

# HALO

## CHAPTER THREE

### Behind the Door

“What’s in there?” I asked, my heart pounding.

Dominic stood between me and the door, his hands balled into fists, but I knew it wasn’t to fight me. “Something bad.”

I sat against the wall, staring up at him.

“Sorry about pushing you,” he said.

I ignored the apology. Something was in his closet, and he’d been trying to protect me and Dad from it. “How can you stand to be in your room if there’s something in there?”

“I have to be here—to make sure it stays. It’s watching me, and I’m watching it, because I don’t know what to do yet.”

We both stood in the doorway, the tortured closet door silent across the room. I had the sense that whatever was in the closet could hear even the faintest sound we made, maybe even my heartbeat.

I understood now why he was reading about demons and exorcisms. He was looking for answers, and Alton said he had them.

“Hey, ghost,” Dominic said, putting an arm out as if to protect me. He wasn’t talking to whatever was in the closet, he was calling out to Alton.

Alton appeared, but not the way I’d ever seen him before. There was no doubting he was supernatural now, his body filled with light, and his eyes burned with power and intelligence. He wore his usual shorts with a button-down t-shirt, but he shone like an arc angel from heaven, sent to destroy the ungodly. The doorknob on the closet door rattled and a low growl rumbled across the floor. Alton murmured words in an unknown language, his hand out toward the closet. The door stopped shaking, but the room became very cold.

“I have something to show you,” Alton said. “But not here. In the attic.”

Alton winked out of sight, and the room became filled with a thick sense of dread. We closed the door to Dominic’s room and made our way to the attic, trusting the ghost.

Dominic pushed open the door at the top of the stairs. The attic was the only unfurnished space in the house, a wide expanse with nothing in it. The faint smell of cigarettes lingered in the air.

A beam of sunlight from the largest window wavered, as if it were underwater, and Alton appeared, standing in the middle of the room, one hand in his pocket, the other holding an unlit cigarette.

"So you can't get rid of the thing in the closet?" Dominic asked, seemingly unmoved by Alton’s sudden appearance.

"You could do that better than I could," Alton said. I squinted at him, trying to see

what made him look like a ghost. All I could conjure up was that faint dream-like quality he had of looking as if he didn't quite fit into his surroundings. Maybe it was more obvious to Dominic.

"What do you mean?" Dominic asked.

"You're what is known as a Sanctifier."

He said this as if he'd just announced Dominic's profession, like plumber or dentist.

"What is that?" Dominic asked.

"You repel or attract certain entities. Aspiring demons, assorted bad spirits and other unpleasant beings."

"Since when? It's never happened to me before."

"This house had an entity in it and you were unconsciously reacting to it," Alton replied.

"Yeah, I felt it when we first walked through the house," Dominic said.

"You did? Why didn't you say something?" I asked. All I'd noticed was that I would have a bedroom in a turret and there was a pool.

"What would I have said? Hey, this house might be haunted? I wasn't even sure I believed it myself."

"You'll learn to trust your instincts," Alton said. "Sanctifiers radiate a certain frequency that those of us who are not mortals can feel. To me, it's comforting, like home. To them, it feels like nails on a chalkboard. You can amplify that pitch to make it more powerful, enough to drive away evil beings. We call it a halo."

"Isn't that supposed to be a glowing ring around my head?" Dominic asked.

"No, that's just how the old artists painted it. They knew a halo had to do with

radiating light, but they didn't get it exactly right."

"So why doesn't the thing in the closet just leave? It should be repelled by me, right?"

Dominic asked.

"It's probably under orders to watch you, a miserable task, I'm certain. I can show you how to repel it back to where it came from, deep enough that it won't return, no matter who orders it to."

"So I have to radiate my *halo* to make the thing go away," Dominic said, sounding contemptuous.

"The thing in your closet is called a ruax," Alton said. "It's a low level entity with a terrible inferiority complex. They make noise and can cause physical harm, but they're not very high on the hierarchy."

"It can physically hurt us?" I asked. I didn't have any interest in ghosts or demons so my knowledge of them was simply that I didn't believe in them, but that didn't seem to be the case anymore. Ghosts were real, and apparently so were other things.

"Yes, spirits can affect this world. Most people like to think that if spirits exist at all it's Grandma watching over you, but other entities are watching, too. Dominic, you need to recognize frequencies, so you can amplify your own."

"What if I can't?"

"You will. It's only a matter of being of aware, and once I've shown you what your halo is you'll always be able to do it. I'm going to amplify my halo and I want you to focus on what you sense from me."

Dominic tilted his head toward Alton, as if he were listening. The attic was quiet, the air still as dust motes lazily swirled in the sun. I wondered if I would be able to sense or hear

anything. And why did Dominic have a halo? Was it something he was born with?

"Well, you don't breathe, so that's strange," Dominic said.

I realized he was right; Alton's chest never rose or fell, he never sighed, he never breathed.

"Keep listening," Alton said in a low voice.

Dominic closed his eyes, his whole body frozen in concentration. I listened, too, vainly trying to sense any kind of vibration.

"I feel something," he muttered, as if he didn't want to drown it out. "It's like..." he trailed off.

Alton rolled the cigarette around his fingers, waiting, a expectant smile on his lips. I gave up trying to sense what Dominic was looking for, watching the two of them.

