

Earth-11937 | Fall of 1948

Only weeks had passed since Jim

Robertson—Brooklyn's new Spider-Man—had finally taken down the infamous crime lord Tombstone and sent him off to prison. It was a victory that had electrified the streets and given the city a reason to believe in the masked hero swinging through the skyline. Jim's takedown of New York's most ruthless kingpin filled the headlines for days. The Spider-Man Strikes! they read. The Wallcrawler Cleans Up the Streets! The praise, though it tugged on his heart for his late brother Sam, filled him with a kind of pride he'd never felt before. For the first time, Jim felt truly unstoppable.

In those few weeks, he allowed himself to settle into the thrill of it all. The adrenaline rush that once had him questioning everything now felt like his greatest ally. He wasn't just some guy behind a mask—he was the Spider-Man, the hero who made even the hardest criminals quake in their boots. He swung through the streets with an ease he hadn't known before, his confidence bolstered by the cheers of bystanders and the wide-eyed admiration of kids who caught glimpses of him on rooftops. Jim's guilt over Sam's death hadn't disappeared, but this —this—felt like he was finally living up to something. Maybe he was even doing more good than he'd thought he ever could.

Then, one warm afternoon, the kind of afternoon where the sun made the sidewalks feel like they were melting, he caught sight of a local bodega—a place he'd walked by with his mom countless times— being held up by a couple of armed muggers. Jim didn't hesitate. He darted to the rooftop across the street, dropping silently onto the wall above the shop's entrance and peering inside. From his vantage point, he saw the two muggers waving their guns at the terrified shopkeeper behind the counter, demanding cash and cigarettes.

With a smirk hidden beneath his mask, Jim slipped inside, clinging to the ceiling and moving quietly until he was hanging just above one of the muggers. He dangled upside down from a web, sneaking up behind the guy.

"Hey there," he quipped, his voice a playful whisper.

"Need a hand? Or maybe two?"

The mugger spun around in shock, firing wildly as Jim flipped down, landing gracefully on his feet. He moved effortlessly, dodging each bullet with an ease that had him chuckling between quips. To Jim, this was nothing more than another fun takedown—no different than any other low-level thug he'd taken down before. As he danced between the two, he threw out more wisecracks.

"Careful, fellas," he said, dodging another shot. "Those bullets cost money. And I don't think your buddy behind the counter's gonna give you a discount!"

In the chaos, he took down one of the muggers with a swift kick, webbing him up in a sticky cocoon that had him struggling and shouting. The other fired again, and Jim sidestepped, catching the man's gun with a web and yanking it out of his hand. The fight was over almost as quickly as it started.

But just as the last thug was webbed up, a sound caught his ear. A dull, sickening thud. His senses flared as he whipped his head toward the aisle where the noise had come from. Without thinking, Jim darted toward it, his heart hammering.

There, lying on the cold, hard floor of the bodega, was his mother, Bethany. Her chest rose and fell in shallow gasps, her hand pressing tightly against her side where blood had begun to seep through her shirt, staining it a dark, horrifying red.

For a moment, Jim couldn't move. It was like the world had frozen, everything blurring as he stared down at her, his mind refusing to accept what he was seeing.

His mother—his mom—was hurt. She was lying there, shot, because of him.

A strangled sound escaped his throat as he rushed to her side, dropping to his knees beside her. "Mom—" The word barely made it out. He clamped his mouth shut, his voice breaking through his mask in a way that felt painfully vulnerable. He forced himself to stay calm, to remember the mask, even as his mind screamed to just rip it off. Bethany's eyes flickered open, the shock and pain clouding her gaze as she looked up at him. To her, Spider-Man was a stranger—just a hero who had come to save the day. But as he spoke, something in his voice tugged at her, something familiar in the way he whispered her name.

"Ma'am, please," he choked, trying to keep his voice steady and low. "I need you to stay with me, okay?"

Just— just keep your eyes on me."

She gave him a small nod, her hand gripping her wound, and he could see the wince in her eyes when he tried to lift her.

"Wait," she whispered, her voice barely a breath.

"Please... don't move me..."

He froze, his chest tightening as he realized how fragile she was, how close she was to slipping away. Every instinct screamed at him to scoop her up and rush her to the hospital, to do something, but he knew she wouldn't survive the movement. He couldn't risk it.

"Somebody—" His voice cracked as he looked back toward the door, shouting to anyone who might hear.

"Somebody, call an ambulance! Please! I can't—she's hurt, I can't move her—"

He turned back to her, his eyes frantically scanning her face for any sign of hope, anything to tell him she'd be okay.

Her gaze was fixed on him, a strange, almost haunted expression in her eyes.

"You... sound like.." Her words were faint, laced with the kind of fear that shattered his heart. She was looking up at him with something between pain and confusion, her voice trembling as she struggled to keep speaking. "You...

sound... like my Jimmy..."

Jim felt a tear slip down his cheek, hidden beneath the mask. He wanted so badly to tell her it was him, to tell her that her son was right there, fighting for her. But he couldn't. He was trapped, forced to play the role of a stranger when all he wanted was to hold her hand as her son.

"I'm here," he whispered, his voice barely more than a breath. "I'm here with you. Just... just stay with me, okay?"

But her eyes were unfocused, her breathing shallow.

Jim watched helplessly as the life seemed to drain from her, her grip on her wound loosening. His mind spiraled, memories flashing—of her laugh, her soft lullabies when he was a kid, the warm meals she'd made for him and Sam.

It was all slipping away, right before his eyes, and he couldn't do a damn thing to stop it.

"No... no, please," he whispered, his hands hovering helplessly over her. "Please, Mom, just—hold on. You can't... not like this..."

Bethany's gaze softened, and for a moment, her lips curled into the faintest of smiles. It was like she could sense his anguish, like she knew he was there for her, even if she couldn't fully see him. She let out a shaky breath, her eyes beginning to close.

"Jimmy..." she whispered, barely audible. "My... brave... boy.."

Her hand went limp. The breath she'd struggled to hold slipped from her chest, leaving a haunting silence in its wake.

Jim's world shattered. He reached out, clutching her hand, even as the coldness crept into her skin.

Everything around him faded —the bodega, the mess, the world outside. All he could see was her face, the mother he'd just lost, and the brutal, unforgiving reality that he couldn't save her.

And it was his fault.

He wanted to scream, to rip off the mask and hold her, but he was frozen, numb, the weight of his guilt crashing down on him like a tidal wave. The victory against Tombstone, the headlines, the confidence he'd felt—all of it felt hollow, meaningless. He wasn't a hero. He was just a kid who thought he could change the world, and now his own mother had paid the price.

As the sounds of sirens finally drew closer, Jim whispered brokenly to her, his voice cracked and raw beneath the mask. "I'm so sorry... I'm so sorry, Mom..."

From that day on, the laughter, the jokes, the cocky confidence that had once defined his battles faded, replaced by a quiet, haunted resolve. He knew, with a clarity that cut deeper than any wound, that the thrill of being a hero wasn't worth the lives of the people he loved.

And he vowed, with every fiber of his being, to never let his arrogance, his recklessness, cost him someone he loved ever again.