

Mr. Edwards' Unraveled Life

Chapter 981

Cody had offered her the dorm out of pity—figuring she'd take the key, get some rest, and finally leave him alone. But instead, Jimena was clinging tighter, treating him like her only way out.

The more he thought about it, the angrier he got. "Now I get it. No wonder no one's helping your family. The whole MacLean clan must be a mess."

Jimena's face twisted in pain. She expected his anger, but dragging her family through the mud? That hit too hard. "I know what I'm doing isn't right," she said, her voice trembling, "but don't insult my family. I'm desperate."

"If your family was worth anything, why'd they leave you drowning in debt? Where's your brother—off hiding somewhere?" Cody shot back, instantly regretting it. He hadn't meant to go that low, but her stubbornness was driving him crazy.

Jimena's chest tightened. Her father had risked everything to save their business, and it failed. Her brother, who'd always been kind to her, had to have his reasons for disappearing. "They're not bad people," she whispered. "Cody, I sent your dad a photo from the dorm. He thinks I'm making progress, so he wired me five million. He said if I get pregnant with your child, he'll clear all my family's debts."

She hated herself for going through with it, but Franklin's offer was too tempting in her situation. Tears welled up in her tired, bloodshot eyes.

Cody's anger faded for a second. He'd seen patients fall apart while trying to save their loved ones. Jimena looked just as desperate.

But then, to his shock, she took off the shirt and dropped to her knees in front of him.

He spun away. "Jimena, what the hell are you doing? You don't need to go this far. Stand on your own two feet!"

His voice was heavy with frustration. This wasn't about a few thousand bucks—it was millions. His father's plan was clear: use Jimena to "fix" Cody, maybe even push a baby into the picture. The whole thing was messed up.

"Fine," Cody muttered. "Play along with my dad, but you're paying back every dollar."

Jimena's eyes lit up. "Deal. As long as you help me clear the debts, I'll do whatever you say."

“Put your clothes on,” he said, still looking away.

He was a doctor—he’d seen plenty of bodies—but this wasn’t about that. This wasn’t medicine. It was manipulation. She got dressed quickly but stayed on her knees.

“I’m dressed.”

He turned and saw her still kneeling. “Get up already.”

Instead, she lowered her head until her forehead touched the floor. “I know I’m shameless, but thank you, Cody.”

“Spare me the drama,” he snapped. “Get up. Go along with my dad’s story, but get a real job.”

Jimena looked up. “Cody, once the debts are cleared, I’ll restart the MacLean Group. I’ll pay you back, I swear.”

He raised an eyebrow. “You? Running a business? Closing deals?”

“I’ve learned some things. I’m not an expert, but I’ll figure it out. I’ll sign an IOU if that helps.”

Cody shook his head. “He’s only sent you part of the money so far. An IOU’s worthless until we know how far this goes.”

Jimena hesitated, then confessed, “He said the rest comes if I get pregnant.”

“He already gave you five million,” Cody replied. “Play the part, and he’ll keep sending more. But we’re not having a kid. Just go along with it, and I’ll cover the rest if I have to.”

Jimena’s eyes widened. Even after all she’d done, Cody still agreed to help.

“If there’s ever anything you need,” she said softly, “I’ll be there.”

He let out a bitter laugh. “What could you possibly do for me?”

Chapter 982

Cody didn’t need help. As Dr. Cody, he was in high demand. And as a member of the powerful Shen family, he could get anything he wanted with a single word.

“I can’t really help you,” Jimena admitted.

“You never know,” Cody replied with a shrug. “Let’s just leave it at that.”

But Franklin Cowan wasn’t buying their act. He showed up at Cody’s place and looked Jimena over with suspicion. “Did Cody really fall for you?”

He knew his son hated matchmaking. Yet now, Jimena was claiming she'd won him over in just a couple of days?

"Uncle Cowan, he only agreed because I kept pushing," Jimena admitted. "He felt bad for me and didn't want more trouble."

At least she was honest—there was no love here, just survival.

Franklin nodded, clearly pleased with her straightforwardness. "You know why I picked you, don't you?"

"Yes," she whispered.

He'd chosen her because she was desperate enough to agree to anything.

