These are the writings that make up the cold opens of Dice Funk Season 7 Wormwood featuring Fryda on a journey of her own years before the main story takes place, along with her bat friend Todd.

Part 9 is where it gets fun.

Parts 13 and 14 are not included as those were improv.

Table of Contents:
(Click to jump to section!)

part 6

part 7

part 8

part 9

part 10

part 11

part 12

part 15

part 16

part 17

part 23

part 25

part 26

part 27

part 28

part 6

i finally did it
i finally left

the others are attempting rebellion
they think they can change the way things are
fucking idiots

eventually they'll see how foolish they're being
but it will be too late
and either way
i will be long gone by then

because i am choosing to move on
to find another god-king, a better one

one that doesn't abuse his wives
one that doesn't hoard his resources
how about one that actually cares for his people

and sabrina will have to grow up without me
this is true
she's so pure
nothing is ever going change that

and so
someday
she will understand

she'll
forgive me
for leaving

because this world—not just the salt flats, but this whole fucking world—
it's ruined

and what better place for us
to create a new life together
than in another

i found in wolfram's library
rumors of a fragment world
they'll never think to look for us there
it's suicide to go

but fuck it
it’s suicide to stay

i burned the pages
just to be safe
but i’ll come back for her

she will understand

part 7

my fears were true

why did i always fight my instinct for the truth?

doesn't matter—now i journey through it, and toward it, and may i soon venture beyond it

charred remnants of my old childhood home
that's all there was as i passed through
left as a symbol, i'm sure

wolfram always did love reminding me that
when he found me, i was living in filth
"couldn't see my own beauty"

"you're not like the other queens," he had said.
i will never forgive myself for smiling at that.

he did always pride himself on his ability to "separate the wheat from the chaff"
i will never forgive myself for smiling at that either.

my only comfort now being
he clearly sees sabrina as his most prized crop.

so i continue my journey

at this point, i've passed more bodies than i can count

they say if you sleep on the salt flats, you die

but most of these seem more like they're waiting to die
glassy-eyed, between worlds
did they lay down on purpose?

i scavenge what i can while the vultures fly above, waiting for a taste
and i find myself thinking
they seem like they might be tasty too 😏

part 8

as soon as i saw the pink slithering across the flats, it's like a switch flipped.

the sluggish pace i'd fallen into by then broke to a full sprint and i didn't stop until i saw this forgotten-looking building not far from me.

i know he can't tell it's me
i know it's all in my head
but the idea of wolfram feeling my presence on the flats at all makes my skin crawl.

i felt better as soon as my feet touched the hardwood.
"wormwood library"
sounds familiar.

there's almost no one and nothing there, except one thing.
i felt it. i'm sure it could feel me.
i stayed in one place until it felt like we both seemed to think the other mostly harmless.

i moved around slowly, innocently, searching for paper.
when i was rifling through the front desk, i heard little noises from inside i can only describe them as "cute"
but when i bent down to look inside, i saw tattered clothes on the floor and got the fuck outta there.

back out on the salt flats at night again, i start a small fire—
the tiniest of fires—
it was enough to make them swarm.

creatures making the sort of sounds that tell me i don't want to stick around to find out more
coming fast
excited

i run for my life for a second time today.

the whole time i'm running all i try to remember is:
if you look back, it slows you down.
i don't look back.

so i made it here to the glass forest.

most seem to have stayed near the fire
but i can still hear stragglers.
i caught a glimpse of one
stunted, snarling.

so here's me:

hyper-aware
alone
cold
hungry

but i am not about to risk another fire.

part 9

the glass forest seems so out of place that i immediately empathize with it.

i thank each tree i pluck from, let the juice from the flesh of each fruit dribble down my chin, spit the seeds and save them for later—they seem special to me. in fact, it all seems special to me. the whole forest, a message meant for me.

i feel myself feeling loopier every day & more & more i'm not just weary from traveling alone, but also wary of traveling alone.

my yearning for connection soon has me dropping bits of crystal fruit crust in a bread crumb trail behind me.

anyone is better than nothing.

at night, a blinding light fills the forest. it seems alive and i make my way toward it, my mind buzzing with the possibilities of what full body spiritual experience surely awaits me. what new friend i am to make!

i can sum up the entire affair in one word: rude.

disappointed from the silent and cold demon who turns out to be absolutely no fun at all, i'm delighted when i come across a very charming fellow—or rather, he comes across me!

he introduces himself as one of the finest bats left in the flats. he proclaims himself a spectral bat, completely unlike the other bats.

in fact, "i eat them up just like that!" he snaps! as all his kind are, whether woefully or willingly, wont to do. himself willingly, he explains, subsequently stating satisfaction in his solo status.

he throws his head back & yells at the top of his lungs, "fruit bats are the wooooooooorst!" & tells me he's been following my trail hoping for a meal.

with a pompadour of epic proportion & the conviction & diction to match, i can hardly question his quest or addiction, so of course we make fast friends with a catch.

i tell him i'm just looking for some fun guys to hang out with, companions for an otherwise joyless journey.

half listening, eyes glistening, "fungi!" he yells! spreads his wings wide! "i know just the place!"

with a thrust of his cape, no doubt from a vampire bat he ate, he spins & marches forward & i follow, all but basking in his bubbly babbling.

