

# Mr. Edwards' Unraveled Life

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## Chapter 1001

Ivan grinned, charmed by her innocence. "What do you think?"

Noor studied him. He looked like Esteban, but without the edge—too cocky, too easy to play. No challenge at all.

Feigning confusion, she reached for her zipper, hands trembling as she tugged it halfway down, revealing smooth skin. Ivan stopped her hand. "Not here."

He didn't want to rush things—not with someone like her. Noor paused, then quietly followed him out.

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Meanwhile, Esteban glanced at his phone. A photo had popped up—Ivan and Noor, together. He smirked. As expected, Ivan—Harper's illegitimate son—was an easy mark. Esteban knew his brother better than Ivan knew himself.

He pocketed the phone.

...

At the Kelly Hotel, Jimena sat in a private room, arms crossed, checking her watch. Her partner was thirty minutes late, and her patience was wearing thin.

Finally, the door opened. A stunning woman in a sleek black dress walked in. "Ms. MacLean, sorry to keep you waiting."

Jimena let out a breath. This deal was too important to lose. "No worries. I just got here," she said with a strained smile, motioning to the empty chair.

But the woman—Janelle Ethier—didn't sit. Instead, she smirked. "Jimena, you really want to work with me?"

Jimena caught the sharpness in her tone. Something felt off. "Ms. Ethier, have we met before?" she asked carefully.

Janelle's eyes scanned her with thinly veiled contempt. "No. But I've heard plenty."

Jimena's stomach sank. Miranda must've fed her lies. Not ideal. But she couldn't afford to lose this. "Ms. Ethier, you don't seem like someone who buys into gossip. Just give me a shot—I promise I won't disappoint."

Janelle raised a brow. "Oh, really?"

"Absolutely," Jimena said firmly. "Just give me a chance."

"And if I don't?" Janelle's voice was like ice.

Jimena's fists clenched beneath the table. This was her nightmare. "Ms. Ethier, I don't know what you've heard, but this deal matters. I'm asking for a fair chance."

Janelle's smirk widened, feeding off Jimena's humility. "Fine. I'll give you a shot, but..."

Jimena leaned in. "But what?"

Janelle's smile turned cruel. "Send a message to every guy you know. Tell them I'm a boyfriend-stealing vixen."

Jimena's eyes flared. This wasn't business—it was personal. "Ms. Ethier, we're here to talk deals. Don't drag personal drama into it."

Janelle's expression darkened. "Then we're done." She turned to leave. "Your company lost this deal because you got emotional, Jimena."

As she moved toward the door, Jimena reached out and grabbed her wrist. Swallowing her pride, she said, "I'm sorry, Ms. Ethier. I overreacted."

"So you'll send the message?" Janelle asked, smug.

Jimena nodded, hating every second. "If you'll sign the contract."

It was just a message. She'd survive the shame.

Janelle laughed mockingly. "You really think one text earns you a deal?"

Jimena stayed calm. "I don't think you're that petty, Ms. Ethier. Let me pitch you my proposal. You might change your mind."

Janelle paused, surprised by her poise. "I'm not interested anymore."

"I'll do whatever it takes," Jimena said, steady but desperate.

Before Janelle could answer, the door burst open. Cody strode in, trench coat trailing, bringing the chill of the night with him. His eyes locked on Janelle. "Don't push it. She doesn't need your deal."

Janelle scowled, but Cody grabbed Jimena's hand and pulled her out before she could protest.

"Cody, let go!" she snapped once they were outside.

## Chapter 1002

Cody let go of her, his expression hard. "Jimena, you're really letting someone like her walk all over you for a deal? What happened to your self-respect?"

His words hit like a slap. Tears spilled before she could stop them. Cody, caught off guard, fumbled for a tissue. "Why are you crying?"

She hadn't cracked when Janelle humiliated her. But Cody's judgment cut deeper. "You think I *want* this?" she snapped, her voice shaking. "I don't have a choice. MacLean Corp needs this deal—and I'm doing it alone."

