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about 700 words

For If They Fall...

by Kasisi D. Harris

With a turn of a knob, Nick Jonas was silenced mid chorus and replaced by the sounds of squeaking brakes, several honks, and a man three cars away screaming at who knows what. *Is this it?* The leather crunched as Derrick gripped the steering wheel tightly and let out a long sigh. The green exit sign that normally marked relief gave him no comfort. After pulling into his driveway he placed the vehicle in park, laid his head back against the head rest and closed his eyes. *I can't do this anymore.* Taking a deep breath he lifted the door handle and

exited the vehicle. Derrick's saunter to the front door was halted when the image of a small box on the porch came into view. His eyes were glued to the box as he closed the door. *El Paso*. He only knew of one person from El Paso, and that person was dead.

He used his keys to cut the tape just enough to rip the lid open. Inside, there was a ring and a card which read, *It was his most favorite thing. Regards, Sarah*. It was modest by Naval Academy standards. The ring was comprised of a white gold band with a mother of pearl stone flanked by two diamonds. Inside there was a portion of a scripture which read, "For if they fall... Eccl 4:10." He began to breathe heavily. His cheeks and ears became hot and his nose began to sniffle. He clutched the ring tight in his hand and his watering eyes stared off in the distance as an explosion of memories filled his head.

Angel Mendez was one part troublemaker, two parts loyal friend, but a leader in every way. His charismatic nature and relentless work ethic earned him the respect of his fellow Marines. Upon his discharge, Angel was accepted to Baylor University. On the eve of his departure, Derrick met briefly with him.

"You've come a long way," said Derrick.

"Thank you sir." Angel began to smile.

"Life isn't so regimented on the outside and you'll have to be strong to survive." Derrick looked down at ring on his hand. "You don't know much about me. Like you, I came from a pretty rough background. I decided that I wanted more in life." He slipped the ring off his finger and placed it in the palm of his hand. "This ring represents my journey. Effort and hard work pays off. It wasn't easy. In fact, it was downright hard. But, I did it. I want this ring to symbolize that for you. Don't ever give up!" Derrick handed the ring to Angel.

Angel gazed at the ring. His blinking increased and the smile that had previously been so prominent transitioned to him biting his lower lip. Angel took the ring and held it in his fist raising it to wipe his wet cheek. Placing the ring on his finger, Angel said, "I won't let you down Sir."

"I know you won't." Derrick extended his hand and Angel shook it. "Now go. Do big things!"

"Thank you sir, for everything." Angel turned, picked up to his two duffle bags and placed them in the trunk of a waiting taxi. He looked back one last time, and after a deep breath, he smiled.

Derrick's memories continued.

Once he was discharged, he remembered the late nights spent tutoring Angel through Chemistry and Calculus via Skype.

"I can't do this Sir," Angel said.

"Yes you can. Now let's run through this problem again."

Derrick refused to let Angel give up. No matter how many times Derrick tried to get Angel to call him by his name, he refused.

"You'll always be, Sir, to me," Angel said.

Angel was in his third year at Baylor when it happened. While visiting his cousin, he pulled out a 9mm pistol and shot himself in the head.

Derrick snapped back to reality. His breathing returned to normal. *For if they fall, one will lift up the other.* His grip loosened and he put the ring on. He began to smile. *I can do this.* He looked up and in a whisper said, "Thank you Angel."