The Writing on the Wall
by Evilida

Summary

House's apartment is robbed and he receives a death threat. A character-driven crime story with a strong dash of House and Wilson friendship and touches of humour.
This story was written when we knew that Wilson had a missing brother but nothing about him. It's non-canonical since the brother I gave Wilson is nothing like the one the show provided him.
Some violence but not graphic.
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Notes

I think the show bungled the whole Wilson's brother storyline. They resolved the whole thing in about six lines of dialogue and we never even met the brother. So I'm posting this non-canonical version which at least lets House and the brother (here named Roy) meet.
Chapter 1

Roy believed that the simple way was usually the best way. Some people used lock picks or credit cards; he just used a pair of heavy steel-toed boots. A couple of hard kicks and he was in the apartment. If he did it quickly and with a minimum of fuss, none of the other tenants in the building would bother to call the police about such a brief disturbance. One of his friends, a cab driver, had given him the tip-off about the empty apartment. The cabbie had driven the occupant and his luggage to the airport, and he'd noticed that his passenger didn't have anyone to see him off. Still it was possible that another person might live there as well. Roy listened for the sound of any movement. Then he relaxed; all his instincts told him no one was home.

He carefully propped the door back in its frame, so that someone glancing in its direction might not notice that it was off its hinges. The occupant had left the curtains drawn so it was quite dark. Roy turned on the lights and looked around. He was impressed. Whoever lived here was not afraid to spend money on the things that gave him pleasure. There was an excellent music system, television and DVD player, the latest game console, a laptop, a guitar, and a very nice piano. Unfortunately, the piano would never fit in his van, but the other items made up for it.

When Roy did his first break-in, he'd been a panicky seventeen year-old drug addict, desperate for enough money for his next high. He'd been so scared, he just grabbed what he could and ran. Most of what he took had been worthless; stuff you couldn't unload at a garage sale. That was a long time ago. Today, he was drug-free; he'd detoxed in prison, which had been no picnic. Theft was a just a job to him. Roy was a criminal because theft paid better than the kind of minimum-wage job an ex-con could land. He took his time and enjoyed his work.

Roy stuffed dozens of cd's into a garbage bag. The cds reflected an eclectic and idiosyncratic taste. Hidden behind a cd of the Who, Roy found a bottle of pills. He glanced at the label - Vicodin. He knew their street value. Roy also recognized the name of the doctor who'd prescribed the pills. Whoever lived here had cancer. Roy put the bottle in his pants pocket, and moved towards the DVD player and the DVD's. He'd only pulled half a dozen DVD's off the shelf when he found another full bottle of Vicodin. This aroused his curiosity. There might be dozens of pill bottles hidden in the apartment. Roy stuffed the rest of the DVD's into the bag and then started searching the rest of the room. Usually, Roy didn't bother with books – too heavy and no resale value – but now he pulled them off the shelves looking for more Vicodin. Soon he had half a dozen bottles of Vicodin and a bottle of morphine.

Roy noticed that some of the books were on medical subjects. On the coffee table, he found an issue of a medical journal that someone had been using as a coaster. The mailing label identified the apartment's occupant as Dr. Gregory House.

A doctor! That explained all the pills. James Wilson was a typical member of the medical profession. Let an ordinary person, even his own brother, come to him in agony and beg for a little pharmaceutical assistance and Jimmy would just turn him down flat. Another doctor was a different story, though. For another doctor, Jimmy would write prescription after prescription until his writing hand cramped! Ordinary people with cancer had to suffer, but this Dr. House wasn't going to suffer. Jimmy had prescribed him enough pills for House to kill himself before the pain became unbearable.

When Roy was on the job, he tried to stay calm and methodical. Emotions could lead to costly mistakes. This time, he felt an anger rising in him that he could not control. He swept through the living room and the bedroom, emptying drawers and knocking pictures from the walls, careless of the noise he was making. He found another five bottles of pills, which he dumped into the garbage
bag; a collection of porn magazines, which he ripped up; and a rat in a cage, which he let loose.

Roy made his way into the kitchen. He could tell that cooking was not one of Dr. Gregory House's hobbies. The cupboards were full of ramen noodles and canned chilli. He pulled open the refrigerator and grabbed a squeeze bottle of mustard. He started to make a puddle of mustard on the kitchen floor until a better idea occurred to him. He went into the living room and smeared a message on the wall in mustard using his latex-gloved fingers. When he ran out of mustard, Roy went back for ketchup and relish. He finished up with a can of chilli and some leftover Chinese food. The words on the wall looked as if they had been written in some obscene biological waste product. They said DIE IN PAIN.

Roy smiled. Without all his Vicodin, Dr. House, whoever he was, would die in pain.

House was attending a medical convention in San Francisco. The current speaker was hopeless – the idiot could not even talk and press a computer mouse at the same time. Whenever a new slide was needed, Dr. Moorhead would freeze while the audience waited in anticipation for the synapses in the swamp of sludge that was Dr. Moorhead's brain to catch fire. Then the feeble signal would pass through his nervous system with the startling speed of a turtle with a broken leg. Finally, the signal would reach his hand and then his finger would depress on the clicker. The new slide would appear, and Moorhead would stare at it in befuddlement for a few seconds before beginning to talk again. The speech was excruciatingly dull and wrong-headed but the long pauses had given House ample time to come up with a mental list of devastatingly clever questions for the q-and-a session at the end of the talk. He'd have Moorhead in tears.

House's cell phone went off. He pulled it out of his pocket, looked at the caller id, and then got up from his seat, and headed toward the exit. Half the audience turned to watch him leave, and Dr. Moorhead, distracted, lost his train of thought again.

"Don't mind me," House called out to the hall, as he limped up the aisle. "I'm the prime exhibit for the next seminar and I've got to get there early."

In the corridor, House speed-dialled a Princeton number.

"What's the problem, Cuddy? Some billionaire's son with an especially difficult case of the sniffles?"

"Hello, House. Your landlord called. He said your apartment has been broken into. He already called the police. They'll probably been in touch with you shortly."

House cursed.

"There's more," Cuddy said. "Apparently there's been some malicious damage. Wilson went to see if he could help but the police wouldn't let him in. There's also some writing on your living room wall. It's a death threat."

"What sort of threat? 'Death to the capitalist imperialist doctor'?

"This isn't funny, House. Remember that patient's husband who tried to kill you? The police never caught him."

"I got the impression that they never really tried. The police are too busy harassing people with chronic pain problems to look for gunmen."

"Just be careful. It sounds like you have an enemy, and he seems to be a pretty disturbed person."
House arranged to change his flight and go back to Princeton Plainsboro. He had let Cuddy know of his new plans, so he wasn't surprised that his best friend at the hospital, Dr. James Wilson, was at the airport to pick him up.

"How was the convention?" he asked.

"Tedious. I had to leave before the good part. This heart specialist from Tacoma was going to take me to this place he knows where all the strippers dress up like hospital administrators. Slip them a twenty and they'll be extra friendly."

"I'll have to keep it in mind for my next trip to the Bay Area. Oh, by the way, I have some bad news for you."

"More bad news. Did a speeding bus crash into my apartment?"

"Worse. It's Tritter. He was in your apartment when I went to check out the damage. I hope there isn't anything there that shouldn't be there."

"What, you mean that half-kilo of China White I've got in the vegetable crisper?"

"Something like that."

"I have valid prescriptions for everything. I don't take any chances. If there's anything there, it's because Tritter and his friends on the force have planted it."

Wilson pulled up in front of House's apartment building. House could tell that Wilson was nervous. His friend did not want to see Tritter again.

"Do you want me to come up with you?" Wilson asked.

"No, I'll be fine." House said.

"I can book you a room at my hotel if you need a place to stay. It sounds like your apartment might not be habitable right now."

"I'm going to see if Cuddy will give me free room and board. If not her, then Cameron, Chase or Foreman. Maybe not Foreman; I don't think I'd be safe in his neighbourhood."

"Maybe not Cameron either. You know how she feels about you."

"Do you think I'd toy with her emotions?" House assumed an outraged tone.

"Why not? You toy with everyone else's."

Wilson drove off, leaving House in front of the apartment building. The door opened and Tritter stood in the doorway.

"Dr. House," he said. "We weren't expecting you back for another two days."

"I heard you were here and couldn't resist coming back early to see you."

"Come inside. Let's talk about your enemies. We'll make a list."
Roy had already fenced most of House’s possessions, but he kept the laptop himself. People were careless. They often left their credit card numbers on their computers. Sometimes he found other interesting things as well, which he would pass on to a friend of his who had a sideline in blackmail. He opened House’s e-mail. Most of the e-mail was spam – ads for herbal Viagra or penile enlargement – but there were a few personal messages. One of them was from “jewilson.” He opened it.

Subject: Lunch

Cameron told me that you’re working from home today. Another ploy to get out of clinic duty or is there an extra special episode of GH today? Anyway, Simonds in radiology was telling me about a place where they do a great New Orleans style muffuletta. The owner is a refugee from Katrina, so it’s really authentic. Want to try it tomorrow? I’ve been eating cafeteria salads all week and want to sin a little.

Have you got the budget figures for Cuddy yet? If you haven’t got them in yet, bring them with you. I can work on them this weekend. I was planning on going condo hunting with Bonnie, but she has the flu, so I’ll have some free time.

Roy snorted. Wasn’t it just like Jimmy? His own wife had the flu, but rather than look after her, he preferred to spend his time doing another doctor’s paperwork. Dr. House was probably Jimmy’s boss. Even as a kid, his baby brother had been a suck-up. Maybe he hoped to get Dr. House’s job after he died of cancer.

Because Roy had dropped out of high school and spent most of his life living on the streets or in prison, people assumed he was stupid. Before he had become addicted to drugs, Roy had been an honour student with a bright future. Everyone had predicted scholarships to Ivy League schools, and a brilliant career. He had been his family’s pride and joy, and Jimmy and Mike had worshipped him. Everyone had known he was the best of the Wilson boys. Mike and Jimmy got good grades, but his were excellent. He’d been the star of the high-school baseball team, while Mike and Jimmy hadn’t even been picked. Girls fawned over him, while they were tongue-tied and awkward. He was the best of them, but now he was a lonely ex-con while they had successful careers and happy marriages. Life had been hard on him. No, that wasn’t quite right – his family had been hard on him.

When Roy had developed his addiction, they had given up on him. It was their fault. The process by which they had withdrawn their love and support had been slow and cruel. The first step had been when his parents had told him he would have to either go to rehab or leave the family home. Roy had heard about the rehab centre his parents chose. His friends told him that it was a snake pit run by sadists. The orderlies laughed while the patients sweated and vomited. One of his friends knew a guy who’d had a seizure from withdrawal and swallowed his tongue. He’d died. Roy decided that living on the streets was better than rehab. A couple of his friends had an apartment in a low-rent area. Roy gave them as much money as he could spare for rent, and slept on the couch.

His parents refused to visit him in his apartment, but they would still phone. Roy usually got into a shouting match with his father, but his mother would cry and urge him to come back home. Mike and then Jimmy went off to university. Mike didn’t have any contact with Roy after he left home, but Jimmy sent him letters and tried to phone. Roy usually hung up on him. Once Jimmy came by to the apartment when he was back home for winter break. Roy was passed out in the closet, and didn’t remember the visit at all. Jimmy, the condescending bastard, had brought Roy a bag of groceries as if Roy were incapable of getting his own food. Roy had wanted to throw that food out, but his friends
had objected. They wanted it even if he didn't and Roy hadn't made a contribution toward the rent in two months. He'd felt humiliated by his little brother's charity. His so-called friends had kicked him out of the apartment a few weeks later, and he'd ended up on the streets.

He'd seen Jimmy just once since then. Roy had been living in a skid-row hotel in New York. He'd run into an old acquaintance from high school who told him that Jimmy was working at Princeton-Plainsboro Teaching Hospital as an oncologist. Roy had phoned him up at work. Jimmy had actually sounded pleased to hear from him, and had agreed to meet him at a restaurant in Jimmy's neighbourhood one Saturday.

Jimmy had insisted on buying Roy a big meal, even though Roy couldn't remember the last time he'd had an appetite for food. He'd picked at the meal, and ordered a whiskey. Jimmy ordered a beer.

"I hear you're working over at PPTH," he said. "You've made a real success of your life. Simon Rosenthal told me you got married. Didn't invite me to the wedding, but that's okay. What's her name, Michelle?"

Jimmy blushed. "I didn't invite anyone really. We eloped. It was a big mistake. I wasn't ready. We broke up."

"A mistake, huh. I guess anyone can make a mistake, even you."

"Yeah. I'm married to someone else now. Her name's Bonnie. We're hoping for kids. You seeing anyone?"

"I see people all the time, but no one sees me. I'm living on the streets. Street people are invisible you know. We walk right up to people, ask 'em for help, and they don't answer. We must be inaudible, too."

"If you need some help," Jimmy said, "one of the nurses was telling me about a place she went to when she was using amphetamines. She said it's really good. You can see how much happier she is, since she came back."

"Someplace like that sounds a little out of my price range."

"I'd pay for it, of course."

"Of course."

Roy put a tiny portion of mashed potato on his fork and started lifting it to his mouth. He stopped when he noticed his hand was shaking.

"There are better ways for you to help me."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm an experienced drug user," Roy said. "User not abuser. I know just how much to take to keep myself functional. The drugs themselves aren't a problem. What's hurting me is that they're expensive and illegal. I have to go to dealers to get the drugs I need, and they lace them with impurities and poisons which are destroying my health. I have to turn to crime because the dealers charge so much that no nine-to-five job could pay for them. You could solve my real problem."

"I'm not giving you drugs," Jimmy said flatly.

"If you really wanted to help me, you would. You know what separates a do-gooder from someone
who actually helps? A do-gooder decides what your problem is and what the solution is, all by himself. Someone who helps listens to you when you tell him what you need and then he gives it to you. That's the difference."

"That's not someone who helps, that's an enabler."

"Oh, has little Jimmy been to therapy? Spare me the psychobabble. I want another whiskey."

"You've barely touched your food, and who knows what other drugs you're mixing with alcohol," Jimmy snapped. "Have a Coca Cola or something."

"You expect me to eat this stuff. It tastes like shit. I need whiskey to wash the taste out of my mouth. Waitress! I need a whiskey and my brother needs a large stick removed from his ass! And a slice of pie. Blueberry, that's your favourite, isn't it?"

"No, blueberry was Mike's favourite. I like apple."

"Apple pie. The golden boy likes apple pie. How could I forget that? It's so predictable. Make that apple," he called out to the waitress.

"Listen," Jimmy said earnestly. "This place I was talking about, it's called Newspring. It's not too far away. I could drive you there tonight. You deserve better than the life you're living now, Roy; you really do. You're better than this. You can be the brother I idolized when I was a kid. He's still in there. Please, Roy, give this place a chance."

"You think this is a new idea? You think I haven't tried rehab before? It's torture; that's what it is. If you were a good brother, you'd give up on this rehab idea and give me the kind of help I really need. All I need is something to keep me going. It's so easy for you."

"I can't. You know I can't. I'd lose my license."

"I should have known," Roy said bitterly. "Self-interest always comes first with you. I'm leaving."

"Don't go yet," Jimmy said.

Roy cursed at him, got to his feet, swaying slightly, and headed for the door. That was the last time he saw his brother.

House refused to talk to Tritter and insisted on making his statement to another officer. Tritter agreed to let another policeman take House's statement, but he didn't leave the room. He was silent and his expression was bland and innocuous, but House knew that he was listening to every word that he said, hoping for information that could be used against him.

"Where's Steve McQueen?"

"What?"

"Steve McQueen is my rat. Is he still in his cage?"

"I didn't see a rat, but I'll tell the men to look out for him. He's a rat; he knows how to survive. Now, tell us where you were when this incident occurred."

"I was in San Francisco at a medical conference. I was going to be on one of the panels today, but I guess they found someone else to fill in."
"Who knew that you were attending this conference?"

"There was a list of presenters published before hand. Everyone who was planning to attend the conference got it. It was listed on the webpage as well. So all the people in the world who have Internet access and can read English could find out that I was going to be in San Francisco."

"My colleague didn't ask who could find out. He asked who knew," Tritter said.

"Cuddy, Wilson, Cameron, Chase and Foreman. Cuddy's assistant. Any of the nurses that Wilson has flirted with in the past week. The night janitor who wears his pants backward. The cafeteria ladies. My motorcycle mechanic. All the good people at United Airlines and the staff of the San Francisco Hilton. The cab driver who drove me to the airport."

"Do you know of any people who wish you harm?" the other police officer said.

"Yes, I do. Tritter, for one."

"Okay, I'll put him on the list, but I think he has a pretty good alibi. Anyone else?"

"The guy who shot me. Moriarty. You never caught him."

"Anyone else?"

"None of Wilson's ex-wives like me very much. Foreman keeps telling me I'm trying to corrupt him and turn him into an evil zombie version of myself. Cuddy said she'd skin me alive if I didn't get the budget figures in on time, but I was a month and a half late and I still have my skin. That woman who was poisoning her husband, is she in jail?"

"She's out on bail, awaiting trial. We'll be talking to her."

"You don't think this threat is serious, do you?"

"We have to take this sort of things seriously, especially since you've been attacked before. Do you have any place where you can stay for a while?"

"I was thinking of asking Cuddy to put me up."

Tritter's voice was low and friendly. "Dr. House doesn't mind inconveniencing his friends or putting them in harm's way."

"If you think whoever did this is really dangerous, I could stay in a hotel."

"Dr. Wilson is at the Princeton Sleep Inn. It's quite comfortable there."

"How do you know where he is?" House snapped.

"I keep an eye on Dr. Wilson," said Tritter. "He might need my help one day. I haven't forgotten him."

"If you want to come after me, do it. Leave Wilson out of it."

"I don't think Wilson has anything to do with this particular incident," Tritter acknowledged. "I think this is all about you and the way you treat people. Now, someone is after you, and I can't say that I'm surprised."
Roy looked at the other messages but didn't find anything else from Jimmy. He went to the PPTH website. James Wilson was listed as Head of the Oncology Department. Dr. Gregory House was Head of Diagnostic Medicine. Was Head of Diagnostic Medicine a more prestigious job than Head of Oncology? Cameron was another doctor in the Department of Diagnostic Medicine and Cuddy was Head of Medicine. Jimmys friends and colleagues. How could he use them? James had the life that Roy deserved. How could he take it away from him? He decided to start with Bonnie. He went to Google and typed "Bonnie Wilson" Princeton. The first result was for a real estate company

Roy called the cell phone number listed on the website. He pretended to be interested in purchasing a condo and made an appointment to see Bonnie Wilson at ten o'clock the next day. He wasn't sure what to do after that. He'd had to do some unpleasant things to survive life in prison and on the streets, but Roy didn't consider himself a violent or unreasonable man. How much did he want to hurt his brother? How much pain did Jimmy deserve for abandoning him?

Wilson and House were in Wilson's hotel room. They were watching an old episode of Seinfeld on Wilson's TV. House was sprawled on the bed, and Wilson had taken the chair. He'd moved it next to the bed, and was resting his sock-clad feet on the bed. He'd made microwave popcorn, but only had a mouthful before House appropriated the bag.

"Don't get any salt under the covers," Wilson ordered.

House rubbed his salted, buttery fingers on the bedspread, just to irritate him. Wilson threw a box of tissues at his head.

"Use these for God's sake."

"A civilized person would have napkins," House complained. "These disintegrate when you get butter on them."

"I'm more civilized than you. I have microwave popcorn and cable. I have a desk and a plug-in for my computer. You have a view of the dumpster."

"It was the only room left. Stupid Class of 1997 reunion. I thought you were going to get me a nice room."

"And I thought you were going to Cuddy's house. She wouldn't let you stay with her?"

"I didn't ask. I had second thoughts. There's a full moon tonight, and I'm really not into claws, teeth and fur."

"Okay. What about Chase, Cameron or Foreman?"

"It's not really a good idea to associate too closely with underlings. Gives them delusions of adequacy."

"You're not trying to protect them, are you?" Wilson asked. "You don't think you're really in danger?"

"No, Tritter was just trying to scare me. It was mindless vandalism."

"What did the message say?"

"Die in pain."
"Not just die, but die in pain?"

"Yup."

"Oddly specific," Wilson said. "Why in pain?"

"I suppose whoever wrote it doesn't like me very much," House said, "or maybe he just hates everybody."

"And it was written in food."

"Chili and leftover Chinese takeaway."

"I thought it was more usual to write in blood or excrement."

"This was bad enough. There were flies everywhere. The walls are going to have to be repainted, and he wiped his hands all over the sofa. Fortunately, he didn't get at the piano, but some of the furniture is going to have to be replaced. I already called my insurance company."

"It's just weird."

Wilson's voice was slurred. It was long past midnight and he was half asleep but too polite to tell his friend to leave. House didn't really want to be alone. He wanted to keep Wilson up all night just to keep him company, but Tritter's sly comment insisted on its insinuating its way into his mind, "Dr. House doesn't mind inconveniencing his friends or putting them in harm's way."

"I have to be up early," he said, awkwardly climbing out of bed. Wilson took the almost empty bag of popcorn from him and passed him his cane. "See you tomorrow."

"Night," said Wilson.
Roy met Bonnie outside a condominium complex overlooking Carnegie Lake.

"I heard about you from a friend we have in common, Gregory House," Roy said.

"Oh, him. He's not really my friend. He's more of an acquaintance really. He's a friend of my exhusband. I found this really terrific condo for him, but he backed out of the deal. Afraid of change, I think."

"Your ex-husband?"

"James Wilson. If you know House, you must know James. While we were married, those two were inseparable, unfortunately. Anyway, I found him the perfect place. Darling kitchen, wood floors, easy commuting distance to the hospital. It was ideal. I'd show it to you now, but this couple from Bayonne snapped it up. She was a former dancer. Such a beautiful figure. I thought he was kind of a brute, to be perfectly honest. I don't really expect that marriage to last. When they break up, I hope she gets the condo."