"Then do your part," Franklin said. "If you're pregnant, we'll know within ten days. I'm giving you two weeks."

Jimena wasn't expecting a timeline. But Franklin added, "Even if you don't get pregnant, I'll still take care of you."

It was a win-win for her—and she knew it. "Uncle Cowan, I won't let you down."

She said it to keep him happy, fully aware Cody wasn't going to lay a finger on her. Franklin left without even checking in with his son, clearly confident in his plan.

Jimena went straight to Cody and told him everything. He raised a brow. "My dad's being generous."

Still, he wasn't happy. If Jimena failed in two weeks, Franklin would just replace her with someone else.

"Stick with me," Cody said. "Don't stress about anything else. Tomorrow, I'll introduce you to a friend who can help with your company."

Cody didn't care about business, even though his family was loaded. But Kevin—his friend—was a legend. He'd turned Edwards' dying firm into one of Belourvinelle's biggest success stories. If anyone could help Jimena rebuild the MacLean Group, it was him.

Jimena blinked. "You're really helping me?"

She knew Cody's circle well—Kevin, the business powerhouse; Kian, his sharp former assistant; and Bonian, the lawyer who'd become a rising business star. Their help could revive her family's company.

Cody shrugged. "You're broke and desperate. If I don't help, you'll just keep pestering me. And you need to make money to pay my dad back."

Jimena lowered her head. "Thank you."

"Enough talk. Let's move."

True to his word, Cody arranged a meetup. Kevin and the others made time, showing up despite their crazy schedules. Jimena followed nervously, trying to stay quiet.

Esteban was the first to joke. "You two are official already? No wonder you didn't pass her off to me. You wanted her for yourself." He winked at Jimena. "What's your name?"

"Jimena," she said, realizing that all the rumors about Cody and Esteban were just that—rumors. Cody's heart still belonged to Miranda.

Bonian smirked. "Nice to finally meet her. When's the wedding? If you have a daughter, maybe she can marry my son. Or Esteban can get moving and find himself a wife. Kevin's got a daughter too, right?"

Kevin's face stayed serious as always. "No arranged marriages for my kid. Let's talk business."

He wasn't here to joke around. Cody had clearly brought Jimena here for a reason. "Your family ran the MacLean Group, right? The one that recently collapsed?" Kevin asked.

Jimena nodded, and Cody confirmed it. "Yeah. She wants to rebuild it. I don't know much about business, but you do. Can you help?"

Kevin waved it off casually. "Easy. Jimena, swing by my office tomorrow." He looked at Cody. "Since you brought your girlfriend, might as well call the rest of the crew next time."

Chapter 983

Bonian was in, but Jayde and Ophelia were swamped with work, and Norah didn't want to show up to a mostly all-guys night, especially when only Cody had brought a date. Jimena felt out of place around them, but she stuck it out—for her family's company, she had to.

While freshening up in the restroom, she ran into Miranda. Still recovering from an appendectomy, Miranda should've been resting, not out and about. Their eyes met, and Miranda gave her a cold once-over.

"Did Cody make some kind of deal with you?" Miranda asked sharply.

Jimena tensed. "Whatever's going on between Cody and me is none of your business."

Miranda's lip curled. "Big words from someone who wouldn't be here without him. He brought you here to get under my skin, didn't he?"

Jimena hadn't expected a face-off. "What I do has nothing to do with you. If you think we're a threat, go win him back yourself." She stepped around her, keeping calm.

But Miranda didn't budge. When Jimena came out of the stall, she was still there.

"Tell Cody to cut the cheap drama," Miranda said. "I'm not falling for it, and I'm not taking him back."

Then she walked out, leaving Jimena stunned. That ego...

Later, when most of the group had left, Jimena told Cody what happened.

"Miranda said this thing between us is just a deal. She told me to tell you to stop trying to provoke her—she's not coming back."

Cody, tipsy from the drinks, sobered up in a flash. "What?"

He couldn't believe Miranda was out after surgery. Furious, he got up and stormed out without a word.

Jimena watched him go, her chest heavy. She knew just how much Miranda meant to him.

