

Mr. Edwards' Unraveled Life

Chapter 1031

Jimena pushed the questions aside. Even if she wanted to track Cody down, she had no idea where he was. And honestly, she didn't have the right to demand answers.

So, instead, she went to the hospital.

"This why you're here?" Noor asked, popping a piece of apple into her mouth with a toothpick. "You're such a chicken."

Jimena paused mid-peel. "Should I call Esteban back then?"

"Okay, fine, I'm the chicken," Noor muttered, dodging the topic.

Normally, Jimena would've roasted her for that, but not today. They were both caught in the same messy boat.

"So, you're just gonna pretend you don't suspect anything?" Noor pressed.

Jimena stayed quiet. It wasn't about playing dumb—she genuinely didn't know what else to do. Confront him?

"You have to ask him!" Noor insisted, eyes wide. "Cody doesn't seem like the cheating type. There's probably some misunderstanding."

Jimena hesitated, and Noor pushed harder. "Didn't you say he stood up for you against Gaudet's company? He chose *you* over Miranda. So what are you so scared of?"

Something clicked. Jimena dropped the apple, grabbed her bag, and bolted.

"Wait—my apple's not peeled!" Noor yelled after her.

Jimena raced out of the hospital and dialed Cody. Dusk had settled over the city, neon lights flickering, cars humming around her. After a few rings, he picked up.

"Hey," he said calmly.

"Where are you?" she asked, straight to the point.

There was a pause. Her palms started to sweat. This was a test.

He gave an address, and relief surged through her. She'd bet right.

Fifteen minutes later, she found him by the roadside. His coat made his lean frame look taller, his shadow long under the streetlight. He looked up as she approached.

Without thinking, she threw herself into his arms.

"What's wrong?" he asked, a smile in his voice as he ruffled her hair. "Miss me?"

She'd been fine on the way there, but now, wrapped in his arms, her emotions came undone. She felt raw, exposed. She wanted to scream her doubts, ask about Miranda, demand clarity.

Then a voice cut in.

"Ahem, get a room."

A guy stood nearby, looking uncomfortable. He shoved a bag at Cody. "Here. It's supposed to help with dysmenorrhea, but it's still experimental. Don't blame me if it doesn't work—you asked for it."

Cody took the bag, and the guy muttered, "Ugh, couples," before walking off.

Cody slipped his arm around her. "Got what I needed. Let's go. You eaten? I'll take you somewhere."

She blinked. "Who was that?"

"A friend. I asked him for some meds. You get bad cramps, right? His professor's working on a new drug for it. It's not FDA-approved yet, but I figured it's worth trying."

Jimena stared at him, speechless.

"So... you were out this late *for that?*" she asked slowly.

He grinned, seeing right through her. "What'd you think I was doing?"

Her face flamed. She'd been ready to catch him cheating—and this is what he'd been doing.

"Sorry I worried you," Cody said softly, lacing his fingers through hers. "I haven't given you enough security. Want to make this official? Give me a title?"

Jimena froze, heart thudding. The emotional rollercoaster had her reeling.

He chuckled. "Just make me your boyfriend."

Her cheeks flushed, but it was exactly what she'd been hoping for. She nodded, his warm gaze melting her hesitation.

Back home, they didn't bring up her earlier suspicions. Jimena was too embarrassed, and Cody—sensitive as ever—let it go.

Still, something in her lingered. She didn't know the full story about him and Miranda.

Cody, catching her silence, turned her face gently toward his. "Focus on me."

Jimena melted under his touch. His hands guided her, coaxing her into surrender, until she was breathless, overwhelmed by sensation.

Later, tangled together, Cody held her from behind. "Miranda and I... crossed paths a while back. I liked her, but she didn't feel the same. She was into someone else—guy got married, had a kid. Later, she circled back, but it never turned into anything serious."

He paused. "Recently, I moved on."

Jimena's heart ached. She turned and hugged him tightly, hands trembling. "Stop. Don't say more."

He chuckled softly. "Wasn't that what you wanted to know? Now you're telling me to shut up?"

He'd read her again. She regretted prying. It only stirred up his old pain.

But now, the air was clear.

"Just know I'm done with her," Cody said, pinning her gently beneath him and kissing her softly. "You're the only one I want."

The next morning, Jimena dragged herself into work. An employee greeted her, then blinked. "Ms. MacLean, what's that on your neck?"

Chapter 1032

Jimena froze.

She knew exactly what the employee meant—and wished the floor would swallow her whole.

If only she hadn't let Cody get so carried away last night.

Luckily, the employee was young and clueless, too innocent to recognize what the mark really was. Jimena ducked into the bathroom and spent forever layering on makeup before she dared face the world again.

"Ms. MacLean, the weekly meeting's in thirty minutes," her assistant said, handing over a stack of documents.

Jimena took them, flipping quickly. "Who'd you assign the Gaudet project to?"

Her assistant named a manager she trusted—competent, dependable. Jimena nodded.

