

The Big Brother

Steve had learned to feel when there was danger. In an area where gangs often fought each other, he had developed a special instinct that warned him to be careful.

That's the way it was today.

As he walked into school, he saw a group of Cubans out of the corner of his eye. He felt that they were coming towards him. He walked more quickly, but a voice said, „Hey, Gomez.“ Steve walked on.

„Hey, why don't you stop when I want to talk to you?“ Steve stopped. The leader of the group was called Carlos Duran. Most of the kids in the barrio were frightened of him. Steve hoped it was just money they wanted, but he kept his hands from his pockets, so that they wouldn't think he had a knife there. „What do you want?“ asked Steve.

„I want to talk to you;“ said Carlos. „You go to the boys' club a lot.“ Steve looked nervously at the big, athletic Cuban. „Most afternoons. Why?“ „I hear a gang of Filipinos robbed you two days back.“ Steve nodded. They had taken his allowance. Carlos Duran took some notes out of his pocket and offered them to Steve.

„I got this back for you. If they ever give you trouble again, you tell me.“ And he walked away.

Steve couldn't believe it. It was a trick. It had to be. All morning Steve wondered what had happened. Was it real or was it some amazing trick that even he couldn't understand?

During the break, he saw the Filipinos. But when they noticed him, they walked away and left him alone. It wasn't possible. Later, while Steve was playing basketball with some friends, Carlos Duran came past and shouted, „Hi, Steve. Everything OK?“ Steve was too surprised to answer.

After school he met Carlos again. This time the Cuban was in his car and he shouted, „Get in, man. I'll drive you home.“ „This is it,“ thought Steve. „If I get in, he'll drive away and take me to the others. But why me?“ he thought. „Why me?“

„It's all right;“ said Steve. „I'll walk.“

„Get in, man. I'm going your way.“ Steve got in. When they drove into 21st Street and stopped outside Steve's house, Carlos took an envelope out of his pocket. He seemed nervous. „Give this to your sister.“ Steve took the envelope and looked at it. There was no address on it, nothing. He nodded and got out of the car. „And don't open it,“ shouted Carlos before he drove away. Steve walked up the steps to the front door. Diane was standing at the living-room window, and she was waiting for him near the stairs as he came through the door.

„I got this for you;“ said Steve. She took it from him and ran to her room before he could ask what was inside.

For the rest of the week Carlos was more than friendly. „If anybody gives you any trouble, you just tell me,“ he said.

„Sure;“ said Steve. But nobody gave him any trouble. It seemed as if the whole barrio knew that Steve was protected. And by Carlos Duran. He found out why at the weekend.

„Steve;“ said Diane on Friday. „There's a dance this evening. Would you like to go.“ „I'm not interested,“ said Steve.

„Oh, come on. You know what Dad's like. If he knows we're going together, he won't cause any problems.“ She worked on him for 15 minutes until he agreed to talk to their father when he came home from work. Mr Gomez nodded and said, „OK, but be sure to come home early.“ And Steve, of course, had to keep an eye on his sister. Steve nodded and wished again he had learned karate.

When they walked into the dance that evening, Steve went first, the „big brother“ although he was two years younger! They had hardly got inside when Carlos Duran came towards them. He didn't even look at Steve. „Hi, Diane;“ he said. „Glad you came.“ Then he turned to Steve. „Hi, Steve. How you keeping?“

Steve couldn't think of anything to say, while Diane started to laugh and talk happily. „Come on,“ said Carlos, „Let's have a drink. This is going to be a wild evening.“ Carlos and Diane danced together all evening while Steve sat at the table and drank his soda. When Diane came to the table to rest, Steve said, „Do you know who he is?“

„He's nice,“ said Diane. „There are a lot of people who feel differently about that. Dad will go crazy if he finds out.“ „Well then, it's obvious that he mustn't find out.“

„He will;“ said Steve. „I'll tell him!“ At ten o'clock Steve said, „I think we ought to go home, Diane. Dad will be angry if it gets too late.“ „I'll drive you home,“ said Carlos.

But what Carlos didn't say was that he would drive them home after he had taken them on a trip across San Francisco. They finally stopped at a beach. It was warm and they could hear the sound of the sea outside.

„Let's go for a walk,“ said Carlos. Steve sighed and opened the door. He felt like one of the nuns at Diane's school. But Carlos was only thinking of a walk with Diane. „You can sit here at the front,“ he said. „I've got some great cassettes. The best.“

„I'm coming with you,“ said Steve. „Stay here,“ said Diane.

But Steve wasn't staying. So Diane and Carlos walked along the beach while Steve stayed five metres behind like a dog without a home.

When they finally arrived back home, it was after midnight and their parents were angry. „Where have you been?“ their father shouted. „Do you kids know what time it is?“ Diane looked at Steve - and he got the message. „Sorry, Dad,“ he said. „But the dance was so good we forgot what time it was.“

„Well, ... OK. Now go to bed. It's late.“

„Oh, Dad,“ said Diane as they started to leave the room, and Steve's heart sank. „There's another dance next week. You won't mind if we go, I hope.“