Cody found Miranda in a private room, mid-meeting with some business partners, sipping warm water instead of wine. They admired her dedication—showing up to a meeting right after surgery. But Cody didn't care. He snatched her glass and threw it aside.

"Are you trying to kill yourself?" he shouted. "You just had surgery, Miranda!"

She stared at him, shocked. "Cody, are you crazy? I'm in the middle of a deal—"

"What deal?" he snapped. "Leave. Now."

Her partners quickly sensed the tension. "Sorry, Ms. Gaudet. Let's reschedule," one of them said and slipped out.

"No! Don't reschedule!" Cody barked, his voice shaking with anger.

He'd dropped everything to rush her to the hospital. Sat by her bedside. And now she was back to business like nothing happened. If she didn't care about herself, why should he?

Alone now, Miranda scoffed. "All this just because I spoke to your new girlfriend? You ruined a major deal over that?"

"It's not about Jimena," Cody snapped. "You're a patient, Miranda. You're supposed to be recovering. Do you even care if you die?"

"I know my limits," she bit back. "This deal matters. You had no right to come barging in."

Cody's expression darkened. "All you care about is your work and Ronan. This is the last time I show up for you. Don't call me again. If I ever come running next time, I'll be no better than a dog."

He let go of her arm.

Miranda's voice turned cold. "I hope you mean that, Cody."

Without another word, he walked out.

Back in the private room, he drank bottle after bottle, trying to drown out the frustration burning in his chest.

Chapter 984

Jimena didn't see it coming. Cody suddenly grabbed her and pulled her into him. She stumbled, landing against his chest, frozen as his arm tightened around her waist.

"Miranda," he mumbled, clearly drunk, "I've been nothing but honest with you. I proposed, chased you around like a fool, and all you do is stomp on my heart."

His face was close—too close. His warm breath brushed her cheek. As his lips moved closer, Jimena panicked. She quickly covered his mouth with her hand.

"I'm not hurting you," she said, thinking on her feet. "I'm just busy. Work's my focus. Love... it's a luxury I can't afford."

She was pretending to be Miranda—her best shot at getting closer to Cody. But it felt wrong. He'd helped her so much already. Using him like this? That'd be low, even for her.

"Yeah?" Cody whispered, bitter and slurring.

Jimena nodded. "Why else would I call you first when I need help?"

"Will you marry me, then?" he asked, his eyes dazed.

"Sure," she said softly, just trying to calm him down.

His arms tightened again, squeezing the air out of her. "Cody, I can't breathe," she gasped.

"Sorry..." he mumbled, letting go. He wobbled, then crashed onto the couch, completely passed out.

Jimena tried to move him but gave up. Afraid he might throw up or choke in his sleep, she stayed by his side, watching him through the night. He never stirred.

The next morning, Cody slowly opened his eyes. He found Jimena still there, asleep on the armrest, hands awkwardly folded. She hadn't left. Hadn't taken advantage. That surprised him.

"Hey," he said softly. "Wake up. Let's grab breakfast, then get you something to wear. You've got that meeting at Edwards', right?"

Her red, sleep-deprived eyes fluttered open. "I can go alone. You don't have to—"

"You're my girlfriend, remember?" Cody cut in with a half-smile. "You show up looking like a wreck, it makes me look bad too."

She blushed, looking down. "You were out cold. I couldn't just leave. I asked the staff to check on you, but... I had to stay."

Cody grinned. "Afraid I'd choke on my own puke? You didn't have to babysit me."

"I had to," she said firmly. "If anything happened, it'd be my fault. And hey, I'm your 'girlfriend,' right? What would people think if I ditched you?"

"Fair enough," Cody said. "Let's eat. You're buying."

Jimena smiled and led him to a nearby breakfast spot. "The beef noodles here are amazing," she said. "You should try them."

"You've been here before?" Cody asked. The place wasn't near her usual neighborhood.

"I used to come with friends," she replied quietly, a flicker of sadness in her voice.

Cody didn't push. But just then, a man stormed over, looking furious.

"Jimena! This why you dumped me?" he barked.

Her face drained of color. Cody looked at her sharply. She motioned toward the man. "Let's talk outside, Pablo. Don't cause trouble for the owner."

