

## Gorgon Girl

*Daphne recounts the story of how she went from being an ordinary woman to a mythological creature known the world over, and priestess of a Goddess. It involves more than a few big changes . . .*

## Gorgon Girl

I wasn't always this way, you know. I know that sounds obvious, looking the way I do. Hell, the story of how I received the Gorgon's Curse is famous world-wide. Parents of unruly children tell my story as a cautionary tale to what can happen if you wander off out of sight and touch or do things you shouldn't. Others are more academic, and look to me as one of the most significant evidences of real magic in the world. Or at least the result of real magic. I even have my own unwanted worshippers; just my very existence in this transformed body has resuscitated the ancient Greek religions to some degree. I suppose I can't blame them. After all, I was the one who saw Athena, talked with Athena, was cursed to become this by Athena. Ugh, just thinking about it makes my 'hair' writhe. Well, more than it usually does.

My point is, it's obvious that I was always this way in terms of my body. Some people get skin conditions, others lose half their face in a car crash or whatever, I get transformed. But even if my case is unique and strange and weird and curse-related, for all of those you can tell that person's body has changed against their will in some way. But if there's one thing I've learned about myself since I was cursed and slowly transformed, it's that it's the change inside that truly counts. Every day I greet tourists and locals, most of them complete strangers to me, and tour them through Athena's temple, leading them in their worship or providing them guidance in how to best respect my new deity's wishes for her sacred temple. And I do it with enthusiasm and grace, not letting my altered form or the frequent stares or awkward questions worsen my day. Most take it for granted, even though on some level they know how strange it must be for me still, how some of my freedom has been taken away, that I'll never be an ordinary human woman like I'd always taken for granted myself. Great Hera, I didn't even know how to speak Greek until I was changed and now I speak it every day.

Positivity, and a willingness to accept the changes as they come. That's all it takes. So here's my story.

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Before I was a freak, I was Daphne Turner, an Aussie tourist from Sydney taking a gap year to explore the world. Cambodia, Russia, Germany, South Africa, Canada, I had did it all. I was determined to see as many new places as I could, even briefly, so someday in the future I could return for a much longer time to those places that caught my fascination. One such place did; Greece. The land of the Parthenon, the Aegean Islands, the bustle of Athens market stalls and whispers of new ancient ruins being uncovered. So fascinated was I with this place that I lingered a full month and a half there, far longer than the time I gave any other country. It was just me alone, constantly messaging my Mum and Dad back home, as well as my protective older brother. My friend Stacey had been with me for the first leg of the trip, and I updated her on my progress too. I could hardly contain my joy to them when I managed to get tickets to a tour of a temple dedicated to Athena outside of Athens.

The temple had been known about for some time and sequestered away from the public, but recently it had been opened up, many of its features restored. Its purpose had been shrouded in doubt for a long time, but a group of archaeologists managed to connect it to various accounts that confirmed it as a temple dedicated to Athena, Goddess of wisdom, courage, law, art and so on. Basically, a deity of culture and justice. Mind you, the Ancient Greeks had a very different idea of what constituted justice; an uncovered mural depicted the famous legend of the temple servant Medusa being raped by the sea god Poseidon in that very temple. For the act of sacrilege, Athena cursed Medusa to become a hideous creature with snakes for hair, whose gaze would turn creatures to stone. She was eventually slain by the hero Perseus. Talk about victim blaming, Athena.

Still, it was a sight to see, and so popular that I was lucky to get entrance. The tour was strictly run, and our guide warned us several times not to wander.

“This is a very sacred temple,” he said, “and it is important that we show not only respect for its heritage, but for the Goddess Athena herself, yes?”

Naturally we agreed, and we were guided through the ruin, and then down into its underground depths where holy relics and sacrifices were once stored in preparation for holy days. I found myself fascinated by some of the sculptures that had survived, protected by thick glass displays as they were. There were many legends depicted but the tale of Medusa seemed the most popular one – a sculpture even showed her in mid-

transformation, the left side of her hair forming into ropey snakes, the other half only just beginning to form their tendrils. That made me shiver.

“Eugh. Who’d want snakes on their head?”

If I’d known the fate that would await me I wouldn’t have been so flippant with that statement at the time. And I certainly wouldn’t have done what I did next, which was to sneak away from the tour group while no one was the wise and duck under a clearly labelled ‘Restricted Area’ cordon. I was driven by curiosity, and I had no idea just how badly me and my body would pay for it. The temple looked more genuine as I travelled down the more original and untouched areas. Soon a set of ancient stairs seemed to beckon to me, at least that’s how I excused my actions, and so I travelled down into the tomb area. The area was cold, musty, quiet. I used my mobile phone light to find my way through, and also to look at the fascinating murals and sculptures that had managed to survive over 2,000 years of stagnation. More depictions of Medusa were displayed across the wall, but also other images that seemed to make no sense according to the classic myth; there were several image with multiple gorgons, one older, the other two clearly young women. They all held their hands upwards in supplication. One image was very faded, but seemed to depict Athena casting her light upon a gorgon who herself was worshipped by a mass of commoners and nobility before her. Interesting. It appeared that there was more than one version of the myth.

Finally, the long hall ended, and I came to the deep sanctum that would irrevocably alter my life and form. Ugh, just thinking about it now makes my hair writhe and end twitch. I entered into the sanctum, which was colder and darker than any other part of the site I had yet visited. There were more cordons, this time warning that only very particular persons with the very top access could visit this sight. Alarm bells were just starting to go in my head that I shouldn’t have been there, when I saw it. The gemstone.

Square in the centre of the rounded room was a green rock the size of my fist, placed atop a sceptre that jutted from a ring in the ground. It seemed to shine in the darkness, calling me. There was an electric hum in the air, as if this was something that no human person was ever meant to touch. So naturally, me being the inquisitive idiot I was, I stepped forward. One step. Two step. Three. Four. Closer and closer towards the stone, until finally I reached out, my blood pumping heavily in my veins and heart beating rapidly against my chest, and snatched it in my hand. I had no intention of stealing it. Truly. I just wanted to feel the stone, and know that I was among the few who ever would. What happened instead was a blinding flash of green light and powerful blast that sent me sprawling backwards.

'WHO DARES COMMIT SUCH SACRILEGE AGAINST MY TOMB!'