"i'm so pleased! finally, someone who gets me! do you realize— you have the most beautiful taste"

"my top pro-tip i'm telling you— always one's best bet to begin any relationship with a trip"

“these times are a-triflin’ when they should be for a-trufflin’!”

he faces me as he paces backwards, arms suddenly full of a magical menagerie

“little deaths are fun but how about the big one”— he grins & hands me three mushrooms.

plopped in my mouth, awaiting the show, nagging thoughts loom:

“the problem with ego is me though”

part 10

along our way to the city
my new bat bro todd and i
split up

he says, “oh, fryda, i just gotta
make a quick stop so i
can stock up”

well, it’s plain to see
no complaints from me 🙆‍♀️

so all alone i waltz into the
hive city, it’s harpe city
i’m feelin’ handsome ‘n kinda witty 💁‍♀️

with some luck, i’m still high as fuck
so i say to myself
fryda
it’s 👏🏽 time 👏🏽 to 👏🏽 make 👏🏽 some 👏🏽 friends 👏🏽

but then todd shows back up.

and he says:
you know, i really hate this hive mind
i always was more the lone strive kind

i say:
what’s that supposed to mean?— todd, are you a libertarian?

don’t worry about it, fryda— oh my my!

he winks at me and points— look, see

i say, todd, didja know that used to be a
skyscraper
i’ve only seen it on paper
i tell him of wolfram’s library
that vile man only looks at books
but
it’s where i learned a lotta things, ya see

todd pauses, raises an eyebrow at me
my dear, are you saying you’re fryda the queen?
oh fuck, todd, please you can’t tell anyone

my daughter sabrina's still waiting for me

tap tap tap tap tap

so as we make our way through the masses
the time starts to flow like molasses
i notice todd put on sunglasses

then he pulls his cape up to his face
and turns to me:

don't look now, fryda
they're throwing us shade
(what?)
they're all just jealous
'cause we've got it made

i don't feel so good, todd
yeah, i don't feel great.
you sure those were good, todd
those mushrooms we ate?

suddenly todd grabs the next poor fellow and into his face bellows:

you gotta take us to the moths, man
look, i'm really at a loss, man

no, i can't afford the cost, man
is all hope really lost, man?

i honestly don't remember much else
i woke up at the moth doctors' office

part 11

the hive city, it’s harpe city
i’m all fucked up now ‘n feelin’ shitty

and it’s clear to me
there’s no one near to me
and for a second i fear how my bat bro todd has become so dear to me

where is he?

my call for todd quickly brings the moths
they say, we’ve just been waitin’ for you to sleep this off
there’s a white moth who smiles while the black moth scoffs
it seems like he was right about something and the black one was not?

hmm

well

they sit me down and tell me todd’s truffles were nothin’ to scuffle with
i ask ‘em how they know me, i look ’n they’re shufflin’

look, fryda, we may have took a look at your notebook, see, uh
the white moth hands it back to me and says
honestly, we’re shook to see
such consistency with the persistency
of this almost relic psychedelic
no one ever here gets to see

now, fryda, listen to me

these shrooms
they make room for high moods and dank tunes
and in their deadly wake
they’ve been known to make loons

the black moth chimes in:

in fact, right now we probably sound
like we’re part of the groove
and there’s no time to explain
‘cuz you gotta get on the move

but the rhyming, the timing
it’s almost too much

you can’t help but keep a beat
and this whole thing’s a rush

i know it’s asking for a lot
but for now we’re gonna need your trust

the white moth says:

you’re a queen consort
so we’re compelled to report
but i hope by now we’ve shown
that we’re just not the sort

the black moth interrupts:

so tell us—what are you doing here?

we all stay silent for a minute

then i tell them i’m just looking for a safe place for my daughter
yes, full well knowing this will likely end in my slaughter

and as i see it now i’ve got two options i’m shoppin’ for
perhaps a new god-king or maybe a fragment world
either way there’ll be no more distractions from my actions
‘cuz there’s nothin’ i’m stopping for—

in fact, i need to leave here—right now

because wolfram will have your wings for this
there will be no strings for this
i can pull with the king once he gets wind of this

the moths look at each other:

so many things she doesn’t know
we ought to share before goes

the white moth walks me through it:

fryda—wolfram is no god, he has a conduit
now it’s true, conduit history is long ’n hard to intuit

but suffice to say, a conduit borrows their power

sure he’s strong, he’ll live long
but the old gods are long gone
and all we have here is just a classic case of don juan

