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WARNING: May contain coarse language, violence, gore, or sexual content. Reader discretion is advised.

Chapter 27. "Broken"

They both walked in and washed their hands, dried them, then Troy waited as Luger used the fur vacuum. Troy saw that both lines were devoid of food except a small selection at the end while a single attendant sat in a chair at that end with, what looked like, a portable gaming system in his hands. Luger explained that in off-hours, all food was either leftovers - as to not waste food - or made-to-order.

There were some scraps of vegetables to choose from with a bit of salad items to choose from. They both fixed plates with vegetables and a small salad, then Luger ordered something from the attendant. Troy erred on the side of caution and just asked for the same. Though Troy understood what was being typed into the communicator, he had no clue what was being said to the person hearing it. He didn't want to order a cheeseburger with fries only to receive fried liver with kiwi slices and sriracha sauce on top between thick slices of toasted onion - battered and deep fried strips of celery on the side. Though, he wondered if they'd view it as cannibalistic if he ordered beef?

They collected their trays, utensils, and drinks and made their way into the dining area. There were a few small groups or couples in here, but it was otherwise empty. Troy took a seat and began to munch on some of the vegetables. He did his best to be a gentleman, though his body was feeling gluttonous and begged for the food to be smashed down his throat with a plunger. Luger sat across from him and happily munched on his salad.

Before they finished their appetizer, a male and female bat walked out and set their order next to them. Troy recognized the one from the locker room that was snapping towels with the dolphin. Luger thanked them for bringing it to them. On the plate was a pan-fried meat that looked like salmon, a whipped white mixture like mashed potatoes with the scent of butter and garlic, and steamed greens that looked like broccoli with a drizzle of cheese sauce.

“Is the butter and cheese...from...?” Troy thought as he looked at the plate - an image of the President flashing in his mind.

He shook that ridiculous thought away as he worked on finishing the plate of vegetables and salad. He set the plate aside and scooped a mouthful of the potato mash onto his fork. He couldn't help looking over at Luger.

Luger had picked up a carrot and crunched into it. He looked deep in thought. Maybe he was troubled over something? His eyes kept glancing over at Troy. He bit into the carrot again and slowly chewed it. He cleared his throat and looked like he wanted to say something. Troy looked at him curiously. Luger looked bashfully down at his plate, then swallowed. He held the remaining bite of carrot between his finger and thumb and hovered it in front of him while staring at it.

“T-Troy,” his voice finally came - the ending of Troy's name coming out in a much higher pitch.

Troy waited patiently for him to speak. He didn't want to stop eating, but he didn't want to be rude to Luger if he wanted to say something. His taste buds weren't exactly singing like an a cappella choir, but the mash was good for what he thought it was.

“What...what was it like...where you're from?” Luger tentatively asked.

Troy placed down his food shovel, picked up the communicator, and began to type.

“Nothing like this,” the speaker stated.

Troy wasn't sure what to say. He wasn't sure if Luger would even find it interesting. He decided to start basic and work his way up to more advanced things. Luger remained quiet as Troy typed. He had looked up and was watching Troy type into the keypad. He seemed to be hanging on every word.

“There was ground made of dirt. Grass, trees, food, and flowers grew in that dirt. Some of the dirt was covered in a synthetic asphalt that made roads or walkways. The sky was vast with fresh air everywhere...unless you were in a city. The sky had clouds and massive, faraway stars that made up the moons that revolve around the planet and shined at night by reflecting light off the sun that the planet revolved around. The sun provides heat and light that would cover the planet during the day. The way the planet turned made it light during the day when the side you were on was facing the sun and dark when it was facing away. That's “day” and “night.” People had made vehicles that

we used to transport things or ourselves around. Cars, trucks, and other types of vehicles like haulers, waste carriers, and other types specific to each need. We also had trains that traveled on tracks above and below ground. Various types of planes flew in the sky. Everyone worked at jobs in large buildings. Think of it like the medical room, research room, and so on in it's own separate building. There were other buildings for offices that large corporations worked out of or buildings where we would purchase food. Buildings came in all shapes and sizes from a small house up to a giant skyscraper that was really, really tall. People lived in houses of their own. Some were for individuals, some were massive mansions for rich people. There were also larger buildings where lots of people lived called "apartments." Each apartment was like a small house. We had places for learning when we were young up to colleges for more specific and advanced learning. We had basic things that required manual labor, some things that required the use of tools, and more advanced technology for more advanced jobs - like this communicator and the things you see outside of the President's room. So many things. Just like here."