The voice was feminine, yet boomed and echoed through the chamber and inside my head. Tendrils of green light reached out from the stone and fixed me into place, kneeling as if in supplication to some deity. Which, looking back, I realised was exactly what was happening. The light grew even brighter, and with the sound of thunder it fell away to reveal a tall woman with a stoic expression. She was something out of a Greek myth herself; bronzed, clad in armour, an owl perched on her shoulder. Her auburn hair fell down in tresses over her shoulders. She held a spear in one hand, and a scroll in the other.

'WHO ARE YOU?' she demanded, her voice seeming like two voices of the same registry overlapping one another, 'AND WHY HAVE YOU DISTURBED ATHENA'S TOMB? ANSWER, OR BE VANQUISHED!'

I was shaking so badly it was a miracle I managed to reply at all. "I-I'm Daphne. Daphne T-Turner. I was j-just exploring. I didn't m-mean to disturb you."

"And yet," she said, her voice calming, her presence relaxing slightly, "you have disturbed my temple young one. I am Athena, Goddess of wisdom, justice, mercy, strategy, and much more. I can see in you that you are not one of my subjects. You are not even descended from the Greek people over which I maintain great power even now still. You are a plunderer, a disrespectful insect that has shown no care for this sacred sight."

"N-no, I-"

"SILENCE! YOU CANNOT LIE TO A GODDESS! I can see already that you deliberately slipped from your guide's sight, and ignored the carefully laid boundaries put there by the academics who do respect my domain; their wisdom was granted from me, in fact. So what shall I do with you, Daphne Turner, intruder. Shall I dispense justice" – she held up her spear – "or mercy?" – and flicked the scroll open with one hand. "Which shall it be?"

"Mercy!" I begged. "Please mercy great Athena. I shall never disturb your resting place again. I only wished to look! I was curious!"

“Curiosity is a blessing, but becomes a vice when not tempered with reason or respect. Hmm.” She seemed to consider something. I just maintained my kneeling bow and tried not to stare directly at her. “Perhaps I shall be merciful. You say you shall never disturb my resting place again?”

“Never! I promise!”

“And yet I say you will. DO NOT SPEAK! You ask for mercy and I shall give it, but mercy can take many forms, and still retain its punishments and responsibilities. I give these to you now. You shall be the guardian of this temple in the time to come. You shall know its responsibilities, and be my faithful servant on this mortal plane. All shall know you by the gorgon’s visage, which you shall possess forevermore, even into the immortal plane, where through good work you shall find a mighty place. So speak I, the Goddess Athena!” The spear and book vanished from her hands, and she pressed her fingers together where bright energy crackled between them. All at once I was enveloped in that energy, could feel it rippling through me. At the time I thought I was going to die. It turns out, it was just the beginning of some very, very big changes. I fainted on the spot.

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When I woke, the chamber was just as empty and cold as I could remember. I convinced myself I must have knocked my head on one of the low-hanging entrances and smacked myself unconscious. It was the only logical explanation for the crazy dream I had just had. It must have been a dream – it simply must have been so. I wandered back, eventually running back into the tour group. I was chastised – rightfully so, I’ll be honest – by the guide and sent packing with the security guards on my tail. I was lucky my intrusion didn’t go viral and end with me getting doxxed or something. Still, I had to pay a hefty fine and was sent back on a flight to Sydney, tail between my legs. I’d very soon find out just how literal that saying was about to become for me.

The first night back from Greece I was overcome by the strangest exhaustion. I had been jetlagged before, and the light from Athens all the way to Singapore and then on to Sydney was no joke, but I had never felt so completely overcome before. I barely made it back to my apartment, and people on the street were asking if I was okay. One man even said I looked like I was turning green. I certainly felt it; after lugging my bags into the apartment I stripped off my clothing, not even bothering to put on my pyjamas, and

collapsed onto my bed. I was dripping sweat, and knew I must have reeked. My heart was pounding, my blood was burning through my veins. I ran a sweaty hand over a sweaty shoulder and half-noticed that the skin was odd there. Sort of scaly. But I was so delirious with exhaustion that I fell asleep before I could investigate that more thoroughly. Of course, this wasn't jetlag. It was my body preparing for the first of many changes to come, ones for which I was totally unprepared.

I had the strangest dream as I slept. I dreamed that I was back in Greece, outside the temple. But it was different somehow – no longer ancient and weathered but vibrant and painted in bright hues. Figures wrapped in togas walked by, speaking in the Greek tongue which I only had a passing knowledge of. I asked one where I was and he shook his head at me, shielding his companion from my presence as they steered off in a different direction. I noticed the rest of the crowd was doing the same, avoiding my gaze as I continued up into the temple, drawn toward it. I entered into its grand halls, empty but for that same green jewel placed in the centre, and a woman entwined with a man beside it. He caressed her naked back as he stood, gazing upon his sexual conquest. He smiled, and his powerful figure dissolved into water which itself evaporated away, leaving just the woman, still blissful and content in post-coital glow. But already something was wrong – the halls were darkening, and all light was being drawn to a single point, out of which stepped a familiar figure. Athena, her expression fierce, a bow drawn in her arms. The woman tried to flee, but the arrow caught her in the shoulder. She screamed and writhed as her body changed, her legs fusing together, extending into a mighty tail. Her hair fell away, and from her head burst venomous snakes that trailed from her scalp and down her back. Her skin became green and covered in scales. Her clothing melted away, shifting into plate armour that protected her chest and grieves for her arms. She flicked a forked tongue in fear, and turned to face me. It was then that I saw that her face, however snake-like, was my own.

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I woke, sweaty still but less exhausted, my heart beating in my chest from the nightmare I had just experienced. Another strange dream, and so similar in theme to the last. It had rattled me to the core, so I decided to be active and catch up with friends that day, jetlag be damned. Anything to get me out of this funk. I discovered as I showered that the front of my shoulders and portions of my upper back were still sore, and the scaly feeling last night had been the beginning of a rather red-looking sunburn. Clearly that final stop in Greece under the heavy sun had done this, and the dreams and deliriousness had been the result of heat exhaustion. I chuckled to myself at that –

damned Apollo, you sun God! Perhaps I should have been dreaming of you instead. Still, I wasn't going to let it dissuade Daphne Turner, no siree! So I put up with the minor pain of it as I showered myself off and had breakfast. My tongue was sore for some reason – how innocent I was to think it was just a side effect of heat exhaustion! – and my scalp itchy, but I brushed these off. If they were anything serious I could go to a doctor. Heh, looking back perhaps a witchdoctor would have been the better choice of consideration.