Dominic straightened, and spoke rapidly, his words tumbling over themselves. "It's not a sound, really. Or it is, but it's a vibration but I hear it in my mind. I think I've always heard them, I just didn't know what they were. Like when your ears ring and you ignore it because you know no one else can hear it and it isn't really a sound."

I hadn't heard him this excited since the time he discovered how many mints to put in a soda to make it explode.

"So listen for your own," Alton said. "It's always with you, like your heart beating."

Again Dominic went still, listening, this time with his eyes open. Finally he whispered, "I think I have it."

"If you have it, then focus on it. See if you can make it louder," Alton said.

Dominic concentrated. A wave of comfort washed over me, like a fond memory, and for the first time in a while I felt at peace, my worries and loneliness fading away, leaving

only an inexplicable sense that everything would be okay.

Alton said, "You've got it. It's getting stronger."

Dominic continued to concentrate, and this time my skin crawled, the hair rising on the back of my neck, reacting to a powerful, unseen current. Warmth flooded through the attic, the wave rising in my chest, becoming more than just comfort, expanding out into a feeling of invincibility, of being able to do anything.

A angry bass note thundered through the house, thrumming through the walls and floors.

"Good," Alton said. "The ruax isn't liking this at all."

Dominic stood with his head down and his eyes blank. He didn't move, his head still bowed, and a chill crept through the room. The wave of confidence faded, and the air became stale. "Something is pushing back at me. It's strong," Dominic said, his eyes dazed.

"Follow me to your room," Alton said, vanishing out of sight.

"What are we doing?" I asked. Alton and Dominic seemed to have an instant connection that didn't need explanations, but I wasn't included in that unspoken understanding.

"Stay behind me," Dominic answered, his eyes still vacant.

I followed him down the attic stairs to his bedroom door, which was still closed. Dominic turned the knob and pushed it open.

Alton stood in the center of the room, facing the closet. He emanated a faint light, tinged blue, his back towards us. With one hand he gestured back at the bedroom door and it swung shut with a soft click.

The sound ignited the room, and dark anticipation filled the air, a malevolent eagerness, as if a wild power were about to be set free.

The closet door shook, the nails beginning to loosen as the door shuddered against the tortured, bent heads.

“We have to repel it now, before it calls others. And we have to send it way back. Your halo has to be as strong as you can make it,” Alton said.

Dominic closed his eyes, his hand going to his chest, as if his chest hurt or he was trying to feel his heartbeat. I could barely sense the vibration that he'd made earlier.

Nails pushed out of the closet door, falling to the floor. When the last nail had fallen the door began shaking, the wood groaning. The air grew heavy and cold. A loud crack split the air and the door splintered, falling open.

*It wasn't in the closet anymore.*

The chill in the room intensified, pressing down from the ceiling. I cowered under unseen pressure, my gaze drawn upward, toward the weight that bore down on me with relentless intensity like the weight of an ocean of darkness threatening to crush me.

*Don't look. It's there.*

I slowly raised my eyes to the ceiling.

Two red, glowing eyes in a bony distorted face leaned down from a pale neck that stretched out as if it had no spine. I fell backward, unable to scream. It leaned closer, crawling across the ceiling. It's mouth gaped open, a bony arm reaching out but I couldn't move, paralyzed by disbelief and terror.

Then it recoiled, it's body shrinking away.

Dominic stood over me, one hand on his chest and the other outstretched to the

crooked limbed thing on the ceiling. The ruax screeched, it's strange, stretched body skittering across the ceiling to a far corner in the room.

Dominic clenched his teeth. A thrum of energy radiated from him, a small wave of warmth, but it was swallowed in the dark terror that suffocated the room. Beads of sweat stood out on his forehead, and one foot slid backwards, as if the thing were pushing him away. The ruax grew taller.

*Dominic isn't strong enough. He's losing. I can feel the cold coming.*

The tall creature reached out a limb that grew thinner and thinner, it's fingers lengthening. The long fingers wrapped around Dominic's outstretched hand and whipped him forward, and then back again, throwing him against the wall. Dominic's head cracked as he hit the wall, and he fell to his knees. The ruax skittered across the ceiling, looming over my brother, who lay crumpled on the floor.

In anguish, I found my voice. "Get away from him!"

The ruax turned its head to look at me, a limb shooting out across the room. I closed my eyes, bracing myself for its cold touch.

The bedroom exploded in light, emanating from a brilliant white form. Alton radiated pure light as he stood between me and the ruax. The ruax recoiled, and then its growl deepened. It grew taller, its darkness trying to eclipse Alton's light.

Dominic pushed himself from the floor onto one knee, and put his hand over his chest again, his body shaking. The ruax turned its oblong shaped head away from the ghost, looking at Dominic.

Dominic rose to his feet, blood trickling from his ear. He faced the ruax, his eyes wide, one hand outstretched at it.

The ruax seemed to gather its body, coiling like a spring, and then it jumped.

A wave of energy exploded from Dominic, thundering through the room. Warm peace and comfort flooded through the room, light suffusing the air, as bright as the sun, burning away the terror and the darkness. The ruax screeched but it was a small, pitiful sound that faded. Then everything was calm, all the fear gone.