the black moth says:

now for your goals we can't be sure of our roles
but if you're lookin' to coup a conduit
i'd place my bets the gore fields duke could do it
now the real deal'd be how to get him to rebuke his ideals
but perhaps you could see to it

it's clear the white moth does not concur
he says, no, fryda, save you and your daughter

wormwood has lots of problems and it's not your job to solve them

and so you see if you ask me
you should take your chance now to escape from wolfram's retort
you'd find that old world you're looking for in absinthia resort

and one more thing, fryda

i'm sorry to burst your bubble
but you know how the clashing goes
if you stay there will be trouble
and if you go there will be double
and now that you've doubled where you'll go
trouble's all you'll know

the black moth goes:

but someone needs to defeat him
our country craves a new leader to lead them

to cure the current tyranny, we must go toe-to-toe
and if you ask me, fryda, the duke's our only hope

the white moth takes a step toward me:

regardless of where you go
it's dangerous to go alone
so as long as you don't mind
i'll apply a block to your mind
to prevent the god-king from finding you
or at least give you some time

he puts his hands up and once done, he reminds me, we only wanna help
just promise me, fryda, that you won't draw attention to yourself

as if on cue, todd bursts through the door

conversations subdue, and i plant both feet on the floor
i say todd, where have you been?
todd says, my dear fryda, if you're going to be my friend
you've got to know i just disappear now and then!

i sigh and thank the moths for their hospitality
and apologize profusely for skipping formalities
no, we can't stay for a meal
because it's now clear to me the reality
we have got to get to the gore fields

part 12

“peacock man and the gore fields"

so before you know it
todd and i find ourselves smuggled into a shipment skiff

and we’re our way to the gore fields

and once we’re there

and i see him

leather jacket
the black
the blue
the green

ugh
well after awhile
i feel a song coming on

snap snap snap snap

one two three

it’s finally my chance
to start a new romance
who knew it could’ve happened to me

a different kinda god-king
the way he makes my heart sing
could only mean it’s meant to be

he’s gonna take the salt king down
i can almost even seen it now
in his blood wolfram will fucking drown
as i crush his tiny crown beneath my feet
into dust

oh i just
can’t
wait

for my dear sabrina
i’m just so elated

for my daughter to meet ya

you’ve taken what’s so dark
from bodies torn apart
the fields a work of art
for us a new start

part 15

“compromise spiral”

so i’m thinkin’ lately
that maybe you can’t save me

is this another spiral?

maybe

a fun one, i hope
tell me now
why can’t i save you

you have to take care of the fields
and all this gore you hoard
of course the muls will never grow bored
having you as their overlord—

—ah, it is a fun one
i love when you lose your gourd
first, you know wolfram is abhorred
second, here we accept we live life in a saltborne land torn
and my people
they like me
sabrina will like me too

sabrina will be comfortable
i will be comfortable
you will be comfortable

an unfairly awarded epithet
are you asking if i have no regret?
nothing is perfect
we take what we can get

i don’t get how you don’t see what’s yours to take
opportunities are made but here we lay
once we make a move and sabrina is here
wolfram will not stay— in place
it will be a race— we can’t afford to lose
no one can afford to lose— against him
no one but you even has the opportunity to choose
you have a conduit, why don’t you use it?

fryda, that’s not how it works
that’s not how any of this works

now show me these seeds of yours
i want them to be grown by the time sabrina gets here

part 16

so i’m thinking lately
that you really can’t save me

fryda, this again?

i saw them
when were you going to tell me

what did you see

your letters from wolfram

oh

you spoke of me

you are not in danger

if you really think that
you don’t know what danger is
and perhaps never have

he would have received word from someone else by now you were seen here

i’m trying to tell you that i’m leaving

i need his trust
for sabrina
so we can save her

you want to take care of everything
and so you take care of nothing

don’t take this the wrong way
but there is no right way
and yet you write to wolfram anyway
hoping to reason like this is some sort of game
worried treason might sully your good name

fryda, this is not true

tell me, what did you trade for this conduit
if i could undo it, i would do it

you keep trying to appease, to please
like a fucking sycophant on your knees

fryda, this isn't you

it's now clear to me all compromise
is just more fuel for what you want

i don't want what he wants

how dear to me your charming lies
all in line with this empire you flaunt

i am helping how i can

such a fool to think the stars aligned
like i'm some fucking debutante

fryda

take your sweet enterprise

the last thing sabrina needs
is another weak-minded man
too scared to bite the hand
that feeds

part 17

It's not until we're *several* sheppeys away from the gore fields that I dare to break this trance Fryda's gotten herself into

Talking to herself, mumbling
Previous self, crumbling

By such time, the two pieces of evidence available to me I've synthesized -- the hellbent nature of her stride and that look in her eyes -- and with these hypothesized --

What in Todd's name just happened.