It was a lovely day in all, catching up with Lizzie and Jasmine, seeing the sights of Sydney again and having coffee. No more struggling to speak broken bits of Greek out of a language guide, just good ole Aussie slang. But they noticed something off about me immediately. "You're wearing coloured contacts!" Lizzie declared. "I love them. Green looks so good with your hair."

"No – I'm not wearing contacts," I replied. "Wait, my eyes look green? Are you sure it's not just the light."

Jasmine stood up and brought herself closer. "Uh, you sure you weren't on a drunken bender Daphne? 'Cause your eyes are totally green right now."

I immediately pulled out my phone and put it into selfie mode. Sure enough, they weren't lying. My normally blue eyes were no longer blue at all, and were now a faint green colour. I dropped my phone. It smashed upon the pavement. "Damn it! Shit!"

"It's okay Daphne, all good," Lizzie said as she scooped up the cracked phone. "Sorry, looks like it didn't make it." But I was too preoccupied with my changing hair colour. I instinctively scratched my back where my sunburn was itching heavily. It felt like the burn was spreading. "Shit, I need to get a new one now. Why has my eye colour changed? How does that just happen?"

"It could be medical maybe?" Jasmine suggested. "My cousin has autoimmune hepatitis and before he was diagnosed his eyes had gone all jaundiced and yellowy."

"But my eyes aren't yellowy, there's green. They look totally normal!"

Lizzie shrugged. "Who cares, they look cool. Maybe it's just a thing. A gift from the Gods or whatever." That stopped me dead in my panic. But still in my denial I pushed that thought aside. "Well, I'll figure it out later. Right now I need a new phone, who wants to come?" Thankfully, they did, if only because they could see I was panicking over something.

Finding a new phone and getting signed up took a couple of hours, but Lizzie and Jasmine were with me all the way. It was the former who noticed a new habit of mine.

"Have you got a rash or something Daph?"

"Huh?" I said, my hand pausing against my scalp.

"You keep scratching your shoulders and back."

"Yeah," piped in Jasmine, "and your head too. Like it's all itchy. Are you okay? You didn't contract something in Greece did you?"

Lizzie shot her a look. "I didn't realise I was even doing it," I said, and it was true. I hadn't. And yet the itching continued to be maddening as I stopped scratching. It felt like it was spreading further, and later, I knew that to be true.

"Oh my God it is a rash!" declared Jasmine, ever the one for drama. "Just look at your arm, it wasn't there a moment ago!"

I looked, and it was true. I'd already bought a new phone by this point and had been putting aside my troubles, during which time my sunburn turned rash had spread down my shoulder. It was summer in Australia, and I was wearing a t-shirt and skirt. But now a few centimetres of red, flaky skin continued out beyond the edge of the short sleeve of my left arm. A peel back of my right sleeve revealed the skin was red and tender there as well, but not so much spread just yet. "Shit. I think I do have to see the doctor."

"Yeah, sorry Daph, but you probably do," said Lizzie. "And here I was hoping it was just an eye colour change. I hope it's not connected. Unless you partied too hard and got both eye colour dye and some new tats or something."

“No. I definitely didn’t. Sorry girls, I think I’ll book an appointment and maybe even get some skin cream. This rash is itchy and I don’t want you to catch it. I’ll ssssee you later.”

I clasped my mouth at that, and took off before they could see how embarrassed I was. Why had I just sounded like a snake? was my thought. Soon, I would find out what being like a snake really meant.

I said goodbye to them, feeling embarrassed and confused at these changes. At the time losing my natural eye colour seemed like the biggest shift in the world. How naïve I truly was. I made an appointment with my GP for that Friday. It was a Monday then, so I just had to apply cream and not socialise much for the next few days, just in case it was contagious or something. So I returned to my apartment, binged some shows I needed to catch up on, and made sure to keep applying the cream. Only it didn’t seem to help. By that night, the redness had spread right down to my forearms, and I had started scratching my belly as well. It was late by that point, and the skin was blistering at the back, even peeling in some places. I had a shower, and several strips of skin fell which was creepy, but at least there was no real pain, just itchiness and a slight soreness in my form. My head on the other hand was started to feel real strange – my hair was getting frizzy where it was usually quite silky, and it felt like there were some raised goosebumps or big moles in spots on my scalp. A quick scan of the internet wasn’t very helpful. I couldn’t find anything to match my symptoms exactly, especially since the tip of my tongue was getting sorer and sorer. I elected to go straight to the hospital if it got any worse, and rested up for the night, still a bit sweaty and overcome. It was to be my last day as an ordinary human. Already, as I slept, the changes in my body were accelerating, and Athena’s magic was reshaping my form to be something no longer human.

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I had the same dream again, the same nightmare, only this time I was looking from a different point of view. I no longer seemed to walk, instead sliding forward, and my hair seemed to tangle and untangle behind me at random. I no longer felt fully myself, and when I entered the temple I was greeted to a similar sight of Athena standing over a haunted figure. Only this time the figure wasn’t a gorgon with my face, it was just me. Ordinary, human me, who looked directly into my eyes and began to scream. It was only then that I managed to look down, and beheld that I was no longer human. My lower half

slithered and coiled, a giant snake's tail, and my skin all over was covered in fine smooth scales. I reached back with shaking hands to my hair, already knowing what I would find. A snake's head coiled around into my vision, followed by another. And another. And another. I could feel all of them, the writhing mass of snakes that was now my hair. They hissed, tongues flickering, and to my horror, I hissed back.

I awoke to my first major changes, though I didn't realise it at the time. The rash had spread, my arms red and itchy, along with my entire upper torso. I groaned in irritation and discomfort as I rose from the bed, sweaty once more with the strange spread of this infection, aghast that the rash had spread to my thighs, covering my pelvis and . . . other delicate parts. I jumped in the shower, hesitant at first, but quickly found that it was comforting, particularly at high temperatures. I looked back over my shoulder, and saw that a sheet of skin was coming off, as if I'd been badly sunburned. Curious, I tugged at it. With a silent rip, a large sheet of skin fell to the shower floor in large piece. The itching there stopped instantly. I screamed at the sheet of my own skin beneath my feet, and screamed again when I saw that what lay under it as I ran from the shower. Where once there had been human skin, now dark green scales covered the flesh across my right shoulder.

