

DAREDEVIL

by Jerry Elbert

At 2:17 a.m., Emilio Reyes hung seventy-two floors above Sixth Avenue with both hands locked around the squeegee bar, his boots trembling on the narrow metal stirrup.

Inside the office glass, a red security light blinked over an empty conference room. Blink. Table. Blink. Twelve black chairs. Blink. His own face floating there, doubled and flattened, a man in a harness with fogged goggles and a mouth set hard against the wind.

He dragged the blade down. The glass cleared. His reflection disappeared.

Below, taxis moved like filings pulled by a magnet. Steam rose from a manhole in shreds. Somewhere a siren began, lost itself, began again.

His phone buzzed against his chest.

DAREDEVIL POSTED 4 HOURS AGO

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He did not look long. He had learned not to smile while suspended. The face muscles changed the bite of the cold.

“Reyes,” came the radio clipped to his shoulder. “You hear me?”

“Yeah.”

“Don’t milk it. We got two more drops before five.”

The supervisor’s voice had the dead warmth of fluorescent tubes.

Emilio lifted his gloved hand. The rubber squeaked. The city reflected back in panels: ambulance lights, office lamps, elevator arrows, the red dot blinking above him like a recording eye.

MTA SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

Due to signal problems at 42nd Street, southbound trains are running express from 72nd to Times Square. Customers are advised to allow additional travel time. We apologize for the inconvenience.

The sound of the train used to come through his childhood apartment floor before sleep. Not loud. A metal animal turning in its buried place.

His mother would count the cars by vibration. “That one’s full,” she’d say. “That one’s tired.”

He believed her.

At 5:43, the crew changed out of wet work pants in the basement room behind freight elevator C. The lockers were dented and tagged. Someone had taped a collection notice to the microwave with a magnet shaped like a tomato.

Dimas, who had three daughters and a second job stocking fruit, held up his phone.

“You see this guy?”

On the screen: a masked figure in a red hoodie sprinted across a roof and jumped the gap to the next building. The city dropped between his legs for one bright second. He landed hard, rolled, sprang up, threw both hands toward the camera.

The caption read: **YOU SEE ME NOW? #DAREDEVIL**

Emilio pulled his shirt over his head. “Stupid.”

“Stupid rich maybe. Brands pay for this.”

“Brands pay for everybody except us.”

Dimas laughed because it was almost a joke. Then he rubbed his wrist where the tendons hurt and checked a text from his wife about the rent.

Across the room, Bashir was arguing softly with a clinic in Queens. “No, I have insurance. No, I gave you the card. No, listen—”

The freight elevator bell chimed. Red light above the doors. Everyone looked up as if called by name.

POLICE BLOTTER / MIDTOWN SOUTH

03:11 – Trespass complaint, commercial rooftop, West 38th Street.

Unknown male fled prior to arrival.

03:44 – Aided case, subway platform, dizziness. Refused transport.

04:08 – Grand larceny, unattended bag. Investigation ongoing.

In daylight Emilio slept badly. The radiators clanked. Delivery trucks backed into alleys with electronic beeps. His apartment window faced a brick wall close enough to touch with a broom handle.

A bill lay open on the table.

AMOUNT DUE: \$41,260.18

The surgery had been called minor until it was itemized. Facility fee. Imaging. Anesthesia. Out-of-network physician he had never met. His left knee still filled with weather before rain.

His phone kept lighting.

@edgebroker: bro monetize harder

@lilsaint: jump the goldman gap or fake

@nyc_ghostcam: collab?

Unknown: Mr. Reyes, this is a final attempt to collect a debt.

He lay on the mattress without sheets, one hand over his eyes. Through his fingers, the screen glow pulsed red.

Private Emilio could barely answer the pharmacy. Daredevil never hesitated. Daredevil did not open envelopes. Daredevil ran toward edges and made the city watch.

“Tonight?” Maribel said.

They were behind the bodega on Ninth, where she smoked beside stacked milk crates during her ten-minute break. She wore scrubs under a puffer and had a smear of glitter on her cheek from some patient’s get-well card.

“Maybe,” Emilio said.

“That means yes.”

“It’s one jump.”

“It’s always one jump.”

A delivery cyclist coasted past, one hand gripping the handlebar, the other holding noodles in a plastic bag. His face was young and utterly elsewhere.

Maribel flicked ash. “My floor had two nurses for thirty-one patients yesterday. One woman kept pressing the call button just to know somebody would come.”

Emilio looked at her hands. Red knuckles. Short nails. Grip marks from lifting bodies.

“You come when they call,” he said.

“Not always fast enough.”

A bus exhaled at the curb. The advertisement on its side showed a smiling woman in a glass apartment: **LIVE ABOVE IT ALL.**

Maribel followed his gaze. “Don’t die for strangers with usernames.”

