

THE GIRL AND THE DEMON LORD

The main thing I remember is the fire raining down.

The grip of my mother’s hand against mine felt so light, fleeting, and I was too terrified to see the way ahead.

An incendiary bomb went off nearby, turning our surroundings into a sea of flame. Where were we supposed to go? It was burning all around us…

I—Shizue Izawa—felt myself teetering on the brink of desperation.

Ahh… Is this where I’m going to die…?

Even at the age of eight, I understood that well enough. I had no relatives I could rely on; I lived alone with my mother. My father had been drafted into the war so long ago that I didn’t even remember what he looked like. I was never quite sure whether I should be happy or sad about that, but either way, it had become my normal life, and I had to accept it for what it was. Me, and my life, and my fate to die in the flames.

And then—

“You want to live? If you want to live, heed my voice!”

—a voice echoed in my head.

Did I want to live? How should I know? I was too young to answer that question.

Still, though…

Looking at my mother, now just a pair of hands after she had shielded me with her body, I couldn’t stop the tears from coming.

And I thought to myself—

I want to live!

Confirmed. Responding to summoner’s request… Successful.

I can’t take it anymore. It’s too scary; it’s too hot. Help me, Mom…

I lay there and cried, no longer fearful of the flame, as I wished life for myself.

Confirmed. Extra skills “Control Flame” and “Cancel Flame Attack”…successfully acquired.

Then my wish came true.

Just…not exactly the way I’d hoped for.

When I next awoke, I was inside the lair of a monster, a lone man in front of me. He had blue eyes, long blond hair, a well-defined face, and long, slitted eyes. His skin was so pale, I thought I could almost see through it. His sheer beauty would make nearly anyone mistake him for a woman.

His name was Leon Cromwell—one of the most powerful figures of this world, a so-called demon lord ascended from the human race. Also known as the “Platinum Devil.” He sized me up.

“…Another failure,” he whispered, seemingly disappointed at the sight of me, and he showed no further interest in me after that.

Perhaps that was why he never bothered killing me, not even with the serious burns I had all over my body. I was close to death, and I didn’t even matter to him. Just a frail little girl clinging to life and no doubt dying soon enough if left alone.

I couldn’t stand that thought. I was still alive. I didn’t want to be abandoned. And I never forgot that experience. That moment of frustrated desperation as he sized me up and tossed me away. That memory wound up following me for the rest of my life’s journey.

At the time, I had nobody to turn to, none of the strength I needed to survive. The only chance I had to keep going was Leon, my demon lord. He symbolized power to me, and being abandoned by him literally meant death.

I suppose I must have instinctually understood that, because without even thinking about it, I had extended a hand out toward Leon.

“Help… Help me…”

But the longing arm I stretched out to the demon failed to reach him. I gave up on myself, and with that came the anger.

Ahh… I really am going to die here…

The sheer selfishness of rescuing me and then leaving me to die was something I just couldn’t let go of.

“You liar,” I said, summoning what little strength I had left. “You asked me if I wanted to live.”

I couldn’t stop the tears as I glared straight up at the demon. I was no longer capable of forming a coherent sentence, but if I had to summarize my thoughts, I suppose they’d be along the lines of this:

You called for me, you gave up on me… I can’t believe you ignored me! That’s cruel!

In the end, it was another demonic whim that saved me. His eyes eerily lit up once more. “Heh. A liar, eh?” he whispered. “One moment…”

The ominous reply filled me with anxiety—but my near-fatal burns left me with nothing else to do. All I could do was prostrate myself before the will of this monster, this Leon.

“I had thought you were merely garbage,” he said, “but maybe you’re suited for flame after all.” Then he activated the summoning spell for Ifrit, the fire titan. It was easy for him. No casting required at all. And when the giant appeared, he tossed him a casual order:

“I’m giving you a body. Use it well.”

It was all the evidence anyone needed to show that Leon treated me as less than human. My frustration began evolving into hatred. The trauma was etched into my mind at such a tender age.

“You want to live? If you want to live, show me your will!”

It must have been my imagination. There was no way the demon lord could have ever said anything like that to me. No way he could have extended a hand out to me just before I succumbed to my burns.

But it was true: thanks to having my body possessed, I lived because of him.

The summoned Ifrit followed his orders, attempting to merge himself with my young frame. I immediately felt my limbs grow numb. It felt as if Ifrit was trying to snatch my body away from me. Just as Leon ordered, he was attempting to commandeer my body for his own use.

Confirming. Do you wish to be possessed by Ifrit in order to live?

Yes

No

As I cowered at the ghastly force flowing into me, I silently prayed to myself.

I don’t want to die! Not yet! But…I can’t… I can’t let my old self disappear!

Confirmed. Possession by Ifrit…successful. Ifrit’s possession is stabilizing Shizue Izawa’s magicules… Successful. Furthermore, unique skill “Deviant”…successfully acquired.

Thus, thanks to a wild serious of coincidences, I managed to survive.