See, there was no change in her pace, no stopping her, no why hello, Todd, how are you
I tell you, it might could be amusing if not so confusing, this void of a person, no chance of defusing, intent to lay waste to any obstacle in their path

So of course I walk to the side.

And when the time feels right, I say to her:
"My dear Fryda, you do realize I assume you set the whole ding dang place on fire?"

Absolutely no response.

And they say I'M the rude dude with a 'tude!

I've got to say though, I don't hate this Fryda.
She's got the walk of bridges burned, of lovers spurned, of hard won lessons learned -- the look of someone with no intent to return.
At least not to that Duke fellow. A little too mellow for my Fryda. And a bit of an apologist, you know, never did really seem to get the gist of this whole situation.

To be fair, I'm not sure even I get the gist of this whole situation.

But I do what I can, I try to be a good friend.
Fryda's the one refusing my truffles again and again!
I tell her it'll take the edge off, but I suppose she wants to keep her edges sharp.

And finally she tells me why, as she goes the fuck off:

"The black moth was wrong to demand
The cure for this land could ever be by Pendergrass' hand
A pathetic ass man who'll never understand
It's the whole ding dang regime he's got to disband
And if you ask me it's not too much a kink in our plan
And honestly I don't even give a damn--"

I say, Fryda, Fryda, oh honeyyyyy
You *clearly* give a damn. You give *plenty* of damns. Perhaps too *many* a damn.
But what really matters now is, where are we --

-- Todd, is that a strip mall?

Oh! A shopping spree for me? Don't mind if I do!

We make our way past Forever 69, I am downright shocked she has no interest in this.
Everything is so nice! Everywhere I look, nice, nice, nice!

But before I know it, she leaves me behind, saying she's off to Racy's department store

I lose track of time frolicking about everything I could ever want and more in Wuzzy Falls.
It really does have the finest wares in all of Wormwood. It was a joy just to play with them.

When I catch up to her just as she's about to enter Racy's, it's clear she's been to Bobzombie & Bitch.
She's got her arms full of steel pipes, containers, a torch, who knows what else.
Like she's preparing for the apocalypse (which we all realize has already happened, right?).
She doesn't look at me. Her eyes are fixed on the perfume counters.
She drops her gear and clears the shelves in less than a minute.

And her conviction is a *bit* disconcerting.
I say, hey Fryda, we came here for a bit of fun, didn't we? Isn't there something *nice* you'd like?
She keeps tinkering on the floor, emptying the perfume bottles into a container.
Maybe a token for Sabrina when you see her, what do you think?
She looks up at me.
"Moonstone," she says.
Then goes back to screwing parts together.

I do not normally take kindly to commands, but I say to myself, Todd! Your girl is having a hard time! Go find her a moonstone and perhaps a tasty treat!

So I leave her there, testing a firestarter, and it is that moment I realize…

I have made a huge mistake.

part 23

absynthia

tarek suburb

we seem to have found ourselves in giant community wide backyard bbq

howdy partner

and i see immediately that he recognizes me as the queen consort fryda

i squint my eyes at him and do the thing

so he can see immediately that i'm onto his shit

he looks confused
todd looks confused

i make a face as if to say
"it's not paranoia when you're right"
and look around to take in the rest of the scene

the streets lined with identical houses
little boxes on the hillside

tarek children playing and chasing each other, no doubt practicing for the coming war

someone walks up to me offers me a kabab
the biggest tarek i've ever SEEN
with a kebab

i snap at him

"you think you can TRICK me, tarek?
like i would fall that easily for a little SNACK?
i will put a void SO FAR UP YOUR--"

todd jumps in between us

"fryda! these people are nice! give them a try! let's stay awhile! have a kebab!"

"todd, these tarek should be baring their teeth at us
what do you think wolfram has done to them thats got them so complacent
something in the water maybe.."

"todd?"

"todd?"

i look over at todd popping open his third la croix

"loosen up, fryda! have a bubbly!"

i stand fast -- i will NOT be persuaded

but before we all get into a scuffle
todd offers to muffle my disdain with a truffle

so i try to get faded while some tarek flexes his pecks
and tells us both why we tareks just aren't as jaded

i take one entire minute to roll my eyes

i mutter to todd
"it's still clear to me this masquerade is a charade
and espionage's their trade
and obviously they’re all getting paid--"

todd elbows me
"FRYDA can you not i'm tryna get laid"

part 25

after another full day of trekking across the salt, Todd and i finally see an oasis forming in the distance

if i didn't know better, i would have thought my mind was playing tricks on me again, forming a mirage in a time of most need

but Absynthia spa and resort is right where we expect it to be, just like Angelo had said it would be, and Todd and i, we are so ready for it, like saliva forming in the mouth in anticipation of a delicious something

and as we get closer, i'm basically regaling him with all the stories that were always tossed around the castle what seems like years ago now--all the rumors of the healing properties of the hot springs, foot massages that don't tickle, hair styling appointments with no time limit, AND the strongest drinks and the softest pillows in all of Wormwood, to the point that by the time we are almost there we're going off back and forth about what we're each getting into first

at some point, Todd and i exchange confused looks, and he says what we're both thinking--isn't it kind of... weird, there don't seem to be any people here? i thought this place was supposed to be popular?

