

CHAPTER ONE

Do You Want to be a Vampire?

The shoe box was covered in newspaper clippings pasted on with Elmer's Glue; we made it together the day I asked my father why I didn't have a mother. Over time it was layered with so much history it was a hard cast, buried deeper the more events were added. It was used as a bookend, no one would know it had anything inside it, except if you picked it up and shook it. My father had been adding layers to the paperweight more recently for an entire year, one article at a time, but 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?" His face paler than usual. A bit of grey under his eyes and cheekbones. My father didn't always look like a ghost; that was recent. He had been forgetful lately, and I figured food was one of those things he couldn't remember either.

I used to think of him like an older version of Super Man, but now he looked like he'd been stuck in a cellar with kryptonite for the past few months. I knew what box he was talking about, but I didn't remember putting anything in it myself. He was getting more frail by the moment.

"The papier-mâché box?"

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

I ignored the box he pointed to beside me and 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.

"Crystal." 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. He said my name through chattering teeth. Soft, 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. 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, and his eyes were wide in a 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. Deep down I felt it in my bones, he was trying to protect me, and I wouldn’t let him down.

“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 continued to ramble incoherently.

I chewed on the brown hair falling in front of my face. My father wanted me to stop nibbling my finger nails, so I just transferred my nervousness to the next best thing. I only needed a few strands and I figured he was too preoccupied to notice.

It was in that hazed moment that I thought my father knew more about my mother’s disappearance than he would tell me. But it wasn’t until now that I wished I had pressed for more answers, instead of asking him to stop, telling him he just needed some rest.

When you're halfway through changing into a monster, thinking of anyway to change back to save your life, those moments of lost opportunities come back to haunt you. I missed feeling like I had opportunities.

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 I felt the options were more along the lines of bad, worse, and unknown. With how little the response time allotted to these choices, the sand ran out and whatever options there were... disappeared along with it.

I was turning into a monster, and silly questions like:

Do you want to fall in love? I don't know, who didn't? When will Victor come over? Why does Aislin always try to interest me in her belief of magic and fairy tales? Why can't life be as freeing as music? What is Victoria's secret anyways?

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

But in all seriousness, when you're compelled by magic, I supposed anything was possible. But the most concerning question asked of me yet was: Do you want to live?

That was a bit more complicated. My options weren't yes or no. It was more like yes, but then I'd have to be a monster. No, I don't want to be a monster... but then I'd be dead. Saying yes, meant saying yes to more than just life, but 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 on the results.

Do you want to be a vampire?

Stepping backward into the moonlight, I dragged a monster's arm into its embrace, his violet eyes stared back at me wide. I rubbed my thumb on the ring loose on my finger, steadying it and praying it would work. I hoped that my instincts were right. I was running away again, but I wouldn't leave alone. I picked option C: the unknown.