"Inseparable."

"What? Oh, James and House. Yes, BFF as they say nowadays, though it's mostly teenaged girls who are BFF, not grown men. Honestly, I can't stand your friend House, but James and I still get along, even after he married that bitch Julie. Oops, excuse my language."

"Julie?"

"You haven't met her? She doesn't like House at all. Anyway, the condo I'm going to show you has a view of the lake, not a straight-on view, but a sideways view - just turn your head to the left a bit. It's got lovely hardwood floors and comes with seven appliances. You can choose plain white or you can upgrade to stainless steel. There's an extra charge for the stainless steel, but it's so stylish."

"So when did Julie marry Jimmy, sorry, James?"

"It was only nine months after we divorced. When I heard that, I was sure that James had been cheating on me with Julie while we were married. I knew he was cheating on me with somebody. I confronted him, and he said it wasn't her. He swore he didn't meet her until after we separated. She snapped him up on the rebound."

"He said that?"

"Well, not that snapping up part. James wouldn't say that. He's too polite. I know James and women. All she had to do was pull her poor tragic waif act and James would come running to save her. He's a sucker for damsels in distress. I wasn't surprised when they divorced. I could have told you Julie was all wrong for him. Anyway, the place we're going to see is on the ninth floor. Your neighbours are a perfectly nice gay couple named Ted and Phil on one side, and this really sweet Latina lady on the other. She works at PPTH, too, in the ICU."

"It's on the ninth floor."

"Yes, the ninth floor."

"It's too high up. I'm afraid of heights."
"Oh, I wish you mentioned that on the phone. There's this other condo we could see. It's in a low rise complex. Honestly, it's not quite as nice as this one, because it faces the freeway, but you'll love the moulded ceilings. Just let me call the seller."

"I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to leave now, Bonnie. I'll call your office and we can make an appointment to see this other condo. Bye."

"Bye, Roy. What was your last name again?"

When she got back to the office, Bonnie tried to telephone Roy but the telephone number she written down didn't work. Unfortunately, she couldn't remember Roy's last name so she couldn't look him up in the phone book. Greg House's home telephone number was still in her rolodex. She left a message for him.

"Hello, Greg. This is Bonnie, Bonnie Wilson. I'm phoning about that fellow you sent to see me. You know, what's his name, not Rory but something like that. He's a tough-looking guy, isn't he? I wouldn't want to meet him in a dark alley. Anyway, he was really interested in this condo by the freeway. I want to call him about it, but I think I copied his number down incorrectly. Would you give me his number, or at least tell him to call me? Oh, and if you ever want to leave your apartment, there's this really nice high-rise condo overlooking Carnegie Lake that I think would be perfect for you."

The message on the wall was preying on House's mind. "Die in pain," the vandal had written. As Wilson had mentioned, it seemed too specific to be directed at the world at large. It seemed personal. He'd hardly gotten any sleep the night before. For once, it had not been his leg pain that kept him awake. Instead, every time he fell asleep, memories of the day he had been shot intruded into his dreams. He woke up covered in sweat, his heart pounding. He didn't think Moriarty was responsible for the vandalism; it would be a strange step backward for a man who had once shot him to be satisfied with painting a nasty message on his wall. Still, there were people out there who hated him, and they knew where he lived. He felt like a target.

House was in an appalling mood. His associates Chase, Cameron and Foreman had scattered. Chase was working in the clinic, while Cameron and Foreman had taken refuge in the Obstetrics Lounge. Cameron was trying to do one of Chase's crossword puzzles and Foreman was pretending to read an article in the New England Journal of Medicine. He was too angry to concentrate.

"House had no right to say that," he said. "He was right about you and Chase – Chase is a brownnoser and you are a Cinderella wannabee - but what he said about me; that was totally wrong."

"When he called you a smug, equal-opportunity Napoleon? That was hilarious," Cameron said, "but I think he hurt Chase's feelings, when he said that his mother must have been as fat as a prize pig. Chase is sensitive about her. He's an orphan, you know."

"I didn't know whether Chase was going to cry or punch him in the mouth."

"Neither did House. I think he realized he went too far. The way he was clutching his cane, I think he was ready to club Chase if he got too close."

"You should go and talk to Chase," Foreman said. "He's too upset to be doing clinic work right now. He makes mistakes when he's distracted."
"You just want me to leave so you can turn on the t.v. and watch Oprah. I know you're not interested in that article. Since when did you care about the psychological effects of enuresis on pre-teenage boys?"

"I happen to have a cousin..."

"You can watch Oprah if you want. I'll never tell. She's talking with the cast of Grey's Anatomy today."

"Really. Well, if you want to watch it, we can turn it on."

Foreman had become addicted to Oprah when he was in college. She was his secret shame. He kept the open copy of NEJM on his lap, but only turned the pages during commercials. He was still furious at House, and wondered if complaining to Cuddy would do any good. He didn't want to look like a whiner, but House's behaviour had been atrocious. He'd heard that House's apartment had been robbed, so it was natural for him to be upset, but he didn't have to dump all his anger and frustration on his colleagues. That was not proper workplace behaviour. Oprah wouldn't put up with it for a second.

Wilson met Chase in the corridor. The younger man was wearing a jacket and had his backpack over his shoulder. Wilson pretended not to notice Chase's red swollen eyes. Chase warned him to avoid House.

"He's in a terrible mood. Maybe the pharmacist switched his Vicodin for placebos and he's going through withdrawal again. I can't take him. I've got a headache. I'm going home. Tell Cuddy I'll make up my hours on the weekend."

"If you're sick, Cuddy won't make you work on the weekend. You're entitled to time off with pay. Wait a minute; I'll drive you home," Wilson said. "You don't look well and I don't think you should be driving."

"I'll take the bus," Chase said. "I'm going home."

"Okay, I'll tell Cuddy you've left. Good bye."

Cuddy stormed into House's office.

"What did you do to Chase? Wilson told me that he had to go home with a headache."

"He's too sensitive; he can't take a joke."

"What sort of joke?"

"One about his dead mother."

"House, I can make you take that sensitivity training seminar again. I know how much you enjoyed it the last time."

"Okay, okay. I'll be good. No more dead mother jokes."

"I've told Chase to take tomorrow off. You're working his clinic hours."

"That's not fair."
"The new sensitivity instructor is named Helga. She tells me that she's never met a man she couldn't break."

"How about I get Foreman and Cameron to work his hours?"

"I don't care as long as someone in your department does those clinic hours."

Although Wilson was angry at House for the way he had treated Chase, he did not kick House out of his office when he came in at lunchtime. House was carrying a Chinese chicken salad for Wilson and a clubhouse sandwich with fries for himself. This was an unprecedented gesture. In all their years of friendship, he could count on one hand the times House had ever given him food. He'd even remembered to ask the cafeteria ladies for dressing on the side, the way Wilson liked it. Wilson was touched.

"Thank you," he said.

"The Chinese chicken salad goes early," House said. "If you aren't there right at noon, you haven't a hope of getting one. This was the last one. You owe me $5.25."

There was a knock on the door, and then Tritter entered without waiting for a reply.

"Hello," he said, nodding to the two men. "I've come to see you, Dr. House. Dr. Cuddy told me that you would probably be here."

"Maybe you two should talk in House's office," Wilson said.

"I'm not sure about that. This may concern you. Dr. House, in your statement to Detective Ortega, you said that all Dr. Wilson's ex-wives disliked you."

"That's not true," Wilson protested. "Michelle never even met you."

"I'm not talking about Michelle, whoever she may be," Tritter said. "I'm talking about Bonnie, Bonnie Wilson."

"Bonnie doesn't like him," Wilson confirmed, "but she's not a violent person. She's not all that strong either. House told me the door was kicked down. Bonnie couldn't do that."

"When was the last time you spoke to Bonnie Wilson?" Tritter asked House.

"About a month ago, when she tried to sell me a condo. I ended up taking Hector instead," said House. "Hector's her dog."

"Have you listened to the messages left at your home telephone?"

"Have you been listening to my messages without my permission? That's a violation of my rights."

"No, Dr. House, but one of the police investigators was on the scene when the message was left. He said it was from Bonnie Wilson and it was about someone called Rory. She said he was a friend of yours. Who is Rory?"

"I have no idea."

"Would you mind listening to your messages? Maybe you could put them on speaker phone so we can all hear them."
House thought of refusing, simply because it would annoy Tritter, but Wilson also seemed anxious to hear the message. He called his home phone line and listened to the message on speakerphone.

"She didn't say his name was Rory," Wilson said. "She said it sounded like Rory. Do you know a Corey, maybe?"

"I don't think someone named Corey would be the type of guy you'd be afraid to meet in a dark alley," House replied. "I don't know any Coreys either."

"I know a Roy," Wilson admitted. "My brother, but I haven't seen him for years. He may be dead."

"Roy Andrew Wilson," Tritter said.

Wilson nodded.

"He was alive as of two years’ ago, when he was released from East Jersey State Prison in Rahway. He was supposed to see his parole officer, but he disappeared before his first appointment. You're sure you haven't seen him?"

"Of course, I'm sure. In any case, Bonnie's never met Roy, and neither has House."

"This is a mug shot of Roy. It was taken about four years ago. Do you recognize him? Have you seen him recently?"

"It's Roy," Wilson confirmed. "He looks so much older. He's only nine years older than I am, but he looks at least sixty. I haven't seen him for ten years."

Tritter showed the same photo to House.

"Do you recognize him? Maybe he was somebody you treated at the clinic. Maybe you gave him the same kind of treatment you gave me."

"I've never seen him before. There's a family resemblance between him and Wilson. I would have noticed."

"Okay," Tritter said. "I'm going to confirm your story with Ms. Wilson and see if she recognizes this photograph. If either of you see this man, telephone me right away. Even if he isn't responsible for the b-and-e and the damage to Dr. House's apartment, he's still wanted for parole violation."

"He's my brother," Wilson said. "I won't tell on him."

"He's your brother, but it seems that he may want to kill your friend here. Which one of them is more important to you?"

Of course, there were easier ways to find him James Wilson than stalking his ex-wives. Roy didn't have his home address, but he knew where he worked. The ex-con missed his family, even though they had let him down terribly. The trouble was that he wanted to be the golden boy again. He wanted to be the favourite son, not Mike, and certainly not Jimmy. Jimmy was supposed to be his useless baby brother. If Roy did return to his family, he'd be the unsuccessful son, the one who never achieved his potential and let down his parents. He saw himself as a forgiving sort of person. He wanted to forgive his family for turning their backs on him; he didn't want to be the one who had to be forgiven.
Roy sat in his car in the visitor's parking lot of the Princeton-Plainsboro Teaching Hospital. His brother was inside. All he had to do was get out of the car and walk in, and he could see Jimmy again. When he thought about Jimmy, he felt angry enough to strangle him. Jimmy had stolen the perfect life that God had intended for Roy. Only now, he was beginning to realize that Jimmy's life was not perfect. He'd struck out three times in the marriage department. His best friend, this Dr. House, was dying of cancer, and even though Jimmy was an oncologist, he couldn't cure him. All he could do was give him enough Vicodin and morphine to kill himself. Now, Jimmy couldn't even do that, since Roy had stolen House's meds.

If I go in that door, Roy thought, and I see him, what will I say to him? I don't want to say I'm sorry for running away from him. I don't want to say I'm sorry for choosing the drugs over my family. I don't want to have to beg for forgiveness. But if I go in there, and I don't say sorry, what will I say?

Roy's thoughts were interrupted by a rap on the car's window. The man standing by his car gestured for Roy to roll down the window. Roy knew he was a cop, even though he was in plain clothes. He didn't need to see the badge that he was taking out of coat pocket. Running away again would take more energy than he possessed. It was easier to just roll down the window.

"Can I see some identification?" he asked. The cop's voice was oddly gentle, even soothing.

"My name's Roy Wilson, and I'm wanted for a parole violation. I guess you already know that."

"I do. If I pat you down, am I going to find any sort of weapon?"

"No, I'm not armed. I'm not a violent person."

"It wasn't Roy," said Wilson. "This is just a mix-up. Bonnie thought you introduced her to this guy, Rory, but it must have been someone else who introduced them. That's all. My brother doesn't even know you. Why would he want you dead? Besides, before he started taking drugs, he was the sweetest guy in the world. He was smart and popular and generous."
"Get out of the vehicle," Tritter said. His hand was on the handle of his gun, but he hadn't drawn the weapon. "Nice and slow."

Roy stepped out of the car.

"What's in the glove compartment?" Tritter asked. "Am I going to find a weapon there?"

"No weapons. Just maps and stuff."

"Right. Pop the trunk. Let's see what you've got there."

Roy leaned down to pull the trunk release. Tritter's eyes never left him for a second and his hand tightened on his gun. He relaxed slightly when Roy straightened up and stepped back from the vehicle. Slowly, maintaining eye contact on the policeman, Roy backed towards the trunk. He opened it. Tritter glanced in. The trunk was lined with plastic garbage bags and was almost empty. There was a squeegee, a plastic ice scraper and a length of cord.

"What were you planning on doing with that rope?" he asked.

"Nothing. It's just there. Been there for months, maybe years. It's not even mine. I got this car used and it was in the trunk."

"To me, these garbage bags and this rope look like part of a plan. Maybe a plan involving Dr. House. Were you out here waiting to attack him when he left work?"

"No. I told you – I'm not violent. I wasn't going to attack anybody. I was waiting for my brother. He works here. We were going to meet up after he got off work."

"I was just talking about you with your brother. He didn't mention any meeting."

"He didn't know about it. It was a surprise. We haven't seen each other for a long time, and I wanted to get in touch with him."

"A family reunion. How long has it been, Roy, since you last saw James Wilson? Your brother was quick to tell me that he doesn't have any contact with you at all anymore and hasn't for years. He was pretty anxious to disown you. I know he never visited you in prison. None of your family did. They'd washed their hands of you, hadn't they?"

Roy didn't answer, but Tritter noted the quick flicker of resentment in the ex-con's eyes, and knew that he had touched a nerve. This was a response he could use. Roy shut the trunk. He got Roy to put his hands behind his back, patted him down (no weapons as promised), took his keys, and handcuffed him. He started walking him towards an unmarked police vehicle.

"I see it in a lot of families," Tritter continued. "There's the black sheep and the white sheep. There's the son who can do no wrong, and the other one - the one his parents figure was just born bad. I guess it was that way in your family too, huh? Your brother being a respected doctor and you being an ex-con and a junkie."

"I've given up drugs," Roy protested. "I haven't touched them for almost two and a half years."

"Personally, I respect a man who manages to conquer his addiction. It shows real resolve and
determination. Still, I've got to wonder how long that resolve is going to last when you're back in Rahway. One hit and you're back to square one. That temptation is always there, isn't it? Always somewhere in the back of your mind. They say prison is hardest on a thinking man – someone with brains. It's the monotony that does them in."

Roy was silent. He was experienced enough to know that it was never a good idea to get chatty with your arresting officer. However, Tritter was highly attuned to Roy's body language and expression. He knew that his words were having an impact. He leaned in close as Roy got into the back of the unmarked police car.

"Two thinking men, if they put their heads together, maybe they could come up with an alternative to prison."

House stood in the doorway of his apartment, surveying the damage. He had to make an inventory of what was lost or destroyed for his insurance claim. Eying the shambles of what had once been his refuge, he felt overwhelmed. It would be easier, he thought, to make a list of what still remained. He walked across the room to open a window, hoping to disperse the stink of rotting food. One of the police officers had given him the card of a specialist service, experienced in cleaning up after crime scenes. He wondered if the cleaner gave him a kickback for every referral.

Wilson had offered to help him with the clean-up, but House had refused his offer. He did not know whether Wilson's brother had anything to do with House's break-in, but the possibility made things awkward between them. Wilson staunchly maintained that his brother could have nothing to do with it. He insisted that his brother had been a paragon of virtue until he was lead astray by drugs. House thought Wilson's protestations had sounded false. He had been evasive; there were things about his brother he did not want to reveal. Unfortunately, Wilson was able to keep a secret better than anyone else that House knew. If he wanted to find out what Wilson wasn't telling him, he would have to investigate elsewhere.

He got out his cellphone and called Robert Chase, the most suitable of his fellows for the job he had in mind. Foreman would have reacted with righteous indignation at having been given a non-work-related assignment, and Cameron would have been too nosy. When Chase answered the phone he sounded disoriented and groggy. House realized that Chase must have been asleep, even though it was only seven p.m. He had assumed that Chase had lied about having a headache and was merely trying to gain a day off from work and some sympathy from his colleagues, particularly from Allison Cameron. Now, he realized that Chase was telling the truth. House felt a second of guilt for upsetting his underling enough to make him feel ill. Then he dismissed the notion; it was not his fault that Chase was over-sensitive.

"Chase, I want you to get me some information."

"Can't Foreman or Cameron handle it?" Chase asked. "I've taken a sleeping pill and I'm groggy. I shouldn't drive."

"You can do this research from home. I want some information on Wilson's brother. He's a lawyer in New York. His name is Michael. Just get me his telephone number to start with."

"We have this thing in Australia, maybe you've heard of it here, it's called Directory Assistance."

"Is that your attempt at sarcasm?" House asked. "I'm not sure, because you're so bad at it. His home phone number is probably unlisted and I don't know which firm he's with."
"Why don't you ask Dr. Wilson?"

"I would have thought that was perfectly obvious. I don't want him to know. Duh."

Chase wasn't in the mood to argue. Agreeing would make House hang up more quickly.

"Okay, Michael Wilson, lawyer. Somewhere in New York, the city or the state?"

"Yes," said House impatiently. "Phone me back." He terminated the call without saying good-bye.

Chase was still angry and hurt by House's earlier comments, and his headache had not abated. The light of the early evening sky coming through his living room window was enough to make him wince in pain. He went across the room to close the curtains and then went back to bed. Whatever House wanted could wait. He wasn't his lapdog.

Fifteen minutes later, Chase was still awake and thinking about House's call. House showed a lot of confidence in him in asking him to handle this delicate matter rather than Foreman or Cameron. He couldn't let him down just because House had been rude. House was rude to everyone, and Chase knew not to take his boss's behaviour personally. He got out of bed and headed toward his computer.

House was rescuing a framed photograph of Stacey from the wreckage of his apartment when his cellphone went off. Chase was on the other end of the line.

"I found two lawyers named Michael Wilson, but one of them is straight out of law school. The other one must be Dr. Wilson's brother. He works for a firm called Petrovich, Alexander in their wills and estates department. He's married and his wife's name is Melissa. I've got his work and home telephone numbers."

House wrote down the phone numbers.

"Anything else you needed to know?" Chase asked.

"That's fine for now. If I think of anything else, I'll let you know tomorrow."

"I won't be in. Cuddy gave me the day off."

"I'm your boss not Cuddy. I think it's a bad idea to give someone a day off just for hurting their feelings. Cameron would never have to come in to work at all."

"But I'm sick. I have a headache."

"And my leg hurts. Boo hoo."

Chase mumbled something – probably a swear word – and hung up on him. House smiled to himself. He felt a sense of accomplishment for provoking the younger man. It was rare indeed for Chase to display any anger towards his mentor, and twice in one day was a record. Maybe one day Chase would learn to stand up for himself.

Instead of taking Roy Wilson to the police station, Tritter had driven him to a diner on the interstate. Tritter had removed his prisoner's handcuffs. Roy cautiously got out of the car. He'd heard of set-ups, where police officers had taken their prisoners to isolated locations and then shot them. They claimed that their prisoners were killed while resisting arrest, but it was cold-hearted murder. Tritter seemed capable of that kind of behaviour. His outward manner was deceptively gentle, but something about
him made Roy uneasy. He would make a very bad enemy.

"When we go into the diner, I'm going to ask for a booth. You slide in first next to the wall, and I'll be between you and the exit."

"Okay."

The waitress came over and showed them to a booth in the back. Tritter said that he didn't need to see the menu. He'd have coffee and a grilled cheese sandwich and his friend would have the same. She left.

"You went to see Bonnie Wilson the other day."

"Yes." Roy didn't see any point in denying what the police officer obviously already knew. "I wanted to check up on my little brother, see how he was doing. Not too well," he said, unable to keep a hint of satisfaction from his voice. "He's been divorced twice since I last saw him. I guess he can't keep a woman happy."

"You told her you were a friend of Gregory House."

"I didn't want her to know I was Jimmy's brother. I saw House's name in the staff directory."

"Out of all the physicians and surgeons at the hospital, you happened to choose your brother's best friend. That's a coincidence. If it had been me, I would have chosen another oncologist, figuring that my brother would be bound to know someone else in his own specialty. Or did you already know that House was your brother's best friend?"

"How could I know that?" Roy said. "I haven't seen him for years."

"House's apartment was broken into. His laptop was stolen and his place was ransacked. Whoever did that had access to a lot of personal information."

"I don't know anything about that."

They were interrupted by the waitress with their orders. Tritter gave her a warm, friendly smile that disappeared as soon as she walked away.

"What did you see when you broke into House's apartment?"

"I didn't break in to anyone's apartment. I've been keeping my nose clean. With the parole violation, I couldn't afford to draw attention to myself."

"If we searched your place, would we find anything from House's apartment? Or maybe from another burglary? It's a wonder what forensics can find if they look hard enough."

Roy pretended to be interested in his cheese sandwich.

"Okay, you're not saying anything. So I'll tell you what you saw in House's apartment. I'm betting you found a whole lot of Vicodin, and maybe some strong opiates as well. Is that right?"

"Is this House guy sick or something?" Roy asked, refusing to confirm Tritter's supposition. "If he has to take all those pills, he must be pretty sick. Cancer maybe?"

"No, he's just an addict like you, except he has a medical degree and some friends who were willing to commit perjury to protect him. I'm an idealist," Tritter said. "I actually think the law should treat the rich and powerful the same as the rest of us. Unfortunately, the judge at House's trial didn't agree."
You got five years; he walked. "

"Jimmy was one of the friends who got him off?"