Troy wondered if he was rambling. The more he typed, the more nostalgic he felt. It hurt to visually recall these things. It gave him a bit of hope to be able to see those things again. It also filled him with dread that he may never see them again.

He glanced up at Luger. He was quietly chewing on a bite of his fish, but his eyes were wide and laser-focused on Troy. Troy took the opportunity to take a few bites himself as the communicator continued on. The fish was incredible! His mouth salivated in anticipation to devour the next bite. The cheese sauce on the broccoli was a bit disappointing. It wasn't real cheese and it was a bit too salty.

As the communicator wrapped up, Luger swallowed and seemed to think.

"What was a day like for you?" Luger asked. He sounded very excited.

Troy thought for a moment as he recalled his usual routine. He could feel his chest tighten as the faces of his coworkers and the Hammerjacks came to him in various interactions. He sighed to compose himself, then typed.

"I woke up before the sun would light up the sky. I'd brew some coffee, toast some bread or microwave a breakfast burrito, and eat or I'd stop at a fast food place that served those things. As the sky begins to light up from the sun, I would get dressed and drive in my vehicle to my job at a construction site. It was a small, but well known company that built houses and small businesses. I would walk into the bosses mobile trailer and get updates on what we were doing that day. Sometimes we would discuss upcoming deadlines or get yelled at for messing up something. I would start work that

involved using tools to create the structure for the building, the flooring, the roof, or the walls. When the sun reached the middle of the sky, I would take a break and eat a lunch I brought or travel with my coworkers to a place that served food. Sometimes my boss would order food for us that was delivered to the job site. After eating, I would continue working until the sun was on the far end of the sky. I drove home and would make dinner that I usually ate in front of the television - watching a show I liked or I'd put a movie on. If it was a rough night, I would go to a scenic overlook and stare up at the sky as the smaller stars filled the sky like little lights that flashed from far away. Then, it was time for a shower and bed. I'd repeat this for four more days. Sometimes more if a deadline was approaching. On my days off, I'd stay at home and recover or I'd tear something apart on the car and put it back together again or replace it."

Troy took a few more bites as the communicator spoke. He started to choke up as he began to really miss those nights under the stars. He hoped he was able to do that just one more time.

Luger was completely enthralled with every word that came out. He looked like he had so many questions, but he'd close his mouth and listen intently or push another bite of food in his mouth to keep it occupied so that he wasn't interrupting.

The quality of the food really suffered as it got colder. It seemed like it became bland. Perhaps they used certain chemicals that mocked spices that activated from the warmth of the food?

"Everything sounds really neat. I wish I could see them," Luger said enthusiastically, but then looked sad. "But, I won't. I'll only see them in pictures from the library."

"Yeah. I guess it all was really neat," the communicator spoke as Troy chewed. "I hope you *do* get to see it someday."

Luger chewed slower. "Yeah. Maybe."

They finished their meal in silence. Troy felt awful for Luger. He kind of wished he hadn't gone into so much detail. It was like explaining the best thing in the world to someone that would never be able to experience it. But, they couldn't stay in this ship forever...could they?

The bat couple brought out a small dessert that looked like berries over yogurt. The berries were quite tasty and sweet, but the yogurt was bland and tasted more like a soy byproduct. Still, it cleansed the palate of the strange aftertaste left from the fish

mixed with the spices. Once finished with that, they took their trays and placed their dishes in the proper place by the exit, washed their hands, and headed out the door.

Troy wondered if Luger was okay. He looked absolutely exhausted again. It sounded like he was dragging his hooves on some steps. They made it past the mechanical room when Luger seemed to perk up a bit and glanced over at Troy a few times.

“Troy,” Luger said quietly. “What are you going to do when you wayg up?”

“Well, I was thinking of going to the medical or research room and finding Doctor Emma. I still need to apologize to her for something I did. I also want to try the library again. I really need to learn your language. I’m sure you don’t want to hang around me all the time telling me what everything means.”

Luger snapped his head over to look up at Troy. “That’s not true! Luger doesn’t mind helping Troy. That’s Luger’s job!”

