

## The Raven's Call

### A Third Watch fanfiction story by AmandaK

*Kim...*

Bobby Caffey forced his eyes open and tried to focus on the pale blur that was his partner's face beside him. Gradually his vision sharpened and he could make out her profile. Her left arm was stretched out in his direction. While he watched in fascination, her slim fingers uncurled slowly from a clenched fist.

The pavement, wet from the rain, was cold and hard beneath his cheek. In the distance a train rattled across its tracks but in the alley everything was quiet. The painted image of a raven on the nearby back door stared down at him and Bobby blinked when it seemed to move. It was a struggle to stay conscious. Kim...

His head throbbed, making it hard to think, and every single breath caused fiery pain to lance through his chest. Bobby hissed when he lifted an arm to reach for Kim. If only he could get to her, could touch her, everything would be okay. His fingers inched across the slick asphalt. If only he could... reach... her...

oOo

*Thump. Thump. Thump.* Someone was beating against the inside of his skull with a hammer. The constant rhythm pulled him from the pleasant blackness where nothing existed. He groaned in protest and moved a feeble hand to wave away his assailant.

"He's coming to," someone said.

"Roberto?" another voice asked with a sob. Bobby frowned. Was that his mother? He could have sworn it was his mother. But-

Then it suddenly all came back to him. The call. The vic in the alley. The set-up. And... "Kim?" he croaked, willing his eyes to open a crack. "Cómo es ella?"

"Oh, Roberto!" His mother again.

"Ssh," another voice hushed. A cool hand touched his forehead. "You're in the hospital. You were pretty beat up when you came in. But you're going to be all right." He recognized Dr. Morales' voice and turned his face in her direction. He blinked as her form swam into focus.

"Kim?" he asked again.

"We'll talk later," Dr. Morales said soothingly. "You get some rest now." She reached out to change the settings on the drip that he only now noticed was leading into his arm.

"No," he protested. But already the comforting blackness was beckoning him once more and soon everything faded from his awareness.

oOo

Bobby didn't regain consciousness until late the following morning when the sleeping aid had worn off and a throb in his shoulder woke him. He opened his eyes. Bright sunlight was streaming in through the high window of the hospital room. It hurt his eyes, used to the darkness as they were, and he quickly closed them, shutting out the glare. He waited a few moments, then tried again, this time more cautiously.

Squinting at the light, he attempted to sit up. A sharp pain in his chest made him change his mind very quickly. Without moving any further, he assessed the various aches and pains in his body. Thinking was hard. The last vestiges of the sleeping aid in his blood made him drowsy. His head still thumped and he suspected he had a concussion. A bandage constricted his chest and after some deliberation, Bobby came to the conclusion he had some cracked ribs too. That fit with the pain in his chest when he tried to breathe too deeply.

Slowly, carefully, he moved his head to take in the room. His gaze stopped upon the curled-up body in the chair next to the bed. "Ma?" he croaked and she gave a start, blinking owlishly before focusing on her son. Her eyes were red-rimmed and he knew she had been crying.

"Oh, Roberto," she said. "Thank God you're awake."

Bobby hoped she wouldn't start crying again. He didn't think he could handle that right now. "Where's Kim?" he asked. "Is she all right?"

Before his mother could reply, there was a discreet knock and the door opened. Two men walked in. They were both dressed in conservative suits, neat but not too expensive, and Bobby knew right away what they were.

The tallest of the two confirmed his suspicions. "Ah, Mr. Caffey, you're awake," he said. "That's good. I'm Detective Rolston and this is my partner, Detective Heckel. We would like to ask you a few questions about what happened last night."

Bobby nodded at them and turned back to his mother. "Would you...?" She glared at the two policemen but left the room without protesting.

"We'd like you to tell us what happened, in your own words," Detective Rolston continued after the door had closed.

"It was a set-up," Bobby said. "They jumped us when we got out of the bus. Where's Kim? Have you talked to her yet?"

The two detectives exchanged a look. The kind of look that Bobby didn't much care for.