"Your brother covered up for him and wrote the prescriptions for his Vicodin. He was willing to lose his practice in order to protect House. Under other circumstances, that kind of loyalty would be admirable."

Titter signalled the waitress for the bill.

"Unfortunately, his loyalty to House is going to get your brother into big trouble. House is hugely arrogant and he thinks that the police are fools. He's certain to make a mistake eventually. The problem is that House has made his friends and co-workers accomplices. When we do catch him, they'll go down as well."

He paid the bill and left a generous tip for the waitress. Roy had not touched half his sandwich, so Titter picked it up and took a bite. It was cold.

"Now comes the time for you to make a decision. We can go down to the station and I can charge you with the parole violation, the b-and-e, and anything else I think might stick. That's fine with me if it's what you decide. The second option is for you to do me a favour. You help me convict House and in return I settle things with the Parole Board. What's your decision?"

"I don't have a choice. I can't go back to prison. I'll help you."

House picked up some Korean barbecue from a takeaway place and returned to his comfortless hotel room. He had just finished his late dinner, when he heard a knock at his door. He knew it must be Wilson. He had checked in under a false name – Carter McCoy – and nobody but Wilson knew where he was. House didn't want to speak to him.

"House," Wilson said. "I know you're there. Let me in for a minute. We should talk."

House turned up the volume on the room's clock radio to drown out his friend's voice. Olivia Newton-John and John Travolta loudly extolled the virtues of "Summer Loving." House couldn't stand the song and hoped that Wilson hated it just as much. After a couple of minutes of aural torture, Wilson gave up.

Normally, James Wilson loved the anonymity of his hotel room – the way it was designed for some theoretical average traveller and not for himself personally. Even someone as astute as House could walk into this hotel room and know nothing about its occupant. He left no footprints here.

After House's refusal to speak to him, however, Wilson wanted company. He headed to the hotel bar rather than his room. Assorted alumni from the Class of '97 were re-enacting one of those timeless Ivy League traditions which, to the uninitiated eye, look so much like binge drinking. He headed toward the bar and ordered a beer. A slim, dark-haired woman was sitting at the bar. Wilson studied her reflection in the mirror over the bar. Lines of worry creased her forehead and he could see the tension in her shoulders. She was lost in her own thoughts, and, judging by her expression, those thoughts were not pleasant. Wilson thought he would be doing a kindness if he distracted her from whatever was worrying her.

"So are you with the Class of 1997?" he asked.
It took her a second to realize that someone was talking to her. "No," she replied, "but I guess it's flattering that you think I could be."

"I'm James Wilson. I'm staying at the hotel temporarily until I find a new apartment."

"I'm in town visiting my oldest son. He's at Princeton. And, no, before you ask, I wasn't a child bride."

"You think I'm trying to pick you up," Wilson said. "I'm not. Only I've had a difficult day and I thought it would just be nice to just talk with someone. And you looked a bit out of place, so I thought that you might want to talk to someone too."

"There are probably worse ways to spend an evening than talking to a stranger," the woman replied. "My name's Joanna Smith or maybe Joanna Partridge. I'm in the middle of a divorce and I haven't quite decided whether I'm going back to my maiden name."

"My ex-wife Bonnie kept her married name after we divorced. Her maiden name is Polish, and she said it was too long to fit on her signs. She's a real estate agent."

"Not a consideration in my case."

"Your drink's almost empty. Would you like a refill? We could take our drinks to a table in the corner away from the noise and talk for a while."

"I guess we could do that. Order me a rum and coke."
Chapter 4

House woke up early the next morning in more pain than usual. An evening of rummaging around his ransacked apartment had not done his leg any favours. House took a couple of Vicodin and waited for the pain to diminish. He pulled open the curtain and groaned. It was pouring outside. House had taken his motorcycle to the hotel; his car was still parked near his apartment. He hadn't thought to bring any rain gear. Unless he wanted to pay for a taxi, he'd have to get a ride with Wilson. House pulled on a pair of pants over the boxers and t-shirt he'd been sleeping in and limped painfully to the elevator. He popped another Vicodin on the trip up to Wilson's room.

Outside the room he could hear the sound of Wilson's hairdryer, which meant that the oncologist was about halfway through his fussy morning grooming rituals. He knocked loudly on Wilson's door. The hairdryer continued to drone. House was beginning to think that Wilson was taking a bit of petty revenge for House's refusal to talk to him the previous evening by ignoring House now. However, the door opened and a woman, whom House immediately classified as a "soccer mom", put out her head.

"You're not room service," Joanna said.

"Hello. I'm Wilson's friend House. Did he mention me to you? Oh, don't worry; we're in an open relationship. Sometimes Wilson wants to explore his masculine side."

"Is that the waiter?" Wilson called out over the noise of his hairdryer.

"It's someone called House. He says he's a friend of yours."

Wilson stepped out of the bathroom. He was adjusting a hideous purple and green tie around his neck. It looked like the old school tie of the Institute for the Colour Blind.

"What do you want, House?"

"I need a ride to work."

"Fine. Meet me back here in about forty five minutes."

"What about breakfast? I hear you ordered room service."

"Go away. Come back in forty five minutes. You might think about combing your hair and brushing your teeth in the meantime."

"He's so strict," House said to Joanna.

Just then the waiter came to the door with the room service cart, and House stopped to steal a slice of bacon from what was probably the soccer mom's plate (Wilson's would be the whole grain toast and fruit cup) before going back to his room.

"What did you say to her?" They were stopped at a red light, so Wilson took his eyes off the road to glare at House.

House was nonchalant. "I said hello, of course. What else would I say? If you don't want me to meet your girlfriends, we need a signal for when you're busy. How about a sock on the door knob?"
"You obviously said something," Wilson refused to be deflected.

"What does it matter? You're not going to ever see her again, are you? Are you afraid she's going to spread malicious rumours about you back in Poughkeepsie?"

"Malicious rumours! So you did say something. What did you say?"

"I said that you and I were very good friends, but that I was willing to share if she was."

"As if there weren't enough rumours about my sexuality floating around already!"

"Those rumours started because you blow-dry your hair," House said. "People see a head of blow-dried hair and they think 'poofter'."

They had reached the parking lot of the hospital. Wilson pulled into his spot which was a long wet walk from the entrance. House and Wilson got out of the car. Wilson took a large golf umbrella and held it over their heads.

"We should talk," Wilson said urgently, "about what Tritter said about my brother. He's got to be wrong about him."

Every time that Wilson mentioned his brother, House could hear the insincerity in his friend's voice. He didn't want to listen to Wilson lie, even though he suspected Wilson was lying to himself just as much as he was to House.

"I'm sure that your brother has a perfectly fine explanation for letting you think he was dead for the past ten years. I'm sure he has absolutely terrific reasons for violating his parole conditions and for spying on your ex-wife. I do, however, have difficulty understanding why such a wonderful person would want to write "Die in Pain" on my living room wall."

"There's no proof whatsoever that that was him."

"The proof," House said, "is that you think he did it. That makes me wonder why."

House's team was waiting for him. Cameron and Foreman were both carrying the files of prospective patients, ready to present them to their boss. Chase was slumped in one of the chairs with a martyred air, a damp washcloth draped ostentatiously over his eyes. House pledged never to tell Chase any "your mother is so fat" jokes. They'd probably give him a nervous breakdown.

"Chase," he barked.

The washcloth fell from his face as Chase sat upright. The Australian still looked unwell. The meeting room was brightly lit, which was obviously causing him pain. There was a barely perceptible tremor in his hands. House's insults alone should not have caused this strong a physical reaction. House speculated that there had to be other stressors in the young man's life, stressors that he did not know about - something about his father's death perhaps, or his one-sided infatuation with Allison Cameron?

"If you don't have any cases to present, I don't need you. Cameron can drive you home. I know which case you're going to present," he said to Cameron, "and it's Churg-Strauss syndrome. Foreman, unless your case involves a Victoria's Secret model who's going to die in the next twenty
minutes, I don't want to hear about it. You can do Chase's clinic hours for him."

When his three underlings had left the room, House telephoned Michael Wilson.

Mike Wilson was working on the Lee file, the estate of a multi-millionaire with a vast web of wives, ex-wives, mistresses, children, stepchildren and devoted friends. Mr. Lee's hobby in his declining years had been revising his will, over and over again, until the final document rivalled the Tax Code in its byzantine complexity. Although Lee's estate was likely to provide for a very significant portion of Mike's income for decades to come, the work itself was tedious in the extreme, and he welcomed any interruption, even one from Gregory House.

Mike had met Gregory House at least twice before. He hadn't made a favourable impression. They'd met at his brother's wedding to Julie. House had recently broken up with his girlfriend Stacey, and he was morose and drunk. Mike had driven him home, and they'd had to stop twice on the way so that House could be sick. Their next encounter had been even more memorable. It was one of Julie's dinner parties. Julie was a perfectionist, so that her parties were never easy, relaxed affairs at the best of times. This one had been a disaster. House made nasty little jokes at Julie's expense all evening, to which she was unable to reply because she lacked a sense of humour. The final straw was when he suggested that her husband was a better cook than she was. Though this was true, no one else would say such a thing to Julie, since her fragile self esteem was dependent upon her being a perfect wife and hostess. Julie lost her temper entirely and threw a wineglass at his head. Unfortunately, she had excellent aim. Jimmy ended up practising first aid on House and consoling his distraught wife while everyone else hurriedly gathered up their coats and left.

Mike had made no impression on House at all.

"I want to talk to you about your brother Roy."

"What about him?"

"According to Wilson, he used to spend all his spare time rescuing kittens and helping little old ladies across the street until he became addicted to drugs."

"That's what Jimmy thinks."

"But not what you think."

"Jimmy was a sweet naive kid. He idolized his big brother. My parents didn't want to disillusion him, so they let him think the best of Roy. I thought he should know the real Roy, but I was overruled."

"Who's the real Roy?"

"I don't see any reason to air all my family's dirty laundry in front of you."

"Roy's back. He was talking to one of Wilson's exes, trying to find out about him."

"They haven't caught him yet?"

"You already know that Roy is wanted by the police. You should have told Wilson."

"Yeah, I knew. We hadn't heard from him for years when my parents got a call from his parole officer. He'd missed his scheduled session and he wanted to know if he was there. We decided not to tell Jimmy for his own good. He would have wanted to help Roy, but it was better for him not to get involved."
Wilson thought he was dead. He thought he'd left his drug-addicted brother to die on the streets."

"Jimmy, call him Jimmy like everybody else," Mike said. "You sound like you're in god-damned prep school, or something."

"Okay, 'Jimmy' if you insist. I think Roy's after me and I think he's after 'Jimmy'. What do I need to know about him?"

"All right," Mike sighed wearily. "Even before the drugs, Roy wasn't what he appeared to be. He could be really charming. He was popular and athletic. He always had a lot of girlfriends. They thought he was wonderful and their parents liked him too. He always seemed so polite and well-spoken and he got good grades.

Then he got one of his girlfriends pregnant. Her name was Paula. She wanted to keep the baby, and Roy was furious. All he could see was a lifetime of child support payments. Nothing he could say would convince her to change her mind. That was when he started threatening her and her parents. He said he'd burn down their house when they were all asleep. She came home from school one day and found her cat had been killed. It had been garrotted with fishing line. She knew Roy did it.

Paula came to see my parents to get their help; she even went to the police. Roy just denied everything. The harassment didn't stop. He only let up when Paula promised to sign a document saying that Roy wasn't the father. She even promised to put the child up for adoption, if he would just leave them both alone.

Jimmy probably thinks I'm jealous because Roy never had any use for me. Jimmy was Roy's mascot. Roy kept him around because he was a cute kid and he'd amuse Roy's friends. Jimmy absolutely refused to see Roy's bad side, no matter what Roy did. He came home with a broken arm once. Roy said it was an accident. Jimmy didn't say anything, but my parents and I knew Roy broke it. Jimmy probably got on his nerves that day. Ask Jimmy about that.

I always thought the drugs didn't change Roy at all; they just made the real Roy easier to see – brought him closer to the surface. My mother cried when Roy left home, and I know that Jimmy was really upset. Jimmy really loved Roy. Personally, I thought Roy leaving was the best thing that could have happened."

House took a few seconds to absorb Michael Wilson's words.

"You said that Jimmy really loved Roy. Did Roy love Jimmy?"

Mike laughed bitterly. "Roy hates his whole family. He blames us for everything that's ever gone wrong in his life. He probably hates Jimmy the worst, because Jimmy tried the hardest to help him."

Roy lived in a furnished apartment over a tanning salon. The place was miserably hot and stuffy on summer nights, and if he opened one of the tiny windows, the traffic noise kept him awake. He'd gone through his everything he owned twice, making sure that nothing he owned had come from one of burglaries. Still, there might be invisible fibres or some other tiny bit of evidence that could connect him to his crimes. He'd watched CSI once. At the time, he'd thought the show was crap - a fantasy for all the law-and-order types who wanted to believe that the justice system was in control and that every criminal could be caught. Now, he wasn't sure what a forensics team might be able to find. Tritter had scared him. Worse yet, even if he managed to remove every trace that linked him to the locations of his burglaries, Tritter and his pals could still plant something on him and get him that way.
The easiest thing to do was to leave the state all together. He could go to California or New Mexico – some place far enough away so that even if he were found no one would want to spend the money to extradite him back to New Jersey. That would be logical. The problem was that his heart was in conflict with his head. His heart wanted to see his brother humbled.

Lying in bed, Roy imagined Jimmy coming to him, begging Roy to save him from prison. Jimmy was soft; prison would kill him for sure. In his imagination, it was entirely up to Roy to decide his brother's fate, like a Roman emperor deciding whether a gladiator would live or die. No one could call Roy a vindictive person, but he did have a high regard for justice. Would it really be just for his brother to get off scot free? Wasn't he endangering people's lives by helping this drug addict doctor? Roy had a sudden vision of his soft baby brother facing a pride of hungry lions in the Coliseum. The image was so comical he had to laugh. Smiling, he drifted off to sleep.
House woke up in a foul mood. Whatever charm the Princeton Sleep Inn had ever held for him had worn off and he missed his familiar apartment. The hotel breakfast was horrible. The scrambled eggs were cold and the orange juice was sour and full of pulp. Fortunately, the service he had hired had promised that his apartment would be clean by the end of the day and he'd be able to move back. The morning was clear and sunny so he drove his motorcycle to work. House noted that Wilson's car was already gone; the oncologist hadn't waited to see whether House needed a ride.

His fellows were waiting for him in his office. Someone had purchased coffee and doughnuts, but even his favourite Boston cream-filled confection could not lift his spirits. Foreman, Cameron and Chase looked insufferably cheerful; it was disgraceful that they should be so happy on a day when he felt irritable and out of sorts. Chase, especially, looked happy. What had happened between him and Cameron when she had driven him home the previous day? He made a note to find out exactly how long the trip had taken her.

"Foreman is going to present the latest case today while I eat this doughnut. Feel free to heckle him."

"Leonora Pope is twenty-two years old. She was a patient at the Green Hill Mental Health Pavilion. She has been diagnosed as a schizophrenic. Two days ago, she began making growling noises in the back of her throat and pulling out her hair. The staff interpreted her behaviour as symptoms of her mental disorder. She also complained of stomach pains but the patient has a history of anorexia and they believed her complaints were a ploy to avoid eating. Yesterday, she began vomiting continuously. Staff noticed blood in her vomit."

Tritter phoned Roy Wilson at seven thirty in the morning. They arranged to meet at ten o'clock at the diner on the interstate. In the meantime, Tritter drove to the real estate agency where Bonnie Wilson worked. Bonnie was a bit flustered at being questioned by a police officer, but Tritter's calm deliberate manner steadied her.

"I'm here to talk about the message that you left on Dr. Gregory House's answering machine."

"There was nothing wrong with that message. It wasn't obscene or anything."

"No, I'm asking about the person you spoke to him about – this Rory."

"Yes, Rory. He said he was a friend of House's, which surprised me. I didn't know House had any friends, other than James, of course. James is my ex-husband."

"Could you describe Rory to me?"

"I guess so. He was about medium height with sandy brown hair going grey. I didn't notice the colour of his eyes. I'm really bad at guessing ages, but I'd say he was fifty or sixty years old. He looked like he lived a hard life."

"Have you ever met your ex-husband's brother, Roy Wilson?"

"No," Bonnie said. "I don't think anyone's seen him for years. I asked about him once at Thanksgiving dinner at James's parent's house. Everyone froze. It was so awkward! They never talk about him."
"I'm going to show you a photograph of Roy Wilson. Let me know if this is the person you mentioned in your message."

Bonnie leaned in to get a cleared look at the photograph. So this was the mysterious Roy Wilson. He didn't look anything like either of his brothers. She had never seen him before. She was a bit disappointed.

"It's definitely not him," she said.

"Thanks for your help, ma'am," Tritter said.

"What's all this about? Is James involved in something illegal? If he is, it must be this Roy that put him up to it, or maybe Greg House."

"No, we don't expect Dr. Wilson of anything. Just crossing off possibilities."

He put the photograph back into his wallet. It was the mug shot of Rudolph Kleiner, who had been convicted of mail fraud in 2003 and had died in prison hospital of a burst appendix in 2005. As he left, Tritter saw Bonnie reach for the telephone. He smiled. She was probably calling James Wilson to let him know that she had just cleared his brother.

Tritter blamed himself for House's acquittal. He had correctly assessed Dr. Wilson as an emotional type who would value a personal relationship more highly than an abstract construct like justice. Misguided loyalty blinded him to the danger House posed to his patients. Dr. Cuddy, however, had really shocked him. Tritter had Dr. Cuddy down as a pragmatist. He had had no idea that she would be willing to commit perjury for Dr. House. He'd expected better from the Chief of Medicine of a prestigious hospital. He'd been naive.

Now, he realized that in order to take down House, he'd have to discredit both of his supporters. House had made a lot of enemies, especially since his feud with Edward Vogler had cost the hospital millions of dollars. Without Cuddy and Wilson to protect him, the hospital board would fire House at the first whiff of scandal. His career at Princeton-Plainsboro Teaching Hospital would be over in a matter of days.

Tritter was already in one of the booths when Roy entered the diner. He had a cup of coffee in front of him and was glancing at a notebook. He looked up when Roy slid onto the bench opposite him.

"Good, you're here. You didn't disappear in the middle of the night."

"Were you expecting me to?"

"I thought you might, which was why I attached a tracking device to your car. You wouldn't have gotten very far if you'd tried. Still, it's a good sign that you've actually come to this meeting."

"Hey, I'm on your side," Roy said. "I want this dangerous doctor off the streets as much as anybody else. It makes me angry to think of little Jimmy helping him."

"When you see your brother, you can't let him see your anger. For this to work, you've got to appear to be sorry for the pain you put him and the family through. You'll have to apologize. Do you think you can do that?"
"It's only acting. It'll be easy to say sorry when I know it's not for real. What's the plan?"

"For the moment, just stay out of your brother's sight. We'll need a story to hook him. Think of a story to tell Dr. Wilson that will make him want to help you. You'll have to be persuasive."

"Don't worry," Roy said. "Jimmy believes everything I say."

"It's not your brother you'll have to convince; it's his friend House."

House's underlings had left to perform the tests they had agreed upon. There was nothing for House to do until the results came back, as long as he didn't count catching up on paperwork, answering e-mails, or looking over the article that Chase was planning to submit to the Medical Journal of Australia. It was at times like this, when he was filled with restless energy, that he most missed the activities he had enjoyed before the infarction. Video games did not give him the physical satisfaction of a good run or a game of lacrosse.

There was a knock on the door and Wilson entered.

"Hello, House," he said.

Wilson was carrying a coffee for House. People seemed to be bestowing coffee upon him left and right today, House noted.

"I had a phone call from Bonnie. It's good news. The police were out to see her about that message on your answering machine. She said that the person who mentioned you wasn't Roy. One of the cops showed her Roy's picture. She's never seen him before."

"Who was it then?"

"I don't know. It doesn't matter anyway. It has nothing to do with your break-in."

"So the only clue we have turns out to be nothing. In what way is that good news?"

"My brother wasn't responsible for the break-in; that's good news. I know that Roy is alive or at least that he was alive two years ago. That's good news, too."

"I doubt that anything connected to your escaped convict brother could ever be called as 'good news'. This means the police have no idea who made death threats against me."

"You said yourself that the writing was probably just mindless vandalism. You're upset that your sanctuary has been invaded. You're angry. That's a perfectly normal reaction. When the insurance money comes in and your apartment is all fixed up, you'll feel better."

"Thank you for your keen psychological insight," House said sarcastically.

"I'll help you clean up and buy new furniture," Wilson said. "I was going to meet a new realtor this weekend, but I can cancel and we'll go shopping."

"Ooooh, shopping. Have you somehow mistaken me for Bridget Jones?"

"I'm trying to help, House."

"Don't. Keep your appointment with your realtor. Pay attention to your own life for a while and stop interfering in mine."
Foreman, Cameron and Chase were eating lunch in the cafeteria. Foreman had a folder containing the first of Leonora Pope's test results.

"I think it's pica," Chase said.

"That wouldn't explain the growling," said Cameron.

"Did her blood tests show iron deficiency?" Chase asked.

"Wait a minute," Foreman replied. "I haven't got to that part yet."

House came up to the table. He was carrying a tray in one hand and his cane in the other. His fellows cleared off a spot for him and he sat down. He hooked a chair from another table with his cane and drew it close enough for him to rest his sore leg. The fellows were nonplussed by his presence. Usually he ate his lunch alone or with Wilson. This desire to socialize with his underlings was unusual. He took some French fries from Chase's plate, but Chase, unlike Wilson, did not try to stop him. This demonstrated Chase's lack of understanding. Wilson had always understood that stolen French fries were much tastier than freely given ones. Cameron was having soup – nothing to steal there – and Foreman's plate was too far away. House resigned himself to eating his own food.

"You seem fully recovered from your mysterious illness, Chase." House said.