i have no answer for him

then the idea strikes me and i stop in my tracks, I thrust my hand out and grab Todd's shoulder, and I blurt out--fuck, Todd. Wolfram's henchmen -- they must have made it here before us, and they've already cleared out the space to make us an easy mark. Denise was never here at all, Angelo's led us straight to where he let the Deacon know we would be, you remember me saying the moths just wanted rid of me, right? it's a trap and we didn't even see--

Fryda, no, Fryda, that's not--I don't think--now, Angelo is a friend, think about it, why would he have worked with you to have more control over your void powers--

i loosen my grip a bit in a combination of both some relief in the logic Todd's words and also surprise as we both look up and over to see a group of tiny elemental goblins??? shuffling toward us, muttering amongst themselves, but carrying little trays of treats??? and motioning for us to come with them

and as it turns out, the mephits immediately recognized me and they are sooo accommodating

"my dear queen Fryda, you must be so tired" and offers me a glass of water

another says, "may i take your weathered travel clothes, perhaps you would prefer one of our famous patented cloud robes, we also have full body self-massaging gowns available"--they catch me looking around

"ah yes please madam don't mind the emptiness, you are a very special guest, you see, and your, hrmm, garçon, is most welcome as well"

Todd is absolutely aghast at this--I quickly say, "please, boys, this is my good friend Todd, and you will treat him with as much respect as you do me, if not more so"

Todd straightens up a bit, continues looking around as if he wasn't paying attention, and the mephits shuffle ahead as we follow at a slower pace. i can tell he doesn't trust them and that muttering they keep doing just out of earshot, but after a few minutes when we each have a drink with a tiny umbrella, and mouths full of bites from an elaborate charcuterie board, he's nudging me with a smile and waggle of his eyebrows like, yooo, i'm with the VIP Fryda! this ain't half bad!

once we're full and satisfied, Todd stands up, "well, i've got a good feeling if there was anywhere ya bat was gonna find a moonstone it'd be somewhere around here"

wait, Todd, what, already? we just got here! don't you want to try the hot spring?

oh no, no hot springs for me, i am NOT getting great vibes about this place, and it's all about the vibes--but--ok you got me, i've got to take a look around the place before i can settle in for the night but of course my top priority is that moonstone you've been hankering for!

"Todd, if you were ever actually looking for a moonstone, i would be wearing a string of them right now, don't bullshit me"

"my dear Fryda, you are now tipping from paranoid to delusional--do get yourself some due rest while i'm gone!"--and with a swish of his cape he walks off with an off-handed wave

a steamy mephit touches my hand and leads me quietly to a room where i melt into a hot bath

for a brief moment of respite, i remember i am the queen consort Fryda, untouchable

i am living a charmed life again

i close my eyes and sink below the water

i forget i am the runaway traitor

the abandoner of all i have ever loved, of all who have ever trusted me

i'm not sure how much time has passed, but no one is around when i exit, fully dressed in high-end Absynthia loungewear, so i decide to explore the place a bit myself, half hoping i will stumble upon Denise, other half hoping i'll find some paper and a bit of time to sort out my thoughts

the more i wander, the more obvious it is that there really are no other people here. and i feel like i can't trust any of the reasons why that might be that keep popping into my head. but i do my best to hold onto the belief that Denise is here, like Angelo said. he has no reason to trick me.

i come across what looks like a little gift shop

i poke my head inside, then make my way looking around slowly. but suddenly i stop, frozen in place.

in the middle of the shop is a cleared space and an unsettling as fuck scene

the floor is covered in claw marks in every direction, and across the surface is smeared what looks like some dark fiendish ritual, a pattern of demonic symbolism made out of some substance i can't identify, but pray it's not blood, and to top it all off, placed throughout are thoughtfully articulated dolls

and it occurs to me that, this moment right now, this is all by design, and whoever made this scene, they wanted someone to stumble across it just as i am now

i begin to back the fuck up

but someone is already standing behind me

part 26

backing up from this horror scene, i whip around to face my enemy, hands outstretched ready to unleash all of my honed void power upon the twisted mind behind it all

but instead looking back at me is a small child

it takes me a couple of seconds to realize--it's sven, my sister denise's child

and he looks me up and down and stifles a giggle

i am not quite as intimidating in my luxury pajamas

my face softens and i lower my arms

i only ever learned the alphabet

i point at myself and spell out f r y d a

he nods vigorously, comes forward and gives me a hug

i had almost forgotten what it was like to receive a hug like that

i lose track of who either of us are and for a moment i'm just like channeling pure maternal energy, i love this little person and i want to keep them safe and give them everything

after a bit i pull back and point

"you realize this is an absolutely terrifying display, right?"