"I'll find you another deal," Cody said without thinking. Realizing what he'd said, he added, "I screwed up your shot with Janelle. I owe you."

Jimena stared at him, stunned. Cody pushed on. "Get ready tonight. You're coming to a party with me."

Before she could reply, he turned and left, leaving her with a faint smile and a flicker of warmth in her chest.

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At the banquet, Cody offered his arm. Jimena hesitated.

"Come on," he said. "You want me walking in solo like some loser?"

She slipped her arm through his. He smiled—just barely.

Inside, Cody introduced her to his contacts. Across the room, Miranda was fuming. "Jimena's such a snake," she hissed.

Nearby, Janelle chimed in. "They bailed on negotiations to show up here all cozy?"

Miranda bit her lip, her eyes shining. "I don't even love Cody, but watching him get played—it sucks."

"You're too soft," Janelle scoffed. "She's going to eat you alive." A sly smile crept onto her face. "I've got a plan to show Cody who she *really* is."

Miranda glanced over, uneasy. "Nothing shady, right?"

Janelle smirked. “Who, me? Never.”

Meanwhile, Jimena jotted down names for potential deals as she mingled beside Cody. She hated leaning on him—but she’d repay him one day.

Then a waiter bumped into her, splashing wine on her dress.

“I’m so sorry, miss!” he gasped, panicked.

Jimena shook her head. “It’s okay. Just keep working.”

Grateful, the waiter offered, “Let me take you upstairs to change.”

She nodded, following him to a dressing room. The air smelled faintly of incense. Inside was a rack of elegant, clean dresses. She chose a light blue gown but struggled with the zipper.

“Need help?” a man’s voice asked from behind.

She spun around. His eyes were shifty.

“This is the women’s dressing room,” she said sharply. “Get out.”

She turned to leave—but dizziness hit. Her knees gave out. The man caught her, grinning.

“Relax, sweetheart. I’ll take care of you.”

Her limbs weakened, her body overheated. She fought to stay upright, but her strength was slipping.

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Downstairs, Janelle spoke up just loud enough. “I heard some sketchy noises from the dressing room. People these days...”

Someone gasped. “Wait, was that MacLean—?”

Whispers rippled through the crowd. Curiosity surged.

“Let’s go see. This can’t be happening here,” someone said.

A small group started up the stairs. Janelle’s eyes gleamed. Miranda’s heart raced—this was it.

Janelle raised her voice, feigning outrage. “Let’s see who’s shameless enough to pull something like this.”

The door flung open—Cody stood there, a woman wrapped in his coat. Her face was hidden.

"My girlfriend's not feeling well," he said coldly. "Now who was talking about being 'shameless'?"

Janelle froze, her smug expression gone. Miranda's jaw dropped.

Cody narrowed his eyes. "Thanks for the gift, Ms. Ethier. I won't forget it."

He carried Jimena away, her body limp in his arms.

Jimena squirmed, feverish and restless.

"Don't move," Cody growled, his voice tight with worry.

### **Chapter 1003**

Jimena was barely conscious, her body hot and restless. Clinging to Cody felt like the only relief. She wrapped her arms around his neck, seeking comfort.

His eyes widened when her lips brushed his. Something in his gaze shifted. "Drive to the nearest hotel," he told the driver, voice strained, pulling the privacy screen up.

She kept moving beside him, her soft murmurs lighting a fire in his chest. At the hotel, he tossed a black card at the front desk. "Best room. Now."

The receptionist, picking up on the urgency, handed over the key with a knowing smile.

Inside the room, Cody laid Jimena on the bed and turned to leave. But her hand shot out, gripping his shirt.

"Don't go. Please," she whispered.

He stared at her, heart pounding. "Jimena... this is your choice."

Desire overpowered him. He gave in.

The rest of the night blurred into heat and passion.

...

Morning light crept through the curtains. Jimena stirred, her whole body aching. When she turned and saw Cody's face, panic flooded her.