"It was a headache. I used to get them fairly often when I was a teenager, but I haven't had one for a couple of years. They rarely last more than twenty-four hours."

"And of course Cameron was there to ease your suffering."

"You asked me to drive Chase home and I did," said Cameron.

"Yes, but I didn't ask you to take two hours to do it. Chase's apartment is only a fifteen minute drive away."

"We were talking," Chase said.

"You two were playing hooky while Foreman here did Chase's clinic hours for him and I was forced to answer my own e-mails and make my own coffee."

"One of the patients in the clinic threw up on me," Foreman complained.

"Did you hear that? Foreman covered with vomit so that you two could indulge yourselves in whatever perverse pleasures you could think of in the privacy of Chase's apartment."

"I'll make up the clinic hours," Chase said, "and we weren't indulging in perverse pleasures; we were talking."

"For two hours. How long does it take to say, 'It was good for me. Was it good for you?' Even taking into account your Australian drawl, it shouldn't have taken more than fifteen minutes."

Cameron had had enough. She rose abruptly and strode out of the cafeteria. After a moment, Chase excused himself and followed her. House dumped the French fries remaining on Chase's plate on to his own. Now, they were the spoils of war and, therefore, tasty again. He looked at his remaining tablemate.

"So what do the test results say?"
Chase caught up to Cameron in the corridor.

"What's wrong, Allison? You usually don't let House get on your nerves like that."

"His attitude just got to me today. So superior and all-knowing."

"That's House. What's annoying is that he's usually right. I hope that you don't regret what happened."

"I didn't intend it, but it was great. I just don't want you to think that it meant more than it did."

"I realize that you don't feel about me that way that I feel about you. I hope that one day you'll change your mind. I want you to know that I really appreciated your help. I was stressed out. I've never had to worry about money or budgeting."

"Well, I know a lot of people in debt; I'm still paying for Med School myself."

"It's just that the bills go up every month. I've been trying to pay them off, but the total never goes down. I can't even pay off the interest!"

"Credit cards?" Cameron asked.

Chase nodded.

"They're a trap. First thing to do is to cut them all up. Cash only for you from now on."

Wilson was in his office, finishing up the day's paperwork, and reflecting on what House had said to him. Usually he paid no attention to his friend's tirades, but this time something the diagnostician had said seemed important. House was right; Wilson had been neglecting his own life. He'd lost confidence after his latest divorce. Although he was still functioning professionally, personally he felt directionless and apathetic. Wilson had to take some sort of positive step in his life or he would sink into depression, as he had done once before. Rescuing his lost brother was just the sort of decisive action he had in mind. Unfortunately, he had only a few meagre bits of information from Tritter to go on, and the police, far more experienced than he, had not manage to track Roy down in two years. What were the chances that he would find him when they had not? Wilson rubbed his aching neck.

The phone rang. The departmental secretary had left for the day, so the call came directly to Wilson's office. When he picked it up, Tritter was on the other end of the phone. His voice, soft and insinuating, slithered into Wilson's ear.

"Hello, Dr. Wilson. This is Detective Tritter. I'm calling to let you know that we have ruled out your brother as a suspect in Dr. House's break-in. We have no reason to suspect any involvement. I believe that my first impression was correct, and that the perpetrator was someone with a grudge against Dr. House. Dr. House has supplied us with a brief list of some of those who had reason to hate him, but I'm sure that his list is far from complete."

"I wanted to ask about my brother. What would happen if he were found?"

"His parole would be revoked and he'd serve the remainder of his sentence. He had served two years of a six-year sentence for breaking and entering and possession of stolen property. He would also be charged with parole violation, which is a serious offence."
"What if he turned himself in?"

"That would be up to the courts and the Parole Board to decide. Dr. Wilson, if you know where he is, you'd better tell me. If I find out that you've been hiding him or concealing information, things will go very hard for you. I have no particular reason to feel generous towards you. I am making it my business to find your brother and put him back behind bars where he belongs."

"Roy has nothing to do with your vendetta against House, or your disappointment with how House's case turned out."

"You misjudge me. I'm not motivated by personal emotion. I'm interested in capturing a felon. Goodbye, Dr. Wilson."
Chapter 6

For a moment before he opened his eyes, James Wilson experienced love for the person beside him – something pure and perfect that filled his whole being – and knew also that he was loved. He did not have the words to describe how it felt, knowing that all the love he had to give was accepted and returned, and it didn't matter that he couldn't have named the person for whom he felt such perfect love or even told you that person's age or sex. For that second, the feeling of cherishing and being cherished was enough. Then Wilson woke up. The feeling of sublime love faded away like the dream it was and he opened his eyes to an empty hotel room. He felt lost and abandoned. He knew that he hadn't lost anything real, but that didn't make his sense of desolation go away, just made it seem ridiculous and childish.

He groaned and twitched open the curtain to see the day outside. It was clear and sunny. He had an appointment with a university student at nine thirty. The young man was a freshman taking a summer course in economics and working evenings as a pizza delivery boy. Wilson had to tell him it was unlikely he'd live long enough to graduate; it was probable he'd be dead in six months. Wilson got up and went to his suitcase to get the bottle of anti-depressants he'd been prescribed. So far, they weren't doing very much that he could tell, though his therapist kept telling him to give them a chance to work. He took one pill out; then hid the bottle underneath a pile of neatly folded underwear. He didn't want the hotel staff to know anything about him so he packed everything back into his suitcases before he left for work every morning.

Inadvertently, he made himself a man of mystery to the cleaners, who wouldn't have paid any attention to the odd bottle of prescription medicine or porn magazine, but who found his habit of locking everything away deeply suspicious. They knew that he had been visited by the police.

Across town, House woke up from a dream where he was having his leg amputated. He thought the dream was triggered by the scent of industrial cleaning products, which his sleeping mind associated with hospital disinfectants. In fact, his apartment smelled much more medicinal than the hospital. Before he even opened his eyes, House reached for the Vicodin, just as he did every morning. Actually his leg pain was reduced from the previous few days – an improvement he credited to sleeping on his own mattress in his own apartment – and he felt far less irritable. He took a couple Vicodin, limped to the window, and opened it wide to let in some fresh air. It was going to be a bright summer day.

Raymond Pope was an important man and he wanted everyone to know it. He wore his hand-tailored suit as if it were the robes of his high office – a visual symbol of the power he wielded. In Washington, D.C., he was courted and feared, driven from appointment to appointment by respectful chauffeurs in stately black cars, protected by a phalanx of secretaries, assistants and aides. In Princeton-Plainsboro Teaching Hospital, however, he was just another supernumerary, waiting for news from one of the bustling doctors and nurses who seemed intent on ignoring him. His wife – a tall, African woman with a regal manner – was his only supporter.

In desperation, Mr. Pope grabbed the arm of a passing doctor. He was one of the doctors attending his daughter – the blond, foreign one. Pope felt a lingering distrust of all foreigners – a distrust that marriage to a French/African aristocrat and postings in a dozen countries had done nothing to alleviate. He thought that his daughter deserved an American doctor.
"I'm Raymond Pope," he said. "You're the doctor treating my daughter."

"I'm one of them. My name is Dr. Robert Chase. I'm a specialist in intensive care. Your daughter is under the care of a team of doctors headed by the hospital's Head of Diagnostic Medicine."

"So you're not in charge."

"No, I'm not, but I'm well informed on the circumstances of your daughter's case and I can answer any questions you have. I also have some questions that I'd like to ask you about Leonora's medical history. Unfortunately, she seems to have taken against me and won't talk to me. She starts barking and growling whenever I get close."

"She thinks you're a lizard person," Mrs. Pope said. Her husband winced, but she continued in a calm, dispassionate voice. "She believes that a lot of people, including her father, have been replaced by lizards."

"Lizard people," said Chase, making a note.

"Yes. She has a dog called Poppy. She says her dog is can sense one of the lizard people and always barks and growls when one comes near. The lizard people hate and fear dogs because they can detect them. That's why she growls. If you look upset or surprised, she thinks you're a lizard person."

"I want to talk to the doctor in charge – the Head of Diagnostic Medicine," Mr. Pope said.

"I'm afraid Dr. House is not available."

"Not available. Where is he?"

"I assure you I can answer all your questions," Chase said.

"Listen, young man. I could have you deported. You'd never be able to come back to the United States. You'd be stuck in England or whatever other godforsaken hole you come from, forever. I can get you put on the no-fly list. I could have you sent to Guantanamo Bay! Take me to Dr. House!"

Chase knew that any encounter between Pope and House would be disastrous. Pope's pomposity would provoke his department head to never-before-seen heights of rudeness. In desperation, he spotted Dr. Cuddy down the corridor.

"Would you like to speak to the hospital's Chief of Medicine? Dr. Cuddy has taken a great interest in your daughter's case."

Chase waved frantically at Lisa Cuddy. His expression was beseeching; he needed her help. Cuddy glanced at Chase and then at the imposing man beside him. Chase was obviously incapable of dealing with him. Assuming an air of gravitas and authority, she walked toward them.

As soon as Chase could, he left Pope with Cuddy and went to House's office to warn him.

"I don't know how long Dr. Cuddy will be able to hold him off," Chase said. "His wife seemed fine, but I don't think you'll want to meet him."

"Are you suggesting that I flee my own office?"

"Yes. He's coming this way."

House's natural perversity made him want to meet Mr. Pope, just because Chase was so anxious to prevent such an encounter. Then he heard Pope's voice – overloud and filled with self-importance.
The authoritarian tone reminded him of his father's voice. He wanted to avoid this man. He could not go out the front door, since Pope would see him. Instead he went to the balcony and manoeuvred over the low railing that separated his office from Wilson's. House looked through the glass door; the office was empty. He opened the unlocked balcony door and slipped in.

Wilson's office offered few distractions. House opened Wilson's desk drawers, but there were only the usual paper clips, pens and breath mints. His bottom drawer was locked, but House had picked the lock before and knew that it contained a seldom used half-bottle of whiskey. Still, he might have put something else in the drawer since that last time he had checked. House took one of Wilson's paper clips and began to straighten it out. He wished he had Foreman's skills; the neurologist was much more adept at lock-picking than he was. The telephone rang. The departmental secretary was on her coffee break, so the call went straight to voice mail. Wilson's had left his phone in speaker-phone mode, so House could hear the caller.

"Hi, Jimmy. It's Roy. I guess you never expected to hear from me again. Actually, I always intended to get in touch with you again, but I wanted to have my life back in control before I did it. I didn't want my little brother to be ashamed of me. I remember our last meeting. Maybe I was a little hard on you then. I guess we were hard on each other."

House could hear a deep sigh of relief on the other end as if the effort of making an apology, if apology it was, had exhausted the speaker. Now, the voice sounded stronger and more confident.

"I probably shouldn't have phoned on a Friday – you're probably off playing golf with all the other doctors," Roy said. "I've been doing well, basically. I've kicked the drugs totally – been clean a couple years. Getting off drugs was hard – unbelievably hard, but I did it. Just be thankful you never got addicted, because detoxing would have killed you."

"I've been working, just day labour sort of stuff right now; I've got some legal troubles that have to be straightened out before I can find anything better. Anyway, I'm calling because I've got this cop who's been asking around about me. He seems to have it in for me, and I can't figure out why. As far as I know, I've never set eyes on the guy. His name is Tritter and he just hates me for no reason."

"Anyway, when a man is in serious trouble, the way I am, that's when he appreciates family. Maybe you won't be able to help me, but just knowing that you still care about me, after all these years, would mean so much to me. Mikey was always jealous of me, and I know I can't go to him for help. I don't want to bother Mom and Dad. They deserve some peace and quiet, and besides they gave up on me years ago. You're my only hope."

"I can't leave my phone number or anything just in case. I'll phone you back and maybe we can arrange to meet. I'd really like to see my baby brother again. Anyway, gotta go."

House pressed star 69, but the incoming call had been routed through hospital reception. Remembering his earlier conversation with Michael Wilson, House was tempted to erase the saved message. He was certain that Roy's return was bad news for Dr. James Wilson. However, Roy had promised to phone back, so erasing the message would only alert Wilson to House's snooping.

House popped his head out the door of Wilson's office and saw Cuddy leading Raymond Price to her office. Price had calmed down and appeared almost gracious as he gestured for Lisa to enter her office first. Sometimes, House was amazed by Cuddy's skill at handling egotistical assholes, until he remembered that she had honed her skills by coping with him.

After he had delivered his news to the university student, Wilson felt emotionally exhausted. It
seemed especially cruel to talk about dying on a day when the sky was so blue and clear and bird song could be heard above the distant murmur of traffic. There was, of course, paperwork to do, as always, but Wilson allowed himself a little break. He sat on a bench in a park while men and women in shorts and t-shirts ran by. He was just deciding that he had taken as long a break as he could afford, when he saw House heading towards him. Wilson moved over a bit to accommodate his friend.

"Hello," Wilson said. "How was the first night back in your apartment?"

"It was a little uncomfortable but much better than your hotel. Whoever went berserk in my apartment broke my bed frame. I couldn't sleep on the couch, because it's still damp with cleaning products, so I had to sleep with my mattress on the floor like a college student."

"Has Steve McQueen shown up yet?"

"I thought I heard some rustling. I hope it was Steve McQueen and not one of his wild relatives."

"I've still got some furniture in storage," Wilson said. "You can use it until you get some new stuff, or until I move out of the hotel and get my own place, whichever comes first."

"Is it furniture from Bonnie's place or from Julie's place? I always hated Julie's furniture. It was so uncomfortable. It was designed to make you sit up straight and mind your manners."

"If that's what it was designed for," Wilson said, "it certainly didn't work. At least not for you. Anyway, it's about half Bonnie, half Julie, a smidgeon of Michelle. I've got stuff in there I haven't touched since med school, maybe even high school. I can take you out tomorrow."

"What about your appointment with the new realtor?"

"Oh, him. He keeps talking about Tuscan marble tile and nine-foot ceilings. I'm not eight and a half feet tall – I don't need nine foot ceilings. He's obviously not going to work out. I'll call and cancel. Anything else you need?"

House looked at his friend. When he had approached Wilson sitting on the bench, House could see his tension and unhappiness reflected in his body language – the tightness around his neck and shoulders that he tried to ease with massage. Now, the prospect of helping another person in a practical way had cheered Wilson. His eyes were brighter and he was no longer rubbing his neck.

"I was thinking of just buying everything over the Internet," House said. "You'll need a new computer first. We can go computer shopping too."

"Why are you so keen to spend your weekend helping me?" House said. "Do you just want to avoid seeing the real estate agent? You can just phone up and cancel; you don't have to use me as an excuse. Or do you feel guilty because you think your brother broke into my apartment, and you're trying to make it up to me?"

"This is really annoying. I'm trying to be nice."

"I know you're trying to be nice. I'm asking you why you're trying to be nice."

"Sometimes people just want to do nice things for their friends. Other people, that is, not you."

"Now, you are accusing me of not being nice. My feelings are hurt."
"Don't be ridiculous. I couldn't hurt your feelings with an elephant gun."

"I'm a sensitive, feeling soul," said House," but I hide behind a gruff exterior. I'm like an M&M. Gooey centre, hard shell. Just ask Cameron."

Wilson snorted. He looked at his watch. He had a departmental meeting to attend in five minutes.

"I've got to go. Should I pick you up at ten tomorrow morning, or is that too early?"

House rose from the bench and they walked in unison towards the hospital.

Wilson's meeting took longer than he expected. It was late afternoon before he returned to his office. He intended to get in a couple of hours at his desk before the weekend. Then he listened to his messages and all thoughts of paperwork vanished from his mind.

Wilson's emotions were confused. He felt relief at hearing his brother's voice. For years, he had been replaying there last conversation in his mind, wondering what he could have said or done to change the outcome - to stop his brother from walking away. Now, that burden of guilt was eased. He was proud that his older brother trusted him more than Mike and more than his own parents. He was happy that Roy had kicked his drug habit and was living a clean life. However, he also felt something else – something he didn't want to admit. He felt fear.

Roy was a natural leader. When they were both young, Roy had been the centre of a group of teenagers, too loosely structured to be called a gang. His little brother had been thrilled to be allowed to spend time with them. Roy had sold some weed, of course; back then, he was more into dealing drugs than using them. He occasionally shoplifted, broke into a vacationing neighbour's house to steal liquor, or went joy-riding, but he wasn't a real criminal. Real criminals were bad, but Roy was cool. Still Jimmy knew enough not to mention these activities to his parents or to Mike; he knew that if he did, they would never let him hang out with Roy.

It had been late August. It was still summer, still hot and sunny, but there was a coolness in the evenings that presaged autumn. There were already dead brown leaves in the gutters. There had even been a flyer for school supplies in the newspaper, but Jimmy had taken it out and hidden it in the trash before his parents could see it. It wasn't that Jimmy hated school. What Jimmy hated was spending the last few hours of his precious summer buying gym shoes and exercise books.

Roy and his friends thought that school was 'totally bogus' and that only nerds cared about grades. They would willingly have spent the whole of their teen years leaning in alleyways smoking or hanging out at the video arcade, if only the world of adults would leave them alone.

"I hope I don't get Mrs. Nicodemus again for English," said Pete. "I can't stand that bitch. She was coming on to me last year, but I blew her off. That's why she gave me a "D"."

"They shouldn't let her teach English anyway," Roy's girlfriend, Paula, said. "She can't even speak it properly. She's from Bermuda or somewhere. They don't even speak proper English like Americans. This is how she talks."

Paula did an impression of Mrs. Nicodemus. Apparently, the teacher sounded a lot like Paula with a bad cold. One of the other girls smiled. Jimmy laughed to be polite. Everybody else ignored her. Desperate for their approval, Paula tried something else - winding up Roy's kid brother might be good for a laugh.
"So," she said in a babyish voice, "is little Jimmy looking forward to school?"

Jimmy backed away from her. He didn't like being the centre of attention. It felt dangerous.

"Guess so," he mumbled.

"What grade are you going to be in?"

"Two...three." Jimmy had been in first grade, and had done so well that the school had decided to let him skip a grade.

"Aren't you sure?" Paula asked. "Look at him. He doesn't even know what grade he's going to."

"Going to grade three," Jimmy mumbled again.

Now, Paula had bent her knees and was staring into his face. Jimmy was turning red under her scrutiny.

"Do you know who teaches grade three, Jimmy?"

Jimmy shook his head.

"I'm surprised that they didn't tell you. Usually on the last day of grade two, they have a special meeting with all the grade twos. There's the parents and the principal and all the students. Roy told me that you skipped a grade, so I bet you missed the special meeting, huh? I can still remember it. Do you remember that special meeting when you were in grade two, Pete?"

"I sure can," said her accomplice. "I was scared shitless."

"Sure you were. Even a brave guy like Pete, he was terrified. You would have fainted dead away, 'cause I know you scare easily."

"That's for sure," laughed Roy.

"They have to prepare everybody. There was this one kid; he was away with chicken pox, and no one thought to warn him. On the first day of grade three, he saw his new teacher, and he had a heart attack. Just fell over dead. Who even knew nine year olds could have heart attacks?"

"His hair turned white turned, too," one of the girls said.

"Yeah. Anyway, they have this meeting and they warn all the students and parents ahead of time about the third grade teacher. Even the other teachers, even the principal, is afraid of the third grade teacher, but they're too scared to fire him. His name's Mr. Beelsbub. Every year, one of the boys from his class just disappears. Sometimes it's one of the naughty boys who talk in class and don't pay attention, but sometimes they're good boys who do all their homework. You just can't tell who's going to disappear."

"In my year," Pete said, "it was Frank. He sat right behind me and used to throw bits of eraser down the back of my shirt."

"I remember Frank," said Paula. "You remember him; don't you, Roy?"

"Sure, Frank," Jimmy's brother nodded.

Jimmy had been almost certain that Paula was lying, until Roy confirmed her story. Although he still doubted her, she might be telling the truth. She certainly looked truthful. Her face was solemn.
"You know, wasn't Frank the youngest boy in the class?" she asked Pete. "I think it's pretty well always the youngest boy in the class, isn't it? I guess, since you're skipping a grade, that'll be you."

Jimmy nodded. She had to be lying, didn't she? But all of the teenagers looked concerned now.

"No one knows what happens to the boys that disappear but there are rumours. I don't want to tell you the rumours. You're too young; they'd scare you too much. I hate to think of our little Jimmy disappearing like that."

"So sad," said one of the girls, mournfully.

"Unless... I don't know if you want to do this... but you could ask Mr. Beelsbub to pick someone else to disappear. If you asked really nicely, he might agree. It wouldn't be a very nice thing to do though, letting another boy take your place. Do you think you want to do that? Get someone else to take your place?"

Reluctantly, Jimmy nodded his head.

"I know where Beelsbub lives," Roy said. "He's on Spooner Street, near the park. We'll take you there, okay?"

Jimmy followed his brother and his friends. Spooner Street seemed to be a long way away. He'd missed dinnertime and the sky was darkening. At last, Roy stopped in front of a grey house with peeling paint. The lawn was a patch of dry straggling weeds. There was a big dog tied to a chain in the front yard. He barked and snapped, pulling on his chain, but Jimmy could see that the dog couldn't quite reach the cracked walkway that led to the front door.

"That's Mr. Beelsbub's dog," Paula said. "His name's Sir Bus."

Jimmy thought Sir Bus was a very strange name for a dog.

"Come on," Roy said, shoving him toward the door. "Don't be a coward, for God's sake. You're my brother; act like you've got some guts."

Jimmy took a couple of steps towards the front door. This act of trespass seemed to make Sir Bus crazy. He pulled against his chain which thankfully, mercifully held. Inside the house, Jimmy heard another dog bark. It sounded, if anything, even bigger and meaner than Sir Bus. Jimmy turned to look for his brother, but Roy and his friends had left. Perhaps Sir Bus had scared them away. Jimmy took another few tentative steps towards Mr. Beelsbub's house. He didn't see a doorbell, so he knocked on the screen door, sending Sir Bus and the other dog into a fury.