"You're not worried about the owner—you're worried about *him*!" Pablo snapped, glaring at Cody. "I wasn't enough for you, huh? You just threw me away like trash?"

Jimena's voice trembled, but she stood her ground. "It wasn't about you. Relationships have to go both ways. I didn't want to be with you anymore, so I ended it. That's all."

Pablo grabbed her shoulders, shaking her. "I love you! I've been busting my ass to marry you, and you do *this* to me? What is this—a business deal?"

Then Jimena noticed his phone lighting up—*Baby* flashing on the screen.

Her heart sank. “This is your idea of love, Pablo?” she asked, her voice cracking.

He hesitated, then doubled down. “You broke up with me first! I only got with her to make you jealous, Jimena. You’re still the one I love most.”

Chapter 985

Jimena’s heart twisted as she stared at Pablo—the man she once loved. His betrayal stung, and his smug attitude made it worse.

“You think I’m that easy to fool?” she snapped, voice tight with hurt.

Pablo’s expression flickered with guilt before hardening. “You wouldn’t even let me touch you. What was I supposed to do—stay faithful forever?”

His eyes roamed over her, sneering. “And now look at you. Right after dumping me, you run off with some new guy. Was I never good enough?”

Each word hit like a punch. Pablo’s jealousy burned hot, his grip on reason gone as he glared at Cody standing beside her. In his mind, she’d traded up—and it drove him crazy.

Jimena froze, stunned by the ugliness coming from someone she once trusted. Now she saw the real Pablo. The heartbreak hit harder than expected.

“Watch your mouth,” Cody said, stepping between them, his voice low and cold.

That simple act—protecting her—soothed something raw inside her. She stared at his back, a little dazed.

“You cheated on her, and now you’re blaming her?” Cody’s tone was sharp. “You’ve got nerve.”

“This is between me and her, pretty boy,” Pablo snapped. “Stay out of it!”

He lunged to grab Jimena’s arm, but Cody caught his wrist mid-air, his grip firm despite his slender, clean-cut hands.

“Let go of me!” Pablo growled.

“Let her go first,” Cody said calmly. “Then swear you’ll leave her alone.”

Pablo resisted, but Cody tightened his hold. Pablo’s wrist started to throb. “Fine, I swear! I won’t bother her again! Just let go!”

Cody shoved him back. “Get lost.”

Pablo staggered away, shooting Jimena a bitter look before disappearing. The resentment in his eyes made her stomach drop.

“Thanks,” she said quietly, turning to Cody. A bitter laugh slipped out. “I must look like a total disaster. My family’s broke, and now I find out my ex is a lying jerk.”

Her voice cracked. With everything crashing down—her dad’s health, the debt, now Pablo—she felt like she was barely holding it together.

“It’s not your fault,” Cody said, voice steady. “He messed up, not you. If he comes back, let me know. I’ll deal with it.”

Her heart swelled. At her lowest, his support meant everything. But she reminded herself—this wasn’t love. He was just a decent guy helping out. Miranda was still the one he cared about.

“I’ll keep that in mind,” she said, managing a smile.

Later, Cody texted her the details for a dinner meeting with Kevin. Her excitement spiked. “This could save the MacLean family,” she whispered, voice trembling with hope.

But nerves quickly followed. What should she wear? Was she even ready for this?

Her rummaging through old clothes drew Aunt Tao—one of the few people who hadn’t abandoned the family.

“Jimena, why are you digging through all this?” she asked, her voice full of concern.

Jimena’s heart warmed. Aunt Tao had stuck around when everyone else left. “I might have a shot to turn things around,” she said. “I’m meeting with a big investor. If it works out, we can pay off Dad’s bills and clear the debt.”

Aunt Tao lit up, but worry lingered. “That’s great, but... will it really work? The company’s gone. People might not trust us anymore.”

Jimena hesitated, then smiled with forced confidence. “I have to try.”

Aunt Tao helped her choose something appropriate. When the day came, Jimena took a cab from the hospital to the hotel. Seeing Cody waiting outside calmed her frayed nerves.

“Dr. Cody, you’re here,” she said formally.

“Of course,” he replied, holding out his hand. “I set this up, didn’t I?”