He opened his eyes calmly. "You're awake."

"We... you..." She stammered, horrified.

"Don't worry," Cody said coolly. "I'll take responsibility."

"I don't need that," she blurted out. Her mind was spinning, memories fuzzy from the drugged haze. "If you hadn't shown up..." She stopped, shuddering.

Cody's voice chilled. "So now you're drawing a line?"

She opened her mouth, trying to explain—but nothing came out. Every word felt like the wrong one.

"Fine," Cody said, getting out of bed. "If you don't need me, I'm out."

As he moved to dress, she noticed his watch on the floor. "You dropped this," she said softly, handing it to him.

His expression darkened. He snatched it and walked out without a word.

...

Esteban grinned, fresh from the racetrack, sweat still clinging to him. "How'd you even have time to drag me out here?"

Cody scooted away, grimacing. "You stink. Stay over there."

Esteban clutched his chest dramatically. "You call me out, I show up like the loyal friend I am—and you insult me? My heart's shattered."

"Cut the crap," Cody said with a smirk. "I need to talk."

"Let me guess—Jimena again?" Esteban raised an eyebrow.

Cody stayed silent. That was answer enough.

Esteban sighed. "Figured. You only ever call when it's about her. Spill it."

Cody hesitated, then shook his head. "Forget it. Just drink with me."

Esteban didn't press. He lifted his glass, but his phone buzzed—Noor's name on the screen.

"Gotta take this," he said, stepping away.

Cody nodded.

Esteban's tone turned cold. "Why're you calling?"

"Sir... I need to talk." Noor's voice was low.

After the call, Esteban came back, looking serious. "Sorry, man. Something came up. I owe you a drink."

“Go take care of it,” Cody said, unfazed.

Alone again, Cody sipped his drink, then made a call.

“I want Janelle’s project,” he said, his voice like steel.

He hung up, staring into his glass. He didn’t know why it felt so right to go after Janelle—but it did.

...

At a discreet hotel, Esteban met Noor. She sat quietly in a white dress, looking fragile.

“Talk,” he said evenly.

Noor fidgeted, then blurted, “I’m with Ivan now. He’s... really into me.”

“I know,” Esteban said. “But that’s not enough.”

Under his steady gaze, Noor’s breath hitched. “I got the bid. The one for the project he’s using to compete with you.”

Esteban’s brows lifted. “Didn’t expect it that easy.”

She handed him the documents, her hands trembling. “I did what you asked. Can I leave him now?”

Esteban leaned back. “Why rush? Didn’t you want a rich guy? Ivan’s got money—and he treats you well.”

“I don’t like him,” Noor muttered. “He’s arrogant. Shallow.”

Esteban smirked. She wasn’t wrong—Ivan was all show, no substance. “Not yet,” he said. “You agreed to two tasks.”

Her face fell. “What’s the second?”

Esteban leaned in close, voice low.

Her face went pale.

“That’s... too much,” she whispered.

## **Chapter 1004**

“Why? Feeling guilty now?” Esteban’s voice was sharp.

Noor bit her lip. “Fine. I’ll do it.”

Later, at her place, she flipped on the light and jumped—Ivan was sitting on the sofa, hidden in the dark.

“No lights?” she asked, trying to stay calm.

“I like the dark,” he said, motioning for her. “Come here.”

She walked over and leaned down, gently massaging his temples. “Rough day?”

“Yeah,” he muttered. Then he grabbed her hand and asked, “You wouldn’t betray me, would you?”

Her heart pounded. Did he know? Forcing a smile, she said, “Why would you say that?”

“Just checking,” he replied, his gaze lingering.

“Of course not,” she lied smoothly. “I’m yours. Always.”

Ivan grinned. “Good. Because if you ever betray me, I’ll take you down with me.”

He said it lightly, but the threat chilled her to the bone.

...

“Miranda, what do I do? Cody’s tearing my family’s projects apart!” Janelle paced in panic. Regret weighed heavy—she never should’ve crossed Jimena.

