Things That Go Bump

by peg22

Summary

Wilson has nightmares. House gets a headache. Everyone tries to diagnose just what's going on between them.

This story is set in Season 2, before House got shot, before the first ducklings left us, before Amber, before House/Cuddy . . . those halcyon days where House and Wilson were just . . . House and Wilson. Wilson is sleeping on House's sofa, after moving out from cancer patient, Grace.

"Wilson just shook his head and limped back into the kitchen. He unloaded a sack of fresh produce. Good produce. Endives and garlic and tomatoes and asparagus. He moved on to the next sack. Beef. Good beef. Brisket and rump roast and ribeyes . . . he was halfway through the third sack of spices and imported cheeses, whistling and daydreaming about braised salmon with fresh asparagus when it hit him. He was being seduced. Through groceries. By groceries. By House through groceries. And he was falling for it. Hard. Lox, stock pot, and basil."
The dead ones come at night. Not in the usual ghostly visage, the boneless moans, the vacant groans, the rattling shutters. No, they come demanding answers. Shouting for resolution - crying for relief. They always want to know the same thing. Why. Why them, why me, why now, why, why, why?

Of course he has no answers. All he knows is why they died. They died because he couldn't cure them. He couldn't save them. They died because he was too late, or too cautious, or too aggressive. The reasons change, but the outcome is always the same. They died because they had cancer. And there is no cure for cancer. There is no eleventh hour reprieve. There is no stay of execution. There is no outfield snatch over the fence. Ever.

And then he moved in with House and for a while, they stopped coming. At first he thought it was because there were enough demons swirling around House, that his bald and angry cancer kids couldn’t compete with rabies and leprosy and snarling misanthropes. Maybe House was enough to scare all the demons away.

And then they found him. On the couch. Even worse than before. Relentless. Tugging and crying and mad as hell. He didn’t even know he was screaming until he hit the floor. He had banged his head on the coffee table on the way down and he sat up slowly, rubbing his forehead. His was surprised to felt wetness. He pulled his hand away and it was covered in blood. As he struggled to get up, he heard House hobbling down the hall, cursing.

“Wilson, what the hell are you . . .” The rest of it died on his lips as he saw the blood.

“Sorry. Bad dream.” Wilson picked himself off the floor and immediately sat down on the couch, dizzy. He felt his head again, and had to close his eyes as a stream of blood poured down his chin and dripped on his leg.

“Jesus, what did you do?” House took a right limp into the kitchen, grabbed a tea towel, wadded it up and threw it at Wilson.

“Fell into the table I guess.” Wilson pressed the towel into his forehead. House stood in the kitchen doorway. “Go back to bed. I’m fine.”

“Yes, well I was in bed before you unleashed that scream. I thought the hounds of hell had finally found you. That or Susie from Starbucks.”

Wilson grimaced. “Same thing.”

House joined Wilson on the couch. He leaned over and lifted the towel to inspect. He fingered the area around the cut and Wilson winced. He took Wilson’s hand and placed it back on the towel.

“Nicely done. You need stitches.”

“No, I don’t.”

“Yes, you do. I’ll do it.” He started to get up. “You got a kit here?”

“You’re not stitching me up. Head wounds bleed. First day of med school. Apply pressure.”

House ignored him and hobbled over to his jacket, pulled out the Vicodin bottle and returned. “Here, take these.” He shook out three pills into his hand. He swallowed one and held out his hand to Wilson.

“I don’t need that. Doesn’t hurt.”
“Okay, now you’re pissing me off.”

“I’m pissing you off?”

“Yes. I’m out here in the middle of the night, all full of Nightingale devotion, and you keep thwarting my ministrations. Take the damn pills and tell me where your kit is.”

“Nightingale devotion?” Wilson leaned back into the couch. He closed his eyes and concentrated on the pounding in his head. Which did hurt. Like hell. He felt House come closer and he held out his hand. House dropped the pills into them. He opened his eyes.

“Water?”

“What?”

“I need water to take these.”

“Why?”

“They’ll get stuck in my throat. Plus it says to drink a full glass of water with each dose.”

“No it doesn’t.”

“Yes it does – do you ever read the bottle?”

House rolled his eyes and got up again, wincing when his leg forgot to come with him. He stumbled and fell into Wilson, who dropped the towel and tried to grab House’s shoulders, but all he managed to do was to shove him more off balance and House tumbled to the floor, hitting the corner of the coffee table on the way down.

“Ow. Fuck.”

“You okay?”

House lifted his leg up over Wilson’s and he turned to try to get up and Wilson saw a small gash over House’s left eyebrow. The blood oozed and House reached a hand up and then the curses began in earnest.

“Jesus hell goddamn it, Jimmy – couldn’t you have just swallowed the damn pills? Now look what you did.”

Wilson ignored the tirade and helped House back onto the couch and handed him the towel. House pressed it to his head and then held out his hand. Wilson dropped another pill into it and House tossed it in his mouth and swallowed.

“See? You just swallow.”

Wilson mimicked his actions and the pill got as far as the back of his throat before he choked. He coughed and spit and turned red. House cursed and reached over and patted his back. Hard. Very hard.

After the third pounding, Wilson caught House’s hand in mid-thump. “Stop it,” he rasped. He got to his feet and stumbled into the kitchen, opened the fridge and pulled out a bottle of water and drank. He grabbed another tea towel and pressed it to his head. He leaned against the sink for a minute, drinking and breathing.
House watched from the couch. He felt his forehead and cursed. “This is perfect. We’re now a matched set.”

Wilson walked into the living room. “You don’t need stitches, either.”

“I don’t, but you do.”

“No I don’t.”

“Just a couple to keep it closed. You can’t have a scar on that angelic head of yours. Scare your patients.”

“I won’t have a scar. I heal fast.”

House watched Wilson walk past him into the bathroom. He sat silent for a moment. Wilson came back and joined him again on the couch. Two men holding two tea towels to their heads, both dressed in t-shirts and pajama bottoms.

“So, what was the nightmare about?”

Wilson closed his eyes briefly as a ghost of the dream flickered through his mind. “Just stuff. You know.”

“If I knew, I wouldn’t have asked. Must have been a doozy. Were you being chased by all your ex-wives? Cuddy with a whip – no wait, that’s my dream.”

“You know – just nightmare stuff.”

“Quit saying I know.”

“Don’t you have nightmares?”

“Not since Mr. Vicodin came to live with me.”

“I think it’s Mr. Vodka and Mr. Whiskey that should take the credit for that.”

“Avoiding the question won’t make me stop. I mean it was bad enough to send you hurtling into the coffee table.”

Wilson sighed. “That was an accident.”

“No, really? You weren’t trying to split your head wide open in the middle of the night? Just to wake me up?”

“Shut-up. My head hurts.”

“So does mine, thanks to you. You owe me. My blood has been spilled for you.”

“Go back to bed.” Wilson started to get up, but House laid a hand across his chest.

“I can’t – what if you have another nightmare?”

“I won’t.”

“You will. And then this delicious cycle will start all over again.”

“Yes, because it’s my ultimate plan to keep you awake all night.”
House didn’t answer, but got up and limped toward the bedroom. He stopped for a moment, tapped his cane on the floor. Then he turned back. “You can sleep in here with me.”

“What?” Wilson almost slipped off the couch again.

“Come sleep in here. Where I can wake you up before you leap out the window.”

“But you said you hate sleeping with . . .”

“Wilson, get the hell in here. Before I rescind the offer and toss you out in the street on that pretty little ass of yours.”

Wilson rose and headed for the bedroom.

“And bring your kit. At least you’ll let me butterfly us, won’t you?”

Wilson wondered if that was some kind of euphemism he didn’t understand. He wondered why he felt like a lamb headed for the slaughterhouse. He wondered if he was still dreaming.

The live ones, they come after him during the day. Molly. Five years old. Leukemia. Acute. Aggressive. Resistant. Her mother was 23 years old. Single. Scared. A child raising a child. They were a matched set. Blonde. Pretty. Petite. Sundresses and flip flops. Except that the little one had bruises all over her body and too many white blood cells and the bigger one had checks bouncing all over town and no coping skills. Perfect, really. He should just pack his stuff and move in tonight. Then House would be satisfied and he could finally ruin the one thing he had managed to hang onto. His career. His vocation. His albatross.

He flipped the chart over and laid his head on the desk, careful not to bump the bandage that House had insisted upon. What he really needed to do was to figure out why he had felt seared and branded when House’s fingers had pressed the butterfly against his skull, whispering, “Sorry, this may hurt a little,” his breath caressing Wilson’s eyelashes, his other hand squeezing the back of Wilson’s neck. He wondered when his relationship with House had crossed over from irritating to essential.

He had spent the rest of last night on the furthest six inches of mattress from House that he could manage. He tried not to move. He barely breathed. Watched the light filter through the cracks in the curtains and listened to House inhale and exhale, regular and soft. The sleep of the innocent. Well, relatively. Relative to not at all. He had the distinct feeling that he was missing some crucial piece to the puzzle that was Gregory House, RN. He had finally dozed off and woke up with House’s leg across his chest.

And now he was paying for it. He lifted his head and looked at his watch. Three o’clock. Thirty minutes before he had to tell Mrs. Thompson that her skin tags were indeed malignant. He rose from the chair, hoping the couch in the oncology lounge was vacant. He got to the door and remembered the file, but as he turned to retrieve it, the door burst open, catching his shoulder and he stumbled, twisting his ankle underneath him as he fell to the floor.

“Wilson, what the . . .” House stopped mid-sentence for the second time in 24 hours at the sight of Wilson sprawled on the floor.
“Can’t you knock?” Wilson groused and then he realized his foot hurt. And his ankle. He reached for it at the same time House was reaching down for him and he managed to knock House on the nose, which caused him to stumble back out into the hall, landing on his ass, shocked.

“Wilson, what’s the matter . . .”

“Sorry, I was just . . .”

“What the hell are you two doing?” Cuddy stood with hands on her hips. ‘Get off the floor.”

House, having recovered from the surprise of being upended, rolled over and looked up at her. “Why don’t you come down here and get me?”

Cuddy kicked House in the side with the toe of her shoe. “Stop acting like a juvenile and get up.”

Wilson had managed to pull himself up and was leaning on his desk, testing his foot. “Ouch!” He drew his leg up and fingered his ankle.

Cuddy walked over House and into Wilson’s office. “Are you two wrestling now? Is that what you do?”

Wilson turned to her and Cuddy’s lips curled in amusement. “Do you know that you and House have matching Scooby Do Band-Aids?”

Wilson reached for his forehead. “Yeah, I hit it on the coffee table.”

Cuddy turned back to House, who was limping through the door. “And are you the coffee table?”