The door sprang open and Mr. Beelsbub appeared before him. Mr. Beelsbub was enormous. He was well over six feet tall and weighed at least three hundred and fifty pounds. His hair was red and his skin was pale and spotted. He waved something at Jimmy's face. Jimmy thought it was a knife or a gun, but actually it was the remote control to a t.v.

"How many times do I have to tell you damned kids not to tease the damned dog!" he roared.

Backing away, Jimmy tripped on the uneven pavement. He cracked his head on the cement of the walkway and almost passed out. Then he scrambled to his feet and fled. The nightmare called after him, but Jimmy was too frightened to make sense of what he said. In any case, it was drowned out by the furious barking of the Mr. Beelsbub's dogs.

"Hey, kid. You all right? You look like you hit your head pretty hard."
When Jimmy didn't reply, the door slammed and Mr. Beelsbub went back inside. Jimmy was still shaking. He felt dizzy and he'd wet his pants. Worse yet, he had been too cowardly to even speak to Mr. Beelsbub. His brother would be so ashamed of him that he would not even care when Jimmy disappeared.

Jimmy was throwing up in the gutter when his brother and his friends came back.

"So did you meet Mr. Beelsbub?" Paula asked cheerfully. Then she looked more closely at the boy. "Oh God, what happened to you?"

"Hit my head."

"Lord," Paula said. "He could have concussion. I took it in First Aid. We should take him to the hospital." She peered into Jimmy's eyes.

"He's fine," Roy said. "Aren't you Jimmy?"

Throwing up had made Jimmy feel dizzier, so he sat down on the curb.

"I think Paula's right," Pete said. "He doesn't look good."

"He's not going to the hospital. My dad'll raise hell if he finds out. He's not sick anyway. He's just acting up for Paula. He's got a crush on her. Come on, Jimmy get up."

When Jimmy did not get up, Roy picked him up. He thought carrying a child was beneath his masculine dignity. He was not happy.

"Gonna tell Dad about Mr. Beelsbub. Tell him to let me go to grade two instead," Jimmy sounded half asleep. Paula became more concerned.

"Come on, Roy. He's got to see a doctor."

"You are not going to mention Mr. Beelsbub to Dad or Mom or Mike or anyone. Not ever."

"Yes, I will," Jimmy said. "I'm not going into Mr. Beelsbub's class. I'm gonna tell Dad and he'll get me out."

"Shut up about it, or I'll turn round and take you back to Mr. Beelsbub right now."

That was when Jimmy began to cry. And that was when Roy lost his temper.

After that, they had to take Jimmy to the hospital. Even Roy had to agree. The doctor who set his broken arm and admitted him overnight for observation did not believe Roy's story about a playground accident. He said as much to Jimmy's parents when he telephoned them. They promised to speak to Roy and find out what had really happened.

The Wilsons were scared of Roy. Although the boy hadn't yet finished high school, he already outweighed his father by fifty pounds. When he lost his temper, he could not control himself. Rather than confront him directly, they simply decided to keep Jimmy away from his older brother as much as possible. They never talked about the incident to Jimmy at all. When school started up – no Mr. Beelsbub, thank God – Jimmy told his classmates he'd broken his arm falling off the swings, which was what his brother told him to say.

Paula was disgusted with herself. She had behaved horribly towards Jimmy Wilson, who was a nice, polite, little boy who had never done her any harm, just to impress Roy and his loser friends. She
didn't like to think of what Roy had become when he'd lost his temper. She'd grown up in a safe loving home, and she no real experience with violence, so she hadn't known how to respond. She'd let Roy give his little brother a black eye and watched him break his arm. She just hadn't known what to do to stop him. She never wanted to see Roy again.

In 2007, James Wilson knows that he broke his arm as a child, but the exact circumstances are a bit cloudy. He remembers a big dog because he was scared of dogs for years afterward. He remembers the brown leaves in the gutter. He remembers fear and pain. He knows that it is better not to think about it.
Chapter 7

There are rules in friendship. To break the rules puts the whole relationship in jeopardy. In the friendship between Wilson and House, one of the most fundamental rules is that they never talked about their pasts or their families. Wilson was relentlessly interested in House – in his motivations and feelings and the workings of his brilliant mind – but he left House's past alone. Wilson knew that his childhood had been spent on military bases. He had met House's parents and knew that House and his father did not get along. He was aware of the broad outline of House's youth but was tactful enough not to enquire into the details. House was happy never to have to talk about the abuse his father had inflicted on him. He hated being vulnerable and despised being the object of other people's pity. House preferred that people think of him as an abrasive jerk rather than the crippled survivor of an unhappy childhood.

House in turn recognized Wilson's reticence about his own life. James Wilson gave the appearance of being a very open person. He was always ready to listen, which made him popular. Friends and colleagues would confide their deepest hopes and fears to Wilson, usually receiving in return nothing more intimate than Wilson's opinions on the hospital cafeteria's new lunch offerings or the films of Alfred Hitchcock. House was too astute not to notice the well-practised conversational techniques Wilson used to deflect attention away from himself, but he was willing to play along most of the time. Besides House had long ago come to the conclusion that the secrets that people work so hard to hide are, in most cases, shocking and unforgivable only to the person doing the hiding – predictable and ordinary to everyone else.

Today, House was planning to break the rule. He had it all worked out. Rummaging through a large storage locker filled with the relics and mementos of his life ought to have made James Wilson nostalgic. He should have found a box containing old photographs or high school yearbooks which would launch him into childhood reminiscences. Then House could very gently steer the conversation toward Wilson's brother Roy. (Despite his usual gruff manner, House was capable of subtlety when it served his purposes.) Unfortunately, Wilson wasn't following House's script. Instead Wilson was focused on the immediate goal of finding usable household items for House's devastated apartment, and didn't seem to be thinking of his past at all.

It was easy to divide Wilson's furniture into the Bonnie and Julie periods. Bonnie had decorated according to the latest trends in the magazines she loved. The suburban house she shared with Wilson had, at different times, taken on the appearance of an English cottage, Tuscan villa, and Provencal farmhouse. At the time of their divorce, the decorating scheme had been "country casual" which meant lots of gingham and calico. Julie had different tastes. She wanted to impress. The furniture she had chosen was heavy and ponderous – slabs of dark polished wood that were better suited to the palace of some petty dictator than to House's apartment. In amongst the furniture were neatly taped and labelled cardboard boxes.

"I think this coffee table will do," Wilson said. He moved a couple of boxes to uncover it. It was from the Bonnie period and she had stencilled a picture of a red hen wearing a bonnet on the top. House grimaced when he saw it. "You can put a bowl of fruit over the chicken. I'll even lend you the bowl. I think Julie left me the bed from the spare bedroom. Oh, there's the headboard."

"It's huge and hideous," House said.

"It was one of Julie's less successful finds," Wilson agreed. "That's why I got to keep it. It's the only bed frame I have though. Do you need an armchair?"

"None of this is going to fit in your car anyway."
"I asked Cuddy if we could borrow her SUV. Chase and Foreman are going to come by with it in about fifteen minutes to help us move the furniture out."

No time for tact then.

"I spoke to your brother Michael," House said. "He told me about Roy."

"Why would talk to Mike? You could have talked to me."

"What Tritter said interested me, and all you would say was how terrific Roy was. I wanted to hear the real story."

"What I said was the real story! It doesn't matter anymore anyway. The police said he was cleared. He didn't wreck your apartment so you don't have to worry about him. It was just Tritter stirring up trouble."

"I also heard the message that Roy left on your office phone."

"My messages are private! What else are you doing – steaming open my mail or bugging my hotel room?"

"You're not so fascinating that I'd spend my evenings listening to you watch Seinfeld. I just happened to be in your office when he left the message."

"What were you doing in my office when I wasn't there?"

"Hiding from a patient's father. He was a real jerk. You would have invited me in if you'd been there. Don't pretend you're angry at me just to change the subject. I want to talk about Roy. Didn't you tell me a couple of days ago that you wanted to talk about him?"

"That was before he was cleared. We don't have anything to talk about now."

"Yes, we do. Tritter's got a grudge against both of us now. If he catches you helping an escaped felon, you could go to jail. You could lose your license."

"Since when have you cared about my license? You were pretty ready to destroy my practice a couple of months ago! Back off, House! I'm not going to talk to you about my brother. It's not any of your business."

"Michael said Roy hates his family. He said he particularly hates you."

"Mike's jealous. Roy and I were really close when we growing up and he felt excluded."

"He said Roy broke your arm."

"That's not true. It was an accident. I think I fell off the swings in the playground. I had a minor concussion so I can't really remember it very well. Everyone has always been so eager to think the worst of Roy because he had a drug problem. Having an addiction doesn't make him a bad person. You should know that."

"Was he high when you fell off the swings?"

"Of course not. All he was using was a little marijuana then. He didn't get into the hard stuff until later. Why are you being so judgemental? Have you been hanging around Cameron too much?"

House didn't want to admit that a movie of little Jimmy Wilson being beaten by his older brother had
been playing in his head ever since Michael had mentioned his suspicions. He was predisposed to dislike someone who had hurt a defenceless child.

"Introduce him to me and let me form my own opinion then."

"I'm not bringing you along just to satisfy your curiosity, House. In any case, Titter wants you worse than he wants me. It makes no sense for you to come along."

"Take me along or I'll telephone Titter right now and let him know your brother is in the area."

"You wouldn't do that."

"I'd do it to protect you. I think Roy is manipulating you."

"Don't be so melodramatic. Here, take this box. It has dishes in it."

"What's on the dishes – bunny rabbits with bow ties or Julie's coat of arms in gold leaf?"

"They're actually my dishes from my college apartment and they're plain white – ivory actually."

"Very tasteful. Your wives should have let you do the decorating."

Wilson had his back to his friend and was attempting to retrieve a floor lamp. House put the box on top of a stack of other boxes, and touched Wilson's arm to make him turn around.

"Chase and Foreman are going to be along in a minute, and I'm not dropping the subject of Roy. If you don't want them to know about it, you can agree to let me see Roy now rather than having me wear you down gradually."

"Fine, you can come along - if I decide to see Roy and if he agrees."

Wilson heard the sound of a vehicle outside the storage locker and went to open the door for Chase and Foreman.

It was a beautiful Monday morning. Detective Titter and Roy Wilson sat in Roy's car in the visitor's parking lot outside the Princeton Plainsboro Teaching Hospital. They had a clear view of the staff parking lot.

"I need some money," Roy said. "With the parole thing hanging over my head, I can't get a job or apply for welfare. How am I supposed to live?"

"The same way you were living before I found you," Titter said indifferently. "I've told you what you get at the end of the deal. Give me your brother and all your legal troubles disappear. That's all I'm offering for him. Get something on his boss, Lisa Cuddy, and there'll be something extra."

"Jimmy should be easy but I don't know about his boss. That might be tricky."

"She isn't clean. I know she committed perjury. It's likely she's done other things that she wouldn't want anyone to know about."

"Yeah, but would Jimmy know about them? Would he tell me about them?"

"Well, your brother's my main focus at this point. Cuddy's the icing on the cake. If you can't help me, I'll get her another way. I'm surprised that you're so ready to give up on the reward, though,
considering you're so intelligent and resourceful."

"Damn right I am. Jimmy's not sharp, not cunning, the way that I am. What's Cuddy like? And this House guy?"

"Stay away from House. It's better if you never meet him, but if you do, say as little as possible. Cuddy is difficult to read. I'm not sure what approach would work on her."

"She's a woman; I'm a man. That's one approach that usually works," said Roy.

Roy still saw himself as the handsome young man with a harem of giggling girlfriends. When he looked in the mirror, he did not see the hard, even brutal, face of an ex-con and long-term drug user. He hadn't noticed that the only women who showed any interest in him lately were hookers and alcoholics, who had lived hard lives and had low expectations. Tritter wondered whether his co-conspirator's vanity was going to be a problem.

"There's Dr. Wilson's car," Tritter said, pointing to a nondescript sedan with several years on it.

"If I had Jimmy's money, I'd buy something flashier," Roy said.

Tritter and Roy stepped out of Roy's car. Tritter moved into the shadow of an ivy-covered wall, where he could not easily be seen. Roy ran toward the staff parking lot. Jimmy was wearing a suit and tie and carrying a scuffed leather briefcase. He had put on a little weight during the past ten years, but he was still youthful in appearance. He hadn't spotted Roy yet. Roy was still fifty feet away and Jimmy was almost at the door. Roy wanted to intercept him before he entered the hospital.

Roy called out, "Jimmy! Jimmy, wait!", but Wilson did not turn his head. No one called him Jimmy any more except his immediate family, so he did not think the shouts were directed at him. Roy sprinted the last few yards and grabbed his brother's arm. Wilson turned around. He froze for a second, and then looked around nervously, checking for observers. He didn't see Tritter in the shadows.

"You shouldn't be here," Wilson said. "Someone will see you."

"Aren't you even going to say hello?" Roy complained.

"Look, it's not safe for you to be here with me. That policeman, Tritter, spoke to me about your parole violation. He knows I'm your brother. Actually, I'm the reason he's after you. He hates me, and he's coming after you just to get to me."

"Why would he hate you?"

"He lost an important case because of me. He's got a grudge against me now."

"So I'm going to be sent back to prison because you pissed off a policeman. God, Jimmy, are you screwing me over again? I'm clean and sober, trying to get my life back in order and you're picking fights with cops. Next time, don't involve me in your shit!"

"I'm sorry that Tritter's after you. I never intentionally tried to involve you. How could I? I didn't know if you were alive or dead."

"Well, whose fault was that? You made it pretty clear that I wasn't part of the family anymore."

"I never said that."
"God, Jimmy, we haven't seen each other for ten years, and this is what you want to do – pick a fight?"

"I'm sorry, Roy. I'm really glad you're okay. I couldn't believe it when I heard your voice. It's just that we are both really screwed if anyone sees you. I think you should turn yourself in and get the parole violation problem squared away. I'll get you a good lawyer and he'll make you some sort of deal."

"So you create this Tritter problem, and your solution is for me to go back to prison. That's great!"

"That's not what I meant," Wilson protested. "We can't talk here and I've got to get to work. Give me your phone number and I'll call you later. We'll arrange to meet somewhere private. I can bring someone along to help you. His name's Gregory House and he's the Head of Diagnostic Medicine at the hospital. He's the one that Tritter was really after. The rest of us are just collateral targets."

"Why do you want him along? Is this some sort of trap?" Roy asked.

"No," Wilson said, although he looked nervous. "I just think he might be able to help. He knows about you already."

Tritter had told him to avoid House, but Roy was curious. He wanted to meet the person that the detective hated so much.

"Okay," he said. "Bring him along. I'll meet you in the food court of the Princeton Shopping Center at six o'clock. Just sit down and I'll find you. Bring some money."

"I've got about a hundred dollars on me," Wilson said, getting his wallet out. "Take it and I'll go to the bank at lunch. How much do you need?"

"I need a lot. You cost me my job, remember?"

Tritter had not been pleased when Roy told him that he had agreed to meet House. When Tritter was angry, he didn't shout or gesticulate. His quiet voice just became harder and more deliberate and his eyes colder and more unforgiving. Roy hadn't let the detective intimidate him. The meeting was going ahead as planned.

It was already half past six. The food court wasn't very busy. There were a few shoppers having a last cup of coffee or a plate of fries to fortify them for the journey home. House and Wilson sat at one of the tables, drinking coffee. Wilson had ordered an extra cup for Roy, which was now stone cold. House regarded the people in the mall with the detached air of a visitor to the zoo, while Wilson tried to look inconspicuous while covertly scanning passersby for his brother and possible police officers. House saw Roy first and waved his cane to attract his attention. Wilson pulled down House's waving arm and glared at him.

Roy had been deliberately late, knowing the effect that waiting would have on his brother's nerves. He walked over to their table. House noticed that Roy didn't seem concerned about being seen in public. His pace was not hurried and he did not look around him nervously as Wilson was doing. Roy's attention was focused on House rather than his brother. He already knew what to say to make Jimmy feel guilty and inadequate, so that he would do whatever Roy wanted. House was an unknown quantity.

The Wilsons were not a demonstrative family. There were no hugs, not even a handshake. Roy just sat down at the table and Jimmy passed him his cold coffee. Jimmy introduced the two men to each
"Jimmy tells me that you're the one responsible for putting the police on my tail."

"No, they're on your tail because you decided to violate your parole," House said.

"I had no choice. When I got out of prison, I was going straight, but my parole officer had friends in the drug trade. He was going to send me back to prison unless I dealt his drugs. It was the hard stuff too – heroin, crystal meth – really bad shit. I couldn't do that. Drugs ruined my life; I couldn't ruin someone else's that way. So I just skipped out on him."

"I'll get you a good lawyer," Jimmy said. "He'll tell your story to the parole board."

"Who's going to believe the word of an ex-con over a parole officer? Jimmy always wants to fix other people's problems his way," Roy said to House. "When I was on drugs, he wanted me to go to this expensive rehab centre he picked out. He had everything arranged without even asking me first. Expected me to drop everything and go to Camp Sunrise or whatever the place was called."

I just wanted you to get off drugs; they were killing you."

"I'm not denying you had good intentions," Roy said, "but taking over another person's life isn't helping them. You're always manipulating people to get them to do what you want, and justifying it because it's for their own good. Why don't you ask me what you can do to help instead of taking over?"

Wilson sighed. "Okay, what can I do to help?"

"I'm not safe here with Tritter nosing around. I'm going to have to leave, but right now Tritter's probably got my name and photo at every bus depot and airport on the Eastern Seaboard. He's got my license plate number if I try to drive. I'm going to need a place to stay for a while, and then I'm going to need money to re-establish myself somewhere else. I figure New Mexico or Arizona. I've always liked the sun."

"Wilson can't put you up," House said. "He's living in a hotel, and having another man as an overnight guest might make the housekeeping staff talk, since his overnight guests are usually female."

"Why are you living in a hotel? Are you separated from Bonnie?"

"I'm divorced. I'm staying there temporarily," Wilson said. He didn't add that in this case temporarily meant for the better part of a year, nor did he mention that he had married and divorced another woman after Bonnie. "If I give you some money, you could find your own place. I've brought six hundred dollars. I had to go to three different bank machines to get it."

Wilson handed over the money. The mall was about to close. Food fair employees were lowering metal gates and wiping down counters. Roy got up to leave.

"This isn't enough. I'm going to need more."

Wilson nodded. He said, "Could I have your phone number? You'll let me know where you're staying?"

"Cellphones can be traced. When I need to get in touch, I'll phone you at the hospital."

Roy left without looking back or saying good-bye.
"You know you can't help him run away," House said. "If you can't convince him to turn himself in, you'll have to turn him in yourself."

"I thought you were a rebel and a non-conformist," Wilson said. "You've turned awfully law abiding suddenly."

"I'm supposed to be a rebel; you're not," House said. "You're supposed to be Mr. Normal and Well-Adjusted, remember? How could you be Mr. Normal and Well-Adjusted when you're in prison for helping him violate his parole? Prison changes a man. I should know; I watched Oz."

"I can't turn in my brother," Wilson said. "I won't do it, no matter what."

Roy and Tritter met in an unmarked police car a few blocks away. Tritter was still angry that Roy had agreed to see House, but he maintained his usual calm demeanour. Roy was cheerful and confident. He didn't like the way that the cop was blackmailing him, but he did enjoy what he was doing. Making Jimmy pay for turning his back on his own brother was going to be fun. He refused to let Tritter spoil his enjoyment.

"If Jimmy agrees to help me, will that be enough for you? Getting him for helping me break parole?"

"Not enough," Tritter said. "He still might get off. There are too many sympathetic judges and juries who think brotherly love is more important than justice."

"I thought staying with Jimmy was a good idea. I could have looked through his papers for incriminating evidence while he was at work."

"I've already searched the hotel room anyway. His cleaner let me in. She has a vivid imagination, and she's convinced he's a hit man or a white slaver. There wasn't anything personal there. He must have a storage locker or a safe deposit box somewhere; see if you can get the key."

"Maybe he is a white slaver," Jimmy joked. "That would explain all the wives."

Tritter didn't respond to his attempt at humour.

"I don't know why you were so worried about House. He didn't say much," Jimmy said.

"Don't underestimate him. He was watching you and making conclusions. You'd better hope that you didn't give anything away. If you spoiled everything by agreeing to see House, I'll drag you back to Rahway myself."
Raymond Pope was a diligent man, and he would not let the fact that his daughter was suffering from an unknown illness interfere with what he knew to be his duty. Without his steady hand, his department would fall to pieces, and that, in turn, would cause perhaps irreparable harm to the interests of his country. He needed to be in constant contact with Washington. The young black doctor had caught him using his cellphone twice before, and each time had pointed out the signs prohibiting the use of wireless devices anywhere on hospital premises. He had told him that the cellphone could interfere with the delicate equipment keeping the patients alive. Pope had his own priorities, however. He could not ignore his responsibility to his department and to his country. He just took his cellphone into a stall in the men's room where the doctor, Foreman, could not see him.

"No," he said. "I don't care about the ambassador's chauffeur. We already know he's a double agent for Mossad. I'm more concerned about the other matter we discussed - the incident involving the cultural attaché and the stolen silver cow creamer. He's going to try to send it home by diplomatic bag."

"Mr. Pope, is that you?" said a voice on the other side of the stall door. Raymond Pope froze. "I can't talk now," he whispered and terminated the call. "Dr. Foreman?" he replied in a louder voice.

"Mr. Pope, I know that you've been talking on your cellphone again. I'm going to have to ask you to leave the hospital. If necessary, I'll have security escort you out."

"But my daughter is ill. I can't leave her."

"I can't allow you to endanger patients' lives," Foreman said sternly. "If you give me your cellphone and your Blackberry, I won't have security throw you out. I'll take them to the security desk in the lobby, and you can pick them up when you leave."