Miranda rolled her eyes. Janelle had rushed in, made a mess, and now wanted sympathy.

“Miranda, say something! I did this for you!” Janelle begged.

Miranda sighed, clearly annoyed. “Cody’s not the same guy anymore. I don’t know what to tell you.” She paused, then added, “But Jimena might help. She still wants to work with you—give it a shot.”

Janelle’s face lit up. “You’re right!” She rushed out.

Miranda smirked coldly. If Jimena fell for the bait, she’d lose everything. As for Janelle’s problems? Not her concern.

Janelle showed up at Jimena’s office but got stopped at the front desk.

“Ms. Ethier, please leave,” the secretary said firmly. “CEO MacLean doesn’t want to see you or work with you.” Her tone turned icy. “She also said to clean up your mess—or she’ll make sure you end up in jail.”



Janelle froze. She'd gone too far—and Jimena could prove it.

The secretary walked away, laughing. "You should've seen her face, Ms. MacLean. Priceless."

Jimena's eyes turned cold. Power earned respect. Now she could crush Janelle, and Janelle couldn't touch her. But she wasn't done yet.

Later, her phone rang.

"Where are you? Get to my place," Cody said.

"Okay," Jimena replied. He'd saved her—she owed him.

At Cody's house, he lounged on the sofa, calm and confident. He crooked a finger at her, and when she approached, he grabbed her wrist and pulled her onto his lap.

"Cody, you—" she began, shocked.

His grip tightened on her waist, smirking. "You taste good. I call, you come. Isn't that enough?"

Before she could reply, he kissed her—deep and hungry. The passion was undeniable, and neither of them could stop.

...

Meanwhile, Ronan handed Miranda a bouquet of roses—her favorite. Normally, they'd make her smile. But today, all she could think about was Cody.

Cody, who left medicine to build his business from nothing. Cody, who sent her roses in every color. Cody, who always answered when she called.

"What's wrong?" Ronan asked, sensing her distance.

"Nothing," she said, voice flat.

Ronan could feel the shift. Miranda used to revolve around him. Now, she was drifting—pulled by Cody's memory.

"Is it Cody? He's just flaunting that broke MacLean girl to mess with you. It's pathetic," Ronan said.

"Don't," Miranda snapped. "Cody was good to me. You're back—focus on your work. Prove yourself."

She stood to leave, but Ronan grabbed her wrist. "Miranda, can we talk?"

His eyes burned with intensity—and something darker.

She'd let him and his daughter stay at her villa, even got him a job at her company. But she couldn't ignore the pull of her past with Cody.

## Chapter 1005

Ronan knew Miranda rarely turned him down. But this time, he wanted more—her whole heart.

"Miranda, I've been back for days," he said, gripping her hand. "Yes, I was married before. That's over. I won't lie. My daughter loves you. Can we try again? Don't I deserve a chance?"

Miranda paused. He came back for her, even rejected Cody's offers just to be here. Their history was no secret.

"Why not?" Ronan asked, his voice cracking. "I know I hurt you by leaving, but I'm here now. If it's my daughter, I'll send her to my mom. I can't lose you again."

His eyes turned red with emotion. Miranda softened. He had been the boy she once loved. His return had promised healing.

When he'd said he was coming back, she had run to the airport. But the spark she remembered had faded. Cody's quiet loyalty had filled the space, little by little.

Cody. Her heart pulled in his direction. He'd been patient, proposing even after rejections, never letting pride get in the way.

Her chest tightened. "Ronan, why did you divorce your wife?" she suddenly asked.

He never gave details before—only that he'd returned to Craggaville.

"Emotional differences," he murmured, looking down. "I left for a big job abroad, to impress your family. But... I married her by mistake."

Miranda gave a faint smile. "You don't have to feel guilty. That was your choice. And I've had someone else by my side."

Cody. He'd made her depend on him—and now that he was gone, she felt lost.

She pulled her hand back. "Ronan, I need to see Cody. You and your daughter can rest here. Stay at the villa. When you're ready, I'll sell it to you at half price."

