Chapter 18 The sterile scent of disinfectant lingered in the air of the schools medical room , mingling with the quiet rustle of papers and the faint hum of uorescent lights overhead The atmosphere was tense , punctuated only by the sound of the school nurse moving carefully around her patients .

She was delicately tending to the wounds of Stella and Grayson , her hands gentle but precise as she cleaned their injuries .

Stellas scrape was on her hand , a small but painful abrasion , while Graysons injury seemed more concerning , a few scratches along his neck .

The scue had happened just moments before and there had been hardly enough time for anyone to react before it escalated .

Teachers had rushed in as quickly as they could , but even their speed couldnt prevent the slap Serena had aimed at Grayson It seemed clear that Serena had intended to strike his face , but thue to her small stature , her hand only reached his neck .

Still , the slap was hard enough to leave several deep , angry red lines on his skin with oozing blood Youre supposed to be watching the children .

How could one of your little ones wander all the way to the elementary school section ? Graysons teacher , a stern woman with an air of authority , scolded Sophia Johnson , the teacher responsible for Serenas class Her voice was sharp , cutting through the tension in the room Sophia ushed red , guilt ooding her chest .

She didnt even by to argue while getting yelled at She also felt that this was her mistake .

When the free time had begun , she hadnt made sure to keep a close eye on her students .

Serena had slipped away from the group and wandered o .

The schoolyard was small she had gured she could keep an eye on them from a distance , but the moment shed stepped away to use the restroom , things had gotten out of hand .

Sophia had asked the new intern to watch the children , but the intern had been too absorbed in her phone to notice what was going on , paying attention only to the children directly in front of her , completely unaware of Serena sneaking o in the other direction .

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She pushed me , and my hand is all scraped up Stella cried dramatically , lifting her nger to show the tiny scratch .

Her voice was a pitiful wail , ted with exaggerated distress . She even hit Sonny ,

Just get rid of her .

Dont let her bully us anymore .

The teachers around her exchanged shocked glances .

Even Michelle Cooper , the principal , had been drawn into the commotion .

Her brow furrowed deeply as she glanced over at Stella and Grayson , her eyes full of concern .

In the entire school , the last children anyone wanted to upset were Grayson and Stella Both came from families with deep in uence , and if anything happened to them , it could spell the end of Michelles tenure as principal .

Have y you contacted Serenas parents ! Michelles voice was tight with authority , her gaze sharp as she xed it on Sophia .

I called her mom .

Shes on her way , Sophia replied, nodding quickly , desperate to avoid further reprimands .

But Michelles stern expression didnt soften .

In fact , it deepened as she gave a single , tight nod .

Good .

When Graysons father and Stellas aunt get here , you all need to be on the same page .

Make sure you know what to say .

Michelles mind raced as she formulated her next steps .

Theres no other choice .

The only thing we can do now is place all the blame on Serena Yes , there was some neglect on our part , but if we portray her as a terribly unruly child , we can de ect some of the criticism from the Vanderbilt and Prescott families .

As for Serena .... Heresyes drifted to the corner , where Serena stood , dishevele d and alone , her small gure shrinking under the weight of the rooms judgment .

Michelles gaze lurdened with disgust .

Too bad for her .

Shes the scapegoat now.