House breezed by Cuddy, ignoring her comment, and laid his cane on the desk. He held out his hand. “Let me see it.” He stared pointedly at Wilson.

“See what?”

“Your foot. Ankle. Whatever.”

“I’m fine.”

“Then you won’t mind me taking a look at it.”

Cuddy crossed her arms. “What is going on with you two?”

House reached down and tugged on Wilson’s thigh. Wilson rolled his eyes and lifted his leg. “I’m fine.”

“That’s what you said last night.”

“And it still rings true. Fine then, fine now-ouch!”

House probed the ankle and frowned. “Probably need an x-ray.”

“Now you’re just being ridiculous.” Wilson pulled his foot out of House’s hand and set it gingerly on the floor. “Go play Florence somewhere else.”

“You twisted it when you fell, I saw you.”

“That’s because you smacked me with the door.”
“That’s because . . .”

“Shut-up.” Cuddy shook her head and rolled her eyes. “House, leave Wilson alone. Wilson, sit down and let me look at your ankle.”

“It’s fine. And I’ve got an appointment.” Wilson shoved past House and limped out the door.

House turned to follow. Cuddy just stood and watched them. And wondered if all hospital administrators felt like they were running a giant daycare center.

**********

Wilson was lying on the couch, his ankle wrapped and iced, when House came through the door.

They didn’t speak for a few minutes. House busied himself with putting his jacket away and tossing his mail in the trash, and Wilson chose that very moment to become absorbed in the absurd mechanics of Sandy the Squirrel’s air bubble home.

He had gone to Wyatt in Orthopedics for his ankle. Sprained. Bruised. Elevation and ice. Wyatt had offered him a cane, which he firmly refused, but then wondered for a moment if it was all part of House’s evil plan. Get him in pain, limping, and in his bed. Well, the in his bed part was really his own fault. He should be able to tell by now when the nightmares were coming. He’d lost three patients already this week. Plus Molly. Plus the fact that Dr. Meridian, his best and brightest resident, had decided to switch to Neonatal, where he could “save lives, not extend them,” to quote his resignation letter. Idealist. Probably for the best.

He felt House’s cane against his thigh and looked up. House’s nose had a long red scratch and his eye was starting to turn purple – from the coffee table or the door, who could tell at this point? Another week and they’d kill each other.

“Broken?”

“Is that a question?”

“Sprained?”

“Are you just guessing, or did you already check my chart?”

“Wyatt’s an ass.”

“Yes, well, you’ll be happy to know he thinks just as highly of you.”

House limped into the kitchen. “You eat?”

Wilson smiled. He had won that round. He flipped off the TV and sat up, careful not to knock his ankle. “Not really hungry. There’s leftover chicken, though.”

“You need to eat.” House opened the fridge door and peered in. “You’re holding out on me, Jimmy. You didn’t mention the cake.”

“It’s from Grace – you won’t want it. Macrobiotic.”
House made a face. Wilson wasn’t sure if it was Grace or the cake, but got up and joined House. “We could call somebody.”

“To get rid of the cake?” House pulled out a beer.

“Chinese – pizza. I don’t care.” Wilson rubbed his face and leaned against the counter. “I’m going to bed, I think.”

“Wyatt give you anything?” House found the chicken, reached around Wilson for a fork, and shut the door with his hip. He popped open the lid and stuck his fork in.

“He told me to take some Aleve.”

“See, he’s an ass. I’ll get you a pill.”

Wilson opened the fridge with House still leaning on it, snaked his hand in and pulled out a bottle of water. He closed the door and House settled back against it. “No, really, don’t move, it’s fine.”

House shoved himself off the door and headed into the living room. He plopped down on the couch, swung his legs up on the coffee table, and switched the channel. Wilson took two limping steps, noting that he walked just like House now, wondering if the cane refusal had been premature and vanity-induced. He could have used the support.

“Go to bed,” House mumbled through a mouthful of chicken and rice. “And get that ankle up. And take a pill.”

“You’re sitting on my bed. And on my pillows. And I don’t need a pill.”

House sighed, pulled out a pillow and tossed it in Wilson’s direction. “My bed. Your pillow. Left jacket pocket.”

Wilson opened his mouth to say something, but exhaustion stopped him. He bent down to retrieve his pillow and limped down the hallway.

“And stay on your own side. I hate hot sheets.”

He couldn’t breathe. They were pressing on his neck, squeezing the life right out of him. Whispering and clawing at his chest. He tried to push them off, but he couldn’t touch them. He kicked his legs and swung his arms up in front of his face. And then he saw Molly. Standing all alone at the foot of his bed. Smiling. Waving. Fuck. Not Molly. No, he wouldn’t allow it. He tried to reach for her, but his hands were batted away by a man whose entire jaw was gone, the tongue hanging loose from his neck. He made one last attempt to save Molly and then darkness descended.


He felt hands around his neck again, but when he touched them, they were solid. His eyes flew open and he saw House’s face hovering over him, could feel House’s body across his own. Oh fuck. Not House . . .

“No, no, no.” He thrashed against the weight, and felt a sting as House slapped him across the face.

“Dammit, wake up.” House dug his knuckle into Wilson’s chest and the fog lifted for good.
Wilson stared up at House for a moment, panting. Noticed that House was panting as well. And frowning. And then wincing as it became apparent that House was holding himself up by his arms and his bad leg, the other straddled across Wilson’s body. Damn. It had been a dream. Again.

“I’m okay,” he rasped and held up his hands. “Sorry.”

House looked hard into Wilson’s face for another moment and then collapsed into his pillows. “Fuck. What the hell was that?”

“Bad dream.”

“Really?”

“Sorry.”

“What the hell were you dreaming? You scared the shit out of me. Not to mention kicking the hell out of me – I was afraid you were going to hurt your ankle again.”

“Must have been the vicodin.” Wilson flung his arm across his eyes. To dispel the rest of the lingering images and to dissuade the interrogation. “I’ll go back to the couch.”

“Why? So I have to travel to save your life from the boogey man? No way – you’re staying here.”

“Damn.” Wilson could feel his ankle start to throb. He peered out from under his eye and saw House rubbing his thigh. He turned and sat up on an elbow. “Did I hurt you?”

“No, I stopped you.” House turned and mirrored Wilson’s position. “So, Jimmy, what do we do now?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, here we are, the middle of the night, you obviously have some serious demons after you, I’m certainly not going to close my eyes again after that wrestling match, and it’s only . . .” He turned to peer at the clock on the bedside table, “. . . three o’clock.” He turned back. “Wanna play a game?” He wiggled his eyebrows.

“A game?” Wilson wondered what kind of game House had in mind. And what kind of game they were already playing.

“How about I Never.”

“I Never?”

“Or Spin the Bottle.”

“Go back to sleep.” Wilson turned onto his back and looked up at the ceiling. He felt House’s thigh against his. Warm. Oddly comforting. Then he felt House’s hand on his chest.

“Or you could tell me what’s going on,” House murmured and started rubbing.

Wilson sat up. “Okay, now you’re freaking me out.” He rolled over and sat up. “I’m going the couch.”

House sighed and rolled onto his back. “Seeking solace in the demons. Take it from me; it’s not a good idea.”
“I just need some sleep.” Wilson limped out the door.

“You forgot your pillow.” House held it out and Wilson turned back. When he went to reach for it, House pulled it back.

“You can’t deal with your reality. So it comes to get you in your sleep. You better figure out which part of your f***ed up life is the real problem. Because until you do, those demons are not going anywhere. Learn from the master.” House hit Wilson in the chest with the pillow and turned away. “Fortunately for you, though, I’m not going anywhere, either.”

No one slept the rest of the night.

************

By Friday, Wilson was positive he was losing his mind. Unlike House, who had regulated his body with caffeine and Vicodin to the point of making sleep optional, Wilson needed at least six hours each night in order to function in any way close to normal. But the nightmares kept coming. He had spent the last three nights alternating between the couch and House’s bed. Last night House had just grabbed him by the shoulders, and limped him toward the bedroom without a word. Had it been anyone else but House, he would have questioned the motives, the intentions. But this was House. And so, when he woke up bathed in a cold sweat with House leaning over him, rubbing his chest and stroking his hair, he just chalked it up to . . . to what?

He stretched out on the couch in the oncology lounge and propped his ankle up on a pillow. He was between a blastocytoma and a stage four lung, which shouldn’t arrive for at least another hour, so he closed his eyes and folded his hands across his stomach. Surely the demons would never come back to the scene of the crime.

He felt a pressure on his arm. He opened his eyes and was horrified to see Mrs. Harold, who had died of colon cancer last year. She was gaunt, her skin hanging off her bones. Literally. Her breath came in gasps and her bony fingers wrapped around his arm, squeezing, burning. He tried to squirm away but other hands held him down. He looked up as another hand covered his mouth and nose. Henry Errington. Farmer. Pancreatic. Some say the worse way to go. Pushed Wilson into two rounds of useless chemo. Died in horrible pain. Wilson tried to shout, scream, breathe – finally one of these people had the strength to actually kill him. In his sleep. He wondered if he could be dreaming that he was dreaming. He tried counting back from a hundred. He got to ninety-three before the lack of oxygen started turning the edges of his vision fuzzy. He gathered every ounce of his strength and threw himself at the hands.

The room cleared and he was on the floor. He tried to get up, but the hands were still there.

“Dr. Wilson, are you okay?” Cameron. Worried. Shit.

He struggled to get up, and she tried to help, but they got tangled up in arms and legs and he ended up pulling her down on top of him. Between the embarrassment and the pain of Cameron’s knee digging into his groin, he heard the lounge door swish open.

“Jesus, Cameron. I said find him, not fuck him. Although I see where you could have gotten confused. Four letters – starts with F.”

Cameron, mortified, hopped up and brushed off her lab coat.
“Shut-up, House.” Wilson rolled over and used the couch to pull himself up. House held out his cane, but Wilson batted it away. “I was asleep.” He tried to smile at Cameron, but only managed a slight grimace. “I guess you just scared me.”

“You were shouting and I thought you were going to hurt yourself.”

House frowned and moved Cameron out of the way with his cane. He placed a hand on Wilson’s shoulder, forcing him to look up. “Another one?”

“I guess. I was trying to take a nap.”

“That’s it, you’re getting an MRI.” House turned to Cameron. “Schedule that. And a full work up.”

Cameron started to say something, saw the look on House’s face, and left without a word.

“I don’t need an MRI.” Wilson got up and faced House, his hands on his hips.

“How long since you slept?”

“I slept last night, remember? You complained about the drool.”

“I mean really slept.”

“How long since you slept? Without help? Let’s look at that instead.”

House turned and headed for the door. “Come on.”

Wilson reluctantly followed. “Where’re we going?”