"What?" he asked, struggling again to sit up.

"Did nobody tell you?" Detective Heckel asked.

"No. Tell me what?" Bobby growled in frustration.

Another look passed between the two men, and then Detective Rolston turned back to look at Bobby. "I'm sorry to tell you this, but Ms. Zambrano is dead."

The blood rushed from his brain and suddenly strengthless, Bobby fell back into the pillows. "No," he croaked. He had a sudden vivid memory of Kim kneeling next to the victim in the alley... The flash of a knife... Her cry, of surprise more than pain... "No!" He squeezed his eyes shut, willing the images to fade.

"Mr. Caffey?" The sound of the detective's voice barely made it through the roar in his ears. "I'm sorry. We thought you knew. You have to tell us what happened, so we can get the bastards that did this to your partner. Think you're up to it?"

Bobby drew a few deep breaths, ignoring the pain his ribs caused him. "Yes," he said through gritted teeth. "You get them. Make them pay." He opened his eyes and stared at the ceiling. A hairline crack showed in the plaster and he stared at it. "It was a setup," he said, his voice hollow. "The call... The vic..."

oOo

"Boy five five three."

"Boy five five three. What you got?" Kim replied.

"A possible cardiac arrest, on Canal and Grand," the disembodied voice said at the other end of the connection.

"Ten four, we'll check it out," Kim replied.

Bobby turned on the blinker and took a left turn to head in the direction of the cross section that the dispatcher just gave them.

A few minutes later they were nearing the location and he slowed the bus down. They both squinted through the front screen at the darkened and wet streets, looking for the victim, or the caller.

"Nothing," Bobby said when they approached the next intersection. "Must've been a crank call. Let's call in a 10-96."

"No, wait," Kim said. "Look. In the alley."

Bobby tapped the brakes and backed up a few yards so he could look down into the alley Kim had pointed out. Indeed, in the dim light of a bar's back door -The Raven, he observed, absently noting the crude image of a bird painted upon the door- lay a crumpled form, apparently a body. No one else was in sight.

"Guess whoever called it in figured they'd done their civic duty and left," he muttered.

Kim nodded. "Suppose so."

Bobby turned into the alley and stopped the bus. Kim was already pushing open her door and grabbing for her bag while Bobby switched off the engine. He followed her outside and ran to the back of the bus to get his bag.

Everything seemed to happen at once.

From the corner of his eye he caught the victim suddenly jumping up. Something flashed in the light and Kim called out in surprise and pain. "Kim!" Bobby yelled. He began running in her direction. "What the hell-"

He caught a black shadow descending on him. Instinctively he ducked. Something slammed against his shoulder, instantly numbing his left arm and he grunted in pain. His legs were kicked out from underneath him and as he went down, he saw Kim also slumping forward.

Bobby's skull hit the pavement with a sickening thud and momentarily he blacked out.

When he came to again, the ambulance doors stood wide open and dark figures were moving about. "Hey!" he croaked, attempting to get back to his feet. "What do you think you're-"

One of the figures turned and a booted foot lashed out. It caught him in the ribs. Bobby screamed in pain and rolled himself into a ball, willing himself not to lose consciousness again. However, it was a losing battle and darkness claimed him once more.

Kim... The memory of her cry woke him a second time.

He tried to focus on the pale blur beside him. The pavement, wet from the rain, was cold and hard beneath his cheek. Bobby struggled to stay conscious. Kim...

His head throbbed and a lump was forming where his skull had hit the pavement. Every single breath caused sharp pain to shoot through his chest. Bobby hissed and gritted his teeth when he

lifted an arm to reach for Kim. If only he could get to her, could touch her, everything would be okay.

oOo

"And that's all I remember," he concluded, his voice hoarse from talking for over an hour. "I woke up here. Oh God, Kim..." He squeezed his eyes shut, not wanting to give in to the grief in the presence of the two detectives. He couldn't stop the tears from leaking through his lashes though.

