikaru’s, carries the blood of the Earth and Fleed. The Dark One has been waiting for a birth like this. You can say that the "Hand of Darkness" began to move as soon as Rex was conceived. "

Duke Fleed is silent. Then another question arises:

"And where is Hikaru? Is she well? Is she alive?"

"She is well, my king, do not worry about her. She is not in danger: is your son who can die. "

"When these stars will be aligned? How much time have I?"

"Eleven days. Until then, the baby will not be touched: the offer must remain unchanged for them. You have to find seven knight and seven crystals, according to the prophecy. "

"What are these crystals?"

"They are the only objects on which the Dark One has no power. Seven crystals of a different color, which together will cause his end"

"And where are these crystals?"

"In the most secure place for the Dark One: in the heart of the "Hand of Darkness", where he exercised the utmost of his power. "

I imagined that would not be easy, thinks Duke Fleed, remaining silent.

While the *simun* blows out, the Ancient One continues to speak to Duke Fleed, who listens carefully.

**Next (10 August): you will discover where is Hikaru!**