“Just come on. I’ve got a case and I need your help. And after that, we’re going to have a long talk about you and this . . . sleep thing.”

“This sleep thing?” Wilson caught up and they limped together down the hall. “You know, a parade float would garner less attention,” he observed as he watched all the heads turn on their way to the elevator. “Matching outfits are the only thing we’re missing now.”

“It would help if you learned to limp faster.”

*************

He managed to stay away from House for the rest of the day. Avoided the MRI when House got caught up in his own problems – 38 year old man with skin lesions, arrhythmia, and rectal bleeding. He admitted Stage Four Lung, and then got called to the ER when Cuddy got bogged down with whatever Cuddy gets bogged down with. Then as a nightcap he spent some time with Molly, who had a fever of 103 and a mother who was slowly picking all the skin off her hands.

The apartment was dark when he got home. He limped into the kitchen and opened the fridge and immediately spied a strange red container with a note attached. “Dearest Jimmy. Please eat this. Me.” If he had been inclined to take a look before, that note changed his mind. He could only imagine what House deemed fit for him to eat. Instead he grabbed a beer, and limped over to the couch. He thought about turning on the TV, but knew House would wake up and so he just sat in the dark, drinking and thinking.
He felt like he could sleep for days. And days. But he knew the minute his body hit REM, the dreams would come. And then he’d wake up. Or House would wake him up. Or both. He scooped up the Vicodin bottle from the coffee table and chuckled at the note taped to the cap. “This will makes you small. Take one.” He shook out two and swallowed them with a sip of beer.

He sighed and laid his head back against the cushions and closed his eyes. Maybe this was the beginning of the end. The burn-out. Had to happen eventually. Or maybe he was just tired of watching everyone die. Everyone. Oh, sure there were those two cases last year. Leukemia. Remission. And the breast cancer guy was having great success with the new treatment. But he wasn’t a breast guy. He just oversaw the breast guy. And so those victories were not his. No, he got all the bad ones. The hopeless ones. The dead ones.

He rubbed his face with a hand and switched his brain to another channel. The House channel. He wondered if House was really sleeping. Knew he had to have heard him come in. Maybe he took an extra dose of something. Probably exhausted. House’s sleep had been almost as erratic as his own. House’s behavior had definitely been as erratic as his own. House’s behavior was not House’s behavior.

They had now officially shared a bed for five days. Nights. And on each of those nights there had come a moment of real awkwardness. The touching was just a little too frequent, too familiar; the talk was just this side of too intimate. Sure, most of it could be explained away as dream-induced paranoia. House was probably just taking his well-worn path of least resistance by insisting on the sleeping arrangements. Convenience instead of concern. What he couldn’t explain was the growing need he felt to walk down that hall and crawl into bed. With House.

“I know you’re out there,” a voice growled in the darkness. “I can hear you obsessing.”

“Just watching some TV.” Wilson reached for the remote.

“Neat trick – considering the TV isn’t on.” The voice was coming closer.

“Didn’t mean to wake you, “Wilson said loudly, hoping House would stay in his room.

A cane tapped his shoulder, and he dropped his beer into his lap. He leaped up, grabbed the bottle and set it on the coffee table, where it erupted and the liquid oozed out all over the place.

“Shit, House.”

“Shithouse?”

“No, I said shit. House. What the hell are you doing?”

House backed up two steps and leaned both hands on his cane. “I’m staying far away from you. Last time this happened, you gave me a black eye.”

Wilson took the bottle into the kitchen sink and returned with a tea towel. He mopped up the beer. House stood watching.

“Go back to bed.”

“Does the redundancy of this ever get to you?”

“You get to me. Just go to bed. I’m fine.”

“You’re not fine. And you’re making me not fine. Did you know I had to take three extra pills
today? I can’t sleep, I can’t eat, all I think about is you and your goddamn nightmares.”

“Nice try blaming me for your increasing dependence. And I told you I am fine out here on the
couch, so I hardly think that your sleep patterns . . .”

House took his cane and flung it across the room. At Wilson. Stopped him from talking, since he had
to duck. The cane smashed against the fireplace and rattled to the floor.

“There. That’s what you do to me.”

“I make you throw your cane?”

“You make me crazy.”

“I make you crazy?”

“Stop talking. Yes, you make me crazy because you live here, day after day, night after night, acting
like nothing’s wrong. Acting like it’s completely normal for you to wake up several times a night
screaming. Like it’s all good that you have stitches and crutches and can’t carry on a normal
conversation with anyone. Like it’s completely normal for you to never eat, except my Vicodin,
which you swallow like a diabetic with a newly discovered Skittles stash. Cuddy accused me today
of stealing your soul and Cameron is afraid to go near you.”

He limped over till he was face to face with Wilson, who stood with his mouth open, unable to
comprehend most of the tirade. “And how the hell can I justify this if you’re too fucked up to
notice?”

House leaned in and brushed his lips against Wilson’s. Then he took a step forward and grabbed
Wilson’s shoulders and pulled him closer. Wilson swayed a little and then everything went to static.
He pressed his lips against House’s; thrust his tongue into the heat and the wet and the musty combo
of Tanqueray and toothpaste. House moaned from somewhere far away, their tongues tangled, their
breaths coming fast and hard and then they were falling onto the couch and Wilson pulled House
down onto him, and he heard himself moan as House nipped at his neck and licked his throat and
cared his chest and then Wilson reached down between them, trying to find House’s . . .

And then House stopped. Lifted himself up and looked at Wilson. “See? You just went from friend
to fuckbuddy in less than a minute.” He awkwardly rolled off the couch and stood.

“What are you doing?” Wilson lay on the couch, panting, confused.

“I’m saving you from yourself.”

“But you just kissed me.”

“And you kissed back.” House fingered his lip, red and starting to swell. “And you have no idea
why.”

Wilson sat up. “Because I wanted to. I . . .”

House limped over and retrieved his cane. “Don’t talk. It'll just piss me off.”

Wilson stood and stopped House from leaving. “We need to talk about this.”

“No, actually, that’s the last thing we need to be doing right now, and if you had any sense in your
sorry albeit gorgeous ass, you’d figure that out.” House used his cane and moved Wilson out of his
way. “I’m going to bed. You sit out here and think some more – it’s been working so well for you.”

He limped down the hall. “And that apartment hunting thing you were doing? Probably should start that again. Gonna need my couch back.” He disappeared into his bedroom and closed the door.

Wilson stood in the dark living room, rubbing his stubble-scraped cheek and wondered two things at once: how long can a person go without sleep and when the hell had he fallen in love with his best friend?

************

House tossed a chart into the middle of the table and limped over to the board. He uncapped a marker and stood poised, ready to write. The chart skipped across Foreman’s scrambled eggs, losing momentum through Chase’s herb cream cheese laden bagel, and finally settled against the edge of Cameron’s red cup, which sloshed over an exclamation point of hot coffee.

“Hey. What the . . .” Foreman pushed his chair back.

Chase covered his bagel with both hands and Cameron picked up the chart with two fingers, walked over to the cabinet, pulled out a napkin and wiped it off.

“Differential, people.” House tapped the marker on the edge of the board.

“On what?” Chase asked.


Cameron opened the folder. Empty. She looked at House and then showed the contents to the boys. Foreman just shook his head.


“Nightmares or night terrors?” Chase turned in his chair to face the board where House furiously scribbled.

“Don’t know.”

Foreman sighed and relented, turning in his chair. “What inner ear complaint?”

“Not sure. Patient falls down a lot.”

“Could be neurological. CAT scan? MRI?”

Cameron sat down in the chair and folded her arms. “It’s Wilson.”

House rolled his eyes. “Yes, yes, it’s Wilson – now come on. What presents with nightmares and vertigo?”

“Living with you too long?” Foreman offered and Chase smirked.

“Oh yes, let’s mock the sick guy.”
“But you always mock the sick guy.” Chase leaned back in his chair.

“Yes, but it’s funny when I do it. Now tell me something that won’t make all the nurses weep.”

Cameron stood and walked over to House. “It could be a brain tumor.”

“Parkinson’s presents with nightmares.” Foreman offered.

“Sounds like adrenal – is he craving salt?”

House sighed and knocked his head against the board. Twice. Was Wilson craving salt? He ran his tongue over the cut on his lower lip. Wilson tasted like salt. He wondered if Cameron would faint if he mentioned that little factoid. With his luck, it’d be Chase who would faint, and then every fantasy he ever had involving the man and the storage closet would just disappear. It occurred to him that Chase may be more of a girl than Cameron . . .

“. . . tests for Dr. Wilson?”

House looked up, realizing they had scampered on ahead of him. “What?”

They all three shot him a look. Cameron frowned. “Have you talked to Wilson?”

“I live with Wilson – of course I talk to him.”

“What did he say?”

“He says he’s fine.”

“So, is he fine?”

Fine? House stared at Foreman. How should he put it? The man was so much more than fine. The eyes, the lips, the hands, the ass . . .

“House?” Cameron laid a hand on his arm. He shrugged her off and limped over to the coffee, to escape from the eyes of the inquisition.

“Okay, so I want Foreman to get an MRI, Chase, you go see if you can get his real chart. Check with Wyatt – he’s the last guy who saw him. Cameron . . .”

He finally looked up and saw that they all three stood facing him, staring at him.

“What? Did you all forget how to be doctors? Go heal and all that.” He waved his stir stick at them. They didn’t move. He crossed his arms and blinked. They didn’t disappear.

“We can’t do any of this if Wilson doesn’t want us to.”

“Doesn’t want you to what?” a voice came from the doorway.

The kids turned in unison to the door. House appreciated the choreography and then added his own as he casually moved in front of the board, blocking the incriminating differential. From Wilson, the man with impeccable timing.

“They won’t let me put sugar in your gas tank. Babies.” House took a drink of coffee, sneaking a good look at Wilson over the edge of the cup. He looked tired. Stressed. His bruise was better today. Then House got all involved in hollow of Wilson’s neck, barely showing under that properly pressed shirt.
“You’re not wearing a tie.” The realization rolled off his tongue almost before it hit his brain.

Wilson took two steps into the room and put his hands on his hips. “Why do you want to put sugar in my gas tank?”

Foreman and Chase turned and quickly sat at the table, and Cameron ducked her head and moved to the desk. Answered House’s fight or flight question. Flight. Definitely flight. Should fire the whole lot of them.

“How aren’t you wearing a tie?”

Wilson frowned and took a step toward the table, but he tripped over Chase’s legs and instead went hurtling into House. His head rammed into the coffee cup House was holding, tipping House backward into the board. Wilson’s momentum took all three of them to the floor with a loud crash and a louder yelp from House when the hot coffee spilled all over his chest.

