

## Broken Trust

by Jeffrey Jenkins

Frankie had watched the scene in his mind countless times. He was transported to his Aunt Eve's house with each replay of the tape.

There was a time when he loved to visit her tan stucco home. Even still a whiff of bacon frying on the stove will come to mind if he lets himself recall happy overnight stays.

Images, though, of what happened there 13 years ago in Stephen's bedroom, on his cousin's bed, pervade his mind, eventually.

His psychiatrist's voice interrupts his trancelike daydreaming. "Frankie, before your aunt finalizes the sale of her home, it would be healing for you to revisit. Design some kind of ritual to honor the little boy inside of you who lost his innocence there."

"Okay, Dr. Lopez," Frankie responded. "I could check in on her and see how she's doing."

"You bet. How long has it been since Stephen died?"

"Five months," Frankie said.

-----

Frankie parked his car in the driveway. He stayed behind the wheel a few minutes to gather himself. His heart pounded inside his chest.

He had wondered many times if his aunt had suspected anything amiss that night long ago. His parents and Eve had been playing Mexican Train, a Friday evening ritual, when Frankie abruptly emerged from Stephen's room with a flushed face and "an upset stomach." His parents quickly said their goodbyes. There was no telling what conversation had transpired afterward between Eve and Stephen.

Today he dreaded carrying on small talk about Stephen's tragic death. Eve had been shocked to find Stephen in the bed, dead from an overdose of painkillers.

With trepidation, Frankie walked nervously to the door. A post-it note was stuck to it, with Eve's message: "I had to run an errand. Be back at 4:30. Make yourself at home!"

Relieved to be alone, he opened the unlocked door. Emotion rushed over him. Had Eve been present he might not have gone to Stephen's room, but her absence made it an easy decision. The bed looked the same – the plaid blue spread, and Dallas Cowboys Afghan folded at the foot.

Frankie relived the events: Stephen suggesting they both strip to their underwear, forcing Frankie onto his stomach, casting his large frame onto Frankie's back, pulling Frankie's underwear down, tightly gripping his mouth, and penetrating Frankie with deep, painful thrusts.

Frankie ordered those thoughts away; today was about the ritual. He pulled the note from his pocket: "Stephen, I bury here and now any thoughts of you and of what you did to me."

He went to the loosened floorboard in the corner and stooped to pull it up. He dropped the note underneath and took out two objects: the half-empty bottle of Oxycodone prescribed for Stephen, and the bottle of Clonazepam prescribed for himself by Dr. Lopez.

A wry smile came to his face as he thought to himself: "Thanks, Doc, for providing the *real* healing I needed when you warned me about combining these two."

---