She walked away without looking back.

Miranda drove straight to Cody's villa. She knew his schedule—if he wasn't at the hospital, he'd be home. Today, he was on leave. She didn't call. She just showed up.

Jimena opened the door, wearing Cody's white shirt. Red marks lined her neck.

Miranda's heart sank. She was too late.

"Miss Gaudet, please wait. I'll get Cody," Jimena said politely, then turned to leave.

But Miranda pushed past her and stormed upstairs.

She met Cody on the staircase. He was in a bathrobe, tall and calm, his dark eyes cold.

She grabbed his hand, her voice shaking. "Cody, I was wrong. I didn't see how amazing you were. I hurt you, but I'm ready now. I'll accept your proposal. Let's be together."

Her eyes were misty, her grip gentle and desperate. The old Cody would've given in.

But he pulled away, his voice ice cold. "Miranda, you never wanted me before. Now you want me to come running? Do you even hear yourself?"

His rejection cut deep.

Miranda's heart broke. "Cody... why are you doing this to me? Do I have to beg?"

## **Chapter 1006**

Cody stared at Miranda. The desperation on her proud face was almost unrecognizable.

"You've got Ronan now," he said, his voice clipped and bitter. "What—he's not enough for you?"

Her face twisted in pain. "There's nothing between us. It's just... old regrets."

"Then why is he still living under your roof?" Cody shot back. "You keep him and his kid close, but I'm the bad guy? Miranda, if anyone else were in his shoes, I'd help them too. Don't act like this is something it's not."

"I'm not sending him away," she said firmly. "He has nowhere else to go. We've known each other too long for me to turn my back on him."

Cody's jaw clenched. "Think whatever you want. But this—us—we're done. We never even started. You made sure of that."

Her eyes brimmed with tears. "Never started? Cody, you don't mean that."

"You never gave me a real chance," he said, eyes like ice. "I was nothing to you. Not even a backup. Now that Jimena's in the picture, suddenly you're threatened? Give me a break."

“Please,” Miranda begged, grabbing his arm. “I’m not doing this to prove anything. I just... I can’t lose you.”

Her voice trembled, but Cody’s face stayed cold.

“Call Ronan,” he said. “He can pick you up. It’s not safe out there.”

His concern was distant, mechanical. Miranda’s heart shattered. The man who once chased after her with roses was gone—this version felt like a stranger.

“You want me to beg?” she cried. “Or kick Ronan out just to prove something to you?”

Cody’s eyes didn’t flinch. “That’s not what I want. You’re only here now because I moved on. This isn’t love—it’s just your pride refusing to lose.”

“We’ve been together for years,” she choked out. “I do love you. Why can’t you believe that?”

From the sidelines, Jimena watched, heart heavy. She’d loved and lost once too. Pablo had chosen someone else, and she’d learned the hard way—love doesn’t always win. Family. Survival. They outweighed romance. Still, seeing Miranda come undone stung.

Cody turned slightly toward Jimena, and she stepped forward. He wrapped an arm around her waist.

“Miranda,” he said, “being with Jimena isn’t exhausting like it was with you. Love is supposed to go both ways.”

Miranda’s expression hardened. “Jimena’s only here because you bailed her out. Without your money or Cowan family, she’d be gone. She’s nothing.”

Jimena didn’t flinch. “Cody’s good to me, and I’m with him. We’re both single. What’s the issue? When he proposed, you ran straight to Ronan. You made your choice.”

“This is between me and Cody,” Miranda snapped. “You don’t get to talk.”

Jimena’s tone stayed even. “I’m not here to fight. Cody, talk to her. I’ll go upstairs.”

But Cody didn’t let go. His grip on her hand tightened.

“Miranda,” he said, “you see how things are now. Jimena’s a good woman, and I’m not letting her down. You and Ronan—go figure that out.”

Miranda’s breath hitched. “If you don’t want him around, I’ll send him away. Cody, I love you. I love the roses you gave me. Please, I can’t lose you.”