The rest of the morning was a blur. She barely had time to breathe before heading to the conference room, where several shareholders were already seated, stone-faced.

Her assistant stood behind her, ready to take notes.

Then Mr. Liu, one of the older shareholders, leaned forward and started in. “Ms. MacLean, arriving late and making us wait? That’s bold—for someone who hasn’t earned half the respect the old chairman commanded.”

The dig was obvious. He was comparing her to her father.

Jimena met his eyes coolly. “Mr. Liu, if you’ve got something to say, say it straight. No need to dance around it. Everyone here worked with my father. You’re all experienced—I’m sure you can handle direct talk.”

Mr. Liu flinched slightly at her tone.

He adjusted his tie. “Fine. I’ll be blunt. You only took over because your father was hospitalized. Now he’s better. It’s time he resumed his position.”

Jimena smirked. “The way you say it, you’d think I stole the company from him. There’s no ‘mine’ or ‘his’ between a father and daughter, is there?”

“That’s not how business works,” he snapped. “Even families settle accounts.”

She scanned the room. Several others were nodding along.

So he wasn’t alone.

She remembered clearly—when the company hit rock bottom, these same shareholders bailed, dumped their shares, and disappeared. But now that things were stable, they wanted back in. They’d used their old ties with her father to get reinstated, thrown in a little capital, and tried to make themselves relevant again.

She’d let them back out of respect for her father and, frankly, because the company needed funding.

But that didn’t mean they got to run her.

“Looks like you’ve gathered a team, Mr. Liu,” she said calmly.

He puffed up, mistaking her tone for submission.

But Jimena knew the truth—they didn’t really want her father back. They just wanted *her* out. She was too competent, too independent, and not deferential enough to these self-important old-timers.

Plus, in their eyes, she was “just the daughter.” Eventually she’d marry, right? Better to push her out now.

Jimena leaned back. “Tell me something—did you even ask my dad what he wants?”

Mr. Liu went still.

She gave a dry laugh. “You want me to step down, but you don’t have the guts to talk to him? You expect me to do it for you?”

The room went quiet.

Everyone knew her father might’ve been down once, but his presence still loomed large. If they tried to force his daughter out, he’d tear them apart.

“You want me to hand over control? Fine,” Jimena said. A flicker of hope lit their faces. “But *you* tell him. I’m not doing your dirty work.”

She stood and left the room, her assistant close behind.

“Those old fossils are insane,” her assistant fumed. “They barely own anything now and do zero actual work, but they think they run the place?”

Jimena was calm. “Some people only back off when you hit back harder.”

“So... what’s the plan?”

“Nothing for now,” Jimena said, a sly smile on her lips. “You haven’t forgotten who the old chairman is to me, have you?”

Her assistant—also her friend—grinned. “You’re ruthless, Ms. MacLean.”

Jimena didn’t want to bother her father. He was out of the hospital but still recovering. No reason to drag him into this drama.

But someone spilled the news anyway.

That evening, her father summoned her home.

“Dad,” Jimena said, stepping into his study.

He sat behind his desk, a document partially covered in front of him. “Jimena, it’s been a while. Sit.”

Guilt pricked her. She’d been too caught up with Cody and work. “Sorry, Dad. I’ll visit more.”

“No need,” he said gently. “You’re grown now. You’ve got your own life. I get it. But I’ve got something for you.”

He slid the document across the desk.

“What is it?” she asked.

“Open it.”

She did—and her jaw dropped. “Dad, why are you giving me this?”

He smiled. “It’s long overdue. It’s yours now. The remaining ten percent goes to your brother.”

Chapter 1033

Jimena never saw it coming.

She always knew her father would include her in his will—his love for her was never in doubt—but not like this. And definitely not now, while he was still healthy.

“Dad, don’t do this,” she said, worried the rumors had gotten to him. “I don’t care what people are saying.”

He sighed, locking eyes with her. “This isn’t about gossip. I should’ve done this a long time ago. I hate that you’ve been dragged through the mud because I didn’t act sooner.”

Her throat tightened.

She’d shrugged off the shareholders’ attacks, ignored the rumors. But hearing it from her father—that he saw it all—hit her hard. She’d poured everything into keeping the company afloat while he was sick and her brother was MIA. Paid off debts. Rebuilt MacLean Enterprises from ashes. And still, to some, it meant nothing—because she was a woman.

How could that not sting?

“I see everything you’ve done,” her father said, his hair graying, but his eyes as warm as ever. “Forget what they say. Do what you want. I’ve got your back.”

From then on, Jimena faced the boardroom circus with quiet, steely resolve.

At the next meeting, Mr. Liu and his loyal crew came at her again, demanding she step down.

She stayed calm. Silent. Just nodded at her assistant.

Mr. Liu raised a brow, puzzled by her confidence. “What game are you playing, Jimena?”

“Game?” she said with a sharp smile. “What could I possibly pull on you esteemed veterans?”

He didn't take it seriously. Why would he? She was young. Female. No threat.

He was wrong.