She paused, remembering their fake relationship, then took his hand. Inside, Kevin was already seated. He gave them a quick glance and a half-smile before it disappeared.

“Sit down. Eat,” he said, voice firm but casual.

Chapter 986

Jimena's nerves were shot, but she knew panicking wouldn't help. She took a few calming breaths, sat beside Cody, and tried to steady herself.

The food was simple, but Kevin barely touched his plate before diving in. "I hear the MacLean family wants in on Edwards' new project—supplying building materials."

He didn't mean it literally. The project needed reliable suppliers, and Jimena was pitching her family for the job.

Kevin had high standards. He didn't need to work with a bankrupt company—but he respected Cody, so he was listening.

Jimena put down her chopsticks, heart pounding. "Yes. We've been in the business for nearly ten years."

"You're bankrupt," Kevin said flatly, hands clasped on the table. "You're buried in debt. What makes you think you can pull this off?"

He wasn't here for charity. If she couldn't convince him, it was over.

She'd come prepared. She handed him a folder. "Please take a look. It's a breakdown of our remaining factory operations."

Kevin flipped through the pages. The report was organized, clean, and to the point. He already knew Jimena's background—a spoiled heiress with a degree unrelated to business. But this wasn't the work of an amateur.

"Not bad," he said. "Still not enough. Convince me."

Jimena's palms were sweaty. Cody gave her a small, encouraging nod.

She met Kevin's gaze. "We're affordable, reliable, and practical. You won't find a supplier more motivated than us. We've got nothing to lose, so we'll go all in."

Kevin sat back, surprised by her blunt honesty. It made sense—MacLean materials were decent, their prices low, and with Edwards backing them, they'd have stability. It was a solid pitch.

A rare smile crept onto Kevin's face. "Alright. Let's sign. My assistant has the paperwork."

The contract was passed over. Jimena signed, hands shaking with relief. Dinner had never tasted so good.

Before they left, Kevin pulled Cody aside.

Jimena didn't ask what it was about, but she couldn't help wondering. When Cody returned, his face was unreadable.

"Let's go. I'll take you home," he said.

She started to argue, but he insisted.

It was late when they arrived. The house was modest—most of the family's wealth was gone. But thanks to Cody, she'd managed to hang on.

Aunt Tao greeted them at the door, fussing immediately. "Jimena! It's freezing! Why didn't you dress warmer?" She draped a coat over her shoulders.

"Sorry, Auntie. I'll be more careful."

Then she noticed Cody, squinting. "Oh! It's you! Stay the night—it's too late to drive back. You two are practically engaged, no need to be shy!"

Jimena's face turned bright red. Cody's ears also flushed.

"Auntie, it's not like that," Jimena said, tugging her away.

"What's the big deal?" Aunt Tao laughed. "I won't put you in the same room."

To her surprise, Cody agreed. "Alright. Thanks, Auntie."

Aunt Tao grinned and went to get the guest room ready. Jimena was mortified but didn't argue.

"Need something to wear?" she asked him later. "I can get some of my brother's old clothes."

"Sure," Cody said. "As long as they're clean."

But as he showered, the water suddenly cut out. Jimena heard the pipes groan and rushed over to check.

Without thinking, she flung the door open.

There stood Cody, wrapped only in a towel, water still dripping from his hair.

They stared at each other. Frozen.

Her face went crimson. "I'm so sorry!" she yelped, slamming the door shut.

Chapter 987

Cody stepped out of the bathroom looking completely calm, like nothing had happened. Jimena's embarrassment eased a little, but the image of his toned chest and long legs kept flashing in her mind. She quickly pushed the thoughts away.

"You okay?" she asked. "The water cuts out sometimes. It didn't used to, but with everything going on, we haven't had the money to fix it."

Cody shrugged. "I'm fine. I was already done."

Relieved, she switched gears. "Will Mr. Jace send someone to check out the factory?"

"Probably tomorrow or the day after," Cody said. "Kevin doesn't waste time. Once he's in, he moves fast."

Jimena hesitated. "You know him pretty well. Can you tell me more about him? I want to be ready for the next steps."

She quickly added, "Only if that's okay."

She wasn't fishing for gossip—she just wanted to be prepared.