sven looks at me confused, i look at him confused

and i look around at the shop again

it's the same space, nothing's changed, but i slowly come to the realization now that what i initially saw as claw marks on the floor are actually just scratches from display shelves being pushed out of the way, what i took as symbols written in blood are just an outline made with oil markers, and the dolls, well, are just that, it's really not sinister at all given the context.

as i'm looking around i say, "i mean... i guess it's fine... i just... didn't understand it. could you explain it to me?"

sven springs into action, like "resetting" the board that is the floor, then walks me through this game, pushing me and moving pieces, pointing at spaces, drawing new lines. i do start to catch on, and eventually by what is clearly the "end" of the game, it seems apparent we have lost, but if you hadn't been paying attention you

wouldn't know it by the look on sven's face. he is just straight up beaming. it is so pure. it's clear he is just so happy to have someone to play with.

i laugh and grasp my fist in front of me and declare, "we may have lost the battle, but they have not won the war!"

smiles. this is a great game. high five. as sven goes about resetting the board again, i gently ask:

"hey, sven, so where is your mom?"

his mood completely changes, as if i wiped his joy away.

deflated, sad, nothing

i walk up to him, pull him close, ruffle his hair, change the subject:

"eh, don't worry about it, we'll catch up with her later, huh? what else can you show me around here?"

---

sven and i spend the entire day together

we always got along well, but something about this time is different, it feels like... we both really need each other

i show him my flamethrower

he goes absolutely bananas

i show him all the fun bits to flick back and forth

he wants to open up and smell every single perfume bottle in my bandolier

he basically pleads with me with his eyes to be able to use it and leads me to an emptied wading pool clearly to do some free flaming

he wants to wear the whole thing the whole way there even though the bandolier goes to his knees and he can barely walk with how the it all weighs him down

once we're there and he flips it on, he falls straight back on his butt

i feel like an idiot, i quickly gather it all from him, help him up and dust him off and say, you know what, sven, how bout let's you and i make you your own one of these

we spend the rest of the afternoon and evening scavenging and tinkering until we have a perfectly sven-sized flamethrower

the whole time he is such a good little helper

almost like he's used to assisting a mad scientist.

---

i always thought of denise as pretty heckin wild.

if you took the time to think about it, it was clear wolfram had a type -- not to toot my own horn or anything here but all the wives were clearly headstrong, independent, leader types. idea being this was the recipe for a conduit offspring.

so denise definitely fit the bill -- and was also always the other one down to get real nerdy.

we'd always have such great and frankly WEIRD conversations. i'd LEARN something from her, and that was the best part. she liked that i could keep up with her, and i'd entertain her ideas, get just as excited about them.

the only times we would really butt heads were on philosophical matters, our place in the world, our role in wolfram's reign. for instance we both agreed the athar were problematic. but there's no equation for human emotion, you know, there's no room for empathy in her projections.

and so yeah i know she's really aloof. like i couldn't imagine being her child. you'd just kind of have to figure shit out on your own.

---

by nighttime, i have mentioned todd a few times but he still hasn't come around.

sven and i are both falling out and i realize neither of us have had anything to eat or drink all day, both so focused on our creation.

but... i am the heckin' adult here. i feel terrible. like fuck fryda have you seriously already forgotten how to be a mother?

eventually we find a mephit who brings us each a humble charcuterie board.

and i decide it's time to broach the subject again.

"so sven, don't you think your mom might be missing you? don't you usually eat dinner together?"

he shakes his head no.

"oh, well, you saw her today though, right?"

he shakes his head.

"yesterday then?"

no again.

"surely in the past WEEK at least?"

he starts pushing around his food on the tray, and shakes his head again.

this is breaking my fucking heart. "well, she does have a lot going on, doesn't she?"

"you know what. no. this is ridiculous. sven, finish my cheese." i stand up. "i am going to go have a talk with your mother!"

part 27

with the serum flowing through my veins, i march into the shard.

once i step into the lab, i see her in the middle of the room, back turned to me.

"hello, denise."

she doesn't say anything, i walk a little closer and see i've caught her wrist-deep in something's abdomen. she holds up a finger as if to say "just a minute!" and plunges the other arm in just a little further.

i try to ignore the squelching as i wait for her to respond to me. i look around the lab, rubbing the spot on my arm where the mephits injected me. they said i couldn't enter the shard without it. it's still really sore. not a great start for me trying to live here.

"ah, fryda!" she walks up to me, "i was wondering when you'd stop by and see me -- could you be a dear and hold this spleen for me?"

i can't help but laugh. "sure. you haven't changed much, have you?"

"oh, i wouldn't put it that way," she gestures at the bandages on her torso and back. "not quite there yet, but i've been working on some improvements! i've got an extra tentacle or two lying around if you'd like to --"

"i'm good! thanks... so... you knew i was here??"