Her voice cracked. “Jimena’s only been here for a few days. She’s using you. I’d give up everything for you.”

## Chapter 1007

Jimena's heart twisted, watching Miranda break. Even as an outsider, the pain was palpable. For Cody—who'd waited for Miranda for years—it had to be gut-wrenching.

But his face didn't waver.

"Miranda," he said, voice low and steady, "you women always say belated love is worthless. Well, it's the same for men. I don't love you like I used to. Go back to Ronan. He'll worship you."

Tears streamed down Miranda's face. "Stop it. Don't say that. Come back to me. Please."

Cody looked away. "Leave, Miranda. I've got things to do."

His words hit like a hammer. Jimena still wearing his shirt made it crystal clear—Miranda had lost him.

Wiping her tears, she choked out, "Fine. Don't come crawling back when you regret this." And then she was gone, running from the villa like a storm in retreat.

The second the door closed, Cody pushed Jimena gently aside. She saw the truth in his eyes—he still loved Miranda.

"Why not go after her?" she asked quietly. "She's realized you're the one. You could finally be happy."

He said nothing. Just turned away.

Jimena didn't push. Some wounds need space to bleed before they can heal.

...

Meanwhile, Esteban met Noor again.

She wore a floral dress, hair loose and long—so soft, so untouched. It riled him. She stirred up a hunger he hated to admit.

Pinching her chin, he growled, "You're Ivan's woman. So why the hell are you dressing like this when I call you?"

Noor blinked, startled. "I wasn't trying to seduce you. This is just how I dress. And Ivan... he's not interested. That million you gave me—"

"What are you saying?" Esteban snapped, eyes narrowing.

"I mean... normal guys don't ignore a woman who's willing," she murmured. "Ivan said he wanted to change locations, but then he just... stopped. He's been ignoring me ever since."

Esteban's face darkened. "You accusing me of something?"

"No!" she said quickly. "I'm just saying... Ivan's weird. Like he's different sometimes. Like he flips a switch."

Esteban went silent. Schizophrenia? Ivan always seemed sharp, but Noor's words hit a nerve. Or maybe—maybe Ivan suspected her.

"Did he catch you talking to me?" Esteban asked, eyes turning cold.

"No," she whispered. "If he had, I'd be dead. I'm nothing to you guys—just an ant."

She wasn't wrong. Esteban had bought her loyalty for cheap, and she knew the stakes.

"Smart girl," he said, finally releasing her chin. "But if you ever cross me, you're done."

"I won't," she said, voice shaky. "I'm just warning you—there's something off about Ivan. Be ready."

Esteban smirked, mocking. "What, feeling sorry for him now?"

She shook her head. "You paid me. I'm yours. Ivan's nothing to me."

## Chapter 1008

Noor's vow of loyalty didn't ease Esteban's suspicions. "Loyal to me? Or just to the cash?"

Her cheeks burned. She had begged for that million, swallowed her pride to get it. "You helped me," she said softly. "I owe you. My loyalty's real."

Esteban stared her down. "Save the speech. Go back to Ivan. If I need something, I'll call. No secrets."

She blinked, startled by the dismissal, but nodded. "Got it."

As she turned to leave, he added, "If anything's off—call me. Don't play dumb."

She gave a quick nod and left.

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Back at Ivan's place, Noor found him waiting. His smile was lazy, but his eyes were sharp.

“Where were you?” he asked casually.

“Just... out for a walk,” she mumbled.

He didn’t believe a word. In one brutal motion, he twisted her wrist until it cracked. She cried out, eyes wide with panic.

“You...” she gasped. If he’d seen her with Esteban, she was dead.

Ivan’s smile curled cruelly. “I hate liars, Noor. Now tell me what you were *really* doing—or I’ll make sure you never speak again.”

Terror surged through her. His grip was steel. “I’m yours,” she stammered. “I swear—I’d never betray you, Ivan.”

