

“You want something, Marmelad?” Petrol purred, his grin unmistakably malicious.

Jolyne still avoided his eyes, and her stomach squeezed in knots. “I’m supposed to be learning how to kill better from you, aren’t I? So that’s what I want.”

“Useless girl that you are, you cannot kill,” Petrol replied, his budding chuckle only subdued by a thin barrier of careful consideration. His eyes wavered over Jolyne’s frame, and an idea bloomed in his mind. “We went over this one, two, three times. I guess four now. But there is something else you can do.”

Jolyne’s permanent frown curled into a snarl, a much less fearsome expression when working with a flatter face and human features. Her hackles raised, sensing intent from the old one. “Gonna make me beg for food?”

“Good idea, but no,” Petrol said, amused. It was impossible how wide his smile could spread, showing every tooth in his mouth. How could a human facade look so much more intimidating than the original? He licked his lips. “Come here.”

Static electricity spread out over Jolyne’s skin, rooting her to the threshold between the kitchen and the living room. Every thread of her being vibrated, snapping at her ankles to turn and flee. To the bathroom, out the front door, anywhere other than here; total darkness would be safer.

Petrol’s horrible grin unrolled into a flat line, his eyes narrowing and body lurching away from the counter as his whole demeanor sharpened into a blade. The shadow of his ire grew, an oil slick spreading out into the rest of the apartment.

Jolyne stood helpless as Petrol approached her; the red pinpricks of his eyes studying the tremble of her shoulders. He lifted a hand to stroke her,

and she flinched. He snatched a fistful of her soft hair, and one of her feathery ears flicked against his wrist pathetically. The urge to strike her swelled within him.