“Fuck. Off. Off.” He tried to push Wilson up and away from him, but Wilson was already struggling to get away from the hot liquid that had soaked through his own shirt. Chase got to the tangle first and grabbed one of Wilson’s arms and pulled, which just threw Wilson more off-balance, forcing him to press his arm harder into House’s chest, his knee grinding into House’s thigh. House hissed in pain.

He felt the edges of the board tearing into his back, heard the frame crack. The coffee cup was pressed against his ribs by Wilson’s weight, and the fingers that were still wrapped around the handle scraped against the hard ceramic.

“Get off.” House struggled to pull his hand out from between them, and finally Foreman joined Chase and managed to get Wilson up and into a chair.

“Ow, ow, ow, ow.” Wilson clawed at his shirt, ripping off buttons, trying to get away from the heat of the coffee.

Cameron knelt down and gently pulled the cup off House’s fingers and he winced, cradling them to his chest. Not broken. He rolled off the board, and Cameron reached down and helped him to stand. He rubbed his thigh with his good hand, and examined his knuckles, which were scraped and bloody.

“Nicely done . . .” he started, but his voice trailed off as he watched Chase drop to a knee in front of Wilson. What the hell? Chase helped Wilson unbutton his shirt, and pulled it down off Wilson’s shoulder to expose an angry red splotch on Wilson’s smooth, hairless chest.

House felt dizzy, took a stumbling step forward and found himself battling three separate urges: the urge to lean down and rip Chase’s heart out of his chest; the urge to scream, “Get your hands off. He’s mine,” and the urge to cradle Wilson in his arms and blow softly on the burned skin. He valiantly fought them all and instead swayed into Cameron, who led him into a chair.

“House, sit down. Are you okay?” She reached for his hand.

House allowed her to probe his fingers, but kept his eyes on Wilson, who was frowning and rubbing his head. A raised red spot had joined the bandage on his forehead. He looked like hell.

And then Foreman walked over with a cold pack and handed it to Chase, who pressed it gently on Wilson’s burns and House realized that the piercing pain he felt in his chest had nothing to do with biology.
It was into this Marx Brothers movie that Cuddy entered, her hands full of unfinished charts. The reprimand she had practiced all the way from the elevator was quickly forgotten, though, at the sight the fallen board, the overturned chair, Chase kneeling in front of a half-dressed Wilson, Cameron holding House’s hand, rubbing his arm. She opened her mouth, but the look on House’s face shocked her silent. House was staring at Wilson and he looked . . . stricken. Cuddy shook her head to make sure it wasn’t a dream. Then she looked back at Wilson, who was now staring at House with the exact same look.

“What the hell is going on in here?”

“Wilson tripped.” Cameron dropped House’s hand and moved to pick up the board, whose frame was bent and twisted.

Wilson quickly shrugged his shirt back over his shoulders and Chase stood. Foreman just leaned against the desk, his arms folded.

“Tuesday is orgy day, Cuddy. Did you forget to sign up?” House wiggled his eyebrows at her.

“It’s not Tuesday.”

“I fell.” Wilson smiled weakly as he held the edges of his shirt away from the burn. “House had coffee – spilled it.”

Cuddy ignored him and turned to the board, reading the smudged words, the board sloping sharply to the left. Wilson did the same and House popped three Vicodin in anticipation of the fallout.

“You did a diagnostic on me?” Wilson looked at House, who was staring at the ceiling.

“This is you?” Cuddy turned to Wilson. “You have vertigo? Why didn’t you tell . . . ?”

House pushed himself from the table and stood. And crumpled back down as his thigh reminded him who the real boss was. “Fuck.” He stayed still for a moment, letting the first wave pass.

“Are you okay?” Cuddy demanded.

“Right as rain, boss.” He dug his fingers into the palm of his hand, tried not to whimper.

Cuddy tossed the pile of charts on the table and turned. “Cameron, you and Chase finish these. They go to Billing – tonight. Foreman, go requisition a new board and schedule an MRI for this afternoon. For Wilson.”

Wilson and House both opened their mouths to protest, but Cuddy raised a finger, silencing them. “And as soon as you can walk, I want to see the both of you in my office.”

She marched over to the door and stopped. “And that board is coming out of somebody’s paycheck.”

**********

“What’s going on with you?” Cuddy didn’t even try to hide the worry in her voice.

House sat in the chair next to Cuddy’s desk, twirling his cane. The vicodin had kicked in and the pain had eased off. “You know, there are better ways to wait for Wilson, Cuddy.”
Cuddy rolled her eyes out of habit. “Gosh, if it weren’t for your sore leg . . . where is he?”

“How do I know? He had to change his shirt. God forbid there be something amiss in the wardrobe of Dr. Fussy.”

“Did you have a fight?”

“Is that relevant?”

“You tell me.”

“It’s not.”

“You did!”

“It wasn’t exactly a fight.” House wondered if Wilson had skipped out.

“What exactly does that mean?”

House was saved from answering by the arrival of Wilson, freshly showered and pressed.

“Got a date?” House asked as Wilson joined him in the other chair.

“Writing a book?” Wilson shot back and crossed his arms.

“Taking notes?” House sneered.

“Fuck off.”

“You wish.”


Cuddy waved her hand. “Hey, guys . . .”

“Sorry.” Wilson sighed and crossed his legs. House snorted and Wilson saw that he was sitting exactly like House and they both uncrossed their legs at the same time. House crossed his arms and Wilson pulled at his tie.

“Wilson needs an MRI.” House decided to move things along.

“I do not.”

“You could have a brain tumor.”

“Brain tumor?” Cuddy looked at Wilson. “Are you having headaches, dizziness?”

“No. House is overreacting. I miss dinner and he goes right to brain tumor.”

“He’s dizzy, complains of insomnia and night terrors, he wakes up screaming. Screaming, Cuddy. He’s had a marked loss of appetite, confusion-“

“Confusion? The only thing I’m confused about is why I thought you were my friend.”

“See, confusion.” House pointed at Wilson and Wilson swatted his finger away. “And aggression. Look at him. He’s a mess.”
“I’ve had trouble sleeping.” Wilson held out his hands to Cuddy. “Makes me clumsy, that’s all. House is just mad about his board.”

“And so to get back at you, I make you get an MRI? What kind of logic is that?”

“House logic. Which is an oxymoron, come to think of it.”

“Did you just call me a moron?”

“Shut up,” Cuddy interrupted. “Jesus, you two are giving me a headache.” She grabbed a pad and a pen and scribbled a note. “I am scheduling you for counseling.”

“Sure, it might be psychological, but he still needs an MRI.” House stood.

Wilson stood and turned to House. “It’s not psychological. I don’t need an MRI and I certainly don’t need to go to a counselor. It’s just stress.”

“Yes, the stress of a serious underlying condition. Like a brain tumor. Which we would know if you’d just let me do an MRI!”

“House, you’re going, too. God knows you could use it.” Cuddy ripped the note off the pad and held it out. “Might even get a two-for-one deal.” House snatched it from her fingers. Read it. Crumpled it in his fist.

“Oh, no. Not me. He’s the weeble who wobbles and does fall down. I’m just the innocent bystander. Collateral damage.”

Cuddy shook her head. “This is not open for debate. Go see Dr. Haynes. I can make it mandatory to employment if I have to.”

House mulled over for a minute the idea of storming out the door, hopping on his motorcycle, and riding far, far away. But then he realized that if the problem with Wilson was psychological, he’d have a front row seat for the big reveal. “Okay.” He smiled sweetly.

“Okay?” Cuddy raised an eyebrow.

“Okay. We’ll go.”

“We’ll go? We will go? We?” Wilson sputtered.

“Excellent contraction subtraction there, Jimmy.” House limped toward the door. “Come on. Prove me wrong. Show me how much you don’t need an MRI.”

“I don’t need an MRI.” Wilson turned and followed House out the door.

Cuddy laid her head on her desk and wondered if it was too late to become a flight attendant.

************

They limped into the elevator and House pushed a button. When Wilson felt the downward movement, he looked up at the lighted panel. G. For garage. Dr. Haynes was on the fourth floor.
“What are you doing?”

House just stared at the elevator doors.

“What are you going?”

“It’s where I’m not going. Which is up to see Dr. McShrinky.”

“You’re going home?”

“We’re going home. By way of the big, bad MRI machine.”

Wilson reached over and punched the 4th floor button. “You can’t go home. Cuddy said . . .”

House turned and looked at Wilson. “Cuddy didn’t mean a word she said and you know it. And I said we’re going home. And I do mean that. See the difference?”

“No, I don’t. If we’re not going to see Dr. Haynes, I’ve got work to do.”

“Oh, you mean the work that’s reduced you to a humorless zombie?”

“Right. That’s it. Or I need to go find an apartment . . .”

House lifted his cane and Wilson flinched. House rolled his eyes and poked the elevator stop button. The squeak of the brakes echoed in the tiny space.

“What the hell are you doing?”

“The exact question I was going to ask you.”

“You can’t keep me trapped here.”

House took a step toward Wilson. “Yes, I can.”

“House, punch the button. The alarm is going to go off.”

House took another step toward Wilson, who backed against the wall.

“What are you so afraid of?”

“I’m not afraid.”

“Yes, you are.”

“This is ridiculous. You can’t kidnap me and force me to get an MRI.”

“No, but I can force you to talk to me.”

“You don’t want to talk to me. You want to interrogate me, dissect me. I’m your new puzzle.”

“You might be my puzzle, but you aren’t new.”

House took another step so that he was nose to nose with Wilson, who placed his hands on his shoulders to try to keep him away.

House raised an eyebrow, but didn’t back off. “Greg? You pulling out the big guns now, James?”

“I just want you to leave me alone.” Wilson dropped his hands. He knew he couldn’t stop House when he was like this. Better to feign compliance and run at the first opportunity.

House turned around and punched the start button. The gears whirred to life and the elevator jerked into motion. “I’ll leave you alone . . . if that’s what you really want. But you have to get an MRI first.”

“No. I don’t. You can’t just dictate the terms of my life, you know. It’s not your business.”

“It is my business. You’re my business. You’re my . . .”

“I’m what? Your flunky? Your sidekick? Your fool?” Wilson felt the anger spread through his chest. “Well, guess what? I’m done. Really. You push and push, trying to find that one tipping point, that one straw that breaks it all, that one line in the sand that I won’t cross. Well, you found it. I’m through.”

“You’re not through. You’re just tired . . .”

Wilson sighed. “Yes, I’m tired. I’m tired of this dance we do. I’m tired of measuring each day by how miserable you are relative to how miserable I am. I’m tired of always ending up on your couch, I’m tired of . . . of . . . I’m tired of a 5 year old girl wasting away to nothing while I sit with her mother and offer her what? Funeral Home brochures?”