Pope left the stall and handed the wireless devices over to Foreman. If he were in Washington, the young man would never have dared confront him. Pope felt his power - and his sense of control over his life – slipping away more and more every minute he spent away from Washington. He decided that he tell Dr. Cuddy, the Chief of Medicine, about Foreman's impertinent behaviour. Lisa Cuddy, at least, had some idea of Raymond Pope's true stature and position.

When House saw the patient's father cornering Lisa Cuddy outside her office, he headed towards her room. Leonora Pope's battles with anorexia and her current illness had left her frail and waiflike. Her dandelion hair and her pale bluish white skin made her look like a China doll. Her stepmother sat at her bedside, leafing through a magazine while she waited for her to wake up. She displayed no surprise when House entered the room, nor did she object when House gently ran his fingers through her stepdaughter's hair.

"How is she?" Mrs. Pope asked.

"She's being treated for dehydration. Other than the fact that she had been vomiting for days, we haven't been able to find anything wrong with her."
"She hasn't thrown up yet today. Maybe she's getting better."

"Maybe. Let's talk about her medical history. Any history of stomach problems or ulcers?"

"Nothing like that."

"I've seen her records from Green Hill, and they don't tell me much. Was she a drug user?"

"No."

"Are you sure? How well do you know your stepdaughter?"

"Very well. I've known Leonora since she was a baby. I went to boarding school with Judith, Leo's mother, and we stayed close friends over the years. In school, Judith was a sweet girl but fragile. She used to suffer from sick headaches and allergies, and she used to get very upset quite easily. I was always a calming influence; I have a naturally even temperament. Leo wasn't like Judith growing up. Leo was a real tomboy – never frightened of anyone or anything. Raymond and Judith took her to half a dozen different cities around the world, and she always adjusted really quickly."

"We'll need a list of those cities. Your stepdaughter had anorexia?"

"Yes. When Leo was twelve, her ballet teacher kept telling her she was too solid and muscular to be a ballerina. She needed to be more "swan-like." That was the trigger. Judith found an excellent treatment centre for Leo in Switzerland, and she responded very well. Leo had a slight relapse after her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer, but she pulled herself together again.

Even after her mother's death, Leo coped. She seemed to have beaten anorexia and was well enough to go to university. Raymond and I didn't hear from her much, which wasn't surprising; she had her own life to lead. We didn't know anything was going wrong with her until a few months ago, when we got a call from Student Health that she was acting irrationally. That's when Raymond sent her to Green Hill.

I've been told that I appear to be cold and uncaring. I was raised not to display emotion, but I assure you that I feel them. I love Leo just as I loved her mother. Leo understands about me and her father. We were both lost after Judith's death. Raymond needed someone to run his home, and I had just divorced and was looking for some sort of purpose. Maybe it was a mistake. Judith and Leonora are all Raymond and I have in common."

She looked down at the sleeping woman and touched her hand.

"Please, Dr. House, save Leo."

"Foreman," House said, as he entered the conference room," you didn't tell me the patient is a blonde."

"What does that have to do with anything?" Foreman asked.

"Have you seen her father? He has dark brown hair. Judging by the second Mrs. Pope and by the way he drooled over Cuddy and spurned our fair-haired Chase here, Mr. Pope has a thing for brunettes. I bet that the first Mrs. Pope was a brunette as well, which means that his daughter's flaxen curls are not the product of nature. Cross hair loss off the white board. It's not a symptom; it's the result of a bad dye job. I can understand Foreman and Chase missing this, but you, Cameron, should have caught it. Otherwise, what's the point of your being a girl?"
"So our remaining symptoms are continually vomiting and stomach pain," Chase said. "We've already ruled out the obvious causes such as stomach cancer or ulcers."

"Foreman also left out the part where the patient's father is a bigwig in the State Department."

"That's because I didn't know it," Foreman protested. "The hospital where she had been staying didn't have anything about her father in her records, and she was in no condition to answer any questions."

House ignored the interruption. "Which means that he and his family make frequent trips abroad, where his daughter could have contracted a tropical illness or parasite. Have you tested her for schistosomiasis?"

"We did a blood antibody test," Cameron confirmed.

"What about poisoning?" Chase suggested. "She could be using cocaine or some other drug loaded with chemical impurities, or she could have come in contact with highly toxic pesticides that are banned here, but are still being sold in Third World countries."

"She hasn't been out of the U.S. for more than a year, according to her father," Cameron said. "There wouldn't be such a long delay between exposure and symptoms."

"Test her anyway," House said.

Roy Wilson had already spent the seven hundred dollars his brother had given him. Most of it had gone to a lap dancer named Georgia Peachum, who currently was asleep beside him. The lighting in the strip club had certainly been kinder to her than the hundred watt bulb in Roy's ceiling. She looked twenty years older than she had in the club. Heavy stage makeup had smeared over her cheeks and caked in the corners of her eyes, accentuating her wrinkles. The smell of cigarette smoke and sour sweat made him want to open a window, despite the rush hour noise below. Suddenly impatient for her to be gone, Roy got out of bed. Georgia groaned but did not wake up. He went his tiny bathroom and filled a glass with water. Standing over the sleeping woman, he dipped his fingers into the glass and sprinkled droplets of cold water over her. She opened her bleary, bloodshot eyes.

"Wake up, sweetness," he said. "I don't have any more money, so you might as well leave."

Fifteen minutes later, Roy was alone again and enjoying a hot shower. He hadn't intended to go through the money so quickly. He had wanted to give at least part of it to the landlord, to keep him happy. Roy was already three weeks behind on the rent and his landlord was threatening eviction. Roy didn't let that bother him. He could always get more money from Jimmy.

James Wilson had just had an uncomfortable conversation with his bank manager, who was curious as to why the oncologist suddenly wanted to withdraw ten thousand dollars in cash. Finally, the bank manager arranged to have Wilson's money ready that afternoon. Wilson wasn't sure about the cost of setting up a new life. Roy would presumably need a reliable used car to drive, and he would need enough money to live on until he could find a job in New Mexico or Arizona. Maybe Roy would want to buy a fake id, and Wilson had no idea how much that would cost. He thought ten thousand dollars would be enough to cover all expenses. Roy could be touchy about money. If he offered him too much, Roy might be offended; if he offered too little, Roy would attack him for being stingy and selfish.

Driving to the hospital, Wilson wondered where he should keep the money until he had a chance to
give it to Roy. His hotel room was not safe because the money might be found by one of the cleaning staff, and neither were his office, his car, or his storage locker. House's apartment had recently been burgled, so it was obviously not a good place to store a large amount of cash. Cuddy had an alarm system installed at her house, but he was reluctant to ask her to keep the money without giving her a reason.

Lost in his thoughts, Wilson almost missed the red light in front of him and slammed on his brakes. A startled pedestrian looked up at the sound of squealing tires, and Wilson made an apologetic gesture. His hand wandered to the back of his neck, where the muscles felt hot and tender.

Wilson did not show up at the Tuesday morning meeting of departmental heads. On those occasions when Wilson could not attend, he always sent someone else from the Oncology Department to cover for him. This time there was simply an empty space at the table. House was also a departmental head, but seldom attended the meetings. If something was decided in one of the meetings that he had to know about, Cuddy or Wilson would tell him about it later. Wilson had House's proxy vote and always scrupulously voted the way he thought House would on any issue that came up, or at least the way that House would have voted had he actually cared. Because one departmental head was suddenly called away to attend to an emergency and another was off with the flu, there were not sufficient attendees to make a quorum. Cuddy had prepared a detailed proposal for new treatment protocols at the clinic. Now consideration of her proposal would have to be postponed, and she was angry.

"Where is Wilson?" she said. "He was supposed to be at the meeting but he didn't show up. He's not in his office either."

"No idea," House said. "Was I supposed to be at the meeting too, or was it a secret?"

"Yes, technically you were supposed to be there, but I knew you wouldn't show up. Wilson was going to back me up on the new clinic protocols."

"How was I going to vote?"

"Wilson said you'd be against it, because you hate change."

"So the vote would have worked out the same whether he showed up or not."

"That's not the point. If you see Wilson, tell him I'm looking for him."

"You can tell him yourself. He just got off the elevator."

Cuddy swivelled on her stiletto heels. Through the glass walls of House's office, she saw the oncologist head towards his office. He had obviously just arrived at the hospital.

"Thanks very much for siccing Cuddy on me," Wilson said. He took a bite of his egg salad sandwich.

"I wasn't the one who missed Cuddy's all-important staff meeting. Well, I was, but she didn't care. That's the problem with being dependable. If you're dependable and you don't show up when you should, people are furious. If you have a reputation for being undependable, no one is upset when you don't show, and they're pleasantly surprised when you do. It's much easier being undependable. I highly recommend it."
"I'll try to remember that the next time you need a favour."

House eyed the other half of Wilson's sandwich. Prudently, Wilson moved his plate farther away. House had to content himself with the pickle on the side of Wilson's plate. It wasn't much of a prize since Wilson didn't even like pickles and would have given it to House if he'd asked. House spotted Cameron, Chase and Foreman sitting together on the other side of the cafeteria. Cameron and Chase were sitting so close that they were almost touching. Just then, Chase made some sort of joke, and Cameron laughed. It was obvious that their on-again off-again relationship was on again. House suppressed a brief pang of jealousy. Cameron had been interested in House, and House had been flattered. However, he had realized that Cameron was only attracted to House because she thought he was wounded. She confused love with pity.

"Are you listening to me, House?"

"Of course, I'm listening."

"So you'll do it."

"Do what?"

"I knew you weren't listening," Wilson sighed theatrically. "Bonnie's going away on vacation. I told her I'd water her plants and check up on Hector. She's going to drop by and leave me her key before she goes to the airport. I'm going to have to leave early today, so I won't be there to meet her."

"You don't expect me to look after Hector again do you?"

"Of course not. Poor Hector barely survived his last visit with you. Hector's going to a very reputable kennel. Bonnie can slide the key to her condo under my office door, but knowing her she'll probably have a long list of instructions. Just nod your head when she talks and ask her to write it down for me, okay?"

"She doesn't think you'll be able to water the plants without a list of instructions."

"She grows orchids. Expensive, delicate orchids. She doesn't let just anybody look after her plants."

"I don't think you understand divorce. You're nicer to your wives after the divorce than you ever were when you were actually married."

When Tritter phoned, Roy didn't answer. He was tired of being on a leash. Tritter needed to be reminded that Roy was essential and had to be treated with respect. He wouldn't like what Roy was planning to do, which was half of the fun of doing it. The other half was watching Jimmy squirm. Jimmy tried to hide it, but he was afraid of his brother. When Roy moved forward, Jimmy edged back. He always kept his distance as if Roy were a dog that might bite. Roy was a bit insulted by Jimmy's reaction. He was also excited by it.

Roy didn't park in the PPTH parking lot, but in front of a convenience store a block away. A couple of young women wearing hospital uniforms had just bought cigarettes. They stopped in the parking lot to light them up. They were very young.

"Hey," Roy said to the prettier of the two women," Do you ladies work at Princeton Plainsboro over there? I'm thinking of applying for a job there."

"Yeah, we work there."
"Is it a good place to work? Good people?"

"It's okay. What kind of job are you applying for?"

"Maybe security, maybe janitorial. Got to see where there are any vacancies. I hear there are some strange people there – people you want to avoid."

"You get that in any large organization," said the less pretty one. "My supervisor's okay."

"Either of you heard of this guy House. I hear you've really got to keep away from him."

"Oh, House. He's got a reputation. I could tell you stories! You know he punched out one of the other doctors. This really cute Australian guy. No reason, just knocked him out. He was unconscious!" The pretty girl demonstrated by rolling her eyes up in her head.

"There was a reason," the other said. "I heard it was all about this female doctor. They were both in love with her. That's why."

"No way! I've heard he's gay."

"Which one, the Australian one or House?"

"House, he's gay. He and Dr. Wilson are, you know, involved."

"Dr. Wilson! You're kidding! He's been married something like five times. You should see the way he flirts with anything in a skirt. My mom came to town and I was showing her the hospital, the place I work, and Dr. Wilson comes along and starts flirting with her! Right in front of me! I swear."

"That's all camouflage. House and Wilson, swear to God."

"Who's Dr. Wilson?" Roy pretended ignorance.

"The Head of Oncology. He's so nice and so not gay!"

"Either of you know Dr. Cuddy?"

"Sure, she's the Head of Medicine. She's always bustling around, going to meetings and organizing things. I don't know what she's like to work with. She seems kind of scary to me," said the pretty one.

"Intimidating, you mean?" asked Roy.

"Yeah, intimidating. She's got these super high heels and these tarty tight skirts and low cut blouses. She's like one of those women with whips."

"Dominatrixes," said the other, "but that's not true. Any woman in power, somebody's going to say that. She spoke at career day at my high school. She was really inspirational."

"If you're working janitorial or security, you won't have much to do with the doctors anyway. We've got to get back. If you want to come with us, I can introduce you to Carl, the head of security."

"You two go ahead," said Roy. "I've got to pick up my kids at school."

Roy waited until the two young women had left and then followed them to PPTH. The hospital was a labyrinth and it took him a while to find his brother's office. He knocked but no one answered; the door was locked. Roy had never been particularly adept at lock picking, and lingering might draw
"Are you looking for Dr. Wilson?"

The speaker was a pleasant looking young woman with her hair drawn back in a ponytail.

"Yeah, I'm a friend of his. We were going to play golf," Roy said.

"Really. I didn't know Dr. Wilson played golf," she said.

"He doesn't," said House, sticking his head out of his office. "Wilson's left for the day, but his friend and I have something to discuss, don't we?"

"Sure," Roy said. He followed House into his office.

House had remembered that Bonnie was due to drop by PPTH in a few minutes to drop off her keys. He still suspected that Bonnie's mysterious client "Rory" was actually Roy. If he could stall Roy for a few minutes, he could bring the two of them together and confirm his suspicions. House carefully shut the blinds that covered the glass walls of his office.

"You don't want to be seen," he said. "So why are you here? If the police are looking for you, wouldn't they expect you to come to see Wilson? Aren't you taking a big risk?"

"It's a risk," Roy said,"but I'm desperate to see Jimmy. Where is he?"

"The mall was a big risk too, wasn't it? But you didn't hesitate. Your brother says that he is bringing along a friend of his, someone you have never met, to your secret meeting, and that doesn't bother you. Maybe I have a suspicious nature, but I'd be curious about why "Jimmy" wanted to bring a friend along for this touching brotherly reunion. Weren't you worried that his friend might be an undercover cop?"

"I trust Jimmy absolutely. Maybe you don't understand because you don't have a brother like Jimmy."

"No, I don't. I've got a friend like him. My friend is sort of a fugitive too. He doesn't like it. He's always watching – looking for undercover cops, looking for Tritter. He's stressed out. He missed a meeting this morning; he never misses meetings."

"Yeah, well, Jimmy's got weak nerves."

"You must have exceptionally strong ones though. The prospect of being arrested doesn't seem to concern you at all. You went straight to Wilson's office. Didn't you think that the police might be watching it?"

"I was careful. I checked that there were no cops."

"No, you didn't. If you'd checked, you would have seen me. You walked out of the elevator and straight toward Wilson's office. You didn't look around to see if there were cops. You knew there weren't going to be any. How did you know that?"

"Look, I came here to speak to Jimmy."

"I told you your brother isn't here. He left work early. You can talk to me instead. What is it you want? Money?"

"I could use some money. The money that Jimmy gave me yesterday, it all went to my rent. I don't
have anything to live on. If you lend me a few bucks, Jimmy will pay you back."

House slapped his pockets as if he were looking for his wallet. "I can lend you fifty, but if Wilson asks, you say I gave you a hundred, okay?"

Roy smiled. This was the sort of petty corruption he understood - fifty dollars for House and fifty dollars for Roy. He thought he'd discovered a kindred spirit, and he didn't pause to consider that fifty dollars to House was very small change indeed.

There was a knock on the door and Cameron put her head in the door.

"Sorry to interrupt, but Bonnie Wilson came by. She left this key and these notes for Dr. Wilson. She said to give them to you, since he wasn't in."

Cameron put the key and the notes on House's desk and left. Roy realized how close he had come to being exposed. For a second, his anger at nearly being tricked showed on his face, but was quickly replaced by a genial expression. House had been watching, however, and he hadn't missed the transformation.

"I don't think I'm going to lend you any money after all," he said. "I think you'd better leave before I call the police."

"You wouldn't do that. Everyone in the hospital knows how close you two are. You wouldn't turn me in because it would hurt Jimmy."

"I wouldn't count on it. Haven't you heard I'm a selfish bastard who doesn't care about other people's feelings?"

Roy slammed the door to the office on his way out. His impulsive visit to the hospital had been a disaster. Thank God Tritter didn't know anything about it. He would be furious if he realized how badly Roy had screwed up.

Chapter End Notes

The reference to the silver cow creamer is a shout-out to P.J. Wodehouse's Jeeves and Wooster stories. Hugh Laurie starred as Bertie Wooster in the television adaptation.
Chapter 9

Roy almost ran back to his car. No one was following him, but he needed to escape the scene of his defeat. He barged through the hospital lobby, nearly knocking over a woman using a walker and drawing outraged looks from the people who had to step aside or be bowled over.

Damn House! If Roy were a violent man, like some of the people he’d been caged with at Rahway, House would be dead by now. He’d had cellmates who never gave a second’s thought about the consequences of their actions. They’d knife someone in full view of the entire prison population. They didn’t think about the risk of a death sentence; all they cared about was that the person they hated was dead. House was damned lucky he was still a reasonable man, even after life on the streets and prison.

As he drove back to his apartment, Roy thought again about simply leaving the East Coast. He couldn’t take his car, but Tritter didn’t know about the van he borrowed from a friend when he went on a job. He’d need money though, which meant Jimmy. He couldn’t walk away with nothing.

By the time he parked his car in his usual space, Roy had calmed down and his natural confidence in his own abilities reasserted itself. All was not lost. House didn't have any actual evidence against him, only observation and logic. Roy could still prevail. Roy was family, after all, and House was merely a friend. (Although family meant nothing to Roy, he knew that it was important to Jimmy.) Roy could be very persuasive, and after all, Jimmy really wanted to believe him. Bonnie had told him how much Jimmy got off on rescuing people, and that fit in perfectly with what Roy knew of him as a child and as a young man. Saving his poor lost brother would be a dream come true for him, and he wouldn’t want to give up on that dream. If Roy was careful, he’d get enough money from Jimmy to finance a new life away from Tritter. If he was lucky, he might be able to ruin his brother's life at the same time.

House was still in his office, twirling his cane as if it were a baton. While he kept his hands busy, his mind was putting pieces of a puzzle together. If Roy had simply been after Wilson's money, House would not have interfered. He had, after all, repeatedly warned Wilson that his brother could not be trusted, and Wilson was an adult who could make his own decisions. Unfortunately, the harm that Roy could do was not limited to the thousands of dollars he could con from Wilson. From the moment he had seen that angry, hateful gleam in Roy's eyes, House knew that Roy was not going to be satisfied with mere money. If he was acting in concert with Tritter, as House suspected, Wilson would need all the help he could get.

Roy was deep in thought as he climbed the stairs to his apartment. He put the key in the lock and opened the door. Tritter was sitting in Roy's chair, idly leafing through a paperback that Roy had picked up at a second-hand store. He looked up when Roy entered. Roy was outraged that his personal territory had been invaded, but there wasn't anything he could do about it. Tritter was a cop and he was armed.

"Is this any good?" he asked, "Lust Killer. Catchy title. I bet you met a couple of them in prison."

"What are you doing here?"

"You didn't answer my calls, so I came to check up on you."
"I didn't get any calls," Roy lied. "Oh, now I remember. I went to a movie last night and I turned off my cellphone. I guess I forgot to turn it back on."

Tritter was unimpressed. "When I couldn't reach you, I used the tracking device on your car to see where you were. You were parked a block away from the hospital. Did you go to see your brother?"

"No," Roy said. "We're in this together. I wouldn't see Jimmy without talking to you first. We're partners."

Tritter did not like to think of himself being in partnership with a low-life such as Roy, but he let Roy's comment pass.

"Stay away from the hospital. Dr. House is there, and it's your brother's home ground. He has too much control there."

"I didn't go to the hospital. I went to this convenience store where the hospital employees buy smokes and lottery tickets. I thought I'd strike up some conversations and get the gossip. Give me some idea where to look for the dirt. They said Jimmy's always coming on to the ladies, so I figure maybe there's something there. Maybe he's sexually harassing the nurses or sleeping with his patients. That would be enough to get him fired. Maybe he'd even lose his license to practise medicine."

"Okay, anything else?"

"They said House assaulted some other doctor."

"I already knew that. The victim declined to press charges."

"Yeah, but I figure we get someone to needle House until he gets mad enough to hit him. Then he gets charged with assault."

"Did you find anything out on Dr. Cuddy?"

Roy thought that the dominatrix accusation was too far-fetched to pass on. It would just make him look desperate. "Nothing on her so far. Her staff is too frightened of her to say anything."

"None of this is worth anything to me. I need something more substantial," Tritter said. "If you can't do any better than this, I might as well send you back to prison."

This threat, on top of the day's other humiliations, was more than the ex-convict could stand. Roy advanced towards the police officer. Tritter stood up. He held his ground, ready to meet him. At the last moment, Roy managed to get his emotions under control. His combative stance relaxed and his fists unclenched.

"I think you need to treat me with more respect."

"I don't respect you," Tritter said. "You're just another pathetic petty criminal."

Tritter brushed past Roy. The policeman took a step towards the door, then stopped and took out a pen and notepad.

"Arrange another meeting with Dr. Wilson. I think this time you should wear a wire. Here's my cellphone number. Call me when you've set it up."

When Roy refused to take the paper, Tritter let it fall to the floor. He walked out of the tiny


apartment, shutting the door quietly behind him.

After he was sure that Tritter had left the building, Roy took out his cellphone and phoned the hospital.