"My father gave me this yesterday," she said, sliding a document across the table. "You'll want to see it."

Mr. Liu's face changed as he read. The old chairman had signed a share transfer agreement.

"This—this is fake!" he snapped. "Your father's fine. Why would he sign something like this?"

Jimena let out a cold laugh. "Still clinging to your delusions, Mr. Liu?"

She held up her phone. "Here's a message from Chairman MacLean."

Her father's voice filled the room—firm and clear—as he formally dismissed Mr. Liu and his closest ally. Two snakes cut off at the head.

Mr. Liu exploded, vowing to confront the chairman himself, insisting there was no way he'd be treated like this.

Jimena's expression softened with just a flicker of pity. "He won't see you," she said. "And it doesn't matter if you disagree. This is his call."

She turned and walked out, leaving them stunned.

This time, she didn't carry the same weight on her shoulders.

Her assistant beamed. "Did you see their faces? That was epic, Ms. MacLean!"

Jimena gave a faint smile.

"They're not gonna go quietly," the assistant warned.

"I know," she said. "But I'm running this show now. I'll kill their projects one at a time. Once there's nothing left for them to squeeze, they'll be gone."

These people were only in it for the fast profits. Cut them off, and they'd scatter.

The company drama wasn't easy—but she could handle it. Still, it left her drained.

Cody noticed. "You've been burning the candle at both ends. You're starting to get dark circles."

Jimena touched her face in alarm. "Seriously?"

She reached for a mirror, but Cody pulled her back, laughing. “Not yet. But keep this up, and you will.”

“You jerk! You scared me,” she said, swatting at him.

Ever since they’d gone official, the walls between them had dropped. Jimena laughed more. Teased more. Cody seemed lighter too—more himself.

“Careful, don’t fall,” he said, catching her hand as she tried to tickle him.

She hadn’t even realized she’d climbed into his lap. Her face flushed.

She tried to get up, but his hand stayed firm on her lower back, his eyes teasing.

“What are you doing?” she whispered, flustered. “Let me up. What if someone walks in?”

“You climbed up here,” he said, smirking.

He wasn’t wrong. And now she regretted the playful ambush.

“You’re exhausted. Just stay put for a second,” Cody said, flipping open his laptop. “I’ve got a few things to finish. Hang tight.”

He got serious about his work, but that didn’t explain why she was still sitting on his lap like this. She wanted to disappear—but his hand held her there, secure in a way that made her feel... weak.

He glanced down and smiled. “Don’t move, alright?”

Blushing and annoyed, she stayed still.

They were locked in their little bubble when the office door creaked open.

A colleague walked in, holding a file. “Dr. Cody, I’ve got another—”

He froze. Jaw dropped.

Jimena, mortified, scrambled off Cody’s lap. He let her go.

Silence hung in the room like a fog.

Then the colleague snapped out of it, tossed the file on the desk, and bolted—slamming the door behind him.

Chapter 1034

Back home, Jimena was still fuming over what happened at the office. She pinched Cody's hand—hard.

He barely flinched, just pulled her into a hug. “Relax. He won't say a word.”

She ducked away from his kiss, still annoyed. It wasn't about Cody's reputation—she didn't care about that. What embarrassed her was being caught like *that*.

Cody nudged her hand away with his nose, gently breaking her half-hearted resistance. He could tell she wasn't really angry—more bark than bite. He nibbled her lips playfully. “Alright, I'm sorry. Don't stay mad, okay?”

Jimena didn't totally buy it. His apology felt more like a move than actual remorse. But when he leaned in again, determined to kiss her, she didn't push him away.

Eventually, she gave in, half-reluctant, as he pulled her close and pressed her to the bed. The spark between them flared again—electric and consuming.

How did he have this much energy? He worked insane hours, was on call all day—and still had this kind of stamina at night.

Afterward, with her tucked against his chest, Cody exhaled softly, his breath warm against her ear. “Don't you think it's time I met your family?”

Jimena blinked. That caught her off guard.

He'd been ready to meet her dad for a while now. His own parents? No problem—he was sure they'd love her. But Mr. MacLean? That was the real boss-level challenge. To Cody, that made it priority number one.

Their relationship had taken off fast, and meeting the parents felt like the next logical step. Still, Jimena paused, unsure.

Cody misread the silence. He kissed her neck, voice low and teasing. “What, you don't want to take responsibility for me?”

She blinked, flustered. “That's not it! I was just... thinking.”

“Then pick a day,” he said, grinning. “I’m free tomorrow.”

He was serious—and definitely not subtle. Jimena couldn’t help but smile. Tomorrow, actually, kind of worked. Her team had the major projects under control, giving her some breathing room. Her dad was “recovering” at home, which mostly meant bonding with his new pet turtle and catching up with old friends. She half-suspected that turtle might bite him one day.

Cody kept nudging for an answer, all clingy charm. Jimena, not in the mood for another round of his full-force persuasion, finally gave in. “Fine. Tomorrow.”