He looked up at House, resignation etched in every line of his face. “I’m not a doctor. I’m a pre-care specialist. I get them ready to bury their children.”

You do good work.” House reached over and pressed the stop button. Wilson didn’t even notice.

“Good work? Yes, well, not many complaints, I guess. Unless you count the ones who keep me up all night, every night now. They’re certainly not happy.”

“You’ve been dreaming about your patients?”

“Don’t you?”

“Don’t dream, remember? Plus most of my patients have no idea who I am.”

“And why is that?”

“Oh, no – we’re talking about you, now. Analyze Greg is on Thursdays, remember?”

“Of course. God forbid we ever talk about you. Pisses me off.”

“Really? Who could tell? You keep everything locked so tight under that pressed and starched exterior. Might really help if you actually learned to express some anger.”

Wilson snorted. “Are you actually going to lecture me on expressing emotions? You? Really?”

“I’m doing a good job of building up some emotion right now. Care to guess which one?”

Wilson rubbed the side of his neck. “Just let me go, House.”
“I’m not touching you.”

“I mean here,” Wilson pointed to his head. “Stop fucking with my head.”

House moved in close. “Gladly. Got an alternative?”

Wilson swallowed hard. “You’re freaking me out with your . . . niceness.”

“You call this nice?”

“I mean all the . . . concern, the interest. It’s weird.”

“You’re my friend. Why wouldn’t I show some interest?”

“You’re not interested in anyone. Except people whose brains are melting away.”

“Maybe your brain is melting away. Oh wait – there’s a test to find that out – what’s it called? Oh yes, an MRI!”

Wilson ignored him. “And then you . . . you know.”

“Again with the you know?”

“Last night . . . you know.”

House cocked his head. “Oh, you mean the ‘you know,’ you know. The heat, the lust, the kiss that rocked our world?”

“I guess. I just don’t need . . .”

“The problem is you don’t know what you need.”

House reached over and silenced any other protest with his lips. Wilson stumbled back and House dropped his cane and grabbed Wilson’s shoulders and began kissing him in earnest. Wilson responded as the heat and the lust and the taste of House’s tongue wiped away every other thought, replaced with an aching need that buckled his knees. He began sliding down the wall and House shifted, wrapping his arms around Wilson’s chest, holding him up as he began a deliberate journey down Wilson’s neck.

Wilson’s eyes closed and he moaned, his hands running up House’s chest, undoing buttons, slipping in, feeling the hot skin. House moaned and they slid to the floor, tearing off ties, ripping buttons, grinding hips. Wilson felt like he was drowning. He couldn’t get close enough; he wanted House inside him, his flesh and blood mixed with his own. His ears were ringing and buzzing . . . and then, from far down the rabbit hole, he heard a voice.

“You guys okay in there?”

As he swam closer to the surface, he realized the ringing and buzzing in his ears was the alarm. Hell. The elevator. He had just been about to do something really stupid in an elevator. At work. With House.

House cursed and shifted; touched his forehead to Wilson’s and then lifted his head up. “Peachy keen. And you?” House’s voice was loud, and his eyes stayed locked on Wilson’s.

“We’ll have you out of there in a jiff. Can you see if the stop button has been inadvertently depressed? It’s over on the control panel.”
House kissed Wilson hard on the mouth and then rolled onto his back. “I can safely say that the stop button has definitely been pushed.” He turned onto his side and pulled himself up. “And it has made me extremely depressed.”

Wilson pushed himself up to a sitting position, his back against a wall. He fingered his lip, thoughtful. He watched House retrieve his cane, push the start button, and then crawl over to sit next to him, their thighs touching. Wilson could still feel his heart knocking around in his chest.

“Think they got cameras in here?” House pulled down his t-shirt.

Wilson blanched. “Oh, God. You think they do?”

“I sure hope so.” House stood slowly and then leaned a hand down and helped Wilson up. He pulled him against his chest and roughly kissed him. “I’d love to see that again in slo-mo. Make a great Christmas gift, don’t you think?”

He tried to button Wilson’s shirt, but there was only one button still attached. Wilson pulled the edges of the shirt together and bent down to pick up his tie. He didn’t know what to say. He suddenly felt awkward. Self-conscious. Shy.

The doors swished open and House limped out. “Get the MRI, Jimmy. And meet me at home.” The doors closed before Wilson could open his mouth.

**********

Foreman tore off the protective sheet and locked the new board into place. Cameron handed him the markers and he set them in the tray.

“There. The world is back to normal.”

Chase snorted. “Hardly. There is definitely something not right in the world of House.”

“The world of House and Wilson you mean.” Foreman walked over to the coffee machine. “They’re a walking train wreck.”

“House is just worried. Wilson does show signs of . . .” Cameron protested.

“Of burning out.” Foreman handed Chase a coffee cup.

Cameron frowned. “He’s not burning out. He’s a great doctor. He’s compassionate, smart . . .”

“. . . and I wuv him so, so much.” Chase mocked. He walked over and picked up a marker, and divided the board in half. He wrote House on the left side and Wilson on the right.

“Okay people; let’s finish this diagnostic properly.” He wrote the words head contusion under both names.

“Is that a symptom?” Foreman stood and picked up another marker.

“Injuries.” Chase wrote ankle sprain under Wilson’s name.

Foreman chuckled and joined Chase. They both wrote furiously, heads together, reading and
laughing and nodding. They finally stepped back, read for a moment, and slapped hands.

Cameron shook her head. “Oh, great. High five. That’s nice. Wilson could have a serious . . .” She stopped talking as they stepped aside and let her read.

Under House’s name it read: head contusion, increased thigh pain, jammed fingers, chest burns, lack of sleep, lack of appetite, irritable. Wilson’s side listed two head contusions, ankle sprain, chest burns, nightmares, insomnia, lack of appetite, paranoia. The phrase emotional distress = physical manifestation crossed both lines. And then at the bottom, someone had tied the last symptoms together and had drawn a big heart with GH + JW right in the middle.

“What the hell . . .” Cameron stepped closer.

Foreman patted her on the back. “Sorry, Cam – he’s taken.”

“Both of he.” Chase added. “They’re sick all right. Lovesick.”

“They are not . . .” Cameron just stared at the board.

“And if they were,” a familiar voice came from the doorway, “you yahoos would be the last to know.” House limped through and snatched the marker from Chase’s hand. He stood at the board for a moment, reading.

“We were just goofing around . . .” Chase started.

House wondered how fast the boy would backpedal if he got him up on a real bike. “Really, Beav? Just giving ol Wilson and Housey the business?”

Foreman stepped in. “We were just trying to finish the differential. You would.”

House answered by snatching the marker from Foreman’s fingers and then he turned to Cameron.

“Et tu, Brutilla?”

“I had nothing to do with it.”

House smirked. “Of course you didn’t.” He turned back to the board. “Okay, here’s what I need.” He looked over his shoulder. “You still work for me, right? This isn’t a sign that you’re now freelancing – striking out on your own?”

Three variations of “no” only served to piss him off. One day he wished they would all just throw something at him and storm out. It seemed to him a much more fitting response than all the obeisance and genuflecting they did. Except Foreman. Though, since they scrambled his brains, he was almost as bad.

“Foreman, you and Cameron go make sure Wilson gets his MRI. And you do it.”

He watched as they hustled out, Chase following.

“Dr. Chase.”

Chase turned in the doorway.

“You’re with me. I need you to run some errands. Big plans. Need supplies,” House limped into his office. “Bring your steno-pad, darling. You’re going to have to take some dictation.”
. . . still a little bit of your taste in my mouth,
. . . still a little bit of you laced with my doubt,
. . . still a little hard to say what’s going on.

*Cannonball – Damien Rice*

With cancer, there’s rarely any guess work. Mutant blood cells, malignant tumors, dark shadows in places where dark shadows shouldn’t be – it’s all quite simple, really. Identify, calculate, eradicate. No looking back at the useless organs, the lost limbs, the scorched shells. It’s a war, and in a war you toss everything you have at the enemy. Unfortunately everything you have often leaves you with very little. And then there are the patients.

He closed Molly’s chart and pinched the bridge of his nose, frustrated. The chemo wasn’t working. Well, it was working if it was supposed to destroy her liver and kidneys. But destroying cancer cells? Not working so well. He reached for another chart on his desk and then stopped. He was stalling. He knew it. *Get the MRI, Jimmy. And meet me at home.* House’s words still echoed in his ears. Home? Not, “meet me at my house” or “meet me at the apartment,” no it was, “meet me at home.”

He knew two things about Greg House. He hated pity and he never, ever, said things he did not mean. Of course the Greg House he knew before today didn’t usually have hot sex in an elevator with his best friend, so perhaps all his calculations were off. Maybe if that kiss hadn’t been so . . . damn. If that alarm hadn’t gone off, he would have had House’s dick in his mouth in a matter of minutes. Without a second thought. Done deal.

He massaged his scraped cheek, felt the heat under the burns, rubbed raw from House’s stubble. Better than an exfoliation treatment. He was going to have to talk House into shaving if this were to continue. His delicate skin couldn’t take it. *If this were to continue?* He sat up straight in the chair and gripped the edge of his desk.

This? Continue? Did he want this to continue? And just what was this? Stolen kisses in the middle of the night? Bump and grind in an elevator? Broken bones and fractured heads?

He sat and allowed his mind to drift forward. Wondered how “this” would ever work – could he commit to House? Live together, eat together, work together, sleep together? The only difference in that and their present situation was the sleeping. Actually sleeping. Together. What comes next? Matching sweaters? Matching Airedales? Vacations on Fire Island? Fiesta ware?

Well, the first thing he’d have to do would be to buy better cookware. House’s were all hand-me-downs from his mother and Stacy. He needed a bigger stock pot, a sauté skillet, some real knives. Okay, that would have to be the second thing he’d do, because the first thing would be to throw away all those damn tea towels. Where in the hell had House gotten so many? They were everywhere. He had found them in most of the kitchen drawers, embroidered, starched, happy kittens and bright poppies. Must be his mother. So not House. So unsanitary. But so useful lately. Guess he’d better keep some around. The way things were going, he was going to need them. To mop up the blood. When he and House finally killed each other.
He looked at his watch. Foreman and Cameron should be coming in with his MRI results. Which he knew would be negative. There was nothing wrong with his head.

He just needed one good night’s sleep, that’s all. That and a Rosetta stone to figure out where he and House were headed. And they were definitely headed somewhere.

Sometime in the past week, in the middle of a dark night, they had officially crossed a line. To somewhere else. Someplace different. Some kind of altered reality. The problem was that he liked that place. That reality. That House. He had always been a hopeless romantic and he couldn’t help himself. Maybe the MRI would show that. Then House would have the diagnostic differential he really wanted.