“I know, Luger. But if I’m supposed to make myself useful to your kind, I need to learn more about it. I think starting with the language would really help. I honestly don’t know what I’m going to do. But I would like it if you were there to help me learn.”

Luger lit up like the night sky in the middle of the city. “O-gay! Luger gan do that!”

“Thank you, Luger. I really appreciate you helping me.”

“Troy! That’s what Luger’s for,” Luger excitedly said and grabbed Troy’s hand.

Troy just smiled and let it happen. How could he refuse holding the hand of this adorable being? He was so kind and willing to do anything for him. He was clearly the best thing going for him on this crazy journey. As they walked, Troy began to wonder if he was the best thing to come into his life...ever...

Suddenly, Luger pulled his hand from Troy’s as he quietly squeaked. He glanced ahead and to the floor several times while appearing to swallow several times. He looked like a boy seeing his crush at school.

Troy looked from him to the path ahead feeling confused. Walking down the hallway towards them was one of the skunk girls carrying a few towels. It was the one with the partially white face and dark neck with the stunning blue eyes and darker pink nose. Her hair was fluffed up on top and down her back in a large braid. She was

wearing a white shirt that clung to one side of her neck and drooped down the opposite shoulder with a pair of pink short shorts. She didn't look too pleased as she stared at the ground in front of her.

As they came closer to each other, Troy could tell Luger was trembling. Uncomfortable-sounding squeaks and groans came from his throat. She finally looked up at them and her eyes went right to Luger. Her eyes got a little wider and a slight smile replaced the sour pucker. Troy continued watching her eyes and noticed the pupil went from about the size of a pencil eraser to halfway filling her iris.

"Hi Luger," she said sweetly. "You look nice."

Luger nervously looked over at her as he cleared his throat, then quickly looked away. "Th-thang you, T-Tasha."

Her eyes never left Luger's thin frame. As they walked past her, Troy watched her turn to face them and could almost feel her eyes staring at Luger as they walked away from her.

Troy couldn't help smiling. "You little devil you," he thought as he pulled out the communicator and typed, "I think she likes you."

Luger quietly squeaked and grumbled as he stared at the floor. "Luger...ginda...um...liges her."

"Praise that pompous Winged Savior! Luger's not gay!" Troy celebrated in his head as a large smile filled his face.

"Why don't you ask her on a date or whatever you call it here? Spend some time with her and get to know her, in other words," the robotic voice said.

Luger shook his head. "Nah. Luger would lige to but...um...Luger's sgared. Her sisters are *really* sgary."

"I can see that. But, don't you want to get to know her better?"

Luger sighed. "Yeah. Luger would lige that."

"Maybe ask her one day if she wants to, I don't know, eat with you or something."

"Maybe," Luger muttered quietly. "Luger ginda liges someone else, too."

“Oh. Who?”

Luger looked over at Troy with his lips pressed together and his eyes slightly squinted. He looked back ahead while shaking his head.

Troy decided not to press the issue. He thought back to the first meeting with the skunk. She was the one that mentioned she was staring at him. She seemed like the only modest one. He remembered her covering herself when he looked their way. He also remembered the state of the other one. He remembered what Bill said. It finally clicked why she was carrying towels and looked the way she did.

“Fucking disgusting animals,” Troy thought in displeasure of the image that flashed in his head. “But, who’s this other person he likes?”

Troy went through all the faces he’d seen so far as they turned the corner and made their way to the outside of Troy’s room. Troy tapped the door control and walked in, then switched on the light. He made his way over to the couch and flopped down while huffing out his breath. It had been a long day. He was glad it was finally winding down. He closed his eyes and stretched his back, then rest his head on the back of the couch. He sighed again and absorbed the quiet. It was *too* quiet.

Troy opened his eyes and flipped his head over to look over at the doorway. Luger was standing out in the hallway in his nervous pose - trembling. Troy chuckled and shook his head as he made it to his feet and walked over to the young buck. He looked down at Luger as Luger nervously glanced from the floor to Troy and back. Troy smiled and grabbed Luger’s hand and gently pulled him in the room, then tapped the door control. Luger squeaked as his hooves tapped against the floor and settled just inside the room. Troy walked with him over to the couch and let go of his hand. He sat on the couch and pulled out the communicator.