Cody nodded. "I've got time. Let's find a quiet spot."

She led him to her father's old study, untouched since he'd been hospitalized. Seeing his teacup and the calligraphy on the walls hit her hard, and tears welled up.

Cody handed her a glass of water. "Here, drink this."

"Thanks," she whispered. His small kindness grounded her. Cody explained what he knew about Kevin—his work habits, Edwards' current projects, and the key things Jimena should keep in mind for the partnership. She listened carefully, soaking it all in.

The next day, after Cody left, her phone rang. It was Kevin's assistant. "Miss MacLean, can we meet? Mr. Jace asked me to inspect the factory."

"Absolutely," she replied, quickly setting a time. The assistant picked her up and they headed to the MacLean factory.

From the outside, the place looked worn down, but inside, the machines were modern and well-kept. It was quiet, dusty, and felt almost abandoned without workers.

The assistant looked around carefully. "This meets Edwards' standards," he said. "I'll report back to Mr. Jace. He also wants to know—do you need financial help or extra workers?"

Jimena knew Kevin understood her family's tough situation. Her pride took a hit, but she stayed strong. "Funds are covered, and I've already lined up workers," she said with confidence.

The assistant looked at her with more respect. He'd expected her to fold under pressure, but she held her own. "Got it. If everything checks out, you'll see the funds today. Use them however you need, Miss MacLean."

By that afternoon, a million dollars hit her account—enough to pay the workers what they were owed. Her first move was finding Sawyer Larouche, the factory's old manager and her father's friend. He'd lost his job when the company collapsed and was struggling to support his two kids.

At the Larouche home, his wife Kallie was in the middle of a heated argument, waving their passbook. "We're broke! You should've demanded that ten grand from the MacLean family. Our son needs two thousand for expenses, and our daughter's tuition is due. How are we supposed to pay?"

Sawyer's face was tense. "I can't do that. Chairman MacLean helped with my medical bills when I had nothing. He's sick now, and his family's in ruins. I can't kick them while they're down. I'm not that kind of man."

As they argued, the doorbell rang. Jimena stood outside.

"Auntie, may I come in?" she asked.

Chapter 988

Kallie stepped aside, giving Jimena a curt nod. "Come in."

Sawyer, on the other hand, lit up. "Jimena, what brings you here?" He quickly poured her tea and set out a bowl of cherries.

Kallie frowned. "Those cherries are for the kids. They're expensive this year."

"Guests are guests," Sawyer said with a firm glance. "It's almost dinner—go make something."

He had no idea why Jimena was there. Maybe to ask for understanding about unpaid wages, or maybe to explain her family's situation. Either way, he'd treat her kindly. Chairman MacLean once paid for his hospital bills. Sawyer wasn't the kind of man to forget that.

"Stay and eat with us tonight," he offered. "It's nothing fancy, but you're welcome."

"Uncle Larouche, don't say that," Jimena replied, touched by his kindness. With her family in ruins, she had no right to be picky. His generosity, despite his own struggles, meant a lot.

"Hold tight," Sawyer said, pulling Kallie into the kitchen and shutting the door behind them.

Kallie didn't hold back. "You used to be a big shot factory manager. Now you let them slide on their debt and I'm supposed to cook for them? You're hopeless."

She gave him a mocking thumbs-up.

Sawyer sighed. “Kallie, I know it’s been hard. I’ve got more interviews tomorrow. I used to be a manager—something will turn up. Once I land a job, things will turn around. Our son graduates in two years, he’ll help out.”

Kallie’s tone softened, but she still snapped, “You’ve got all this sympathy for someone else’s daughter, but not for your own kids? Move. I’ll cook.”

She shoved past him, resigned to his soft heart.

“Thanks, Kallie,” Sawyer said, his voice tight. Not being able to provide weighed on him.

When they returned to the table, Sawyer gave Jimena a warm smile. “Sorry to keep you waiting. You’re here about the wages, right?”

Jimena nodded and reached into her bag, but before she could pull out the cash, he stopped her. “I know your family’s situation. Pay when you can. Your dad helped me when I was down—I won’t forget that.”