He finally went looking for his MRI and found Cameron and Foreman pouring over it, arguing. They were under pressure, he knew, to find something, anything that they could report back to House. He heard the same conversation three times in the space of ten minutes.

“What is that?” Cameron squinted at the image.

“What?” Foreman pressed in close to look.

“That shadow.”

“Where?”

“There.”

“There?”

“There.”

“Shadow.”

“But what is it?”

“It’s nothing. Keep looking.”

He finally put them out of their misery and retrieved the films, dropping them in the interdepartmental mail slot on his way to his car. He felt a little guilty about ignoring Cuddy’s directive about Dr. Haynes, but hell if he was going to comply if House didn’t. They were in this together, that was the one thing that remained very clear. For better or for worse. He wondered what his mother would think when he brought House home for Sunday dinner. As his date.

************

House was in the coma patient’s room, on the phone. He’d been on the phone for thirty minutes. Lost his patience after ten. His temper had hit the dust around twenty-five. Now at twenty-nine and counting, it was all wrath. All the time.

“Yes, that’s my correct address. Yes, that’s my correct zip code. Where in the hell are you talking to me from? Yes, I know it’s a final sale. Yes, I’m well aware, in fact, I’ve been well aware since the third day of med school that it can cause strokes . . . yes, med school – that place you people seem to send everyone to. Aren’t you all already doctors? What happened to you? Fell down a lot as a child?” The dial tone alerted him that he had gone too far. Finally. Jesus. Muhammad. Buddha.
Whatever.

The door to the room slid open and a tall woman poked her head in.

“Dr. House?”

“Shhh, he’s sleeping.” House gathered the papers and files that were strewn all over coma guy and stood.

“Sorry, I need to talk to you.” The woman stepped forward and held out her hand.

House noticed the silver rings on the right hand, the red nail polish, the jangling charm bracelet. He ignored the hand and reached for his cane. “Sorry, wish I could. Important case. You understand.”

“I’m Dr. Haynes. Dr. Cuddy said I might find you here . . .”

House snorted. “Don’t believe a word that woman says. She asked to be tied up. Swear.”

“I’m sure she did – but did you have to use the good leather?”

House stopped trying to escape and took another good look at this woman. Who had just trumped him. Hard. She stood smiling at him. She held a chart in her hand and a messenger bag looped around her shoulder. She wore flats and still looked him in the eye. She had to be at least six feet tall. Great. Giant therapist kicks his ass. Coma patient wakes up to place bet. He’d never get home at this rate.

“I’m sure you have better things to do than to be Cuddy’s lap dog. And I don’t need a shrink.”

Dr. Haynes just stood in front of the door, smiling. House grew more uncomfortable. The woman wasn’t moving, wasn’t crumbling under his scathing wit. Wasn’t going to go away. Cuddy had done well. Too well.

“Okay, so – I wet the bed as a child. I had imaginary friends. I feel anger toward my father, and I sometimes steal lipstick from the drugstore. I have a debilitating handicap which causes me constant pain and has forced me into a life of drug addiction. And I hate hospitals. That about cover it?”

“Dr. House, if you’d stop running so fast, I’d tell you why I’m here.”

House eyes widened and he opened his mouth wide. “Funny, Doc. Bum leg. Can’t run. Thanks for reminding me, though. Will cry myself to sleep tonight.”

Dr. Haynes laid a hand on House’s shoulder. The contact itself was unusual, but it was the look in her eyes that freaked him out. She was serious. And concerned. Weird.

“I just want you to know that if you and Dr. Wilson want to come in together, then I’m okay with that. I know it’s unusual, considering you and he are not a couple, but from what Dr. Cuddy has said, as well as what I have observed, I think it might be a good idea . . .”

“I have a better idea,” House ducked under the arm of compassion that was making his skin crawl. “You see Wilson. Alone. He’s the one with the dreams and the screams and the guilt-induced injuries. I’m just the one with the great misfortune to always be standing next to him.”

“And why do you think that is?”
“Well, I’m sure you hope it’s because I’m in love with him, or that I have unresolved feelings or that it’s some manifestation of both of those. But it’s not. It’s proximity. That’s all.” House managed to get the door open and turned back.

“Thanks, though, Dr. Haynes. It’s been swell. Really. I feel so mental healthy now.”

“Dr. House, I don’t want to pull rank here.” Still the same damn smile.

“But you’re going to.”

“Yes, I am.”

House sighed and turned back to face her, but not close enough for her to try that touching thing again. That was just creepy.

“I’ll make you a deal.” Dr Haynes took a step toward House and put her hand on his arm, which caused him to flinch and swat at her with his cane. She just smiled wider.

“You and Dr. Wilson schedule an appointment with me. We’ll talk about the weather if you want. And then I can tell Dr. Cuddy that you complied, and you can keep the bedwetting to yourself. Okay?”

House’s eyes narrowed as he tried to find any hidden shrinkspeak in her offer. “What’s in it for you?”

“Ah, yes – because there must be. Altruism doesn’t exist. Your world works that way, right?”

“Uh, THE world works that way, Doc.”

“Okay then, let’s just say that Dr. Gregory House as my patient makes my street cred soar. That your very presence on my couch . . .”

“Hey . . .”

“. . . will have all my colleagues salivating at the next conference.”

“Right, because I’m such an interesting case. It’s all textbook here, lady.” House tapped the side of his head. “Run of the mill, sexually repressed white guy. Dime a dozen.”

“Dr. House, I doubt there is anything about you that’s run of the mill. The sexually repressed part – we can talk about that.” She opened the file in her hand, scanned the page as she continued. “Now we could stand here all afternoon discussing the merits of your psyche, but all I really need is a verbal commitment to an appointment. How about Wednesday at 3:30?”

Again with the smile. House frowned but nodded. She held out her hand and he held out his cane. “Oh no, enough with the touching. Isn’t that one of the first things they teach you at shrinky school? Personal space, boundaries, bad touch, good touch?”

Dr. Haynes dropped her hand. And smiled. Again. “You know, Dr. House, I think we’re going to get along just fine.” She turned and walked down the hall.

************
Wilson was surprised to find the house dark when he got home. He just dropped everything at the
door and limped over to the couch, falling into the cushions with a heavy sigh. He unbuttoned his
shirt and fingered his chest, which was tender, raised and raw. He had almost forgotten about his
burns in all the crazy confusing aftermath. He wondered if House had any salve. Of course House
didn’t have any salve. He didn’t even have a kit.

Wilson felt the exhaustion creep over his body and he closed his eyes and flopped a hand over his
face. If he could just sleep for twenty minutes, even ten, he was sure he’d be better . . . feel better. He
could face whatever would happen when House walked through the door . . . The doorbell jerked
him awake. He glanced at his watch. Okay, well, two minutes might do it.

“Use your key.” Every muscle felt like jello. He didn’t feel like getting up. He wasn’t even sure he
could get up. A loud knock echoed through the room.

“Use your key,” he said louder and put his pillow over his head. “I’m not getting up.”

The knock grew more insistent. Damn House. Probably forgot his key. More likely, it was just
another of his thousand tests – how long will it take Wilson to open the door for me. And when he
finally relented, and got up and answered the door, House would be standing there, keys dangling
from his fingers. Victorious in his manipulation. Again.

Well, Wilson wasn’t giving him the satisfaction this time. He turned on his stomach and buried his
head in the cushions. The knock continued. Stalemate.

“Uh, Dr. Wilson?” a muffled and familiar voice crept under the door.


“Chase?”

“Uh, could you open the door? House said . . .”

Or maybe this was just House’s game taken up a notch. He’d hurry to answer the door for Chase,
only to find House standing behind him, grinning like a madman. Wilson paused for a moment as the
vision of a smiling House made his heart beat faster. It was a glorious sight – that scowl turned
serene. He wondered what could make House smile like that again . . .

He sighed and sat up on the couch. He had it bad. For House. Damn.

“Dr. Wilson?”

“Hang on, I’m coming.” Wilson stood and limped slowly to the door. He peeked out the hole and
satisfied it wasn’t House as Chase, he opened it and Chase shoved a sack in his arms.

“Here. Take this. I’ve got loads more in the car and I’m double parked.”

Wilson took a step back and then peered over the edge of the sack. Groceries. Good groceries. From
Whole Foods. He didn’t even know House knew where Whole Foods was. He was pretty sure that
House’s idea of Whole Foods was to eat the peanut butter straight from the jar. He walked into
kitchen and set the sack on the counter. Chase followed him with two more sacks that were stacked
on a large box.

“What the hell . . .”

“Don’t ask me. I just spent two hours hunting for all this stuff. Are you and he taking a cooking class
or something? Having company?"

Wilson shook his head and read the side of the box. Le Creuset. French. Expensive. Red. To match the crock pot, probably. He started to look in another bag when Foreman appeared with three other boxes and a piece of paper between his teeth.

“Mmmmm ummm.” Foreman tried to gesture with his head. Wilson reached up and pulled the paper out of his mouth. “Where you want these?”

Wilson just pointed to an empty space on the counter. Foreman unloaded and turned around and walked back out, muttering, “I’m not a damn delivery boy – and that note’s for you.”

Chase was coming in with another load and chuckled. “He’s just pissed because he didn’t want to come in.”

“Why not?”

“He said he didn’t ever want to see where House lived. Might make him seem more human or something. Who knows with Foreman?” Chase set the boxes on the now crowded countertops. “That’s it, then.”

“Oh, okay – thanks I guess.” Wilson just stared at the stuff.

Chase patted him on the shoulder. “Yeah, man – have fun.” He headed out into the living room and then turned. “Oh, yeah – I’m supposed to tell you Gibbons took your call this weekend, so you don’t have to work.”

“I didn’t ask Gibbons . . .”

“House arranged it. Used Cuddy’s voice. I saw him – it was a beautiful thing.”

“But I don’t . . .”

Chase held up his hand. “Messenger here, mate. Oh, and he said he’d better smell something cooking when he got home or there’d be hell to pay.” He shrugged and closed the door.

Wilson just shook his head and limped back into the kitchen. He unloaded a sack of fresh produce. Good produce. Endives and garlic and tomatoes and asparagus. He moved on to the next sack. Beef. Good beef. Brisket and rump roast and ribeyes . . . he was halfway through the third sack of spices and imported cheeses, whistling and daydreaming about braised salmon with fresh asparagus when it hit him. He was being seduced. Through groceries. By groceries. By House through groceries. And he was falling for it. Hard. Lox, stock pot, and basil.

He turned to the boxes and read the labels. Sauté pan. Cutting board. Panini press. Dutch oven. Saucier. Damn. Seduced was not the word. More like hypnotized, mesmerized. He grabbed a knife and began ripping the boxes open, admiring the workmanship, the feel of the handles in his hands, recipes swirling in his head. He was in heaven.