"They ransacked the ambulance," Detective Heckel told him. "They were after drugs, supplies, needles. What they can't use, they'll sell. You're right, you were set up. It's happened before."

Bobby barely heard him. All he could think about was his partner. He had let her down. They should have been more careful, should have called for confirmation, called for the cops, whatever. Instead, Kim went to help a victim and got killed for her compassion. While he, Bobby Caffey, didn't do squat to help her.

"There wasn't anything you could have done," Detective Rolston said. "Short of getting yourself killed too. These junkies-

"I want you to leave," he growled at the detectives. "Now."

oOo

"I want to go to Kim's funeral," Bobby told Dr. Morales two days later. He rubbed his face, feeling drained. He had just been through another session with the police. It seemed he was subject to an endless stream of visitors, pumping him for information, searching for a clue that he might have forgotten. They were on it in force, but the many visits told him they weren't making much progress in finding Kim's killers.

"Bobby, you're in no condition to-" Morales began.

"I am going," he snapped. "With or without your permission."

She straightened and studied him briefly, her eyes full of compassion. "Okay then," she gave in. "But I'll have Doc take you. And afterwards you get back here, you hear? I'm not quite ready to release you just yet."

He nodded. "Fair enough." She turned to leave the room and when she got to the door, he added, "Thanks." Morales gave him a quick smile and a nod before closing the door behind her. And Bobby was left alone with his thoughts and the nightmares that haunted him during the night.

oOo

Early the next afternoon, Doc walked in. Dressed neatly in his paramedics' uniform, he pushed a wheelchair ahead of him. "You ready?" he asked Bobby.

Bobby nodded. He had been ready for over an hour, having dressed with the help of one of the nurses. "Yeah, I'm ready." He stiffly climbed off the bed and plopped down in the chair. He hated having to rely on the thing but he knew there was no way he could walk through the ceremony and the funeral.

Outside, Carlos was waiting. His two colleagues helped him into their bus and took their seats in the front cabin. Not much was said on the way to St. Mary's Church.

Bobby's mouth dropped open in shock when they pulled up in front of the church. It seemed as if every paramedic in New York City had come out to say a last farewell to one of their own.

Carlos wheeled him down the aisle to the front of the church. Heads turned and a muted whisper traveled through the congregation. It took all of Bobby's willpower to keep his head up and his back straight. To his ears, that whisper held an accusation. "There he is," the murmur said. "He lives and she's dead." "Maybe he had something to do with it." "He certainly didn't try very hard to help her."

When Carlos halted the chair next to the open casket, Bobby no longer heard the voices. He looked down upon Kim's face. So peaceful now. And she looked just as beautiful as when she had been alive. He still couldn't quite believe she was really gone. He half expected her to sit up and grin at him. 'Gotcha!'

Of course that didn't happen and tears began to well in his eyes. He fumbled for the wheels, wanting to roll himself away from the casket. Doc quickly took over and parked him next to the front row of pews, across the aisle from Kim's family. Her mother, her sister. Joey. Jimmy Doherty. Bobby didn't dare look in their direction.

The church grew silent. "The just man, though he die early, shall be at rest. For the age that is honorable comes not with the passing of time, nor can it be measured in terms of years..." Bobby shut out the voice of the priest beginning the mass.

oOo

The church service, the funeral, it passed in a blur. Afterwards, when Doc was getting ready to help Bobby back into the ambulance, Doherty walked up to them. Bobby swallowed when he saw the firefighter approach. Doc quickly excused himself, leaving the two men alone.

"Caffey," Doherty greeted him.

Bobby flinched. He fully expected Jimmy to accuse him of getting the mother of his son killed. And part of him craved it. Needed someone to finally say what everyone had to be thinking: how come Kim was dead and he wasn't?

Instead, Jimmy cleared his throat and said, "Thanks for coming. That must've been hard." He paused, while it took Bobby a moment for his words to sink in. "You've been a good friend to Kim, always. Better than I ever was."

