

When You Care Enough

By Madison

Quickly pulling the stack of envelopes and advertisements from the mailbox, he tucked them under his arm and dashed back toward the house. He'd just made it into the kitchen, the screen door slamming behind him, when the sky opened up and the downpour began. He poured himself a fresh cup of coffee before heading into the den. With Claire and the girls visiting her parents in Seattle, he'd planned to spend the next few days painting the garage and cleaning the gutters. Obviously, Mother Nature had other plans, and so it was without guilt that he turned on the radio and sank back into his recliner.

It was between the electric bill and the overdue library book notice that he found it. He couldn't help smiling as he ran his thumb lightly over the familiar handwriting. Turning it over, he slid a finger under the edge of the flap and along the length of the envelope, and pulled out the contents in one smooth motion. He reached for the bifocals resting on the table beside him, slid them on, and began to read. On the front of the card was a picture of a smiling stick figure. Someone had given it what appeared to be a yellow helmet, and a thin golden line had been drawn over the top of its upturned mouth. Above its head, was the written designation: "You," and he realized what he'd mistaken for a helmet was actually supposed to be hair, and the line of gold a moustache. Below its feet, the printed message read:

Friend (frend) *n.*

1. a person whom one knows well and is fond of; intimate associate; close acquaintance.
2. a person on the same side in a struggle; one who is not an enemy or foe; ally.
3. a supporter or sympathizer.

The inside of the card had originally been blank, but there the sender had scrawled: "Says it all, don't it?" Underneath, another stick figure had been carefully drawn. This one had a squiggle of curly brown hair swirling around its head and wore bright blue shoes with three white stripes running up each side. It stood next to a somewhat lopsided bright-red car that proudly sported a white stripe of its own. There was even a teeny tiny Mars light on top.

It was signed: "Love, Me."

"Oh, Starsk," he whispered around the lump that had suddenly taken up residence in his throat. His eyes had become suspiciously moist, and he swiped a hand over them grumbling, "Damn allergies."

His vision once again clear, he noticed something else. It was a small red arrow in the bottom left corner, indicating there was something on the back he needed to see. He flipped it over and promptly burst into laughter. Starsky had circled the Hallmark insignia and scribbled beside it: "'Cause I care enough to send you the very best, partner."

He studied the card again from front to back, then carried it and the now-empty coffee mug back into the kitchen. Standing in front of the refrigerator, he used the guitar magnet his youngest had given him for Father's Day to anchor it to the door—a definite place of honor in the Hutchinson household.

Rinsing out the dirty cup, he noticed the return of the sun through the small window above the sink. Its heat had already dried up what little rain had fallen during the earlier brief shower. Turning to head outside and get started, he changed course midstride, instead grabbing the cordless phone and heading out to the patio. The chores could wait, he decided. What was one more day? He had much more important things to do. Like catching up with a friend.

Stretched out comfortably on a chaise lounge in the shade of a massive oak tree, he dialed the number he knew better than his own. It rang once, then twice.

“Hey, Gordo! What d’ya mean it’s about time I called? It was your turn, remember? I left a message with Dana. Oh, she did? How could she forget her Uncle Hutch? Jeez. Well, tell her I’ll forgive her just this once. Yeah, it came today. Did the kids get you a new box of crayons for you birthday? What? They got you a model? Of the *Tomato*?! You’ve got to be kidding! Where? On eBay? It figures. They sell all kinds of junk on there. Now, you know I didn’t mean it like that. Okay, dirtball, so maybe I did....”

The End