The next day, Cody took time off, and they drove to the MacLean family estate. No call ahead—just a surprise visit.

And it was definitely a surprise.

Mr. MacLean was in the backyard, completely absorbed in playtime with his red-backed tortoise—a low-maintenance pet he’d taken in lately. He was crouched near the grass when the sound of the car caught his attention.

“Sir, Miss MacLean’s here,” a staff member announced.

Mr. MacLean perked up instantly. He’d been hoping to spend time with his daughter again, worried the company drama had pushed them apart.

Then he saw Cody trailing behind her.

His expression dropped.

Standing nearby, his longtime aide Saoirse—who’d been with him for decades and practically watched Jimena grow up—whispered, “Sir... watch your face.”

Watch his face? His daughter shows up with some guy, and he’s supposed to smile?

He was furious. He’d raised her with care, planned to keep her close for a few more years. And now this random guy just shows up?

Still, he was no rookie. He’d built MacLean Enterprises from the ground up. Poker face? Second nature.

“Hmph. You’re back,” he said coolly. “Why’d you bring a guy?”

Jimena glanced awkwardly at Cody. “Dad, he’s not—”

“Let’s not get into it,” Mr. MacLean interrupted—maybe on purpose, maybe not. “You eaten? I’ll have the staff fix something.”

Of course she hadn’t eaten. It had been ages since she’d shared a simple meal with her dad. This was rare.

Cody had brought gifts—standard courtesy—but Mr. MacLean acted like they didn’t exist. Like *he* didn’t exist. His entire focus stayed locked on his daughter. “That mess at the company? It’s under control now? If anyone gives you trouble, you come to me. I’ll deal with them.”

“Dad, I’m not a kid anymore,” Jimena said, touched but a little annoyed. He still saw her as his little girl.

“You’ll always be my daughter,” he said flatly.

Cody, quietly sidelined, let out a slow breath. But he wasn’t shocked.

Saoirse, taking the gifts from Cody, chuckled softly. “You’ll get used to it. That’s just dad-mode.”

Cody nodded, making a mental note of her name. Saoirse at least seemed open-minded—probably because she’d known Jimena forever. Still, Cody knew it was on him to win over her dad.

At dinner, the tension stayed thick.

Mr. MacLean barely acknowledged Cody. “What’s with this guy you brought? Just standing there, no manners, like he belongs here.”

“Dad, he’s not from the company,” Jimena said, exasperated. “He’s—”

Mr. MacLean cut her off again.

Cody didn’t flinch. Unbothered by the frosty reception, he casually reached over and placed a piece of pork rib in Jimena’s bowl.

“You like these,” he said quietly.

Chapter 1035

Jimena had to hand it to Cody. He didn't flinch under her dad's glare, calmly serving her food like it was no big deal.

She pulled her bowl back, staying out of their showdown. She'd agreed to bring Cody here, but convincing her dad? That was his job. She wasn't stepping in—she couldn't. Her father was a softie with her, but once he made up his mind, even she couldn't sway him.

Dinner was tense.

Afterward, as expected, Mr. MacLean called Cody into his study.

Jimena hesitated. “You sure you can handle him? Don't push it.”

“I've got this,” Cody said, tapping her forehead when he caught her skeptical look. “What, you don't trust your future husband?”

Her face burned. After that office fiasco, she glanced around nervously. “Don't say that! Just go.”

Cody headed in, and Jimena waited outside, jittery. She was nervous he'd mess up and her dad would shut them down. She could tell Cody was serious about marriage, and she was ready to say yes once he met her parents. They weren't kids anymore—marriage made sense.

“Ms. MacLean, have some tea. Don't stress,” Special Assistant Saoirse said, appearing beside her.

She looked up, surprised. “Saoirse, it's you.”

They hadn't talked much lately. She was always rushing when she visited, prioritizing her dad. But she remembered Saoirse from her childhood—when her dad was busy and her brother was at school, Saoirse was the one she called for help. To kid-Jimena, he was a superhero.

She glanced at the closed study door.

Saoirse read her mind. “Your dad's not heartless. And that guy you brought? He's got his heart set on you.”

Jimena flushed, embarrassed by the blunt assessment. “Saoirse, come on.”

He just smiled, thinking how grown-up she'd become.

Fifteen minutes later, Cody emerged. “Sorry to keep you waiting. Let’s head out.”

Her dad didn’t come out. Jimena wanted to check on him, but Saoirse stopped her. “I’ve got him, Miss. You go.”

She nodded, figuring her dad might need a minute. On the drive, curiosity got the better of her. “What’d you say to him? Why didn’t he come out?”

She hesitated, suspecting her dad—despite his stern front—might’ve gotten teary. He was a crier, deep down.

“Don’t worry, I didn’t upset him,” Cody said, pausing. “Maybe he just couldn’t bear to see you go.”

She rolled her eyes but relaxed. If Cody said it was fine, it probably was.

With her dad’s approval secured, Cody took her to meet his parents. Unlike her father, they were warm and welcoming, thrilled with their future daughter-in-law. The visit went off without a hitch.