Bobby was rendered speechless. His mouth worked, trying to find the words. He wanted to scream at Jimmy that it was his fault. That he should have done things different. That if he had, this conversation would never have happened. But no words came. And after a moment's hesitation, Jimmy turned on his heels. "I'll see ya," he muttered in goodbye. Bobby was left to stare at the other man's back.

oOo

Weeks passed. Bobby was released from the hospital a few days after Kim's funeral. He did not return to work, claiming that his broken ribs were still bothering him, that he wasn't up to the lifting and carrying of patients. Truth was, he was afraid. Afraid of hearing the whispers behind his back. Afraid of the calls that might come in, the ones that would lead to dark alleys. And most of all, he was afraid of being assigned a new partner. Afraid of having to face the hard truth that Kim was gone forever.

So Bobby spent his days locked up in his apartment. At first, his friends and colleagues dropped by regularly. But he was sullen and moody, sometimes even downright refusing to let them in, and they stopped coming. It suited him just fine.

The nights were the worst. When sirens howled in the distance and TV talk-show hosts cast their stupid jokes at him, not even the bottle of Hennessy -his constant companion these days- could chase the shadows from his mind. Afraid to sleep, Bobby sat drinking and staring at the screen until his eyes watered. And when the alcohol finally made him drift off into sleep, his dreams were haunted by phantoms.

He always returned to the alley. Dark shapes moved about in the gloom, casting misshapen shadows on the wall. A bright flash when a knife reflected the dim light. Bobby tried to call out a warning. But he couldn't move. Kim screamed and slumped forward. Her fingers uncurled slowly from her fist. The raven on the door cawed triumphantly...

With a muffled shout, Bobby flew up. He was drenched in sweat and blinked at the silent flicker of the TV that cast weird shadows on the far wall. His mouth was dry and he worked his jaws to get moisture flowing. He swung his legs off the couch and shakily got to his feet. Maybe a sip of water would be a good idea.

That's when he heard her voice.

"Bobby."

His knees gave way and he fell back onto the couch with a thud. He blinked again, for a moment not sure if he were awake. Then he barked a laugh. He had to be very drunk if he heard voices of dead people.

"Bobby."

There it was again.

Abruptly feeling more sober than he ever had in his life, Bobby's head whipped around. "Kim?" He flinched at the sound of his own voice, sounding so loud in the empty room.

"Yes, Bobby. It's me."

"But...but..." he stammered. "You can't be... You're..."

"Dead. Yes."

Bobby jumped up from the couch and threw up his hands. "I'm going nuts," he groaned. "I'm having a conversation with my dead partner!" He wrapped his arms around his head.

"You're not crazy," Kim's voice assured him. "I came back to..." She hesitated. "Help you."

"Help me?" he asked bitterly. "With what?"

"It wasn't your fault," she continued. "In spite of what you think. We did what we were supposed to do. We didn't break procedure. We got a call for help and we responded."

"And see where it got us. You're dead and I'm-"

"Alive," Kim finished. "Bobby, you can't give up now. There's a city full of people out there who need you. You're a good paramedic. One of the best."

Bobby plopped back down on the couch. Tears welled in his eyes and slowly trickled across the stubble that shaded his cheeks. "Kim..."

"Goodbye, Bobby. I have to go now. Remember me. I love you." Was it his imagination or did he indeed feel a cool draft, like a featherlight kiss, brush his lips?

"Kim?" he asked. "Kim!" He received no reply.

The room suddenly felt too small, too cramped, and Bobby had trouble breathing. He stumbled



to the front window and threw it open wide. Drawing in deep gulps of cold night air, he waited for his heartbeat to return to normal.

Silhouetted against the nearly full moon, a dark bird flew by. A raven, Bobby noted. The bird cawed. And for a brief moment Bobby heard the animal quote: "Nevermore." He shook his head to clear it, and watched as the bird disappeared into the shadows of a nearby high-rise, the 'whoop-whoop' of a distant police siren drowning out its farewell call.

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