The hospital receptionist had refused to give Roy Dr. Wilson's phone number, but she had agreed to contact the oncologist. With Dr. Wilson's permission, she arranged a conference call between the two. Roy was adamant that he needed to see Wilson as soon as possible. Wilson had wanted to meet him some place where they could not readily be observed. Roy was impatient though. None of the places that Wilson suggested met with his approval, and finally Roy said that he would meet Wilson at his hotel room. Wilson thought this was a very bad idea – Tritter knew where he lived – but Roy overruled him. He said that he could spot a cop a mile away, and Wilson was being too fearful and cautious. Finally, against his better judgement, Wilson agreed.

While he waited, Wilson looked at the ten thousand dollars he had withdrawn from the bank. Now that he actually saw it, wrapped in rubber bands and stuffed into his brief case, it didn't look like much. Roy had left it up to him to set an amount, and Wilson was certain he had screwed up. Ten thousand dollars wasn't going to be enough. It would have been easier if Roy had simply told him how much he needed, but that had never been Roy's way. Every encounter with Roy was a test, one which Jimmy Wilson invariably failed. He always proved himself too arrogant or too greedy or too cowardly. Wilson knew that he was never going to pass his brother's tests – that Roy had rigged the game so that winning was impossible. Still there was something stubborn (and stupid) in Wilson that made him try every time.

Wilson's thoughts were interrupted by a knock on the door. Wilson closed the briefcase and stowed it under the desk. It was too soon to be Roy, who had never arrived early to an appointment in his life. Wilson was afraid that it was Tritter. He peered through the peephole and was relieved to see House. He opened the door.

"I brought you Bonnie's keys," House said.

"You could have waited until tomorrow."

"I couldn't bear to think of all those thirsty orchids. I wouldn't have been able to sleep."

He dropped the keys and Bonnie's notes into Wilson's hand, and then stepped past Wilson into the room.

"I'm really busy right now. Thanks for dropping off the keys. I'll see you tomorrow."

House looked at the clean surfaces of Wilson's hotel room. If Wilson was busy, it was difficult to say what he was busy doing. There was no paperwork on the desk and the television and radio were off. There was not even a book or a magazine on the nightstand. House looked sceptical.

"Okay, you've caught me. I'm expecting a visitor – a call girl."

"Really, which one? I might know her."

"Robin. You've met her."

Robin was the only call girl Wilson knew by name. He had met her at the hospital when one of her clients had collapsed. Unlike House, he had never used the services of a prostitute.

"Yes. I didn't realize that you were seeing her professionally. You told me you took her out to dinner, but you decided not to see her again."
"I was lying. She's going to be here any minute. You should leave."

"I'll hang around. Maybe she offers two-for-one specials."

"She's not delivering pizzas."

"Are you afraid I'll find out all your kinks? I've been on clinic duty. Believe me there's nothing that you two could do that would surprise me."

House lay down on Wilson's bed on top of the coverlet. He took one of Wilson's pillows and used it to elevate his aching leg. He grabbed the remote to Wilson's television from the nightstand. He turned the t.v. on, and pretended to be absorbed in the baseball game. He muted the sound though.

"House," said Wilson. There was a note of exasperated pleading in his voice that House chose to ignore. Short of calling hotel security to remove him bodily, Wilson couldn't think of how to get House to leave. Finally, in desperation, he decided to tell the truth.

"Roy's going to be here any minute. I don't think you should be around."

"Why are you meeting him here? Isn't this the first place Tritter would look for him?"

"That's what I told Roy. I tried to talk him out of it."

"Roy seems a lot less concerned about being caught than you are. Why is that?"

"I guess he's used to it. He used to deal pot when I was a kid. There's an element of risk in that line of business."

"Illegal drugs?" said House in an incredulous voice. "Your saintly brother? I thought he was pure in thought and deed until those wicked drug dealers forced him to use their products!"

"I never said he was a saint."

"You never said he was an asshole either. I found that out myself. You know that he hates you, don't you?"

"He resents me. He thinks I forced this whole Tritter situation on him. I don't blame him. I had a hard time forgiving you for bringing Tritter into my life."

"He hates you," House repeated seriously. "You can't trust him."

"It doesn't matter whether he hates me or not," Wilson said. "I still love him, and I'm going to help him."

"That doesn't even make sense."

"You don't understand because you don't have a brother. You don't even like your family. You don't know what it's like when someone you used to be close to just drops out of your life, and you have no idea whether he is alive or dead. You don't know how often you think about what you could have done to stop that person from walking away."

"I've lost people," House said, thinking of Stacey. "You have to accept that they're gone."

"Roy isn't gone yet."
"Roy isn't the person that you were missing! He's not the loving older brother you remember! For God's sake, Wilson, how could anyone miss somebody like Roy? It would be like missing a cancerous tumour. Michael was right; your family was better off without him."

"I knew I couldn't make you understand," Wilson said.

He rubbed the back of his neck and began pacing the room. He glanced at his watch. Time was running short and Roy would soon be there. Suddenly asking Phil and Jason in Security to help him drag House out of the hotel didn't seem like a bad idea.

"No, I get it, all right," House said. "You and Roy grew up together, blah, blah, blah. Loyalty to your family, etc., etc., etc. Emotional ties that cannot be broken, yada, yada, yada. Does all that mean that you have to disregard common sense entirely? I know that you're gullible, and I've used that to my advantage, but I never imagined that you were moronic!"

"Do you think that insulting me is actually going to help you win this argument?"

"Wilson, you can't afford to think like a nine year-old boy!" House said angrily. "You could get in real trouble, and real trouble here doesn't mean a timeout. Tritter's involved in this. You remember Tritter! He was the one willing to destroy your practice and ruin your reputation just because I pissed him off. I think he and Roy are acting together."

"That's ridiculous."

"No, it isn't. Roy keeps talking about how afraid he is of Tritter. Tritter's tracking him down like the hunter after Bambi's mom, and you've got to help him get away. But what does Roy actually do? He agrees to meet us in the middle of a crowded mall. He's never met me before; for all he knows, I could be an undercover cop. That doesn't concern him. Now, he's meeting you where you live. He must know that Tritter's got your address. God, Wilson, he's not even bothering to pretend to be afraid of Tritter anymore. He knows that you'll give him the money anyway, even if you don't believe a word he says."

Wilson was listening, despite himself.

"But it isn't about the money," House said, "if Tritter's involved. Tritter doesn't give a damn about money. He wants to hurt you to get to me."

These words released Wilson from House's spell. Wilson laughed humourlessly.

"Everything has to revolve around you. This can't be about me seeing my brother again after ten years; it has to be about you and Tritter!"

There was a knock on Wilson's door.

"Let Roy in," House said, standing up. "I'm not leaving."
Wilson opened the door to let his brother in. Roy had sounded agitated on the telephone and he was obviously still upset. His fists were clenched and his eyes were wild. Wilson knew from experience that when Roy was really angry, he was capable of violence. Jimmy Wilson had always accepted that his brother had an explosive temper and that everyone had to be careful not to set him off. He had never blamed Roy for what he did when he wasn't in control, and he had never considered how frequently Roy got his way just because other people were afraid of sparking one of his fits of rage. Roy's temper had been very useful to him over the years, which perhaps explained why the anger management classes he had been forced to take in prison had not changed his behaviour at all.

Roy glared at House. "What's he doing here?"

"House just came by to drop off some papers," Wilson said. "He'll be leaving soon."

House was going to contradict him, but he caught Wilson's warning glance and nodded his head. He noticed the low calm voice Wilson used to speak to his brother, and how careful Wilson was not to come too close or to touch him. Wilson handed his brother a beer and a bag of pretzels from the mini-fridge, always staying a full arm's length away. He tossed House a can of beer without even looking at him.

"Don't I get any pretzels?" House complained.

Roy paced the room, eyes darting into every corner of the room. When his glance fell on House, he frowned. Wilson immediately tried to distract his brother.

"Would you like a sandwich?" he asked Roy."I have some thin-sliced smoked turkey and some Swiss cheese. If you want something else, we can get it from room service."

"Turkey's fine," Roy said, turning toward his brother, "but not too much mayonnaise. You always put on too much mayonnaise and not enough mustard."

House would have mocked Wilson for his servile behaviour, but his relief at no longer being the focus of the ex-convict's attention was too great. Wilson was obviously more sensitive to Roy's aura of imperfectly suppressed rage, but House could feel it too. It was like being in the same room with an unpredictable wild animal.

Roy took the spot that House had vacated. He turned up the sound on the television and randomly began switching channels using the remote control.

"Where's the porn?" he asked.

"You have to go to the pay services menu," Wilson said. "I'll show you. Which one do you want?"

"Nah," Roy said. "It's creepy watching porn with other guys in the room. You got HBO?"

Wilson handed his brother his turkey sandwich and switched the t.v. to HBO, where Tony was arguing with Carmella. He waited a moment until Roy appeared to be engrossed in the Sopranos' conversation, and then grabbed House by the arm and dragged him into the bathroom. He left the door partly ajar, so that he could see Roy and spoke in an urgent whisper.

"You have to go," he said. "Roy's in a bad mood. Anything you say could set him off."
"I said I wasn't leaving," House said, "and I'm not."

"What are you going to do – protect me? I'm sure Roy is going to be really afraid of a man who walks with a cane. The prospect of being on the receiving end of a really cutting remark just terrifies him."

"You're afraid of him."

"Of course I'm afraid of him. When he's in this kind of mood, if you say the wrong thing, if you look at him the wrong way, he blows up. You pride yourself on your lack of tact! I feel like I'm stuck between a match and a keg of dynamite."

"I won't say anything. I'll be quiet as a mouse."

"I saw him break a man's jaw for backing the wrong football team," Wilson warned. "He shoved my father through a plate glass window for grumbling about his report card. We're eight stories up. If he shoves you through a window..."

"He did break your arm, didn't he?"

"I said before, I had a concussion and I don't remember. It doesn't matter anyway."

"Of course it matters," House said. "You're like a trained dog. He's conditioned you to fear him and do whatever he wants."

"If you leave now, I promise you can come back and insult me as much as you like another time. You can call me a miniature poodle if you want."

Wilson, who had been keeping an eye on his brother, now looked at House directly. House refused to back down. Wilson shrugged his shoulders in a way that eloquently expressed his annoyance with his best friend and his helplessness when confronted by such obduracy.

"The Sopranos is over," he said. "I'd better get back to Roy. Stay here."

House would have followed Wilson, but a stern glance from the oncologist kept him in place. He watched through the door while Wilson cleared away Roy's plate and fetched him another beer. Roy wasn't pleased with HBO's next offering and was clicking through the channels again. Finally, Roy switched off the television and threw the remote control down. While Wilson was occupied, looking in the mini refrigerator for something else that Roy might like, House quietly stepped out of the bathroom.

"Your friend Tritter dropped by my apartment today," Roy said to Wilson. "He was rummaging through my things."

"I know what that feels like," House said. "Some nasty little sneak thief was in my apartment not too long ago. Of course, he did more than rummage. He ransacked the place."

Roy ignored House. The diagnostician was of no importance to him. He continued to address Wilson.

"I don't know whether I'm angrier with you or with Tritter. Of course, without you I would never have met Tritter, so that put you on top. But then Tritter came to my own home and insulted me. I've been sitting here trying to decide which one of you deserves to be hurt the most."

"You've met Tritter?" Wilson asked.
"Of course, I've met him," Roy said. "He's been threatening me to get at you and House. I thought your boyfriend here might have figured that out. He's not as gullible as you are."

"I told him," House confirmed. "He didn't want to believe me. He wanted to help you anyway."

"Jimmy always wants to help," Roy said, "and he always makes everything worse. Anyway, Tritter offered me a deal. Get something on you and he'd make my parole violation disappear. Sounded like a good deal to me, especially since I didn't have any choice.

You don't give away your secrets easily. I taught you that. Anything you say can be used against you. Not just in court, in normal life too. But I know I can get you to tell me all your dirty little secrets – you can't hide anything from me. It would just take a bit of time though and Tritter's already getting impatient. Besides, I'm beginning to think he can't be trusted. I think he'd promise me anything just to get something that could be used to destroy you."

"I assume that you're telling us this because you've decided to make a deal with us instead of Tritter," House said.

"Precisely," said Roy. "I get you Tritter and you set me up in another state. Fifty thousand dollars each should do it. Don't say it's too much because I know you're both doctors and you can afford it."

The next morning House was having a spirited discussion with the manager of his bank branch. House had just finished explaining that the money in House's bank account did, in fact, belong to House, and that he could do whatever he wanted with it, up to and including making little paper airplanes from twenty dollar bills and sailing them off his office balcony, when Cameron knocked on his office door. House told the banker to have the money he had requested ready or he would transfer all his business to another bank and then hung up. He called for Cameron to enter.

"The patient's leaving," she said. "She's no longer vomiting and her electrolyte levels are back to normal. They're taking her back to Green Hill."

"Fine," said House.

"But we don't know what's wrong with her!"

"Correction, you don't know what's wrong with her. I do. She has cyclical vomiting syndrome. It's every bit as unpleasant as it sounds but not life-threatening."

"But if it is cyclical, wouldn't she have suffered more than one episode?"

"There is always a first time," House said, "and we don't know that it is her first episode. Foreman couldn't get a complete history from the patient, so he got all the information from her parents. She could have had earlier episodes that she didn't mention."

"CVS is a childhood illness," said Cameron.

"It's more frequent in children," House agreed," but there are cases of CVS in adults. It's associated with migraine and panic attacks. Leonora has a family history of migraines. Her stepmother told me that her Leonora's mother had migraines all her life."

"There's no proof though."

"The proof is that she doesn't have anything else wrong with her," House argued. "Talk to her; ask
her if she's had other episodes in the past. Maybe she thought she had bouts of stomach flu or food poisoning."

Cameron still looked unconvinced.

"Tell her to start keeping a diary. Sometimes there's a trigger to the vomiting attacks. If there is a pattern, she might be able to spot the trigger and reduce the frequency of attacks."

"I don't think we've explored all the options," she said. "There are other possibilities."

"Are you annoyed because her diagnosis isn't dramatic enough for you?" he asked sarcastically. "Would subjecting Leonora to half a dozen painful tests and a couple of unnecessary surgeries make it more interesting? Would that prove to you I'm taking her seriously despite the fact she's as loony as a Canadian dollar?"

"I'll ask her about previous episodes." Cameron said in a small tight voice. She shut the door behind her.

Roy and James Wilson were having dinner in a restaurant off the freeway. James Wilson knew that his brother was wearing a wire, and that every word they said was being transmitted to Detective Titter. It made him feel like an actor, as if an entire audience was listening to him order apple pie. He worried that his voice might sound artificial. Roy, in contrast, seemed to be enjoying himself. It made Wilson wonder how much of the brother he remembered had been performance and how much had been real.

"The pie here is really good," Roy said, "but you should have ordered the pecan."

"I like apple."

"Well, apple's kind of dull. Pecan's better. Anyway, we were talking about what you've been up to while I've been gone."

"Yes," said Wilson.

"The last time I saw you, you had just divorced Michelle and married Bonnie."

"That's right. Bonnie and I got married, and then we got divorced."

Wilson found it uncomfortable to talk about his personal life with Titter listening, even though he'd gone over the situation with Roy and House and they'd all agreed on what he was going to say. He found it difficult to picture himself telling all these intimate details of his life to Roy. Why would he confide all these secrets to another person? Why would anyone? The role of confessor just didn't seem to fit him. Roy made expansive gestures, indicating that Wilson should elaborate and provide more details.

"Yes, I was unfaithful to her, and we divorced," Wilson said.

The waitress came with two pieces of pie and two cups of coffee. Wilson smiled warmly at her, welcoming the interruption, and she wished she'd given him a bigger slice of pie. Then Wilson spotted House at the restaurant door. He hadn't known House was coming; they hadn't arranged it, but Wilson was happy to see him. He stood up and waved him over. House sat next to Wilson and regarded the two pieces of pie. After a second's thought he grabbed the pecan pie and a fork and took a bite before Roy could protest.
"Another pecan pie and another coffee, please," Wilson ordered, taking a bite of apple.

The waitress left.

"What were you two talking about?" House asked.

"My infidelity."

"To Michelle, Bonnie or Julie?"

"Bonnie. I wasn't unfaithful to Julie."

"What about that nurse?"

"Having dinner together is not being unfaithful. It's eating. Everybody eats."

"You were all dressed up. You were wearing a tie that brings out the colour of your eyes."

House batted his eyes to demonstrate. Wilson would have laughed, but he was afraid of choking on his pie.

"I always wear a tie to work. Just because you dress like a slob all the time."

The waitress returned with Roy's pie and coffee. Wilson gave her another smile, but Roy just glowered at her.

"Wilson's quite the ladies' man, aren't you Wilson?" House prompted, returning Wilson to the prepared script.

Wilson nodded, and then remembered that Tritter couldn't hear a nod.

"Yes, I am," he said emphatically. "I have had many affairs with my co-workers at the hospital."

"Nurse Billings." House mouthed back. Now, Wilson remembered her. A drunken kiss under the mistletoe; he was separated from Bonnie and Nurse Billings was trying to make her boyfriend jealous.

"Naomi from the gift shop."

Wilson frowned, because he actually had had a brief affair with Naomi and he had thought, until that moment, that nobody knew about it.

"And, of course, Cuddy."

Wilson was going to protest that he had never slept with Lisa Cuddy, but realized in time that he was supposed to be a heartless womanizer.

"Lisa Cuddy, your boss!" said Roy, pretending to be surprised.

"That's how I got my job," Wilson said, improvising wildly. "I slept my way to the top. I have incriminating photos of Lisa Cuddy which I keep in a very safe place."

House wasn't sure he liked this detail. Would Tritter believe it? He hit Wilson's leg with his cane to
warn him to keep to the script.

"Wilson's also slept with lots of his female patients, haven't you Wilson?"

"I'm admitting nothing," said Wilson.

Wilson had practiced this line over and over again. He sounded like a man who had to plenty to admit to but was too shrewd to say anything in front of witnesses. Wilson looked at House, hoping desperately that he would not mention Grace. He didn't need to worry. House wasn't going to mention her in front of Roy and Tritter.

"I don't believe it," Roy said. "When I knew you, you were too scared to talk to girls. Now suddenly you're this seducer."

"I have letters," Wilson said. "Steamy letters and photos too. You'd be surprised at the photos. He's seen them."

"I've seen them," House confirmed, "Hot stuff."

"Isn't it a bit risky, keeping them in your hotel room? What about the housekeeping staff finding them?"

"That's why I don't keep them in my hotel room. I keep them in a locker at a self-storage facility near the waste treatment plant. House saw them when I took him out there to borrow some of my furniture."

"After all my stuff was destroyed by some moronic criminal," House said, looking straight at Roy. Wilson relaxed. He had delivered all his lines successfully. He called the waitress over to settle up the bill.

"I've got to go. I want to check up on Hector before the kennel closes."

House and Roy both glared at him. Concern for an ex-wife's pet wasn't in character for a heartless womanizer.

"The woman who owns the kennel has the hots for me," Wilson said, recovering nicely.

He nimbly stepped away from the table in case House decided to hit him with his cane again. He thought he'd done quite well despite his nervousness. He could have been an actor, if he weren't already an oncologist.
"Dr. Wilson's voice sounds a bit strange," said Tritter, listening to the tape for the third time.

"What do you mean, strange?" asked Roy.

"Tense, strained, uncomfortable."

"Nerves," said Roy. "He's afraid of me. He's so soft sometimes; it makes me sick to think he's my brother."

"Do you think that you can get him to give you the key to this storage locker?"

"Not without making him suspicious. What am I going to say, "Oh, Jimmy, before I go on the run from the law, could you please lend me the key to your storage locker? I need to borrow a couple of old kitchen chairs'?"

Tritter looked at the ex-convict sternly, letting him know that he did not appreciate sarcasm or attempts at humour.

"I know the storage facility Dr. Wilson mentioned," he said, "but we'll need to find out which locker belongs to your brother."

"I can do that," Roy said. "No problem. Give me a fifty to bribe the counter guy."

"You can break into the locker tomorrow night."

"That's a problem. I'm not doing anything like that. I've given you the info to get Jimmy and that's as far as I'm going. You want to get into that locker, you do it yourself. Get a warrant or whatever."

"I won't be able to get a warrant," Tritter said. "This wire wasn't strictly official. Even if I could use the tape, Wilson doesn't actually confess to anything illegal."

"Blackmail," said Roy helpfully. "He says he blackmailed Cuddy into hiring him."

"He's just bragging at that point. Dr. Cuddy didn't even promote your brother to head of oncology; her predecessor did that. I checked his employment records when I was investigating House. Where I think we've got him is his relationships with female patients. We find one photo or one letter from one of his patients and Dr. Wilson loses his license."

"Tantalizing, isn't it, knowing that there's all that nice evidence sitting there in that locker, and no legal way to get at it?"

The desk clerk spotted Wilson in the lobby. The hotel's only permanent resident was carrying a large cardboard box and walking swiftly and soundlessly towards the elevators.

"Dr. Wilson," he called.

Wilson turned around but didn't come toward him, so that the desk clerk was forced to call to him across the lobby.

"That friend of yours, the tall man with a limp, is waiting in your room. I said that he should wait in
the lobby, but he said you wouldn't mind."

"The tall man with a limp," said Wilson abstractedly. "It sounds like a description from an Alfred Hitchcock movie, doesn't it? Thanks for letting me know, Jeremy."

"No problem, sir. Do you need any help with that box?"

"No, it's quite light, thanks," Wilson said, shifting the box awkwardly to press the elevator button. "Good night."

House heard Wilson in the hallway and opened the door for him.

"Thanks," Wilson said. He put the cardboard box on the floor and opened it. Hector was sleeping in the box. Wilson put his hand on the dog's chest to make sure that he was breathing steadily.

"I had to give him a mild sedative so he wouldn't make any noise and I could get him past the desk clerk. Jeremy's nosy and he's got excellent hearing."

"What about the reputable kennel?"

