

## His Beta 366

### Chapter 366

Lanie

Panic instantly set in, and I shouted Stella's name. My eyes swept the empty hallway. My stomach was hot ball of fear.

That's when I heard the familiar set of three giggles,

I was so relieved I could hardly even be angry with them as three small faces peeked out of an open doorway. I swept them into a hug. They'd been hiding just inside what looked like a storage closet.

"That wasn't funny," I scolded. "You scared me. Please don't do that again."

Isaac, my sensitive boy, looked as though he might cry. Alaina also looked chastened. Stella, on the other hand, frowned and looked surprised.

"I thought you liked Hide and Seek, Mother! It was one of your favorite childhood games, wasn't it?"

I paused as I studied her. "I guess it might have been. My sister and I played it "

With all the rush and up and down of my emotions, I should've been used to going from fear to sadness and back again. Even so, my throat clenched at the memory of me and Selena running and playing.

Such happier times, long before I'd ever imagined what awaited me.

I hadn't spoken to her in so long. How could I have let so much time pass without reaching out to let

her

and

my mother know I was all right? Yes, I had to keep my distance to secure their safety, but there had to

be some way to reassure them, and to find out if they were okay.

"Mother?"

I shook away the thoughts and looked into Stella's concerned eyes. "I do like that game, sweetie, but it

not fun to play a game if you don't know you're playing it. Does that make sense?"

Stella's eyes welled with tears. "I'm sorry, Mother!"

"Shh. It's all right. Tell you what. Let's head back home and I'll order some ice cream for a snack. And

after we're all done, we can play Hide and Seek. Okay?" I cupped my darling girl's face in my hands. I

didn't

want her bursting into tears, which would send the twins into a crying fit along with her. Goddess knew,

I'd

probably end up sobbing, too.

This time, all three of them held tightly to mine or each other's hands, and nobody ran off. Our quarters were still empty when we all got back, and I did my best not to show my disappointment. I didn't want the children to sense something was wrong, but although Alaina and Isaac happily started playing with a set of plastic bricks, building a castle, Stella was very quiet. I could tell she sensed something.

"I'll order the ice cream," I told them and went to the house phone to place the order. I might not have a fridge of my own, but I could still treat my darlings to ice cream in the comfort of our own space. I was determined more than ever to make sure that these quarters, which might not be our forever home, would still feel like home for as long as we stayed here

I did enjoy the convenience of being able to call down to the kitchen and have three small cartons of sweet treats arrive within a few minutes. Chocolate, strawberry, and vanilla, the favorites of each of my three pups. Stella, however, shook her head when I told her the snack would be here soon.

"I'm not hungry, Mother. May I please be allowed to go read in my room? Miss Janice says if I'm to get better at reading, I should practice on my own."

I hesitated. We didn't have any children's books that knew of. "What will you read?"

Stella pointed at the big bookcase on the other side of the room. "One of those."

Of course I checked first to make sure that the book was appropriate, and she seemed happy with the choice of an encyclopedia of supernaturals. It looked boring to me, but Stella ran off with it like it was a prize.

"Mumma," Isaac said a few minutes later from around a gigantic spoonful of chocolate ice cream. "Why is

Stellie diff'ent?

I paused scooping some strawberry ice cream into Alaina's bowl. "What?"

"She's not like us." Alaina supported her twin as she eyed the treat impatiently. "Mumma, please give the

ice cream?"

"Sorry," I murmured and finished filling her bowl. I sat down across from them. "What do you mean, Izzy.

Why is Stella different?"

I kept my voice pitched low, aware that even though Stella seemed to be reading happily in the other

room, she could still overhear. My heart had started beating a little faster,

Isaac licked his spoon and dug back in for another bite. "Bigger."

"Well, you and Allie aren't smaller than she is anymore."

Alaina shook her head, a frown on her ice cream smeared lips. "Her with the bigger kids."

"Do you mean the reading group?"

"All the bigger kids," Isaac said.

Alaina nodded. "Stellie's got the magic."

Stunned, I wasn't sure I'd heard her right. "What?"

"Magic, Mumma," Alaina repeated. "You know. Magic!"