“Please sit down, Luger. I don’t want to force you to. You’re welcome here. Remember: I invited you,” the small speaker conveyed.

Luger slowly nodded and stepped in front of the couch. He slowly bent his legs and sank his backside into the cushion. He still looked nervous - almost petrified - being in the room. Troy wondered why he was acting like this. Sure the couch wasn’t very large and they were practically sitting next to each other, but he just proclaimed he liked a female. Why was he so nervous? He did think back to how Luger reacted when they first met in the shower.

"Wait...does he feel the same about both sexes?" Troy wondered as he stared blankly at the screen on the stand. He glanced over at Luger. "Luger, if you feel that way about me, I can't stop you. But, I hope you come to realize that we're just friends. I can't *be* more than that for you."

Troy glanced down at the small table in front of him and grabbed the remote activator for the television. He hoped by allowing Luger to make the decision of what to watch that, maybe, he'd loosen up a bit. Luger squeaked when Troy set the remote in his lap.

"Shit! I hope I didn't accidentally hit his sensitive parts. How the crap *is* he sitting without crushing those things?" Troy wondered.

He mentally kicked himself for thinking about that. He had *just* got done pushing aside any notion of attraction Luger should have for him and here he was thinking about Luger's equipment. He pulled out the communicator.

"I don't know if this works like the one from my planet and I wouldn't begin to know what to watch. You're in control. We can watch whatever you want to," the communicator said.

Luger slowly picked up the remote and spoke softly. "O-gay. It's all old stuff though. There won't be anything new. They said it all game from their planet. Luger's already seen most of it. Luger doesn't know what Troy likes so Luger will just put it on his favorite show...if...that's o-gay with Troy."

"Yeah, Luger. That's fine."

Luger pressed a button and the screen flickered while the speakers hummed. A strange logo materialized on the screen, then dematerialized. A moving picture came up and a low sound came from the speakers. Luger flipped through the channels and explained what each one usually ran genre-wise. It was so strange watching a lion in a suit forecasting the weather, a deer wearing glasses behind a desk on a talk show, and a sports team with all of their kind wearing uniforms playing baseball. There were even movies. One had a bull playing a detective. Another had a lizard lady playing a cave explorer. The one Luger stayed on for a minute looked absolutely ridiculous: An old hound with the long, droopy jowls was the sheriff of an old "western" town and he was training a young mouse kid and his friend to be brave. The mouse's friend was a tubby, mustachioed feline trying to act like a canine. The mouse boy fawned over a lady mouse in a red dress that was a singer in a saloon.

The common thing about nearly all these shows was that there were humans in them. If these shows came from when these people still lived on a planet, why weren't there any on the ship?

Luger set the remote down after reaching a show that depicted an old bear cop paired with a younger badger cop with reckless tendencies that bordered on psychotic. There was plenty of action with some very well-timed comedic lines and scenes. It was strange watching it go from the badger begging a bank robber to shoot him to a scene where it was a holiday dinner and the old bear invited the badger over. They had great chemistry and the writing was really good.

Troy jumped a bit in surprise when Luger's head pressed into his shoulder. Troy felt his heart slam in his chest as heat filled his face. He glanced over to see that Luger's eyes were closed and he was breathing a bit slower.

"I guess he was exhausted," Troy thought as he adjusted to make Luger more comfortable.

He slipped his arm over Luger's shoulders and turned slightly so that Luger's head was more on his chest. Troy was feeling a bit tired himself. He tried to stay awake to let Luger rest as he watched another episode of the show. He found himself listening to Luger's soft snores more than the show itself. He even found himself smiling as he stared at the young man's face during a slow part in the show.

The credits rolled and a preview started for the next show. Troy carefully grabbed the remote and clicked off the screen, then placed the remote on the edge of the table. He cradled Luger's head in his hand and held it still as he scooted himself off the couch. He quietly stepped over to the bed and grabbed the pillow, then made his way back over to the couch. He carefully lifted Luger's head and slid the pillow under it, then carefully lowered his head and slipped his hand free. He stepped over, knelt, and carefully lifted Luger's legs onto the couch.

"He must be a deep sleeper to not stir with all that jostling," Troy thought as he moved back over and looked down at Luger for a moment. He couldn't help smiling. "He looks so peaceful...so innocent. I can't believe for a second he would..."