In a panic I called my Mum, but couldn't bring myself to tell her what was going on. I danced around the conversation, making small talk and patiently hearing out pleas that I call more often. "I will Mum, I will," I said, even as tears streamed down my eyes and I looked at the strange green scales that now covered a large portion of my upper back. "Hey Mum, do – do you know if we have a history of strange medical conditions in our family?"

"Medical conditions? Oh my God Daphne are you alright? What's happening? Do your father and I need to visit?"

"No, no! Nothing like that Mum. I've just had this strange . . . rash, of sorts."

"Oh. Oh honey. Well, I'm glad you chose to call me. I know that you're young, and in the city, and probably quite . . . active, though hopefully not too much. But hygiene must also be considered when-

"Oh my God Mum no! Not that. Just . . . no. I haven't been seeing anyone since Aaron dumped me and I started travelling the world." That was a lie. I had quite a number of flings during my world travels, quite a few that were memorable, particularly a tall, dark

drink of Greek water with the abs of a God during the last leg of my journey. But Mum didn't need to know that, and whatever was happening to my body was definitely not a simple STD.

"Oh, okay dear. Well, I can't think of anything off the top of my head. I can find out from your grandparents on your father's side, but Turner family has always had healthy genes dear."

I scratched at my back absentmindedly. "Yeah, okay. I'll go sssssee a GP about it. Easy to worry about, y'know? Anyway, I've got to go, thanks Mum. Love you."

"Love you too dear."

I ended the call and sighed, brought my hands around to cup my forehead, only to find another peel of skin sticking to my fingers. "Shit!" I stood and ran again to the bathroom. I had been scratching away at my itchy back without even realising it, almost like I was in a trance or something (I later learned I was in fact put in a strange hypnotic trance, with mild compulsions to expedite my transformation by shedding my old layer of skin to make way for the new).

In a maddened frenzy I tried reapplying the skin, and when that failed, sticking the peeling sheets still attached firmly in place. Instead I only made it worse, revealing more of those hideous scales (I've since come around on them a little). Tears streamed down my eyes as I looked down upon the mess of skin that I had shed. Shed. That word. Just thinking of it rocked me to my core. I was huddling my arms against each other, small trips of skin hanging from my arms, when I finally gave in to temptation. I reached a still-human finger behind me and pressed it against the large section of my back where my skin had become scaled. It was surprisingly . . . smooth. The surface was colder than human skin, and I could feel the light indentations of the scales, but overall it was almost pleasantly sleek. I ran my finger against the grain of my scales and found it only a little more pebbled in texture. It didn't feel too different, even sorta sensual in a strange way. My sense of feeling hadn't gone away, it might have even been enhanced judging from how clearly I could feel the press of my own finger.

The itchiness across my form was returning with a vengeance, but I hardened my resolve not to worsen my condition. Whatever was happening to me had a medical explanation, however remote and unheard of. It had to. Because the only alternative was that the strange nightmare in which I met Athena and was cursed to become a guardian

for her temple was real, and that was not something I was prepared to accept at all. So instead I ignored the desire to scratch away the rest of my skin, even knowing that I probably had freshly-formed scales already under much or even all of it. I resisted the temptation to touch my scalp, which had begun to feel even stranger than my skin, itchy certainly but also sore in a number of spots under the roots of my hair, as if the skin was raised in a number of bumps from large mosquito bites. My tongue was feeling even more numb, but a quick check in the mirror confirmed there was nothing strange about it, though my hair looked even more wiry and frail today than yesterday. So I did what I should have done, and called my GP to speed up my appointment. No luck; Friday was the best he could do, which left another three days of waiting. It was then that I decided to go to the hospital.

Nervous as I was I knew I had to do it. I wore a long-sleeve sweater and scarf to cover up my . . . my scales. I took public transport, fidgeting all the while and trying to ignore the heavy itchiness. I caught myself absentmindedly scratching my leg at once point, and saw that another scrape of skin had come away. More of those dark green scales. It was like I was going into a goddamn trance. Several onlookers including a couple of kids and an elderly woman were looking at me, mouths agape. I quickly exited the bus, even though I was blocks away from my destination. Stupid, stupid, I thought. Why did I decide to wear a skirt and not even any stockings? And why are people looking at my face and head more than my freaky scaled legs anyway? I soon discovered my answer when I caught my reflection in the mirror. My hair was falling out in patches, leaving darkened greenish bumps along my scalp. I pelted towards the hospital on foot, my heart pounding in fear in my chest. Tears welled at the corners of my eyes, but still I pressed on, the hospital in sight now. Whatever was happening to me wasn't natural, could even be magical, but still I decided to press on and pursue the only means I could to prevent it. Wandering eyes followed me wherever I went. I reached a hand up as I ran to check my scalp, and instead returned my hand with a clump of blackened, frizzled and dead hair. It was falling out even faster now, and the bumps seemed even bigger. Sorer. My hands had just reached the double-door entrance to the facility when I was blinded by a bright light.

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Again, the dream returned. I moved forward, but this time I could feel my lower body. It was different, somehow. I moved at a constant pace, no sense of one leg hitting the ground before the other. It was as if part of me shifted from side to side in my wake, propelling me forward in a slithering way through the use of hundreds of powerful

muscles along a single snaking file. I descended into the temple, this time to where a great audience of judges met me, sat atop a great platform far above. I was alone, and yet I didn't feel so for some reason, as my hair shifted and writhed like tendrils on my shoulders and back, heavy and weighted and alive somehow. The audience of judges before me were white-robed or armoured in Greek style. Foremost sat a large and powerful man, a staff in the shape of a lightning bolt. In this strange dream I at once knew his name. Zeus. He spoke to the woman at his side, still-armoured and mighty with a great red cloak.

'Daughter Athena, need you go so far as cursing this mortal woman? This will no doubt draw . . . attention, and a Goddess of wisdom such as yourself should recognise the need for cautiousness.

Athena regarded me with an arched brow. 'I have done no more than you would do Father, were it your temple that was desecrated or disrespected, as mine was. This mortal woman Daphne Turner pried into that which she should have approached with humility, and should be punished through divine magic.'

I chose to speak in this moment. "Please! I don't know what's happening to me, what I'm becoming! I'm sorry if I showed disrespect, I'll be better. I don't want to be transformed into a monster."

It was Hera that replied. 'Criminals often show regret, after they have been caught, but it does not erase the crime. I have told you once Daphne Turner, that I am also the Goddess of mercy. You shall know some measure of it as my servant, if you stay silent during these proceedings!'