Before leaving, Cody’s mom slipped a red envelope into Jimena’s pocket, insisting she keep it secret from Cody. Later, Jimena found ten grand inside. The amount wasn’t much to her, but the gesture meant everything.

“I’m jealous,” Noor said, still in the hospital, listening to Jimena’s updates. “If all goes well, Cody’s gonna pop the question. Has he hinted when?”

Jimena froze. “No, but... soon, I think.”

She was waiting, but Cody was tight-lipped, showing no signs of planning anything. Days passed, and doubt crept in, though she trusted he wouldn’t let her down.

Noor opened her mouth to say more, but the ward door swung open.

Jimena jumped, glancing at Noor, whose chatty demeanor vanished, replaced by an icy glare. “What are you doing here? I told you we’re done. I paid you back.”

Esteban’s face darkened.

Normally, Noor’s attitude would’ve set him off, but he thought of how she’d taken a knife for him, pale and fragile in this very bed. He swallowed his anger and looked at Jimena. “Ms. MacLean, can you step out? I need to talk to her.”

Noor cut in. “I’ve got nothing to say.”

Esteban’s eyes narrowed, but he stayed silent.

Jimena sensed the tension, noting Noor's clenched fists. Hesitating, she said, "I'll be outside." To Esteban, she added, "I'm right by the door. Come out when you're done."

He nodded, and she left.

In the ward, Noor glared at Esteban, taking a deep breath. "What do you want?"

"Ivan went abroad," he said, dropping a bombshell.

Noor's mind blanked. After a long pause, her voice shook. "When? Why?"

Esteban met her gaze. "Two days ago. I took him to the airport. It was his choice."

Chapter 1036

Noor was reeling, her fists clenched tight. The guy she'd been tangled up with, who she thought she'd never escape, was gone. Just like that.

"Nothing lasts forever," she thought.

Esteban softened, seeing her turmoil. He sat beside her, the bed dipping under his weight.

Before she could protest, he took her hand, his warmth steadying her. "I've been thinking. Let's make this work, okay? Leave the past behind."

Tears pricked Noor's eyes. Easier said than done.

"I need time," she said, pulling her hand free and gesturing for him to go.

Esteban left without pushing further.

Jimena checked on Noor later, but work kept her from visiting in person. On the phone, Noor sounded fine, insisting everything was calm to keep Jimena from worrying. Relieved, Jimena let it go.

Meanwhile, Cody suggested a vacation during her break. It was a spontaneous idea, sparked when Jimena overheard a coworker daydreaming about an island getaway but being too swamped to go. It hit her—since she and Cody got together, they'd been so busy they hadn't taken a proper trip. The thought left her wistful.

So, she gave the company a holiday and organized a group trip, a chance for her and Cody to unwind.

Cody pitched an island. "You've always wanted to go, right? Let's do it."

"When did I say that?" Jimena asked, confused.

He grinned, pulling her close, his chin resting on her shoulder, breath warm against her ear. “Last time at your dad’s, he showed me your old diary.”

Jimena froze. Her childhood diary? She cringed, imagining the silly things she’d written. How could her dad show Cody that?

“Am I just anyone?” Cody teased, nipping her neck when she didn’t answer.

She hadn’t realized she’d said that out loud. Cody was easygoing, but when he got mad, he was tougher to handle than most women. She’d learned that the hard way.

She tried to smooth things over, but it wasn’t easy. Cody had brought home a “massage” recliner from the hospital, meant for relaxation, but it quickly became their playground. Pinned to it, Jimena felt every inch of its “features” as he teased her waist, leaving her breathless.

Satisfied, he carried her to the shower, their closeness cementing their bond.

The next morning, they caught a flight for their island getaway. Jimena didn’t rent out the whole island—she was here to relax, not flex her wealth. She also covered a tour group for her employees, who were thrilled, swearing loyalty to the company for life.

The beach glowed gold under the sun, lively but not packed. Jimena was glad she hadn’t cleared it out; the buzz gave it that true vacation vibe.

They picked a quiet spot away from the group. Under a parasol, Jimena stretched out on a yoga mat. “Can you put sunscreen on me?”

Cody grabbed the bottle, spreading it evenly. When the cool cream hit her back, she shivered, arching slightly. His low chuckle followed.

“Relax, you’re so tense,” he said, pressing her back down.

His words sounded innocent, but they made her mind wander to less innocent places. Embarrassed by her own thoughts, she tried to shake it off.

Cody, maybe sensing it, leaned closer. “What’s on your mind?”

His hand grazed her lower back, and she nearly collapsed, caught by his quick reflexes. “Don’t touch my waist... it tickles.”

Her ticklishness was his secret weapon, just like she knew his weaknesses. Their intimacy had made them experts in each other’s bodies.

She glared when he kept teasing her waist. “You’re doing it on purpose.”

He stopped, grinning, and finished applying the sunscreen. By the time he was done, Jimena was wiped out, needing a moment to recover before hitting the beach.