(Author's note: TW: Cutting. Please skip to the next note if you are sensitive to this type of material.)

Troy's thoughts faded as he flashed back to the sight of the knife under Luger's mattress. He knelt down and carefully lifted Luger's arm. He slowly turned it over in his

left hand and brushed his finger through Luger's fur just behind his palm. Troy felt like he was kicked in the chest and being strangled. His eyes began to water as his trembling finger brushed over scars across Luger's wrist. He moved his finger slightly up towards Luger's forearm. His lips quivered and a tear slid down Troy's cheek as his finger passed over a scabbed line. It felt fresh - possibly within the last few days.

(Author's note: All clear. Please try to enjoy the rest of the chapter.)

Troy sniffled as he cradled Luger's hand between his and brought it up to his forehead. More tears streamed down Troy's cheeks when he squeezed his eyes shut and quietly sobbed. He gently brushed his thumbs over the back of Luger's hand as visions of Luger's smile filled his head.

"How can someone so happy...so innocent...so kind..."

"Lucca-sss-orry," Luger softly mumbled, then groaned.

Troy popped his head up and looked at Luger. His eyes were still shut. His face flickered from neutral to slightly contorted as if he were in pain. He breathed a few times, then groaned.

"Lu-gah...sorry," Luger softly mumbled again.

"For what, Luger!?" Troy thought as his shaking hand moved from Luger's.

More tears slid down Troy's cheek as he reached over and ran his fingers through the fur along Luger's head. Luger hummed and his lips moved back into a slight smile.

"Why, Luger? Why do you feel the need to do this?" Troy mouthed as he continued to move his fingers through Luger's fur.

Luger continued to hum his breath out. He hummed a little louder - kind of like a chuckle.

"Masd-...Troy," he hummed out and began to breathe normally with that slight smile on his mouth.

Troy lifted his hand and clenched his fist. His mind was blank, but he felt full of anger. He felt devastated. He felt useless. He felt sick. He unclenched his fist and

brought it back to Luger's hand. He held Luger's hand close to his mouth as he stared at the sleeping buck.

"I'm so sorry, Luger. Whatever happened...you didn't deserve it," Troy thought and released the welled tears in his eyes.

He didn't want to leave his side. He didn't want to wake him, either. Troy sniffled and gently placed Luger's hand next to his muzzle. Luger groaned and adjusted his head on the pillow, sighed, and started to snore softly. Troy watched him for a few more moments, then stood, went to the bed, grabbed the thin blanket, brought it over to the couch, and carefully draped it over Luger. He wasn't sure what compelled him to do it, but Troy leaned in and lightly kissed the side of Luger's head.

"Goodnight, my friend."

Troy smiled slightly and stood upright. He wiped the tears from his face, then made his way over to the light switch. He tapped the light off, waited for his eyes to adjust, then walked over to the bed, quietly took off the shoes, and carefully laid down on the bed. He stared at the empty ceiling for a long time before tossing and turning with his thoughts.

"Hold on a second," Troy thought as something occurred to him. "Was his speech impediment gone for a moment there? It's happened a few times now. I wonder why that is." Troy sighed and turned on his side. "Also, is his name really Lucca? How do you screw that up?" Troy yawned hard. "Questions that'll have to wait."

He thought of the crazy moments he's had with Luger so far. He tried to maintain an image of Luger smiling in his head as he closed his eyes. It was the only thing that calmed him...comforted him among all the other horrible images he staved off.

Troy groaned as he stirred awake. He was hard as a rock and it hurt something fierce as the flesh burrowed into the unyielding fabric. He felt disgusted with the dream he had. He dreamt about Luger washing him and him washing Luger. He dreamed about finishing what he started in that daydream when he watched Luger dry off. Thankfully it transitioned into him mating with the Colonel, but it still made him feel sick to his stomach.

"Fucking manimal beast freaks," he thought as he pulled his legs up towards his chest.

He pushed off the mattress and let his feet fall to the floor. He leaned forward and rubbed his hands against his face, then held them there. He forced the recurring images from the dream out of his mind until the painful erection receded. He wondered what time it was. He wondered if he could sneak out and “use the bathroom” without waking Luger. He wondered what all the thrashing was about.

“Thrashing?” He wondered as his ears and head perked up.