"yes," she flips a hand dismissively, "you needed your rest, fryda! i figured you'd come to me when--"

"then i expect the mephits also informed you i've spent the entire day with sven -- you know, your son? your very young child?"

she seems genuinely surprised, "oh, sure, sven, he's a bit needy, isn't he? thank you for that. as you can see, i've got a lot of work to do around here." she gestures around. "i'd love to think you came to lend a hand -- perhaps literally?" :)))

"i think you're missing the point, denise. do you know he told me it's been OVER A WEEK since you've seen him." i realize i'm shaking the spleen at her.

"oh, fryda, that is RICH coming from you. first of all, he's INVITED to the lab! and he doesn't WANT to be a subject, it's not like i don't OFFER. look, i even have a little lab coat for him!" she picks up a little white lab coat. "see?? it's cute!"

"--but more importantly, tell me, fryda, where is your daughter now?"

the wind's knocked out of me in this one blow. even if i had a response, i physically cannot speak. no reason i can come up with that is defensible. i had assumed she was safe at the castle, but now being asked i suddenly

realize i have no idea if that's even still the case, and beyond that i have no way of tracing a castle that moves, and i kept no contacts in the castle who could inform me. but denise has contacts. i spiral into what her question could mean -- does she know her to be somewhere else?

"and how old is she again?" denise asks as she flips her goggles back down and turns back to her table, leaving me with my thoughts.

after a few seconds, denise pokes something squishy that squeals.

"i need your help."

"we always got along before, fryda, no reason we can't now."

i say, "okay, here it is -- i came here because i've had it in mind for awhile that this shard could be the start of a new life. maybe i could even help with your work, i could help take care of sven too, and he'd have someone close to his age to play with again too."

"oh no, no, no, you can't stay here, fryda. you'd get horribly sick -- obviously the mephits gave you the shot this time so you could be here now but--"

"yeah, they didn't really explain it to me -- so what would happen if i didn't get the shot? how horribly sick are we talking? could i get over it? or are you getting these shots all the time? honestly if wolfram isn't coming here, i'd be willing to do it -- "

"fryda, if you can get used to a rapid overgrowth of your own cells all over and eventually protruding out of your body until they quickly overtake you and you die, you would be my guest. wolfram doesn't come here because he's a negative genasi -- and you're negative too. honestly, as a void genasi, you'd probably be more peachy in a black hole. and as for me, as a radiance genasi, i can withstand the positive forces of this plane."

"i realize you've made your peace with the way Wormwood is all going, and you've carved out a spot for yourself in this world but... i can't. and now, i'm not trying to get into a discussion on morality--"

"MORALITY, she says! i should have written to wolfram IMMEDIATELY once you set foot here. and here i am having a little chat. have you thought of that, fryda KALI?"

the hairs on the back of my neck bristle. of course all i can think of is how does she know that name, who else knows, are the moths in danger, but instead i ask: "and why didn't you write to wolfram?"

"well, i can't really call you out on wanting to leave and have control over your life. i found my own way to do just the same, didn't i?"

"you know, your daughter though, she's not negative, she's water and air, she'd be fine. if you could figure out a way to get her here, who's to say how it happened?"

i think to myself -- leave her in the castle, protected for now by the potential of being a conduit, or bring her here only to abandon her again where i know she'll be neglected?

i refuse to believe these are the only options. i say, "call it sentimental, denise, but i'm looking for a place for us to be together. there's got to be another place wolfram doesn't have power over."

"you know, other than here, i do know one other place wolfram avoids. he's afraid of it, even. but you should be too."

"what is it? where is it?"

denise rolls her eyes. "so wolfram's become obsessed with this i don't know this thing, it's just been consuming his thoughts lately. it's honestly probably half the reason i'm left to my own devices out here. something about the bottom of the world. i have no idea. he just gets fixated on things, you know? the potential of a new consort one day, a different one the next. now this new threat. i don't know. but for now -- what? fryda! where are you going? i hope you know you can't go there! come on, at least give me my spleen back!"

---

sven is right where i left him. but the mephits are gone, and so is my flamethrower. those thieving fucks

i walk up to sven.

"hey sven, i'm so sorry how long that took."

i sit down next to him.

"so... i think you know this but, todd and i, we're not going to be able to stay here."

he looks down.

"i want to, but i'm trying to find a place for sabrina and i, and it can't be here. but you're safe here."

no response.

"i just have to go find todd then i'll be going. i'm very glad we got to spend time together today, sven." i hold him in a hug for a minute.

as i let go and stand up, he looks up at me, hits me with the big sad eyes. he points at himself and does a little circle gesture with this pointer finger, then motions at me.