She wore a conservative swimsuit—not frumpy, but tamer than the bikinis her employees rocked. Not because she didn't want to, but because Cody vetoed it. The night before, she'd pulled out a bikini, only for him to toss it aside and kiss her senseless, insisting she wear something less revealing. She'd compromised, barely, and he'd backed off when she saw her about to snap.

On the beach, Jimena got caught up in the fun, losing track of Cody. When she noticed he was gone, she scanned the crowd.

An employee nearby said, "That guy with you? He was just here. Maybe over there?" They pointed.

Jimena thanked them and headed that way, missing the employee's sly smile and gossipy glance.

Chapter 1037

Jimena didn't catch on until she reached the cluster of coconut trees decked out with balloons. Then she saw Cody—in a sharp suit, standing in the sand.

Her heart skipped.

She'd been wondering when he'd finally propose. He'd been so quiet about it lately, and even though she tried not to let it show, the waiting had made her anxious. But now, here he was. With this.

Only... she was still in a swimsuit. Great. Underdressed for the biggest moment of her life.

But Cody had thought of everything. He smiled gently and said, "Go change. I'll wait."

That look on his face—tender, calm—made her cheeks burn. She mumbled an "Okay" and let herself be guided away.

In the changing tent, she slapped her cheeks lightly. *What is wrong with me?* She'd seen Cody a million times, yet she was acting like a flustered teenager.

The makeup artist chuckled as she helped her into the white dress. "You two are adorable. My husband and I were like that back in college. After marriage... well, everything shifts to family. Enjoy these sweet moments."

Jimena didn't say much—she was too nervous, too overwhelmed.

Ten minutes later, she stepped out in a flowing white dress, fitted at the waist and fluttering with every breeze. Cody stood waiting, bouquet in hand, his eyes soft as he reached for her.

"You wait long?" she whispered.

“For you? I’d wait forever,” he said—and then dropped to one knee.

Her heart thudded in her chest.

He kissed the back of her hand. “Will you marry me?”

She’d rehearsed her answer a dozen times. But in that moment, her voice caught. “I do,” she finally said, falling into his arms as tears spilled down her cheeks.

The golden beach shimmered around them as the sun began to set.

When they finally pulled apart, Jimena froze.

There was a crowd behind them.

Employees, tourists, random strangers—she wasn’t sure. Everyone clapped and grinned, offering awkward excuses like, “Oh, we were just walking by!”

But she wasn’t buying it. She turned to Cody with narrowed eyes. “You set this up?”

He smirked, leaning in for a kiss. “Yup.”

So, that’s why he’d pushed for the island trip. He’d planned everything, right down to roping in her employees to keep it quiet.

Since the proposal, the biggest change—aside from the ring—was how transparent his affection had become. Jimena found a receipt on his phone later: the custom ring had been ordered two months ago.

Cody’s parents were thrilled, especially his mom, who began dropping not-so-subtle hints. One day, Jimena overheard her saying, “With how much time you spend at the hospital, it’s a miracle someone likes you. Lock her down before she realizes she can do better!”

Jimena had to stifle a laugh.

Cody came from an unexpected blend—his dad, calm and scholarly in retirement, and his mom, a powerhouse turned warm matriarch. Together, they somehow produced Cody: polished, driven... and sneakier than he looked.

Mr. MacLean, for his part, had softened after the talk with Cody. He still nitpicked, but there was no real opposition now.

By the end of the month, Jimena and Cody had their marriage license in hand. They chose two wedding dresses—a strapless gown and a Chinese-style dress—for a dual ceremony.

Cody’s mom even consulted an almanac to pick an auspicious date: mid-next month.

With her help, everything came together seamlessly.

Jimena called Noor and asked her to be a bridesmaid.

Noor, finally discharged from the hospital, was thrilled. “Of course! Save me a seat—and a dessert table. I’m eating big at your wedding.”

Jimena laughed. “Just don’t overdo it.”

She didn’t bring up Esteban, and Noor didn’t mention him either. Later, Jimena heard Ivan had officially gone abroad.

That complicated triangle had unraveled on its own.

Chapter 1038

Noor hadn’t taken Esteban back—not yet. But he wasn’t giving up either.

Knowing her friend’s soft heart, Jimena figured it was only a matter of time.

She decided not to interfere. Everyone had their own path to walk.

“By the way,” Cody mentioned one evening, “Noor had a follow-up at the hospital. Esteban brought her.”

Jimena raised an eyebrow. Quiet Noor, always full of surprises.

Time flew.

By mid-next month, Cody had booked out a winery and spent days transforming it into their dream venue. The sprawling estate felt like a luxury resort, complete with a private wine cellar for guests to enjoy.

The wedding stayed small and elegant, just the way Jimena wanted—no over-the-top display, just close family and friends.

During the ceremony, Cody proposed again—this time in front of everyone.

“I’ve got so much to say,” he began, “but words always fall short. I loved blindly once and missed my chance. I won’t make that mistake again. Thank you for giving me a lifetime.”

