

S. M. McCoy

Blood
Crescent

Divine Series Book One

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CHAPTER ONE

Do You Want to Be a Vampire?

The shoe box was covered in newspaper clippings pasted on with Elmer's glue; we'd made it together the day I asked my father why I didn't have a mother. Over time it had been layered with so much history it became a hard cast, buried deeper the more events were added. It was eventually used as a bookend and forgotten; no one would know it had anything inside it, unless you picked it up and shook it. More recently, my father had been adding layers to it for an entire year, one article at a time. The box didn't make a sound anymore.

Two years ago, he told me to open it as he drove me to the bus station. That was the last time I ever saw him, alive.

"You remember the memory box we made together." It wasn't a question; the box was seated right next to me. His face was paler than usual. Gray shadows under his eyes and cheekbones. My father didn't always look like a ghost—that was recent. He had been forgetful lately. Food was one of those things he couldn't seem to remember either; our refrigerator was empty, and I never saw him eat.

I used to think of him like an older version of Superman, but now he looked like he'd been stuck in a cellar with kryptonite for the past few months.

"This one?" I placed my hand on the papier-mâché box. I didn't remember putting anything in it, even though I always thought of it as a memory box, and it used to jingle from the items bouncing inside it. He was getting more frail by the moment.

"That's the one." He scratched behind his ear, creating red streaks along the way.

I wanted to ignore the box on the backseat, so removing my hand from it, I climbed over the middle console to be at his side, sitting on the front passenger seat. He smiled gently, saying not to worry, it was just eczema. It was hard not to believe him when the lie was followed by a soft chuckle.

Several minutes passed in silence as he drove. Until his hands trembled, and his back became stiff. He flexed his fingers over the leather steering wheel, reasserting his control. Even then, at his weakest, he held strong and the car held steady before he pulled into the bus station.

"Crystal." My name was said through chattering teeth. In a hushed tone, soothing like a warm wind wrapping you up and promising you sweet nothings.

But I wasn't precious, as he believed I was, just an everyday human experiment. Hard and strong, made in a science class out of sugar or salt, some boiling water, and a string. I had to be strong after what I'd seen, and for him, he needed me to be strong.

I remembered this moment more than most, because it still tore at my insides.

"You're the next in line. They'll come for you if they know. I promised your mother that I'd keep you safe. Don't let them know, don't let anyone know." My father's face sunk deeper, shadowed, and his eyes were wide in frenzied turmoil.

I wasn't stupid, I knew he was losing his mind. But I was too naïve to know I was going to lose more than sanity. Maybe it was genetic, or maybe he wasn't that crazy after all, but my heart raced to meet his quick plea.

Anxious, ready, and believing, despite myself, that the shadows I saw were real. That something or someone was after us, but his mind was too far gone to tell me why. Deep in my bones I felt it—he was trying to protect me, and I wouldn't let him down, even if that meant running away from something I didn't know existed. But he knew. And I saw them, sometimes I saw them, and panic reentered my father's eyes when he noticed.

"They're coming...I can't remember your mother's face anymore. I know they're here...they'll clean up everything. Me...even you. Only a matter of time." He rambled incoherently.

I chewed on the brown hair that fell in front of my face. My father wanted me to stop nibbling my fingernails, so I transferred my nervousness to the next best thing. I only needed a few strands to glide across my tongue to help distract me, and he was too preoccupied to notice.

It was in that hazed moment that I suspected my father knew more about my mother's disappearance than he would tell me. It was the things that followed us that were responsible.

"What are they?" I would foolishly ask of him.

"Serpents." He closed his eyes and rounded his shoulders back against the seat before slumping into it.

But it wasn't until now, stepping into my new life, that I wished I had pressed for more answers, instead of asking him to stop, telling him he just needed some rest. Maybe then I would have known more about why serpents were so dangerous to us...to me. It wouldn't be until later that I made the connection that they weren't merely snakes in the shadows.

They were vampires.

When you're halfway through transforming into a monster, wishing of any way to change back to save your life, those moments of lost opportunities come back to haunt you. I missed feeling like I had opportunities. Missed my chance to ask who my mother actually was, and why vampires would be after me. Missed my chance to believe Aislin when she told me magic was real, but even my weird roommate couldn't have predicted that her current charge wasn't going to hunt down vampires like her predecessors.

I used to have a heart that told me when I was tired, excited, and alive. And as choices go, most of the time they were between bad, better, and best. Currently, the options were more along the lines of bad, worse, and unknown. The sand ran out on my response time, and whatever options there were...disappeared along with it.

I was turning into a monster, and silly peppered me:

Do you want to fall in love? (I don't know, who doesn't?) When will Victor come over? Why can't life be as freeing as music? What is Victoria's secret anyway?

Those questions felt like ages ago, along with why pimples are attracted to hairlines.

But the most concerning question asked of me yet was: Do you want to live?

That one was a bit more complicated. My options weren't yes or no. If I said yes, then I'd be a monster. If I said no...then I'd just be dead. Saying yes meant saying yes to not life, but also the death of who I was. Who I still believed I was.

Worse yet, the longer I waited to answer the question, the more I didn't have a choice in the outcome.

When you're compelled by magic, anything was possible.

Do you want to be a vampire?

I wouldn't let the creatures in my life dictate my future anymore.

I was making a choice, completely off course...fates be damned.

Stepping back, I dragged a monster by its collar with me into the moonlight's glowing embrace. His violet eyes stared back at me wide. I rubbed my thumb against the ring loose on my finger, steadying it and praying it would work. I hoped my instincts were right. I was running away again, but I wouldn't leave alone.

I picked option C: the unknown.

STEVIE MARIE

is the author of young adult paranormal fantasy and the Divine series. Born within the apex of another universe, where magic flows like leaky faucets, and forged from the fires of the Underrealm she dug her way to Earth and reluctantly participates in human society, secretly returning to her home world to relay the stories of her monsters and the troubled love of her people. When she isn't writing she's crafting clothing in her sewing room, cuddling her significant-other creature, or pretending to adult by managing a portfolio of properties for an accounting business in the rainy city of Seattle, Washington.

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