“Call me Ivan,” he snapped.

“Ivan,” she corrected, voice shaking. “I’ll be good. I won’t upset you again.”

He shoved her to the floor. She landed hard.

“Keep that in mind,” he said coldly. “I’m not fixing your wrist. Let it hurt.”

Noor nodded, clutching her injury as he left. Dread settled like lead in her gut. Ivan wasn’t just violent—he was unstable. But she’d taken Esteban’s money. She had no choice now but to endure.

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At Cody’s villa, Esteban found him smoking, a cloud of stress around him. Jimena sat nearby, quiet.

“You should go after Miranda,” Jimena said. “She came to you. She meant it. Say the word, and she’ll choose you. You two could have something real.”

Her voice was calm, but her chest felt tight.

Cody gave a bitter laugh. “We just slept together, and now you’re pushing me toward her? What are you, my life coach? Or was that just a warm bed for a night?”

Jimena held his gaze. “You’ve done so much for me. It wasn’t meaningless. The company’s recovering—I’ll pay you back, every cent.”

Cody scoffed. “Touching.”

Before the conversation could spiral further, his phone buzzed. *Esteban*. Cody answered with a grunt. “What?”

“You’re a doctor, right?” Esteban asked. “How do you tell if someone’s got schizophrenia?”

Cody sat up straighter. “Who are we talking about?”

Esteban didn’t answer right away, but Cody’s curiosity was hooked. Esteban didn’t worry about people often—this had to be someone close.

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## Chapter 1009

Esteban’s tone was casual, but Cody heard the tension under it. “Just someone. Why do you care?”

Cody smirked. “I’m a doctor, not a mind reader. If it’s schizophrenia, I need details to even start.”

Esteban sighed. “Right. But it’s just a gut feeling. Could be nothing.”

He was still mulling over Noor’s warning about Ivan. The guy was off—but he had no proof yet. Diagnosing something that serious based on vibes wasn’t his style.

“Forget it,” Esteban said. “This isn’t a phone convo. Where are you? I’ll come by.”

Cody glanced at Jimena, who stood silently nearby. “The villa,” he said. “Come if you want.”

Esteban laughed. “You? At home like a normal person? Shocking.”

Cody rolled his eyes and tossed the phone down. He looked at Jimena. “You got nothing to say?”

She met his gaze, calm. “What’s there to say? I meant what I said. We’re adults. No drama unless we create it. I’m good—you should be too.”

She turned to leave. “I’m gonna shower.”

Water ran in the background as Cody sat alone. Miranda’s tear-streaked face flashed through his mind. Years of chasing her—of loving her—had twisted into something painful. And Jimena... she wasn’t indifferent, just distant. Detached. That messed with him more than he wanted to admit.

Ten minutes later, Esteban walked in, letting himself through like it was his own place. Spotting Cody on the bed, he grinned.

“Damn, bro. Living like royalty.”

“I don’t rest,” Cody muttered. “You do enough of that for both of us.”



Esteban poured himself a glass of water from the bedside tray. “So, Miranda came crawling back. You taking her up on it?”

Cody’s jaw clenched. “Why would I? You know what I gave her—years, effort, all of me. I’m done bleeding for someone who never wanted me.”

Before Esteban could dig deeper, Jimena stepped out of the bathroom, towel wrapped tight. She froze at the sight of him.

“Uh... hi,” she mumbled, then ducked back inside.

Esteban laughed. “Wow. Moving on in style, huh?”

“Cut it out,” Cody said sharply. “Now, who’s this person you’re worried about?”

The amusement faded from Esteban’s face. “It’s complicated. Someone close. Lately they’ve been... off. Mood swings, weird behavior. Like they’re not themselves half the time.”

Cody leaned in, his voice more serious. “Could be anything—bipolar, stress, schizophrenia. You can’t know without observation, maybe a full psych workup. They’d have to agree to that.”

Esteban cursed under his breath. “That’s the issue. Getting them to sit for an eval? Impossible. Even sending someone in would take serious planning.”