Zeus nodded, stroking his white beard. 'What say you Sister-Wife Hera? As the patron protector of women, you should have due input before this mortal is condemned to wear this monstrous form forevermore.'

A gorgeous, matronly woman to Zeus' right, clutching his hand dearly, gazed upon me. 'The time of our power shall return, and she shall be our first sign. It is important such a sign invoke not simply fear, but awe and respect as well. The world has changed in its values, and even the Pantheon must change with it. To this end my daughter Athena, she shall not suffer the fate of Medusa of long past.'

My hair writhed oddly, and I rose several feet in the air on my snake-like form, though my dream did not yet allow me to see it. "Yes, yes! Thank you great Goddess Hera, I owe you—"

'SILENCE!' I shot back down under her glare. 'Do not tempt fate foolish mortal, as you already have by attempting to seek mortal remedies to cure a change wrought upon you by divine means. Seek such help again and I shall make you a living fountain, cursed to provide our Pantheon with cool water atop Olympus. As I said, you shall not suffer Medusa's poor fate, though you shall share likeness in form. Unlike her, your gaze shall not petrify all you see into stone, nor shall the bite of your new hair drip venom unless you personally will it. You shall retain your beauty in visage despite your changes, unlike your Gorgon antecedent whose face inspired such great horror. But your changes shall proceed apace, and your body will still be greatly changed and unmistakably un-human. You shall be Athena's servant and messenger, guardian of her temple, possessing both the role's responsibilities and pleasures. What say you, Athena? What say you Zeus?'

Zeus nodded. Athena bowed in acceptance as well, a hint of a smile on her face. 'This is acceptable mother, father. Daphne Turner, my gorgon. You may now awake. Awake, and revel in the changes I have wrought upon you.'

And awoke I did, my body irrevocably changed.

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I was back in my apartment, somehow. The frenzied rush to the hospital rang through my memory like a bad dream, ending at the instant that I reached those entrance doors. Had I gone in? Had I been assessed and found crazy? Was I crazy now? All I knew was that I was back, and that it was now Thursday, the day before my GP appointment. I rose from my bed, and nearly staggered and fell again as the events of my strange and twisted dream returned to me; the curse that Athena had wrought, the debate amongst the pantheon over my fate, my own small voice pleading to reverse my transformation, and Hera's divine anger that a mere mortal such as I should ever disrupt such proceedings. The decision was made final, irreversible; I was to be changed, altered in some way into something that was no longer human. A different species entirely.

It was the Gorgon's Curse, they had said, an only slightly more merciful polymorphic fate than that of infamous Medusa's. I knew at once what those swellings on my head were going to become. With shaking hands and a deepening sense of dread, I slowly ran my fingers along my scalp. The last flakes of shrivelled black hair tumbled down my forehead and through my vision. My scalp was now completely hairless, with large bumpy protrusions around an inch in diameter each swelling out from my skull. My snakes in development, ready to burst from my skull and become my living hair for the rest of my life. I shuddered as I touched a particularly sore bump just above my right ear. Even as I touched it, I could feel it swell, the bone and cartilage joining with my skull in perpetual union. I searched for other changes and quickly found them.

The scales had spread all over my upper body and down my arms, and most frighteningly my legs had become more stiff, less mobile, as if preparing for a great change. I suspected I knew what that change would be (and I was right, in the end). My ears had also changed, with scaly tips pointing an extra inch or so upwards, like a mockery of elven ears. A look in the mirror confirmed that my pupils had changed entirely now, a lush green colour with vertical black slits for pupils. My breasts, oddly, had grown, becoming full C-cups that swelled against my bra.

"Ssssssooo many changessssss," I said, and gasped at the strange sensation of my altered tongue that made me strain out my S's. I stuck it outwards, examined the mirror's reflection which revealed a slithering forked tongue, thinner yet longer than the human one I'd known all my life. It slid over my teeth, unaltered except for my canines which were thinner and pointier, giving me a set of snake fangs. I tried saying some more words to test my new verbal limits.

"She ssssellssseashellssss by the ssssea shore. Sssstrong Ssssamantha ssssold a sssset of ssssteak knivessss." I groaned. "Jessssussss Chrissst I can't ssssay anything without sssstretching my Ssssss'sss."

It was then that I was interrupted by a rapping upon my door, which jolted me back to attention. "Who issss it?" I asked, cursing my use of another dreaded s-word.

"It's Jasmine."

"And Lizzie too!"

“I was going to mention you.”

“We’re here to see if you’re alright Daph.”

I distinctly remember my sheer panic at that moment. It was my worst nightmare come true; my body transforming into a frickin’ Gorgon and my friends busting in just in time to see it happen! Already by this point I could feel Athena’s magic swelling within me, urging me to change even further and become her symbol of punishment, her snake-woman servant. I covered myself as best I could while yelling to the door.

“Don’t come in, I’m really sssssick!” I called, cringing at using another s-word. My forked tongue now seemed to slide outwards from my mouth when I spoke. There was a pause at the door. “Daphne? You sound weird.”

“It’sssss just my voicsssse. I just need ressst.”

And just what I feared would happen happened, because instead of heeding my advice, my friends started whispering amongst themselves, weighing up whether to ignore what I’d said and come on in to see what they could do. I had never before wanted less caring friends up until that moment. I rushed faster to cover up my changes – putting on a hat to cover my hairless, bump-ridden scalp; sunglasses to mask my unnaturally green, slitted eyes; long-sleeve pyjamas in the middle of summer to cover my scales and itching, shedding skin. I struggled with the pyjama bottoms, my legs even stiffer than before, barely wanting to move at the pelvic joint. I settled instead with shuffling towards the bed and quickly throwing over the covers, just as Lizzie and Jasmine opened the door anyway. To this day they no longer have door key rights, though admittedly I don’t exactly have doors anymore, or anything resembling a modern apartment. But it didn’t take long for them to tell something sus was up.

“Oh my God Daph I knew you’d contracted some freaky European disease!” declared Jasmine. They both came to my side, eyes scanning the untidy mess of my room. It was then that I realised I hadn’t even cleaned up the sheets of skin I’d shed. I could even just manage to feel with my less-sensitive new skin a few peelings that had come off in the bed with me. My heart beat tremulously as they stared over me.

"Don't be insensitive Jasmine," Lizzie said, but I could see in her eyes the same concern. "Daphne, we've tried calling you, messaging you. You've been off the grid three days! We were close to calling the police!"