“Uncle Larouche, you’ve got it wrong,” Jimena said, placing a stack of bills on the table. “Fifteen grand—thirteen for your back wages, two as interest. It’s overdue.”

Sawyer stared at the money, stunned. “Where did this come from?”

“I landed a deal,” she explained. “The partner invested. My first priority was paying everyone back. You’ve waited long enough.”

Sawyer was speechless. Then she added, “Have you found any work yet? If not, I’d like you to come back as factory manager. We’ve got orders, but I need help.”

His mouth fell open. “The factory’s up and running again? Just like that?”

He’d hoped the MacLean family would recover, but he never imagined Jimena, the once-sheltered daughter, would be the one to make it happen.

“Yes,” she said. “I’d prefer our old team. They know how everything works. If they won’t return, I’ll hire new staff.”

“I’m in,” Sawyer said, slapping his thigh. “Your dad always treated me right, and you’re paying up fast. I’ll be there tomorrow.”

He pushed two grand back toward her. “I’ll take the thirteen. Not the extra. That’s too much.”

Jimena smiled. His honesty only confirmed her trust in him. “Keep it,” she said. “I need you to reach out to the old workers, settle what we owe them, and see who’ll come back. And I want you running production once we restart. Consider it a bonus.”

Sawyer pocketed the money with a grin. “Ms. MacLean, you’ve got yourself a deal.”

Kallie walked out with two plates of stir-fried greens and braised pork ribs. “Dinner’s ready,” she said. “Ms. MacLean, it’s nothing fancy, but it’s hearty.”

“Home-cooked is the best,” Jimena said, sitting down. The ribs were tangy and sweet—just right.

Over dinner, Sawyer filled Kallie in. “I’m starting back at the factory tomorrow. Wages are paid. I’ve got the money right here. Deposit it later.”

“Paid?” Kallie blinked, caught off guard. She’d been expecting a sob story, not this.

“Eat,” Sawyer said. “I need to go over the project and staffing plans with Ms. MacLean.”

Chapter 989

Jimena laid out the Edwards project details for Sawyer. As the former factory manager, he knew the place inside and out.

“Ms. MacLean, if we get at least half the old crew back, we can meet the deadlines and keep up the quality,” he said. “If more want to return, should I bring them in?”

“Absolutely,” Jimena said. “You all stuck with us through the worst—I’d be happy to have you back. We’ve got more projects coming. I’ll take everyone willing to return.”

The Edwards deal—thanks to Cody—was a lifeline, but Jimena knew she couldn’t rely on it forever. The factory needed steady, long-term work.

“You’ve got my loyalty, Ms. MacLean,” Sawyer said, tapping his chest. Her drive reminded him of her father, and it gave him hope for the future of the plant.

After dinner, Jimena went to her father’s old office and started digging through the client records. She spent the rest of the day calling old business contacts, hoping her father’s reputation for good work would help reopen doors. If they didn’t bite, she’d find new ones.

Sawyer stayed busy too, calling and visiting former workers. Some responded with skepticism.

“You serious, Sawyer?” one guy scoffed. “That girl’s bluffing. Take your money and bounce. Why get involved again?”

Sawyer clenched his jaw. “Don’t talk about Ms. MacLean like that. She’s got a real deal going. Daily pay. Work starts soon. You know jobs like this aren’t easy to find.”

Still, many didn’t trust Jimena. They took their back pay and disappeared. Less than half were willing to come back.

Sawyer stared at his phone, frustrated. “Ungrateful bunch.”

“If they’re not into it, let them go,” Kallie said. “We need people who care. Forcing them won’t help.”

“It’s not about them,” Sawyer sighed. “I’m worried about Ms. MacLean. This project’s starting soon, and we’re still short-staffed. I don’t want to overwork the crew.”

Kallie thought for a second. “There are folks around here who’ve been out of work for months—odd jobs, nothing steady. They’re reliable. Want me to make a list?”

Sawyer grabbed a pen immediately and started writing names. Every bit of help counted now.

The next morning, Jimena arrived at the factory and was surprised to see it spotless. Sawyer and a few workers were wiping down the machines and tidying up.

“Uncle Larouche, what’s going on?” she asked.

