

Chapter 8: *'I turned on the lights, the TV, and the radio, Still I can't escape the ghost of you'*
Duran Duran (Rotem JR, Taylor J, et al 1993)

Nichols grabbed Deepak's arm at the top of the stairs. Quillam was still in the toilet. 'Deepak, I'm not going to be some Abraham *Van Helsing* here, I'm humouring your landlord, and I'm doing it for *you*, but he may well be a complete lunatic!', and with that he kissed Deepak illicitly on the mouth. Deepak held both of Nichols arms in a firm, caring embrace, but then parted from him as Quillam emerged onto the landing. He appeared not to have noticed the awkwardness of Nichols and Deepak, too introspective and scared. 'We'll take my car, I suggest,' Nichols stated, and they made their way downstairs out onto the faculty car park and into Nichols' battered, but classic Jaguar. Deepak was already used to the car, Quillam was too self-absorbed to comment. Nichols navigated their exit and then turned in the direction of the village, the church and the cemetery.

Jennifer and Eva were in extracorporeal form, Becks taking a little longer to transition herself, and all three shared a single thought, a location, visually in their collective minds. The cemetery. Becks still inhabited it, not yet accepted into the safe haven of the coven, not yet. She had to complete the next step, *to murder her father*. If she didn't, she would be forever damned to be on her own, tied to her burial site, not able to be part of the coven. Becks needed to fulfill a ritual her new sisters had, and as all the sisters did over the last five thousand years. The Lilitu Order was one of the oldest, emerging from ancient Sumeria. Lilith herself, Adam's first wife prior to Eve, had transitioned the first of the Order, some of whom, The Elder Ones, were still living undead through thousands of years of history. Lilith had set the rules for covens across the world, The Elder Ones enforcing them. Jennifer had conveyed this reminder to Becks and Eva as they travelled in the ether, emerging into corporeal form in the shadow of the church.

Nichols's Jaguar was fairly close to the churchyard car park, its headlights in the growing dusk picking out the eerie emptiness of the village outskirts. The trio of men were unaware of death spreading across the local populace, all those open doors, the mesmiration and invites to come in. Victims preying on yet more victims at a geometric rate, a discriminating infectious disease. They arrived at the church with the sound of tyres on gravel, headlights turning off, doors opening slowly, with trepidation. They all could feel something, something not of their nature, Nichols and Deepak glancing at each other, Quillam shuddering and looking like he could vomit onto the gravel.

The three Lilitus tensed as they sensed the humans in their vicinity. Either of the three could easily take on the trio of men, it would not be much of a contest. They started to circle, Becks in the centre, Jennifer and Eva to her sides, already in a position to outflank the men as they stepped into the pocket they had formed. The trap.

Nichols was quietly questioning Quillam again, picking out details from his fractured memory of the encounter with the undead Becks, his daughter. Deepak followed them dutifully as they all made their way to the main pedestrian gate to the cemetery.

Jennifer stopped, momentarily distracted, her face turning, looking beyond the church. She sensed what, surely not? More vampires, more undead, but not like the Order's, these were freshly initiated, and there were many. *Many*. This should not be. She glanced towards Eva's position seeing that she too was also alarmed. It would have to wait until after the *father-slaying*, but they would need to investigate further. Becks needed to cross this threshold and join their Order. She had to.

The trio of men had entered the cemetery, walking quietly (for humans) towards where Quillam thought he had been attacked, feeling to him like it was eons ago.

Becks tensed, supranatural strength rippling through her frame.