************

House pulled his motorcycle onto the sidewalk, removed his helmet, and looked at his apartment.
Lights streamed out the front window, which was open slightly, and he could hear Miles Davis drifting out into the street. Miles Davis and . . . garlic. Roasted garlic. He stopped for a minute to listen and smell. *Generique.* Perfect. He stood with his eyes closed, letting the music settle onto his shoulders, melt through to his bones. He opened his eyes and looked through the window and his heart fell to the concrete. Wilson stood in his kitchen, barefoot, in just a t-shirt and shorts, with his back to the window, head down, chopping. House watched as he moved to the stove, dropped something into a large steaming pot, and went back to chopping.

House swallowed hard and moved closer to the window, transfixed. He watched as Wilson dragged a hand across his forehead, and then turned to reach for something on the island. His face was calm, happy. He was smiling and nodding to the music. House found himself nodding as well, immediately caught up in the bliss that was Wilson. Cooking. In his kitchen.

Then Wilson looked up and saw House. Stopped nodding. Just stared. House stared back and gave a little half wave. Wilson waved back with the knife. Then pointed to the knife and smiled. Almost took House to a knee, that smile. He waved again and ducked out of sight. Damn. He couldn’t yet define the emotion that threatened to take him down, but it was strong. Potent. Dangerous. He moved into the doorway and made a decision. A resolution of sorts. To never come home to a dark, empty house again.

*Don’t fuck this up, don’t fuck this up, don’t fuck this up . . .* he whispered over and over again as he unlocked the door and let Miles and the garlic suck him in. He closed and locked the door, threw his bag on the couch, and limped into the kitchen. Wilson turned and opened his mouth, but House closed the space between them in two steps, tossing the cane against the refrigerator, and grabbed Wilson and pulled him towards him.

“Whaa . . .” Wilson tried to speak but House just tugged harder.

“Just shut up and kiss me.” House demanded. Wilson dropped the knife he was holding and House ducked his head and captured Wilson’s lips, which tasted like garlic. And salt. Definitely salt. He placed both hands on either side of Wilson’s head and went to work, teasing and tasting and nipping at Wilson’s lips and chin and neck.

Wilson moaned and wrapped his hands around House’s neck, pressed his body closer, thrusting his hips, grinding them into House’s erection. House pushed Wilson up against the counter and forced his lips apart, his tongue into his mouth, and then hissed when Wilson sucked his tongue deeper into the heat.

And then they were sliding to the floor, ripping t-shirts over heads. House steadied himself against the counter and yanked Wilson’s shorts off with one hand and Wilson arched his back as House took his dick in his hands.

“Oh, God . . .” Wilson moaned.

“Hardly,” House whispered against Wilson’s neck. And then moaned as Wilson reached down and released his own dick from his jeans. And then they were rolling and kissing and they managed to wedge up against the leg of the island and for a while the only sound was a steady moan, rhythmically accompanied by Miles’ soulful horn. It was damn near perfect.

House threw his head back and shouted, hurtling over the edge half a second before Wilson’s sharp intake of breath served as exclamation. They melted together, arms and legs and bodies all over the kitchen floor. Miles continued to swirl around them and the pots on the stove hissed and the sounds of distant traffic merged with the sound of House’s heart, still beating out of his chest. Wilson crawled up House’s length, careful to avoid his thigh, and threw an arm around his chest, resting his
Wilson and House had been in each other's beds for so long that House could get used to Wilson's head on his shoulder. Another thing House could get very used to was Wilson in his kitchen and Wilson on his kitchen floor... he sighed as reality cracked his high.

“What are we doing?” He absently rubbed Wilson’s back.

Wilson sighed and ran his hand up House’s thigh, running a finger just a little too close, a little too fast. “I don’t know. Don’t analyze. Just be.”

House chuckled. Wilson as surfer philosopher – who knew? “Yes, but after the endorphins wear off, then what, dude?”

Wilson pushed off House’s chest and looked him in the eyes. “Then we do it again.”

“Again?”

“You got a problem with that?”

House felt a shot of apprehension run through his spine. “Yes.” Wilson looked up quickly, eyebrows raised. “Okay, no. Not really. What do you have in mind?”

Wilson kept his eyes locked on House, but moved his body down between his legs. House took in a breath as he realized what Wilson had in mind. And then wiped everything out of his head and settled back to enjoy the ride.

************

At first he didn’t realize where he was. The soft patter of rain against the window, the odd pattern of light and shadow splashed across an unfamiliar wall, the rhythmic rise and fall of the naked chest beside him. He tentatively reached over and brushed his hand across the chest. Soft, hairy – and then his hand was captured and he was pulled onto the chest and he finally opened his eyes and everything tumbled back into his brain when he saw the raised eyebrow, the self-satisfied smirk, the ridiculously blue iris of House.


Wilson stared into the eyes, allowing the memories of the last two days to find their way back into his brain. He realized he smelled like curry. They both smelled like curry.

“What day is it?”

House chuckled and rolled Wilson off him, sat up slightly and rubbed his thigh. “I’m flattered. Fucked your memory right out of your head. It’s Monday. Time for all good doctors to go to work.” He lay back down, pulled the covers up to his chin and closed his eyes.

“And what are you going to do?” Wilson moved closer, using House’s shoulder as a balance, and looked at the clock. Six am.

House pulled Wilson onto his chest. “Plenty of time for a little morning devotion.”

“Do you always wake up this horny?” Wilson nuzzled in and tried to ignore the buzzing at the base of his skull. It was like one piece of this puzzle had not clicked in yet. Like the other shoe was perched precariously over his testicles, ready to drop at any moment.
“I don’t know – do I? You’ve been here long enough now.”

“Two days hardly qualifies as long enough.”

House lifted Wilson’s head and looked at him. “Two days?”

“Yeah, well, you can’t really count the other five – you were just being nice, as hard as that is to believe.”

“Five months?”

Wilson didn’t like the way House was looking at him. “Five days. Remember – nightmares, blood.” He reached up and traced House’s scar. Scar? He reached up and felt his own . . . scar. There was no way. The cut had reopened just yesterday and House had made an epic event out of closing it back up. It couldn’t have healed . . .

“Jimmy?”

House read his mind. “Three months, you’ve lived . . . been here . . . with me . . . three months.” He sat up and swung his legs over the edge of the bed. “Funny way of getting out of sex, Jimmy. Mental illness.” He stood and crumpled back down, gripping the sides of the bed, breathing through his teeth.

Wilson was at his side in an instant. “You okay? Need a pill?”

House rubbed and cursed and finally said, “I need a new goddamn leg. You get that for me?”

Wilson took a step back and House looked up. “Sorry, Jimmy. Bad morning.”

“Uh, yeah, me too.” Wilson tried again to remember anything past last night and curry and jasmine rice and the tofu that he had managed to slip by House’s palate, but he couldn’t. And then he felt House’s hand on his leg and he looked up and House snarled at him, and the hand on his leg began to burn through his pajama bottoms and he tried to pry it off but he couldn’t and then House leaped on top of him, long bony fingers circled his neck, burning and squeezing and he struggled against the pain and he felt hot breath on his face and he opened his eyes and watched as House’s face melted off and he tried to scream, but he had no air and he kicked and clawed at House’s arms, but it was no use and he could feel the darkness descending . . .

“Wilson! Goddamn it – wake up.”

He wouldn’t open his eyes. He couldn’t. He felt the heat subside, the pressure on his throat disappear. He reached his hands up and felt a bare chest. He opened one eye and saw House’s face, red, worried, but perfectly normal. All except for the cut above his eye and the long scratch down his nose.

“Come on, talk to me.” House rubbed his chest and cursed, twisting around until he was sitting next to Wilson, who finally realized he was half on/half off the bed, sheets wrapped around him, the contents of the bedside table everywhere but on the bedside table.

Damn. It had been a dream.

“Sorry,” he croaked and tried to untangle his legs, which only brought the lamp rushing over the edge of the bed, crashing into House’s leg.
“Hey! Don’t move.” House set the lamp on the floor, pulled himself up, unwound the sheets and then crawled back into the bed.

“So much for the healing cock theory.”

Wilson sat up and rubbed his eyes. And remembered. It was Monday. They did have curry last night. He had slept with House. Slept. With. By every definition.

“Healing cock theory?” He draped the sheet back over House, picked up the lamp and the clock, which read six am, set it back on the table, and crawled over House back into bed.

“The dying ingénue sleeps with the handsome leading man and is instantly cured of all her ills – healing cock theory. Was hoping that our marathon of the weekend would have exorcised all your demons. Or at least exhausted them.”

“I didn’t dream Saturday night.”

“Well,” House rose up on an elbow, “nobody slept Saturday night.” He waggled an eyebrow and leaned over and brushed his lips over Wilson’s. “Wanna fuck?”

“That’s what you said in the dream.” Wilson pressed the bridge of his nose with his fingers, closed his eyes, tried to make this picture match all the others.

“So that’s a no?” House fell back against the pillows, folded his arms across his chest, and looked at the ceiling. “I just don’t know what’s wrong with you.”

“There’s nothing wrong with me. MRI proved it.”

“Are you going to trust MRIs now?”

“Don’t you?”

“Yes, unless they don’t tell me anything.”

“That’s because there’s nothing to tell. Just tired.”

“Tired, hell.” House swung his legs off the bed and sat up. “When are you going to deal with this?”

“I’m not. I’m late for work.” Wilson got up and walked out of the room.

House wished he was the kind of man who threw things. He felt like throwing something. He swiped the lamp back onto the floor. He didn’t feel any better.

Wilson’s phone rang and he heard Wilson pick it up and talk in hushed tones. The phone call ended and Wilson appeared at the door. His face was ashen. He looked like shit.

“It’s a patient . . . Molly. I’ve got to go.”

House rolled out of the bed, ignoring the protest registered by his thigh. “I’m going with you.”

“You don’t have to.”

“Yes, I do. I have to be there to witness your complete breakdown when Martha-”

“Molly.”
“Whatever. When Molly dies. You’re three threads from losing your yarmulke as it is.”

“I am not.”

“Okay, so I just want to ride into work with you. How about that?”

Wilson stopped and turned to House. “I never thought of that.”

“Of what? Giving me a ride?”

“No, of us.”

“Us?”

“Work. And us.”

House sighed. “Yes, yes, it will be tricky. Except for the fact that we have always worked together. And you often drive me to work. I can see the problem.”

Wilson walked into the bedroom and closed the door.

************

Cuddy was waiting at the Clinic doors. “House, I want to see you.”

She turned and clicked into her office. House followed, mainly because he had nowhere else to go. He didn’t want to go to his office – too many eyes, too many questions. He couldn’t follow Wilson. He wanted to follow Wilson. He wanted to strap Wilson down on a table and run every test he could think of until he figured out the cause of the nightmares, the dizziness.