“These folks signed on today,” Sawyer said, setting down his broom. “Figured we’d start the day by cleaning up.”

The group greeted her warmly with a respectful “Ms. MacLean.” They didn’t care that she was young or a woman. What mattered was that she got the factory running and paid them fair.

“Let’s get you all onboarded first,” Jimena said. “Pay starts today. Same base rate as before, plus commissions—more work, more pay.”

With Sawyer helping, they got everyone registered in under an hour. Then Jimena called Kevin’s assistant.

“Already?” he asked, surprised. “That’s fast.”

The funds had just cleared, yet she already had workers on-site and ready to go.

“We’re good to go,” Jimena said. “Come by and see for yourself.”

The assistant showed up soon after. He was impressed by the organized setup, clean machines, and eager team. Seeing Edwards’ representative boosted morale among the workers, and the assistant’s faith in Jimena grew even stronger.

Once the tour ended, Jimena returned to her office. She sank into the chair, finally letting herself breathe—until her phone rang.

Chapter 990

It was Mr. Kwan—an old client she’d called the day before. He’d told her then that he had nothing for her. His call now caught her off guard.

“Mr. Kwan! It’s good to hear from you,” she said, answering.

“Jimena, I’ve got a project for you,” he replied. “You reached out yesterday, so I want to help.”

Her stomach twisted. She hadn’t begged, just asked if he had anything. But in business, clients held the power. She kept her voice calm. “Thank you, Mr. Kwan.”

“Free for dinner?” he asked. “I want to introduce you to someone. Maybe we can strike a deal tonight. If not, I’ll find something else for you.”

She could hear his fingers tapping—a nervous habit that hinted at something off. Still, she agreed. “Text me the address. I’m on my way.”

At the restaurant, she stepped into the private dining room. Mr. Kwan was there with a stranger.

“Jimena, this is Mr. Jensen,” Mr. Kwan said. “Call him that.”

“No need to be formal,” Mr. Jensen added, eyes lingering a little too long. “Mr. Jensen’s fine.”

“Mr. Jensen, let me give you a toast and then walk you through what our factory can do,” Jimena said, trying to steer things toward business.

But neither of them cared about the factory. Mr. Kwan kept pushing drinks on her, and Mr. Jensen kept brushing her hand every time they clinked glasses. She dodged the touches, but the discomfort grew.

Mr. Jensen gave Mr. Kwan a look, clearly approving. Then Mr. Kwan stood up. “I’ve got to take a call. You two chat. Call me if you need anything.”

He left, closing the door behind him.

Jimena tried again. “Mr. Jensen, about the factory—”

He waved her off. “You’re young. Why waste your life in some dusty old plant? It’s a dead end.”

“I’m doing what I can,” she said, forcing a polite smile. “If it doesn’t work out, I’ll figure out another way.”

“Girls your age should be chasing money and luxury, not messing around in some factory,” he said, moving closer. “Your dad dropped a mess on your lap. Not fair, right?”

Her gut twisted in warning. She stood up. “Mr. Jensen, I’m here to talk business. If you’re not interested, I’ll leave.”

He grabbed her arm. “Follow me, and I’ll give you fifty grand a month. You don’t need to break your back running a factory.”

Jimena's temper exploded. She kicked him hard, yanking herself free. "Keep your dirty money!"

"You little—" he lunged, stronger than he looked. He pinned her legs, trying to overpower her.

She grabbed a wine glass and smashed it against his head. Blood trickled down as he staggered, and she twisted free, landing a heel squarely on his nose.

He howled in pain, hands clutching his bleeding face. Jimena bolted, sprinting out of the restaurant and into the cold night.

Under a streetlamp, she stopped to catch her breath. Her arms and legs were bruised from the struggle, and her heart pounded.

Fearing she might've been drugged, she rushed to the hospital to get checked out and treat her injuries.

At the ER, Cody spotted her.

His eyes darkened when he saw her torn collar, messy hair, and red marks on her wrist. "Jimena, what happened?"

His voice was tight. "Who did this to you? Tell me—I'll handle it."

"It's over," she said quietly, shaking her head. "I'm okay."

She didn't want to pull him into her chaos. But the concern in his voice hit her hard, warming her even in her pain.