The crowd erupted in applause. Onstage, Jimena covered her mouth, tears streaming down her face.

Afterward, she noticed a sleek black Cayenne pull up outside the venue.

The window rolled down.

Esteban.

Noor climbed in beside him, the two sharing a rare, peaceful moment. It wasn't official—but it looked promising.

Cody came up behind her and draped his coat over her shoulders. "Stop staring. Everyone's gone. Let's head home."

She smiled and slipped her hand into his. Whatever was happening between Noor and Esteban—it was theirs to figure out.

Their wedding night was everything she'd dreamed of. At home, Cody helped her out of her gown and makeup, even giving her a gentle shoulder massage.

"You know how to do this?" she asked, surprised.

"I'm a hospital director," he said with a smug grin. "Massage is the least of my skills."

Whatever he did, it worked. Her body melted under his touch.

Too much, in fact. She shoved him away, laughing. "That's enough!"

He grabbed her hand and pulled her onto the bed. With a soft yelp, she tumbled into his arms as he kissed her deeply.

Later, as she lay catching her breath, he whispered, "My mom's already asking for grandkids."

Her flushed skin burned hotter. Then he called her *honey*, and she completely melted.

That night, Cody—usually composed and controlled—was anything but. He kissed her from the bedroom to the bathroom and back again, leaving her dizzy and breathless.

The next morning, she called in sick.

Two days later, she was back at work.

Her employees grinned knowingly. "Congratulations, Mrs. MacLean!"

Three days absent? Everyone could guess why. Jimena, now wiser, had checked herself for hickeys before leaving the house. No more PR mishaps, thank you very much.

A few days later, a wedding gift arrived at the office. No sender's name.

"Did the delivery guy say who it's from?" she asked the receptionist.

"Nope. Just dropped it off and left."

Inside the box: a vintage-looking brooch and a simple card in elegant handwriting. *Happy wedding.*

She had a hunch. Showed it to Cody.

His eyes flickered.

“I made a camellia brooch once. Lost it. This one looks similar... but it’s old. If you like it, I’ll make you a new one. Don’t wear this one.”

Two days later, he gave her a handmade osmanthus brooch—her favorite flower.

The mysterious one faded from memory.

Married life wasn’t wildly different, just deeper. They worked, ate, sometimes even showered together. Cody loved “helping” her bathe—which usually led to detours she hadn’t planned for.

One night, squinting at him, she asked, “Be honest. Are you a fox spirit draining my energy?”

Instead of laughing, he leaned in and kissed her collarbone, then her lips. “You caught me. No use resisting now.”

Another round started, and Jimena groaned—half-pleasure, half-regret.

Should’ve kept my mouth shut.

Chapter 1039

After the wedding, Jimena had dreamed of a honeymoon—somewhere quiet, beautiful, and far from work. But Cody’s hospital schedule was relentless.

She understood. She was used to it. Still, the disappointment stung more than she’d expected.

Her assistant noticed. “No honeymoon, Ms. MacLean? My friend just got married—he’s deep into travel guides. Says a marriage without a honeymoon is half-baked.”

Jimena blinked, realizing she’d zoned out while staring at a spreadsheet. Embarrassed, she cleared her throat. “We’ll get to it. Now, the project plan?”

But her focus had drifted again. She missed Cody. She hated how much she missed him.

At lunch, a message from him lit up her phone: *Dinner tonight?*

Her mood lifted instantly.

Nearby employees exchanged knowing glances. Jimena grabbed her keys and left before anyone could tease her.

That evening, Cody took her to a trendy new restaurant, all soft lighting and sleek design. After the meal, she hesitated. “You heading back to the hospital?”

He raised an eyebrow. “You want me to?”

She froze. She wanted him to stay. Wanted more time—more than dinner and leftovers of conversation between calls. But she couldn’t bring herself to ask.

He reached over, brushing her cheek. “Relax. I’m kidding. I booked a photo studio for us this afternoon. You free?”

Jimena blinked. “Wait, today?”

He grinned. “Yeah. Something fun. Unless you’re ditching me already?”

She remembered a meeting—nothing urgent—but hesitated too long.

Cody leaned in and kissed her softly. “Can’t skip one meeting for your husband?”

“Not here!” she hissed, swatting at him, glancing around.

He chuckled. “You were all over me last night, and now you’re shy?”

“I’ll go,” she blurted, covering his mouth. His smile made her dizzy. Marriage had unlocked a side of Cody she’d never fully seen—playful, teasing, infuriatingly charming.

The photo studio was private—no prying eyes. The photographer, a curly-haired woman, greeted them with a grin. “Mr. Cowan, this your wife? Are we doing wedding photos?”

Jimena hesitated. They’d already taken so many—on the island, at the ceremony. What was the point?

Then the photographer handed her an album of past shoots. The styles varied—romantic, traditional, dramatic—and Jimena’s eyes caught on a series with a *Republic of Craggaville* theme. Vintage, moody, cinematic.