"i don't think you can come with me, sven."

it looks like i've broken him. like i've said the absolute most hurtful thing i ever could have.

this is not working. it's so hard to say goodbye. i couldn't even explain to my own daughter why i had to leave. i couldn't even say goodbye to her. wherever she is right now, whatever she's thinking, all she knows is that i left her.

i hold out my hand.

"okay, new plan, sven. we don't need to worry about todd. he'll catch up with us. let's go."

part 28

sven seems equal parts satisfied he got his way and
well
by the way he's looking around
i can tell he's also a bit...
apprehensive
about the whole situation

but you know
he's never been on an adventure before!
so that must be it

i decide to take some pressure off
by adding a little chat to the air

"so todd should be coming along any time now.
he's always saying he's off getting a moonstone,
but you know
he never is.
-- so he'll be back soon is all i'm really saying."

sven looks at me and gestures as if to ask
"what's a moonstone?"

"oh, it's something i've been --
well, todd has been looking for me for awhile.
i've wanted one for sabrina
as a gift when i return
so she has something to --
well, there's a few reasons for it --
she's got this stone necklace from wolfram --
well, you know about that --
so first i'd like to replace that
but also, moonstone, with the right intentions
some say it's purifying.
and that it's helpful for processing... difficult emotions.
with stress comes an unstable mind, sven.
and intuition and empathy take years to develop...
but with the right help
perhaps we can all be a little more patient
and inspire each other
take care of each other
that sort of thing."

it's not long before todd finally joins us.

"it's about time! let's get on with your bat self, todd!"

"ah yes! and where are we headed today? a little day trip fun?"

"does it matter? you've come with me everywhere before, todd, why ask questions now?"

"hold on, i'm confused. didn't you speak with denise? are we not laying low here?"

"the shard is a no-go. but there's somewhere else wolfram will never go -- the bottom of the world. we can stay there."

"wait, who is we? whoa, whoa, whoa, are we STEALING this CHILD?"

sven is looking back and forth between us.

"oh please, i'm not STEALING.
if anything, i'm BORROWING.
and honestly i'd be incredibly surprised if even after a month denise notices her son is gone!"

i hear a whimper from sven.
that was not the right thing to say.

"now look, todd, let's just get out of here, okay?"

"oh, fryda
please help me out here, i'm trying to understand.
i want to be sensitive to the fact that
you are clearly displacing
whatever it is
whatever you've been holding onto
your guilt
your shame
your LOVE for your daughter sabrina
i --"

"SHAME?
you misunderstand me, TODD
i have no SHAME
why should i have shame?
i made a conscious decision to leave sabrina
TEMPORARILY
where she would be SAFE
just as i am making a conscious decision NOW to take sven"

"oh? and so tell me again the logic here?
because the reason you couldn't take sabrina was the dangerous journey

but now you can take sven on one
one that is perhaps even more dangerous"

your head's not even on straight, FRYDA
but you know what
this is on me isn't it for tryna
psychoanalyze the psycho!"

"how DARE you talk to me this way
i may be on the run, but i am still your queen --"

"what?" todd shakes his head in disbelief.
"you can't have it both ways, fryda!
denounce the crown AND continue to benefit from the title?
hmm?
unless you're planning on KEEPing the title --"

"is THAT what you think of me, todd?
that it's been my aim this entire time to overthrow wolfram for my own gain?"

"tell me, todd
how long have you felt this way?"

todd holds up his hands a little in defense, "fryda, i don't know what you're on about"

"how didn't i see this before?"

"i'm clearly not on WOLFRAM'S side" he starts backing away from me

"and who else have you been calling me 'psycho' to?"

i come closer, "is that what you told the duke so he wouldn't compromise with me?"

"fryda, please"

"and is that why the moths keep sending me on these wild goose chases?"

"fryda, i've only been here this entire time as a friend and to help you"

"i'm sure that's exactly what you wanted me to think. and i did, todd. i ate it right up. but not anymore.
sven, let's go." i take his head and start speed walking. "i will NOT let you stop us, todd"

"fryda, you can't even take care of yourself in this state, much less a child."
he keeping pace right after us, his cape swishing loudly.
"you wouldn't even be able to take care of sabrina now if you were reunited.
you need a BREAK, fryda. you can't keep pushing yourself like this."

"yes, a BREAK, todd, just STAY HERE, right?

where my traitor sister and my traitor best friend have already given me up."

"FUCK, fryda, you've really lost it!
you're not fit to be a mother!"

"YOU have lost it, todd." i'm not even looking back at him. sven starts crying.

"fryda -- i'm taking sven back to his mother." he starts to pull sven away from me.

"NO!"

i put a void in him.

i had to stop him. stop him from stopping us. stop him from giving us up.

as i slowly lower my hand, todd collapses.

but the look in his eyes right before he does shows me
i was wrong.
the look, it was equal parts deep hurt, and pure compassion.

"oh no"

i fall to me knees.

and out of todd's cape tumbles... something.
i pick it up.
moonstone.