Three days!? My mind reeled at the knowledge of that. So I had missed my doctor's appointment entirely. I was in over my head, at the mercy of a vengeful Goddess' whims, one who was intent on turning me into a mythical creature.

"I'm sssssory," I said, and knew it was a mistake. My friends leapt back at once. I could have slapped my forehead in that moment, if I hadn't already felt my nails just grow longer and pointier against my thigh. They'd seen my forked snake tongue.

"What the hell? Daphne girl, why do you have a lizard tongue?"

I shrunk further under the blankets, withering under their gaze. "I have to sssshow you sssssomething. Pleasssse don't ssssscream. Let me exsssplain first."

They nodded in unison, still looking white, and slowly, ever so slowly, I rose from the bed, removing my sunglasses, then my cap, then the bed sheet that hid my scaly form. A sheet of skin from my leg peeled off with it, but it was hard to care by that point. I was too far gone, and I needed my friends before I changed any further into the monster I was becoming. "I've been cursssssed," I explain."

They both fainted.

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It was a long hour of waiting for Liz and Jasmine to come to. I admit I was nervous – my body was changing, my body pulsing as it readied for the final burst of my transformation in a gorgon – but part of me had started to accept it, as impossible as it seems. My mother had always told me that if you can't change something there's no use worrying about it. But I could change how I went through this final change, and who would be with me as I did, and I desperately desired that my friends would at least

support me. Over the hour or waiting the stumps on my head grew sorer, growing outwards slightly so that not even a wig could plausibly hide them. My scales grew in completely, dominating my face now. No hiding there either. And perhaps most frighteningly, my legs were completely immobilised, a scaly hide connecting my legs like a thin webbing, one that was becoming stronger as my bones fused together or melted away completely. Despite my dreams I had held out hope of maintaining my legs, even if it meant just having a snake tail out my backside or something. No such luck, though these days I can appreciate the upsides of having a lower-half in the form of a snake.

In the end they wakened, me sheepishly awaiting them at the end of the bed, somewhat clothed, but no longer attempting to hide the transformations. Even in that moment I could feel the stumps on my head readying to burst forth. I just hoped that I had enough time to tell them my side of the story. It was Lizzie who first spoke, in a shaking voice. "Daphnie . . . Daph, is that really you?"

I nodded, cautious not to make any sudden movements. "Yesss, Lizzzz, it isss. I'm transsssforming." My snake-tongue slithered out as I spoke, and my fangs were on full display. I turned to Jasmine, who was clutching her friend in terror. "You were right Jassssmine. I did contract something in Greecccccce. Only it wassssn't a dissseassse, it was a curssse. Pleassse don't run. It'ssss sssstill me inssside. I'm sssso afraid!"

They looked to one another, then to the door. "I can't even move from thiss bed," I said to reassure them, "ssssee?" I pulled up the bed cover that was over my legs, and even I was surprised how far the changes had advanced just in that short span of time. My toes were no longer numb but instead gone entirely, my joined 'feet' if they could even be called that anymore now just tapering to a fleshy point that extended further than my toes ever had before. There was no denying it anymore, my lower half was becoming a snake, like a mermaid only slithery and scaly and not remotely as romanticised. But as creaped out as they were, it did noticeably calm them down a bit. "Pleassse," I said, "jussst let me exsssplain – oooh!" I reached a clawed, leathery hand up to my scalp, and felt one of my fleshy protrusions push out even further. My final changes were upon me. I didn't have much time. "Pleasse?" I said again.

It was Jasmine that first believed me, stepping forward to sit beside me, Lizzie reaching to draw her friend back but deciding against it. Jasmine put an arm around my shoulder, tentatively at first, marvelling at my lustrous green scales. Then she embraced me fully, and I'm not afraid to admit I began crying. She cried with me too, and though Lizzie was clearly more hesitant than Jasmine, she eventually came by my side too. It was then that I mustered up the courage to tell them the story; of Athena, of my curse, or what I was turning into. How I was destined to become a high priestess, serving her in this new

body of mine. They followed along silently, and when I was done Liz asked a simple question.

“How long do you have?”

I went to answer and flinched, placing a scaled hand on my bump-ridden head. One of the protrusions was becoming sorer, the skin stretching. “Momentsss, I think. Will you ssstay with me?”

They both nodded in affirmation, and I smiled awkwardly, trying not to show off my fangs or forked tongue as I did so. The pressure was becoming unbearable, the deep-set need to release. My legs – if they could be called so any more – felt as if they were on fire, alight with a readiness to change and become what they were now meant to be. My scalp itched, full of pressure across every bump and protrusion. I knew I couldn’t hold it off for long. My final change was upon me, and in moments my transformation into a gorgon would be complete, never to return to the woman I once was. “You had eugh! You had besst go-ooooohh. Get sssome disssstance from me, jussst in – aahh – casse!”

They did so, never keeping their eyes off of me as they began to move. They were barely out of arms reach when the changes began in full, and I howled as my body shifted and pulled into my final form. A brief pain rippled across the various protrusions on my head, and then as one they burst, my snakes erupting forth to become my new, forever writhing hair. My spine lengthened, my leg bones merging with it as my tail extended further and further outwards, slithering across the room and near my friends. I retracted it out of instinct and it shattered the window to the outside, extending further over the outer wall to hang partway downwards. A scream echoed from the street below but I was too overcome by my bodily changes to care. I grunted and groaned as my internal organs shifted, as my intestines reconfigured and shifted downwards through my lower half, and my, well, opening altered in shape and positioning to match my new nature.

Finally, as quickly as they had come, the changes stopped. There was silence in the room, broken only by the commotion outside and the rapid breathing of myself and my two friends, who stared at me with abject horror and shock. I ran a shaking hand through what I still unconsciously assumed to be my hair, only to feel the hair to be incredibly thick, scaled, and writhing and wriggling in response to my touch. I leapt upwards, and the most alien feeling followed; the dozens of snakes that now formed my gorgon hair rose out as one, hissing madly to match my own surprised hiss. Lizzie and Jasmine pressed themselves against the wall as if I was going to leap forward and eat

them. I could feel my snakes' agitation, sense somehow their protective instincts towards me, ready to lash out and sink their fangs into any intruder. I went to close my eyes and found I couldn't; my eyelids were now completely gone.