He almost said, They’re the only ones looking.

Instead he said, “I’ll text.”

She shook her head, already being pulled back by the automatic doors, by fluorescent light, by somebody else’s pain.

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Age nine. A bottle thrown in the courtyard. Green pieces of glass under sunlight. His father sweeping with bare hands because the super never came. Blood on the thumb. "Don't step," his father said. "Look where you put yourself."

The building on Leonard Street had a service door that never latched. Emilio knew this because window washers collected the city's weaknesses the way priests collected sins. Broken cameras. Lazy guards. Scaffolds with gaps. Roof doors blocked open by paint cans.

At 11:58 p.m., he climbed the last stair in the red hoodie, mask tucked under his chin. His knee complained on every landing.

On the roof, wind shoved him sideways. The skyline glittered with sealed rooms. Office towers, luxury condos, hotels with curtains drawn. Each pane held someone's sleep or spreadsheet or secret argument.

His friend Kev was already there, crouched behind a vent, camera rig balanced on his shoulder.

"You're late."

"Trains."

"Everybody says trains." Kev checked the frame. "Comments want no cut this time. Continuous. Roof to roof."

“Gap?”

“Eleven feet. Maybe twelve.”

Emilio walked to the ledge. Across the alley, the next roof sat lower, its parapet topped with metal flashing. A red aircraft warning light blinked on a crane beyond it.

Blink. Distance. Blink. Debt. Blink. His name under collections. Blink. Daredevil tagged in fan edits with fire emojis. Blink. Maribel’s face turned away before she begged.

Kev said, “You good?”

A police siren rose below, then another. The city seemed to accelerate: elevators climbing, trains shaking bolts loose underground, screens refreshing in thousands of hands, markets opening elsewhere, someone being born, someone being billed, someone pressing a call button.

Emilio put on the mask.

LIVE CHAT TRANSCRIPT – 12:06 A.M.

jump jump jump

fake cops lol

DAREDEVIL I SEE YOU

bro looks scared

algorithm hates pauses

send it

SEND IT

SEND IT

The first jump of his life had been over a puddle at the curb, his mother holding groceries, laughing when he landed in the water anyway. Yellow cab horn. Wet socks. Her hand gripping his hood before he ran into traffic.

Her hand had known the exact weight of him.

Emilio backed up twenty paces.

Kev whispered, “Rolling.”

The mask smelled like laundry detergent and breath. His palms were slick inside the gloves. He could feel each fingertip, each point of contact with the roof gravel, as if his hands were thinking faster than he was.

Then the service door burst open.

“Police! Don’t move!”

Two uniforms came out low and bright behind flashlights. One was young, wide-eyed, scared of the height. The other kept a hand on the radio at his shoulder. Behind them, a building security guard panted in a suit jacket too tight across the stomach.

Kev cursed and dropped the camera. It clattered, still recording the tar roof.

Emilio did not move.

The young cop said, “Step back from the edge.”

But step back meant toward them. Toward the charge. Toward the warrant maybe. Toward losing the job if his name surfaced. Toward the hospital bill calling his mother's old number. Toward Daredevil becoming Emilio Reyes, trespasser, debtor, employee terminated for cause.

The older cop said, softer, "Hey. Just come here."

Below, someone shouted from a window. Another phone appeared across the alley, then another, small rectangles catching him.

The red crane light blinked.

Emilio looked at the opposite roof. Eleven feet. Maybe twelve. Lower landing. Bad knee. Wet flashing.

Kev said, "Emilio—"

His name sounded wrong in the open air.

He ran.

SPORTS RADIO, 12:07 A.M.

—you gotta commit once you leave your feet. That's fundamentals. You can talk all night about talent, pressure, crowd noise, but the body only understands what you've already trained it to do—

His shoe hit the parapet. His hands opened.

For one second the city gave him every window.

He saw a man in a kitchen washing one cup. A child awake under blue tablet light. Maribel on a hospital floor, looking up without knowing why. Dimas counting cash on a train. Bashir asleep with his wrist wrapped. A guard reaching too late. A cop's mouth forming a word.

He struck the far edge chest-first.

Air left him. His left hand caught the metal flashing. The glove tore. His right hand slapped glass below the parapet, found nothing, slid, squealed.

The city watched.

Kev screamed. The young cop was on his knees. Somewhere the live chat multiplied into hearts, skulls, sirens, flame.

Emilio's fingers held.

The metal cut through the glove into his palm. His knee swung against reflective glass, and in it he saw Daredevil hanging, red hood blown back, mask crooked, one human hand clamped white around the edge.

The warning light blinked behind him.

Blink.

His grip tightened.

Blink.