“Then don’t,” Cody said. “Start small—personal items, hair, blood. Or get a video. Something concrete. Otherwise, you’re just chasing shadows.”

Jimena reentered, dressed now. Her phone buzzed, and she checked it. Her face turned serious.

“Sorry,” she said. “I was gonna grab a late bite with you, but something’s come up at the company. I have to go.”

Cody waved her off. “Go handle it.”

She left.

Esteban gave Cody a sly punch to the arm. “Lost Miranda, landed her? Not bad, man.”

But Cody didn’t smile. “Drop it.”

## Chapter 1010

Cody’s words echoed in Esteban’s mind as he walked out of the villa. “Personal items. Video evidence.” He muttered the list under his breath, already thinking of how to get close enough to Ivan to pull it off. Not easy. Ivan wasn’t dumb—and Esteban didn’t have much leverage.

Back inside, Cody lay on his back, staring at the ceiling. Miranda's tears had stirred something in him—pity maybe. Regret, at best. Not love. And Jimena? Her calm, clean exit only unsettled him more. She didn't cling, didn't beg. It was refreshing—but unfamiliar.

—

Jimena rushed to her company, where her assistant met her with a grim expression.

“Boss, it's bad,” she said quietly. “You need to see this.”

In the conference room, tension crackled. Key staff hunched over paperwork, eyes dark.

“What's going on?” Jimena asked, scanning the room.

Her assistant handed her a thick file. “The deal we locked in—they're backing out. If we lose this, the quarter tanks.”

Jimena's jaw tightened. “We had sign-off. What changed?”

“They didn't say. Just pulled the plug,” an executive muttered. “And we've got no way to pressure them.”

Jimena didn't flinch. “Then I'll handle it.”

Her assistant followed her down the hall, hesitating. “Boss... maybe don't go yourself. This feels personal.”

Jimena frowned. “You think I'm being targeted?”

The assistant looked nervous. “I shouldn't say this, but... the other party? It's Hana. Miranda's close friend.”

Jimena froze. Hana. That name stirred old tension. Back when her connection to Cody had just started, Hana had come for her—accused her of being a gold-digger sniffing around Miranda's man. Jimena had shrugged it off at the time.

Now it was back. With teeth.

—

At the meeting spot, Jimena walked in—and froze. Not just Hana. Miranda was there too.

Hana smiled with mock sweetness. “Well, if it isn't Noor. Sorry—your little project isn't happening.”

Jimena's spine straightened at the name. Noor. Deliberate jab? Or a calculated insult?

“Is there an issue with the proposal?” she asked evenly.

Hana leaned back, eyes glinting. “I’m just not feeling it. Mood matters in business, don’t you think?”

Miranda said nothing. Her glare was sharp enough to cut steel.

Jimena stayed cool. “This is professional. My personal life shouldn’t factor into anything.”

Hana snorted. “Oh, come on. You slept with Cody, knowing full well Miranda was in the picture. You think you can stroll in here and act like it’s just business?”

Miranda added coldly, “If not for you, Cody would’ve come back to me. You think you’ve won? You’re delusional.”

Jimena’s voice stayed level. “I’m not here for anyone’s man. I’m here to do my job.”

Hana slammed the contract on the table. “You want the deal? Apologize to Miranda. Grovel, and maybe we’ll consider it.”

Jimena’s jaw clenched. The deal was critical. Her company needed this. She forced herself to start bowing her head—

—when Hana shoved a chair hard into her knees.

Jimena stumbled and fell.

Before she could react, Miranda stepped in. Her stiletto came down hard on Jimena’s hand.

“Oops,” she said, smiling. “My bad.”

Pain lanced up Jimena’s arm as Miranda pressed down harder.

Jimena stared up at her, stunned. The same woman who had cried at Cody’s feet the night before was now gleefully cruel.

“You’re not the victim you pretend to be,” she hissed.

Miranda’s smirk didn’t waver. “Keep talking. See how that works out.”