

MEDUSA

Jordan Denniston

When I found the poor boy, he was half-dead on the cool sand. Nighttime was the only relief Africa gave, when this sole gift often became a curse as the wind blew too strong and I wished again for the heat of the day. There was a reason no one lived here. It was the same reason I *did*.

Yet they came, one after another, to seek the beautiful maiden with the hair of deadly serpents. Surely Athena had spread word of my curse! They came with swords and shields, with *friends* as if this was a game and I was the prize. It didn't matter that I wished for my own death more violently than they ever could...they could not kill me before I killed them first. Each time, they turned to stone and I wept as I dug ditches in the desert wasteland and begged the gods to strike me dead.

One day, I'd begun to wonder if maybe that was part of my curse as well.

I crept closer to the boy in the sand, and felt the serpents hiss in wonder. This was the closest we had been to a living human in a long time. He was

tanned and muscled, with long blonde hair that was a shade darker than my own had once been. I reached out to touch it without thinking...and three of my monsters attacked my arm in a fury.

I bit my lip to keep from crying out, for the boy could not awaken yet. The snakes hated that I mourned for what had once been in their place. The first three years of our life together they had attacked me every time I wept. They attacked every time I buried a man, and every time I lost control and screamed and cursed Athena for destroying my life. I was not allowed to mourn. I had to be *grateful*. It was a fate worse than death.

I took my opportunity. For a while, the serpents let me be, as they could not have known what I was doing. I bound the boy's hands and fastened him to a tree. Tearing from my own worn garment, I masked his eyes. As the sun began to rise, I sat in front of him and waited. Today—may the gods have mercy—today, I would finally die.