Troy could hear the sound of something - someone - squirming around on a soft surface mixed with the sound of something banging against the same surface. He heard a loud “*pop*” followed by the sound of something tearing. Whatever it was and whatever was going on, it was coming from over on the couch. It sounded like Luger was having a bad dream.

“mmaaaaAAHHH-ONK!!! WAAA-ONK!!! AAHHH!!!”

Luger’s cries started softly, then turned into a blood-curdling scream that would end in a loud honk like a stifled goose call.

“LUGER!” Troy screamed in his head and shot to his feet.

“AAHHH!!! AH! AAH! AAHHH!!!”

Troy jumped over to the couch to see Luger staring wide-eyed up at the ceiling with his arms flailing, his legs kicking, and his head lifting, then slamming into the couch - his horns piercing the fabric and tearing it. He was screaming so shrill, so loud, and so panicked.

“Fuck! Night terrors!?” Troy surmised as he pieced everything together.

He quickly stepped over, pulled the blanket off Luger, and tossed it on the floor next to the pillow. He knelt down and held his hands out over Luger as he tried to think of what to do.

“Fuck it!”

Troy leaned in and shoved his hands under Luger - his left hand under Luger’s right arm and his right hand over Luger’s shoulder. He pressed his head against Luger’s and lifted him into a seated position in fear Luger might swallow his tongue. Luger

began to punch Troy's back and sides. He rammed his head against Troy's as he continued to scream intensely.

"LET ME GO!!! LET ME GO, YOU FUCKING FUCK!!! I'LL FUCKING KILL YOU!!!
RRRAAAHHH!!!"

"Please wake up, Luger," Troy pleaded as he tried to keep his head close to the sweat-soaked gazelle. "Keep hitting my head like this and you just *might* kill me."

Luger continued to scream while punching his fists into Troy's back and side as he rammed his head into the side of Troy's. Troy was starting to find it hard to breathe. Luger wasn't strong, but his punches were starting to take their toll. Troy squeezed his eyes shut as each strike of Luger's head was starting to make him see dancing lights.

After - what felt like - an hour of Luger's onslaught, he finally stopped screaming and flailing. He panted heavily as he leaned against Troy's body. Troy could hear him sniffing as his hands started to explore Troy's body.

"Wha-...Troy?" Luger wheezed through panting. "Troy...is that you?"

"Fuck! He can't see! No wonder he kept attacking me," Troy thought as he nodded his head into Luger's shoulder.

"Troy!" Luger's crackling voice exclaimed as he wrapped his arms around Troy. Luger began to frantically cry as he dug his fingers into Troy's shirt and squeezed him tightly. "Troy! Lucca's sorry! Lucca's so sorry, Troy! Lucca didn't mean to hurt you!"

Troy held Luger a little tighter and continuously shook his head while Luger apologized profusely. "You don't have to apologize," Troy thought as he rubbed his left hand over Luger's back. "It's okay now. I'm here for you."

Troy looked down to see the couch cushion was torn open and the stuffing was in pieces, scattered over the cushion and the floor. As he calmed down, he felt pain rising in his head. His eyes began to blur and he started feeling dizzy. He felt sick to his stomach and very weak. Luger squeaked as Troy felt himself lean limply into Luger's chest.

"Troy?" Luger asked as he began to fall back against the couch. "Troy!" He exclaimed, sounding panicked.

"Luger...I'm sorry. I don't...feel so good," Troy thought as his eyes closed.

He wasn't sure how long he was out for. Troy groaned as he brought his hand up to his head. His eyes seemed to focus just fine, but he had a splitting headache. He tried to sit up but found himself snared by something behind him. He heard Luger groan as he looked down to see he was trapped within Luger's arms. He felt something damp on his back. Troy listened for a moment and heard Luger softly snoring behind him.

"Luger? What happened? Why are you," Troy thought, then remembered Luger's thrashing. "Shit! It was probably you smashing your head against mine. But, why are you sleeping with me now? Wait! Did you...cry yourself to sleep...because of me?" Troy lowered his head down onto the pillow and carefully placed his hand on Luger's. "You have a very hard head, Luger. I bet you knocked me out, huh? Concussion, I bet. Adrenaline must've kept me awake." Troy ran his fingers through the soft fur on the back of Luger's hand as he listened to Luger's breathing and soft snoring. "Thank you for looking after me, Luger. Get some rest. You deserve it."