A quick look at my hand mirror confirmed the truth: my eyes were slitted green things, reptilian and unblinking, for whatever reason. The revelation took a backseat to the incredible sight of my active new hairdo of snakes, which writhed and moved constantly.

The strangest part was I could feel their writhing, not just their slithering heads and bodies against head and shoulders and upper back but the actual sensation of the snakes themselves, twisting and sliding among one another. It was as if the snakes were part of me as well, which, I suppose, was absolutely true. I concentrated, held my hand out, and the snake that was stirring over my right boob rose up, hissed casually, and placed its head in my hand. A light press on its head, and I could feel it too. Could feel the pressure on its head as if it were my own. A brief flicker of images, and I could see myself through its eyes. Something to keep in mind, I thought. The creature hissed, and I knew somehow that it was a hiss of contentment to be given such attention. I patted it lovingly. I had no way of knowing if it was the curse or just the trauma or transforming or just my arrival at the acceptance stage, but the critters that were attached to my skull were actually kind of cute, even if it was utterly alien to feel them writhing against my back. The longest of them were reaching my lower back, in fact, which meant these things could potentially have the reach of my arms.

It was the strangest feeling in the world to possess hair that was heavy and alive, and constantly making its presence known. It took a backseat to my tail for those first moments of new experience, until Lizzie spoke. "Umm, Daphne, is it still you in there?"

I woke from my transformation-induced haze. "Oh, um, yeah Lizzssie. It'sss sstill me. Thanksss for sstaying with me. I think that wasss the lassst change."

Still hissing, I remember thinking. I think my fork tongue is even longer now too. I wasn't intent on showing it off. After all, my dear friends had stayed with me for my transformation into this monstrous form. I didn't want to scare them off now. But then, I realised I already was – my enormous lower half was pressed up against them.

"Oh fuck!" I shrieked in realisation, agitating my snake hair, "I'm sssorry! Let me jusst get a hold on this big thing." The big thing, of course, was now part of me, at least 20

metres in length, likely more. There was a weight and heft to me now, and I could no longer claim to be a dainty little thing when my tail could barely fit in my apartment without being spooled around itself. I flexed it, and instinctually hundreds of incredibly powerful muscles worked in unison to slightly shift the middle section away from my friends, and the tail's end from outside the window where I could feel it scraping against the ledge.

"I'm sssso . . . big," I whispered through my fangs.

"Are you okay Daphne?" Jasmine asked, standing. She stepped carefully over my tail from all the way across the room, made her way bravely over. "Do you need a water? Umm, or something else?" She stopped at the threshold where my hair could reach her, looking at my writhing tangle with both an intense curiosity and wariness that I couldn't blame her for. "Does it . . . feel weird?"

"Like the ssstrangessst thing in the world," I responded. "I can control them, sort of, but I have to concentrate. "And at that I drew several of my 'hair's out from behind my shoulder and rested them in my 'lap', where my enormous snake tail first began. I patted them, and they seemed quite soothed by it. "I think they want to protect me, and won't harm anyone unlessss I want them to. But don't get too clossse, just in case."

But then she did something I'll never forget, and will always love her for. She stepped forward anyway, trusting me absolutely. Lizzie screeched a warning behind her, but she was already beside me, holding my scaled hand in hers. My snakes moved of their own, slithering over her, sniffing her, lapping slightly at her skin. "Sssorry!" I said, and she was visibly alarmed, but kept calm anyway, and in moments most of my snakes returned to their writhing against my back, sides and front, a few remaining on her lap and closing their eyes.

"I guess you're still you," she said.

"Thank you," I whispered, and I truly was. Slowly Lizzie came over and sat beside me as I rearranged my tail across the room, my immense body slithering into a coiled form. It took a great deal of practice, and like dorks we laughed at my initial ineptness, as I collided into cupboards, got caught in myself, lost track of where my tail-end was, and generally made a fool of myself. "Worssst Medusssa ever," I declared, and we descended into fits of giggles. We were still laughing sympathetically at my new body's

plight when Athena finally made her presence known, stepping forth from a burst of light in the room, and warding my tail away for some free standing space.

“So, I see you are becoming accustomed to your new form,” she said.

I hissed without meaning too, as did my horde of snakes, each bolting upright to recognise the Goddess Athena as a threat.

“Calm, little ones, this is not a fight you can win,” she said. Lizzie cowered before Athena’s might, as did Jasmine. “I see you have entrusted your friends into our secret, my new gorgon. To not have abandoned you, it seems they were true friends indeed. Perhaps they shall visit you often in your new home.”

My large tail writhed, slithering slowly to coil around me, creating a barrier between myself and the one who had transformed me. “My new . . . home?”

The Goddess smiled. “Of course, dear one. You have paid the price for your transgressions only in part. You are to be a priestess of my temple, remember? And what better temple than the one you once chose to defile with your presence and actions?”

I looked to my friends, then back to her. “Nothing happens to them.”

A nod. “So long as they too do not defile my glory, then they shall be unharmed.”

“Can I say goodbye?”

Another nod. “And then your new role awaits.” She stepped aside to allow access to my friends, both of them still awestruck by the current events. Lizzie had tears in her eyes, more overcome than Jasmine, who had always been the tougher of the two. I slithered over to them, as they had jolted from my presence when Athena first showed. Moving as a snake-woman was an odd thing; humans have an aversion to putting their upper body at certain angles because it means they will tip over, and I was going to have to get used to abandoning that hesitation, as the immensely strong muscles of my new form could hold my humanoid-half at any angle I desired and still keep comfortably

positioned on the ground. I managed to move, slowly at first and then more confidently, my great mass sliding to my friends and embracing them. My snakes positioned themselves on my back at my mental command, so as not to ruin the moment or unsettle them further.

“Goodbye my friendsss . . . pleassse visssit me sssometime.”

Between my tears and the strangeness of my new form, I didn't – or couldn't – say much more. But the looks in their eyes were enough. I turned on the spot, swivelling on my mighty snake form, to face Athena. “I'm ready,” I said.

“That is good to hear. You shall be a mighty priestess of my temple, and in time, the world shall know your name and respect it well.”

She snapped her fingers, and there was a light.

...

And that's basically my story of how I went from a rule-breaking early 20s Aussie city girl to a snake-woman servant of a Greek Goddess, presiding over her temple in Athens, Greece. To give her credit, Athena had given me the ability to speak and understand Greek flawlessly, though I wish I didn't also have a Greek accent. Lizzie, when she first visited me, claimed it was cute, but I miss my old voice, and it makes talking to my parents weird. Well, weirder. Have a reptilian tail the length of a flatbed truck instead of legs already makes it weird enough.