“Can we do this one?”

“Of course,” the photographer said. “We’ll set it up.”

Cody had even insisted on new outfits from the studio. “Too many germs,” he said, a hint of his doctor self peeking through. Jimena rolled her eyes but didn’t protest.

After two hours of makeup and costume tweaks, she emerged in a sleek cheongsam, hair styled like she'd stepped out of a 1930s painting.

The photographer's eyes lit up. "Perfect. That's the look."

But it was Cody's stare that made her stumble.

Dressed in a sharp gray suit with a tilted fedora, he looked like a leading man from another time. And he was staring at her like she was the only woman in the world.

"Stand by your wife," the photographer said. "Just there—yes."

Jimena leaned slightly into Cody. The rustle of their clothes, the warmth of his hands at her waist, made her pulse quicken.

"Relax," he murmured. "It's just a photo."

"Don't touch me," she muttered under her breath, glaring without heat.

He didn't let go.

She could feel his breath on her neck, and suddenly she was right back to last night—his hands on her skin, the burn of his kiss. How was she supposed to pose when she could barely breathe?

Chapter 1040

Cody's gaze simmered with quiet intensity—like a warlord laying claim to his bride.

The photographer, caught in the crossfire, cleared his throat nervously. "Uh, Mr. Cowan, eyes to the camera?"

Cody's gaze snapped toward the lens. The shutter clicked fast.

They went through several poses, each one more intimate than the last. Jimena couldn't decide which photo she liked best, though the *Republic of Craggaville* series stole her heart.

"How long until we get the prints?" she asked.

"Two or three days," the photographer said. "We'll send them by express. Also... would you mind if we kept a few for the studio wall?"

"The entrance one?" Jimena asked, remembering the dramatic photo display by the front door.

"Yes," the photographer said. "We always ask permission first—it's a bit of tradition and a bit of advertising."

She glanced at Cody. "I'm fine with it. You?"

He shrugged. "Whatever you want."

A few days later, the photos arrived. Jimena tucked them away carefully, unaware that a passerby had already spotted their image on the studio wall, snapped a photo, and posted it online.

It exploded.

Netizens went wild:

"She looks like she stepped out of a warlord's mansion!"
"I need their love story NOW."
"Absolute stunners. Who are they?!"

But Jimena didn't notice. She was too busy making dumplings with Cody's mom for the winter solstice.

"Pinch the ends like this," her mother-in-law instructed. "Keeps them from bursting."

Jimena tried. Her hands were clumsy. She hadn't grown up making dumplings—servants always did that—but she liked the feeling of shared work, of soft laughter in the kitchen.

In the living room, Cody and his dad played chess. It still amused Jimena that Cody—a modern, high-functioning professional—would spend hours locked in slow battles with his retired father.

"Cody's dad loves it," his mom said with a sigh. "Only plays when Cody visits. No one else will face him."

"Why not the park?"

"Oh, he got banned," she said, shaking her head. "Beat everyone. They told him not to come back."

Jimena burst into laughter, picturing the man sulking after a neighborhood chess exile.

Later, talk turned to family. "My niece had twins," Cody's mom said, smiling. "So tiny. I gave them longevity locks. Old tradition."

Jimena sensed where this was going.

"I, uh... need the restroom," she said, dropping her half-made dumpling.

But her mother-in-law caught her wrist. "You two aren't getting any younger. Time to think about children. Put in the effort."

Jimena gave a tight smile and nodded, escaping soon after. She couldn't really argue. Cody's mom had been generous and loving—she'd even insisted on buying them a house as a dowry gift, despite Cody already owning one. "His is his. This is from me—for both of you," she'd said, adding Jimena's name to the deed.

So the gentle baby-pushing came with love... but still left Jimena rattled.

On the drive home, she asked, "What did your mom whisper when we left?"

Cody smirked. "You really wanna know?"

"Yeah."

He leaned closer, brushing her hair back. "She told me to give her a grandkid. Soon."

The husky way he said it made her ears burn. That night, he kissed her senseless—slow, focused, and maddeningly thorough.

She didn't stand a chance.

A few days later, good news landed—but not for her.

Cody had been promoted.

"The dean's stepping down?" Jimena asked. "Isn't he, like, sixty-three?"

"Prime age to chase dreams," Cody said, smirking as he twirled his chopsticks.

She blinked. Since when did he make jokes?

"So, you're the dean now?" she asked, slipping a piece of food into his bowl.

"Yep," he said. "Means more time with you."

"Wait, really? I thought being dean meant *more* work."

He tapped her forehead. "Who told you that? Bosses don't grind like grunts."

Jimena, who'd been sneaking out of work early for days, flushed. Touché.

Cody's promotion was a win, but her calendar stayed packed. It didn't change their time much—except at night, where he insisted on "making the most of their hours."

She delegated more to her assistant just to survive his nightly... enthusiasm.

At this rate, she thought wryly, her mother-in-law might just get her wish.