"The brochure they gave Bonnie was grossly misleading. Acres of woodland, it said, but it didn't say that they keep the dog's inside their cages most of the day. When they let them out, they keep them in this fenced enclosure with a concrete floor. The dogs can smell the woods and see the woods, but they never get to be in them. The owner and I had words."

"I can't look after him this time," House said. "Steve McQueen is still on the loose, and I don't think he and Hector would get along."

"That's okay; you're more a rat person than a dog person anyway."

"You know I didn't really hurt Hector when he stayed with me. I trained him to limp like that."

"I knew that. Bonnie was going to take Hector to some expensive doggie physiotherapist and bill you, so I had to tell her. I'm going to phone Bonnie and ask her if I can stay at her place while I look after Hector and the orchids. It'll be nice staying in a real home for a while."

"So are you finally serious about getting your own place?" House asked.

"Still thinking about it," Wilson said, picking up the sleeping dog. He lay down on his bed with the sleeping Hector on his chest. "There are just so many decisions to make, and realtors have so much energy and they're so pushy. I'm really tired, House; can whatever you have to say wait until tomorrow?"

"Probably," House said. "But we're both here now."

"And I'll be just as tired tomorrow," Wilson said.

It had been a long day and he just couldn't keep up his guard any longer; for a moment, he lost the struggle to act as if he were normal and everything was under control. He looked vulnerable and exhausted and desperate. House turned away and walked over to the window and shut the curtains, pretending with unaccustomed tact that he hadn't noticed. When he turned around, Wilson was sitting up with his back against the headboard with Hector still asleep beside him. His face was expressionless.

"You know that "uncontrollable rage" thing that Roy does is hooey. He knows exactly what he's
doing. He was angry at Tritter today, but he didn't attack him. Tritter's a policeman so he's been trained how to fight and he's got a gun. Instead, he went all the way across town to your hotel room and scared you instead."

"You were scared too."

"Not as scared as you," House said. "That guy whose jaw he broke – I bet he was a little guy. Probably just sitting in a bar, having a friendly discussion about football, when Roy attacked him. Not such a feat, beating up a guy who's smaller than you and unprepared."

"Maybe there's a kind of choice at the beginning," Wilson agreed, "but once he's actually started in on someone, choice is gone. He's not like a rational human being anymore; he's so deep into this animal rage, he wouldn't recognize his own name. I've only seen him like that two or three times, but it's not something I'll ever forget."

"You act as if it's up to you to keep him happy all the time, so he won't get angry and hurt someone."

"Of course I don't want people to be hurt!"

"You're deliberately pretending not to get my point," House said with elaborate patience, "so I'll speak to you in terms that even an administrator could understand. Roy is an independent human being. When he decided to push your father through a plate glass window, when he decided to trash my apartment, when he decided to skip out on his parole, he was responsible, not you. Roy did those things, and you aren't going to be able protect him from the consequences anymore."

"Yes, but if I have the ability to limit or prevent the harm that Roy does to others and to himself, isn't it my duty to do that? I've had this argument before. One of my roommates in college was a liberal arts major and a serious pothead. He'd wake me up at three in the morning and we'd have conversations just like this. It's better when you're eighteen and half-stoned from second-hand smoke."

"I've got some bad news, Wilson. Our plan isn't going to work."

"What do you mean, House?" Wilson asked. "Sure it will work. The police will catch Tritter breaking into my storage locker. He'll get kicked off the force and maybe go to jail, and Roy will go off to Arizona or wherever and we'll never see either of them again."

"That part will work. It's the part afterwards, when Tritter starts talking and wants to make a deal were things start to go wrong. He's going to know that Roy tricked him, and he's going to guess who helped Roy get away and start a new life. Once he gives his friends on the force our names, the first thing the cops will do is look at our bank records. I don't know about you, but I didn't have a secret untraceable account in the Cayman Islands or fifty thousand dollars in cash tucked away in my cookie jar."

"I didn't think of that," Wilson admitted.

"Yeah, crime is way trickier than oncology. You've got to convince Roy to turn himself in."

Wilson began to protest, but House ignored him.

"Either Roy turns himself in for his parole violation, or you and I get arrested for helping him get away. There aren't any other options. I don't know about you, but I don't want to spend the next year or two locked up in a cell with some tattooed biker who calls me baby. Maybe I'd get lucky though; maybe I'd get put in the same cell as Tritter."
"I'm not turning my brother in to the police," Wilson repeated mechanically.

"I'm not asking you to," House said. "If it comes to it, I'll turn him in. I would love to see that bastard dragged back to prison where he belongs."

"Don't call the police," Wilson said. "I'll talk to him."

House was headed for the door, when Wilson's voice stopped him.

"He's still going to need the money though – for lawyers and to set himself up once he gets out of prison."

"He can have the money," House agreed, although he hated the idea of giving a cent to Roy.

It was too hot to sleep in Roy's stuffy apartment, but for once he didn't mind. He was occupied making plans for his glorious future. Roy greedily pictured a plasma t.v., a condo with a pool, and a new car. He'd have all the luxuries that Jimmy had - all the consumer items that he took from the places he burgled but couldn't afford to keep for himself. The hundred thousand dollars was only the starting point. Once Jimmy had paid him off the first time, he'd have to keep on paying. He'd bleed him slowly. House was a different story, of course. He only agreed to pay out his share for Jimmy's sake and Roy probably wouldn't get another dime out of him. Jimmy was going to be fun though.

Tritter was going to be fun too. Wouldn't it be great if he were sent to Rahway? Roy still knew people there, and he could call in some favours to make Tritter's experience there particularly intense. Despite the heat, pleasant thoughts had almost lulled Roy to sleep when his cellphone went off. Roy waited for whoever was calling him to give up, but his caller was persistent. Swearing, Roy got out of bed and answered his cellphone. It was Jimmy, who had finally talked Roy into giving him his cellphone number, wanting to arrange a meeting for the next day. Roy agreed to a time and place. He opened a window, went back to bed, and fell asleep to the sounds of traffic.

Roy and Jimmy Wilson were sitting on a bench in a park near the hospital. Wilson was wearing his white coat, and his face was grave, as if were delivering bad news to a patient. Runners passing the two men avoided looking at them, sensing that something deeply private was going on.

Wilson had prepared himself for Roy's anger, but not for this stunned disbelief. It was as if something had gone haywire with his brother's emotional circuitry and all he could express was surprise.

"You want me to turn myself in," Roy repeated.

"It will be better for you that way. If you don't, House will turn you in."

"You're not going to try to stop him."

"No, I'm not."

"You're choosing House over me."

"Yes."

"You could pretend you never saw me. I could just drive away and start a new life without any of your money. There would be nothing to connect us."
"That's not true. Tritter would connect us."

Roy was genuinely hurt by his little brother's betrayal. He had never thought that Jimmy was capable of turning on him. Jimmy had always idolized him and had been the last remaining link to Roy's family and his childhood. Sadly, Roy had been too hardened by the life he had chosen to be able to recognize his feelings of pain and loss. After the initial shock, Roy experienced his emotion as anger, which was more familiar and easier to deal with.

"I could strangle you right now," Roy said, finally reacting in the way Wilson expected. "I could kill you and then go up to your friend House's office and beat him to death with his own cane."

Wilson wondered whether Roy's rage was something separate from himself. Could he summon when needed and dismiss when it was no longer necessary? He felt curious rather than frightened. He realized that he didn't care whether Roy attacked him as long as he didn't hurt anyone else.

"You could strangle me," Wilson said calmly, "but there are a lot of witnesses here. You wouldn't make it as far as House's office, though. He gave hospital security your photograph. It's your decision."

Jimmy deliberately looked away, giving his brother time to choose.

"What about Tritter?" Roy asked.

"That can go ahead."

"I want to be there; I want to see him get arrested. After that, I'll give myself up."

Wilson nodded and shook his brother's hand.
Chapter 12

Roy sat in the front passenger seat of his brother's car, looking out into the darkness. He tried to think of how he could turn the situation around, so that he ended up free, while House and Jimmy and Tritter all went to prison. He needed to remain calm so that he could make rational plans; he took calm slow breaths the way the anger management counsellors had suggested. The technique would work for about fifteen seconds until he thought about the situation he was in. He was an innocent non-combatant who had wandered into someone else's war. Now, both sides were shooting at him.

His brother James, in the driver's seat, was hardly in a better mood. He'd had to spend the entire day with Roy, since he was afraid to leave him alone in case he decided to run away or to alert Tritter to their plans. At first, Wilson had felt sorry for his brother, and had tried to make Roy's last day on the outside as pleasant as possible. He'd taken his brother to Roy's favourite strip joint, the most unwholesome place Wilson had ever been in his life. (The beer he ordered came in a glass so greasy that it slipped out of Wilson's hand when he tried to pick it up, and all the strippers had cold sores and visible needle marks.) He had even let Roy use his hotel room for a "date" with one of the club's lap dancers. There are, however, limits to anyone's patience, and James Wilson was sick of being compared to Judas and Benedict Arnold.

House sat in the back seat. Being on a stake-out with Wilson, he thought, would have been fun if only Roy had not been there. He stretched out, "accidentally" kicking Roy's seat with his good leg.

The car was parked at a turnoff a short distance from the storage facility. Except for the storage facility and, a half mile further on, the waste treatment plant, this area was scrubland. At some point, there must have had plans to develop the land into lots, because someone had used a bulldozer to clear access to the planned lots. The development had never taken place, and bush and weeds were gradually taking over the cleared areas. The dirt access roads to the individual lots were hard to spot in daylight and almost invisible at night. James Wilson had carefully backed his car into one of the dirt roads and had then walked back to make sure it could not be seen by passing motorists.

Wilson left the car to relieve himself. When he came back, he looked at Roy, scowling, emitting waves of animosity that Wilson could almost see and could certainly feel. Instead of taking the driver's seat, Wilson got into the back with House. He knew that Roy would see this as another snub, and that it would be additional fuel for his resentment, but Wilson didn't care anymore.

"Pass me one of those wet naps," he said. "Are there any fruit bars left?"

"No."

"How about oranges?" House passed him a wet nap and the last orange.

"If you knew anything about catering for a stake-out, you would have brought take-out. Greasy hamburgers and fries. Chow mein noodles and cold coffee in paper cups." House said. "High fibre fruit bars are not genre-appropriate. Neither are oranges."

"Quick energy," Wilson explained, leaning back against the head rest. "And oranges are genre-appropriate. You must have seen The Grifters."

"Angelica Huston in that movie reminds me of Cuddy - her hair and her clothes sense and of course her warm, compassionate personality."

"Shut up," Roy said. "I can see headlights. That has to be him"
The car was still a long way away. House had bought a pair of night vision goggles especially for the occasion. He watched the car for a moment and confirmed the driver's identity. They watched as the car came steadily closer and then turned off at the storage facility. The parking lot in front was brightly lit, so Tritter parked behind the building, where they could not see him. Wilson pulled out his cellphone, ready to call the police to report a break-in.

"Not yet. Wait a couple of minutes until we're sure he's actually in the building," House said.

"This isn't good enough," Roy grumbled. "You told me I'd see him get arrested. I'm going to see."

He opened the door of the car and stepped out. Wilson made frantic gestures for him to return, but Roy ignored him. Roy had crossed the road and was walking towards the back of the building, carefully avoiding the illuminated parking area for the dark bushes on the side. Wilson swore quietly and put his cellphone back in his pocket.

"Don't call the police until we get back," he said, following Roy out into the night.

"Wait for me," House said. "If you idiots insist on playing follow the leader, I want to join in."

Tritter considered himself a good policeman. He was thorough and conscientious and, best of all, absolutely relentless. There were a couple of times where he'd done more to get a conviction than the rules and regulations allowed but never anything that weighed on his conscience. He knew that breaking and entering was crossing a line. It was something he could not have imagined himself doing when he'd joined the force. He'd always been an idealist.

Tritter had come to House as a patient and the man had humiliated him, but it was not only the memory of his humiliation that made Tritter loathe House. Tritter had seen House's kind of arrogance before - that same certainty that the law could never touch him - in the drunk driver who had killed his wife. He'd prevailed against Dwight Twilig, deputy district attorney and secret lush, and he'd thought that he would prevail against House. He hadn't though. He pulled every string he could, called in all his favours, and still House got away. His captain thought he'd lost perspective and suggested he see a counsellor. He could tell the captain didn't trust him anymore. Tritter was planning on retiring in a couple of years and he hated that his failure to convict House was all that anyone would remember about him.

He walked up to the storage facility's rear entrance, which was illuminated by a single light bulb. Even though there was no one around to see him, Tritter reached up and unscrewed the light bulb with his gloved hand. He shone a penlight on the alarm box. It was a cheap model that was easy to disable. The lock, too, was no deterrent to anyone with experience. Dr. Wilson, he thought, should have picked a better location to hide all his incriminating photos.

Tritter heard a sound and turned around. He switched off the penlight and allowed his eyes to adjust the darkness. His hand was on his gun. He spotted a shape moving in the bushes.

"I see you," he called. "You might as well come out."

Roy stepped out from the bushes. Tritter was annoyed to see him, but not concerned. He thought that Roy had changed his mind and decided to take part in the robbery.

"That was not smart," he said to Roy. "You could have been shot. Now that you're here, you can hold the penlight while I work on the alarm."

He tossed Roy the penlight and turned back to his work. Roy came up behind him and shone the
"I didn't appreciate you breaking into my apartment," he said. "We are supposed to be partners. I didn't like that at all."

"We are not partners," Tritter said. "Be quiet; I need to concentrate."

He disabled the alarm and picked the lock. Then he entered the building. Roy followed him and shut the door behind him. They wondered through a labyrinth of corridors, looking for Unit 149. If there was a logic to the numbering system this place used, it wasn't obvious.

Wilson and House were hidden in the bushes that bordered the parking lot. They watched the two men enter the building.

"I'm phoning the police," House whispered.

"Not yet. Give Roy time to get out of the building first. Please."

Standing on the uneven ground was making House's leg ache. He popped a Vicodin.

"You should go back to the car," whispered Wilson.

"I don't want to miss anything."

Tritter had finally found Unit 149. The lock was so cheap that you could open it with a butter knife. He shone the pen light on neat stacks of labelled boxes. He found one labelled 'correspondence' and opened it. The first letter was from Wilson's divorce lawyer. So was the next.

"What would you do," Roy said," if I told you this was a set-up?"

"What do you mean?"

"House and my brother playing games with you. Getting you to break in and then calling the cops."

Tritter turned around to face the ex-convict.

"I bet the cops are on their way right now, "Roy grinned.

Tritter shone his pen light into Roy's face. He saw Roy's confident smile and knew that Roy was telling the truth. He quickly walked past the ex-convict, heading for the exit. Roy followed.

"They're coming," he said. "If you drive off now, you'll pass them going the other way. How are you going to explain being on this empty road at two in the morning? You're stuck." He laughed in the policeman's face.

Tritter was tired of Roy's taunts. "I'll tell them that I was nearby when I heard the dispatcher mention a break-in over the radio. When I got here to investigate, I found you."

Despite this threat, Tritter knew his best chance was to get away before the police arrived. Framing Roy would be a last resort. He continued walking rapidly through the maze of corridors. At last he reached the exit. He walked out the building and headed for his car. Roy followed after him, shouting abuse.
"You are not getting away, you fucking bastard! If I have to go to prison, so do you!"

Roy tried to grab the policeman, who evaded his grip. When Roy continued to advance toward him, Tritter pulled his weapon. He backed away, still heading toward his car. The ex-convict seemed to be oblivious of the gun pointed at him.

When James Wilson saw Tritter point the gun toward his brother, he stepped out of the bushes where he had been waiting. He had to intervene. He could not let the policeman shoot Roy.

"Let him go, Roy," he urged.

Tritter continued to keep his eyes on Roy, but Roy was distracted by the sound of his brother's voice. He looked away from the policeman and spotted Wilson, who was little more than a silhouette in the dark. Wilson stepped out on to the parking lot. House was a little further back in the shadows; neither Roy nor Tritter saw him. Tritter took advantage of Roy's momentary inattention to get to his car.

Roy's anger now was directed at Wilson, who had allowed Tritter to get away. Furious, Roy launched himself at his brother. Wilson was thrown to the ground. Roy sat on Wilson's chest, pinning him with his legs. He pounded Wilson's head into the asphalt surface of the parking lot. Wilson struggled but he was no match for Roy. He began to lose consciousness. House tried to pull Roy off his brother. When that didn't work, he swung at him with his cane, but Roy hardly noticed the blow. He looked up at House but didn't seem to recognize him at all. His teeth were bared and his face was locked in a rictus of unreasoning rage. House involuntarily took a step back in shock, and Roy returned his attention to battering Wilson. House swung his cane at Roy again, delivering a blow to the head that should have knocked him dizzy. Roy ignored the blow, ignored the blood dripping down into his eyes. He seemed something inhuman and unstoppable.

Tritter stepped out of his car. He couldn't watch Roy kill Dr. Wilson and do nothing. He was still too much a cop to do that.

"Get away from him or I'll shoot."

House was still trying to pull Roy off Wilson. He looked towards Tritter, who motioned for him to get out of the line of fire. House hesitated for a fraction of a second, and then moved aside.

"Roy, step away from Dr. Wilson or I will shoot you," Tritter said.

Roy looked up at Tritter. He had been clutching his brother by his neck and shoulders and he abruptly dropped his grip. Wilson's head fell against the asphalt with a sickening thud. Roy stood up and faced Tritter. Wilson was still; House couldn't tell if he was breathing. He brushed past Roy to get to his friend, but Roy did not react. Tritter lowered his gun but kept the weapon ready. He took a couple of steps towards the injured man, but never took his eyes off Roy.

Wilson was unconscious but still breathing. There was too much blood for House to examine his head wound properly. That didn't mean much, House told himself; scalp wounds bleed profusely. Wilson probably had a couple of broken ribs. He hoped there were no internal injuries. He took off the light weight summer jacket he was wearing and covered Wilson with it.

Roy glanced down at his brother in mild curiosity, as if he had had nothing to do with Jimmy’s injuries. He put his head to his own forehead, where House had hit him with the cane, and then looked at the blood on his hands. He seemed surprised to find that he was hurt.

"I didn't mean to do that, but he makes me so mad sometimes. Where are the cops?" he asked House. "Aren't they taking a long time?"
Wilson wanted to wait until you were out of the building before we called the cops. He didn't want you to be there when they came. He wanted to protect you," House said bitterly.

House took his cellphone out to call an ambulance but Roy snatched it from his hands. He had a brilliant idea.

"This could still work," he said to Tritter. "We could still come out on top. The cops aren't coming. Nobody knows we're here. You get rid of the witnesses and we both walk away."

"Get rid of the witnesses?" Tritter repeated.

Roy was annoyed that the policeman could be so obtuse.

"Shoot them."

"You think I could kill two people in cold blood. You think I'm like you. Fuck you, Roy. Give Dr. House his cellphone."

Roy threw the cellphone as far as he could into the bushes. House reached into Wilson's pocket to get his phone but Roy kicked him hard in his bad leg. House cried out in pain and fell to the ground. Roy neatly leaned down and took Wilson's cellphone. It went into the bushes too. He smiled triumphantly.

Tritter pointed his handgun at the ex-convict.

"I've got a phone in my jacket pocket. Dr. House, come over here and take it. It's in my jacket pocket. Call 9-1-1."

House tried to stand up, but his leg would not bear any weight at all. He began to drag himself towards Tritter. Roy watched for a minute, laughing, and then walked toward Wilson.

"Don't, House" he said. "I'll kill him. Jimmy doesn't look very good. It wouldn't be difficult. One good kick to the head."

House didn't move.

"I'll call 9-1-1 myself," Tritter said.

Still keeping his gun pointed at Roy, he used his other hand to get his cellphone. Tritter only took his eyes off the ex-convict for a second, and that was all Roy needed. He covered the ground between him and the policeman astonishingly quickly. Tritter fired his gun, but he was aiming one-handed, and he wasn't sure whether he hit Roy. The ex-convict was on top of him, his hands around his throat. Tritter still had the gun in his hand, so he swung it at Roy's head as hard as he could. Roy's grip finally faltered, and Tritter pushed him off. He felt shaky and nauseous. He'd been in the police force for twenty years, but he'd never had to use his firearm before.

"Is he dead?" Tritter asked.

House pulled himself up with difficulty and managed a few faltering steps before collapsing next to Tritter.

"I hope so," said House. He put out his hand for Tritter's cellphone.

Wilson had been drifting in and out for hours, but this time he seemed more decisively awake. He
was paying attention to his surroundings.

"What time is it?" he asked House, who was sitting in a wheelchair beside Wilson's bed. "Are you eating my pudding?"

"It two-thirty in the afternoon and yes, but it's banana and you're not missing anything."

"Hector," Wilson said. "I meant to be back a lot sooner."

"Don't worry about Hector. The Lollipop Guild is looking after him."

"The Lollipop Guild?"

"Cameron, Chase and Foreman."

"But Hector's at Bonnie's and they don't have her address or her key."

"The Great and Powerful Oz has arranged everything."

Wilson looked confused.

"I am the Great and Powerful Oz," House explained.

"Simple declarative sentences, please," said Wilson. "I'm not up to metaphor and allusion yet."

"Your brother..."

"He's dead. You told me that before. Or somebody told me. I'm going to have to phone my parents."

"I can phone them."

"No, House. It's my responsibility," Wilson tried to sit up, but his body protested. "I'm sorry about Roy. You were right about him. I wanted him to be better than he was. Did he hurt you?"

"He whacked me pretty good. It's a good thing that I'm used to excruciating pain," House said. "The police are going to want to talk to you. It's not going to be pleasant. They had a lot to say to me about 'amateur sting operations' and 'people playing detective.' Whatever you do, don't mention Alfred Hitchcock."

"I'll try to leave him out of it," Wilson said wryly. "Thank you, House."

Wilson went back to sleep, and House watched him intently for a minute, to make sure that it was natural sleep, and not a coma. Then he opened the box of chocolates Cuddy had bought for Wilson and picked out a caramel.

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