Still, I adapted. I learned the histories of the Greek Gods, the whole pantheon, as well as the history of the country itself. The duties of the temple are complex – there are ceremonies to uphold, burnt offerings to be made, prayers to be given. Athena's following grows daily, and as a result so does my workload, which includes leading services in her honour and passing on her words of wisdom (or displeasure). It was a nervous thing at first, receiving all the stares from gawkers keen to get their look at the 'Modern Medusa' as the news liked to call me. A couple of weirdos early on even tried to touch my hair. The hospital visit my snakes incurred on them had made others more

considerate about doing that. But I've grown into my role, slowly accepting my lifelong fate as a gorgon.

Some things still weird me out about my snake body; my snakes grow, and for several months I was worried that my hair would grow far too long to cope with, until yet another alien sensation came over me one morning when I felt my longest snake disconnect from my skull and wiggle away from me, the sensations of its movements disappearing. A check later on confirmed that another bump was forming where it had been pushed out, effectively meaning that I 'birth' snakes from my head every six months or so when they grow too long, only for new ones to grow into place. They're not on all on the same timer, and I have over forty snakes writhing away at one time, so I usually lose one or sometimes two every five weeks or so, and I've long given up on getting used to the strangeness of it. I kept my first departing baby – Addles – as a pet. You might have seen him on the telly at some point slung around my shoulders, as the first leaver he seems to have preferred to stay with me.

My permanently open eyes are also unquestionably odd, even now, two years on. I don't sleep as I used to. Instead I enter a sort of dazed trance, filled with incredibly vivid dreams, and I do that each night. During it, at least a few snakes remain awake to watch guard over me, and I have occasionally wakened when one of them has spotted a rat or mouse, or some other critter that it thought was worth going into hiss-mode. That usually leaves me in a pissy mood, particularly since while my metabolism is much bigger now with my increased girth and symbiotic reptiles jutting from my head, my snakes still like to experience the act of eating themselves occasionally. So I end up slithering and sliding through the halls of the temple at 3 in the morning, chasing down rodents and sticking my head against walls so my snakes can slide through ratholes in search of prey. And then I get the bizarre sensation of feeling the victorious winner consuming its catch, the second-hand taste of live food struggling in one of my snake mouths, and then being swallowed. There's a weird satisfaction that comes with it, and I've increasingly taken to feeding my snakes between my own meals, but I try to keep it a private affair between them and I. The one time I dangled a live mouse before my snakes in front of my parents during their one of their visits it really freaked them out. But that's the way of things when you're no longer human; you forget some people would prefer you act normal and not show off the fact that you can fully unhinge your jaw to swallow a bigger meal.

I also moulted for the first time last month, on the two-year anniversary of my transformation. Athena tells me that'll be a bi-annual pleasure; something to not look forward to. I thought I was dying, and instead I end up having to wiggle out of my own damn skin, my tail having grown another metre to boot! (My boobs went up a cup-size as well, but I won't complain about that. A girl has to take the good with the bad I

suppose). I also changed colour; from dark green to mottled jungle green. Still not used to that.

But other aspects have been normalised. I can't imagine living without a full head of snakes anymore. I go to sleep with them crawling across my back or over my breasts, depending on how I'm sleeping, and they nestle into a comfortable position among each other as we drift off, leaving a few to remain on guard. I wake to their writhing, let them aid me in my preaching as the priestess of Athena, serve as visual tools (it's really fun to use my hair to point to things rather than my hands), and I draw great contentment from simply petting them. I'm never alone, and I always have my little buddies to protect and look out for me.

I've also gotten awesome at my new means of transportation. It was an uphill thing, learning to sliver along my long belly rather than walk, having effectively gone from 4 limbs to 3, albeit the third being super flexible. Now though, I can travel in ways I never could back when I was just human. Athena's temple is vast now that it is restored, and I can coil up and around pillars, suspend my great body from multiple rafters before sliding back down again, having upside down to spook newcomers with my silent movement. I can move fast – faster than Usain Bolt with ease – and can draw myself up to a great height or speed along with my own human half barely 30cm from the ground's surface. A snake body is truly a wonderful, flexible thing, and I can contort myself into what position I so desire, or coil myself into a loop and rest my own head against my tail. Hell, when I want to withdraw, I can and have literally coiled my length into a circular wall and hidden inside of it just to get some privacy. It's also handy for batting away bullies and protestors that try to harm me or Athena's followers. I have a flock of sorts to defend now, and I'm damn good at it.

I of course have become a local icon, a thing for the tourists to gawk at and take pictures of, and I have it on good authority that there are chat boards dedicated to discussing me in a very sexual manner. Gross, but also cool I guess? Nice at least to know that I've got a rockin' bod in the eyes of some. I've actually taken to having some confidence in it; my boobs may be scaly but they're still boobs right? I've still got nipples, at least. And now I'm the proud owner of a pretty good reptilian rack if I do say so myself. I've also still got a sweet hourglass figure before the whole 'lower snake half' bit. So yeah, I get it. I don't have a boyfriend per se as yet, but nothing Athena's said indicates dating is out of the question, so I've made a few inquiries and put out feelers if any man out there is brave, weird or open enough to going on a date with the 'Modern Medusa' Daphne Turner. I've had a couple of good dates, a couple of disasters, and a few paparazzi-filled plazas where cameras made a light show of snapping dozens of pics of the snake woman trying to enjoy a nice night out with a prospective date. The guy I'm seeing right now is pretty sweet. He doesn't seem intimidated by my size or my

snakes, and even pets them with me. They like him, and theirs are a set of opinions I trust. You could say I'm a bit smitten. I'm certainly hoping it turns into something, I don't have the biggest pool of candidates that aren't just pure weirdos, and a gal has needs, even as a snake. My reproductive equipment ain't that changed.

So this is me, now and for forever. For all my fears I turned out alright. Life is stranger, there's more responsibilities, and while I don't see them as often as I'd like I still catch up with my friends Lizzie and Jasmine and my family. And really, when you generalise it like that, it's not too different from just regular old adulthood. Right down to my mum pestering me to settle down with my current guy and start making grandkids for her. Which Athena tells me is an actual possibility. Though when I asked her what the kids would look like, she only smiled.

The End