He shut his eyes and tried to dispel the image of Wilson tied down on a bed. This was not going to work if his mind kept that particular Hustler fantasy track running all the time. Cuddy would notice. She noticed everything.

“Were the girls cold this morning?” House asked as he lowered himself on the couch. He pointed his cane toward Cuddy and her unusual button up collar and long sleeves. “Or are they grounded? What they do? Wink at the milkman?”

Cuddy ignored him and tossed a large file on his lap. “He’s fine.”

House took the MRI image out of the envelope and held it up to the light. “Who read it?”


“But did you . . .”

“House, it’s clean. Stop looking.”

House tossed the image aside and rubbed a hand across his face. “It doesn’t make sense. You know the nightmares are getting worse. He won’t let me do any proper tests.”
“What did Dr. Haynes say?”

“Why, did he see her?”

“You tell me. You were both supposed to see her.”

“I took the bullet. Saw her. Touched her. Hate her.”

“And . . .”

“And we have an appointment Wednesday. But Cuddy, seriously. A shrink?”

Cuddy leaned in and laid her hand on House’s leg. He started to swat it with his cane, but then he saw the obvious concern in her face and decided to behave.

“Dr. Haynes thinks it might be as simple as an anxiety disorder.”

“Simple? He’s cracking up. That’s it?”

“Diazepam might be all he needs. Maybe some therapy. Couldn’t hurt.”

House stood and began to pace. “Oh yeah, just like all I need is a little massage. You know it took me almost five minutes to wake him up this morning, he trashed my bed. . . “ House stopped, realizing what he was admitting.

“Oh, really?” Cuddy’s eyebrows practically disappeared into her hairline.

“Yes, really. He’s staying with me. You know that.”

“Yes, but I didn’t realize he was staying with you.”

“Emphasis doesn’t change meaning, Cuddy.”

“Emphasis always changes meaning, House. When did this happen? Don’t you think it might factor into Wilson’s condition? I know living with you would scare the hell out of me.”

“Don’t worry. I can practically guarantee you will never have the chance to test that theory.”

“Practically?”

“Well, I always like to leave a little wiggle room. I’ve grown quite fond of those apples of yours.”

“Don’t change the subject. What do you plan to do?”

House turned and headed toward the door. “Really busy now, Cuddy. Patients and all. Lives to save. Can’t stay here playing twenty questions with you all day.”

Cuddy let him go. Then picked up the phone and paged Wilson. And Dr. Haynes. Then she sat for a moment, lost in the idea of House and Wilson. Together. As a couple. She rested her head in her hands. None of them would survive.

**********
House stood outside and stared at his dark windows. Grabbed his bag and helmet and limped up the steps and into his apartment. Empty. Cold. Dark. Damn. He had hoped to have at least a week before the universe bitch-slapped him back to his lonely reality.

He didn’t bother to turn on any lights. Got a beer out of the fridge and slumped on the couch. It was so quiet that he could hear the horns and the traffic through his closed windows. He could still smell curry. He could still feel Wilson. He was a pathetic bastard.

He stayed on the couch for the rest of the night. Wilson never came home. Called about two am, mumbled something about a difficult case into the answering machine. Sounded tired. Probably losing his mind over this latest cancer-ridden moppet. House just stared into the cold fireplace and wondered when his life had become something unrecognizable.

He thought about Wilson standing his kitchen, chopping, mixing and measuring something that smelled amazing. Wilson standing in his bathroom, endlessly blow-drying his hair. Wilson on his couch, arguing about whether Emily should be with Sonny or go back to Nicholas. Wilson in his bed, sleeping. Wilson lying across his piano, all moans and minor keys, gasping, begging . . .

He tossed the beer bottle against the fireplace. The echo of the shattering glass somehow made him feel better. Made him feel like he wasn’t so goddamn alone. It was ruined now. His sanctuary. His carefully constructed life where the dark edges of longing and loneliness couldn’t reach him. Wilson had ruined it. Had ruined him.

By the time the alarm in his bedroom announced that it was seven, House had a plan. A decision. A wish, really. He got off the couch, ignoring the protests of his stiff, stiff body, and shuffled off to shower and shave. He had stuff to do today.

**********

Wilson sat watching the clock turn to 7:00. A.M. He rubbed his eyes and unfolded from the chair in the oncology lounge. Molly had died at one, he had called House at two, Cuddy had found him at three, and he drank coffee with her until four, so sleep was out of the question. He didn’t want to sleep, anyway. He didn’t want to see Molly in his dreams. He didn’t want to find House in his dreams. He didn’t want to dream.

Cuddy had convinced him to see Dr. Haynes this morning, so he hoped he had a change of clothes in his locker. He didn’t have time to go home. Well, he did, but he didn’t have the time to go home and deal with House. He was avoiding House. And the house. The home. The transformative syntax hadn’t even registered until Cuddy had pointed it out.

“So, are you and House going to live together? Be together? Make a home together?”

“We already live together. We work together. And he bought me a Panini maker.”

“God, I hate men. No one ever bought me a Panini maker.”

Wilson wondered if there was more than a seduction in the gifts House had showered upon him Friday night. It got him laid, sure, but was there more? Could there be more? Did he want more? Did House? He found a dry cleaning bag in his locker and concentrated on convincing Dr. Haynes that he wasn’t cracking up. He’d figure out the rest of it later.
Foreman was pissed. At first he was just annoyed. Then he moved to irritated. And now he could feel the ragged edge of full blown anger clawing at his brain. He had lost House. Again. Sent on the ridiculous errand of stealing warm blankets from Recovery, he had no idea where House went after he delivered them. And Cuddy was looking for him, and they had a new patient, and Chase wanted to go play tennis, and so he was pissed. He had not spent the last eight years of his life working to become a glorified concierge.

He walked into House’s empty office and was surprised to see him out on the balcony. Sound asleep. Wrapped in the blankets. He pushed the door open and was about to release some of his anger at the source when House held up a single finger. He was not asleep. He was watching. Wilson. With a patient. Across the balcony in his office.

Foreman stood for a moment, watched House watch Wilson, and then just tossed the new patient file into the folds of the blanket and stormed back into the office, past a surprised Cameron, shouting to Chase to follow him, and headed out the door. He was done for the day.

House let the file slide off the blankets and onto the floor. Nothing could deter him from his plan. To find out what was wrong. With Wilson. Himself. He had been sitting in the same spot for three hours, watching, observing. Wilson had come out when he first noticed, but House had shooed him back in and curiously, Wilson had done what he had asked. Without a single question. Without a protest. Or a pithy comment. Had just nodded and disappeared back into his office.

So now he had a flow chart. Of Wilson. And his patients. And he was making progress. He had already deduced that when Wilson was breaking the bad news, he smiled more. He came around his desk, sat in the chair next to Patient Dead, maybe even engaged in a little touching.

Other patients, ones there for check-ups and chemo schedules, and the odd nurse - he sat straight, no smile, rustled papers a lot. Self-conscious. Nervous. Of course all this data was mixed in with some very unscientific observations about the way Wilson's hair fell over his eye, the long fingers he used to push it back in place. The way his eyes crinkled when he laughed. The sighs he let out when they left his office, the scrubbing of his face, the steeling of his spine for the next one. All this observation was of no use. Except to him. House. Personally.

Finally, Wilson pushed himself away from his desk and walked out onto his balcony.

He stared at the sunset, straightened his jacket, rubbed a hand across his face. He didn’t look over at House.

“You coming home tonight?” House asked.

Wilson barely heard him, he spoke so soft. But there it was again. That word. Home.

“Don’t know. Probably.”

No one spoke for another minute. House watched Wilson and Wilson watched the sun dip lower in the sky.

“That last one. She’s going to die?” House finally broke the silence.
Wilson shook his head. “No. Melanoma. Referral from County.” He turned and looked at House. “What are you doing out here?”

“Working.”

“Ahh. For a minute I thought you were watching me.”

“My new case. You.”

“I thought we’ve already been over this. I’m not your case. I’m fine.”

“I know. I know. That’s the part we’ve already been over. It’s the next part I’m working on.”

Wilson rolled his eyes, then hopped over the wall and sat in the other chair. “You eat today?”

“Don’t you want to know the next part?”

“Is it wrong to say no?” Wilson sighed and tapped his jacket pocket.

“Hey,” House sat up as he heard the familiar rattle of a pill bottle. “You’ve been holding out on me. What you got in there, Jimmy?”

Wilson pulled out the bottle and tossed it toward House, who caught it on his clipboard. He rolled the bottle over and read it.

“You’ve been busy.” He pulled a hand out of the blanket and tossed the bottle back. “Cuddy and Dr. Touchy Feely?”

“Thought it would help. With the nightmares.” Wilson felt strange. Talking to House as if the weekend had never happened. But it happened. That part wasn’t a dream. That part was real. That part was making this part harder than it should be. That part was making this part very important.

“So, you coming home tonight?” House asked again.

“Yes.”

“Good.”

They sat in silence for a few moments. Then House began to unravel himself from the chair. He unwrapped blanket after blanket after blanket, depositing them on the floor until the pile was as high as the chair.

“Were you cold?”

House shrugged. “No, I just love these blankets. They’re served warm, you know.”

“Oh sure, they’re served warm if you’re in Recovery. After surgery.” Wilson brushed a hand across the top of the pile. “They are soft.”

“Maybe I’m in recovery.” House stood and faced Wilson. “From a hard couch, bad leg, no dinner.”

“I had to stay . . .” Wilson started.

House leaned over and brushed his lips across Wilson’s, then grabbed his cane, and limped to his office door.
“Come on. We’ve got a lot to do before you get all blissed out on Valium and do something stupid like fall in love with me.”

**********

They made it just inside the apartment. Wilson walked in first and then turned, slamming the door shut with House’s body. The cane rattled to the floor as Wilson kissed House hard on the lips, his hands ripping their bags away, ripping House’s jacket from his shoulders.

House threaded his hands through Wilson’s hair, pulled him closer, drowning in the heat and the passion and the taste of Wilson’s mouth. Peppermint. And salt. And Wilson. He felt the doorknob pressing into his hip and he pushed him back a step.

“Bedroom,” he managed between breaths. Wilson looked at him, panting. For a minute House wondered if he had heard him. But then Wilson grabbed House’s hand and pulled him down the hall. House tried to limp, but ended up hopping, which made his leg hurt. But he wasn’t about to protest. To make Wilson stop. Change his mind.

He finally just hopped up on Wilson’s back and rode him the last few steps to the bed. They tumbled together in a tangle of clothes and sheets and as House floated away from his brain, he realized that the odd feeling in the pit of his stomach could actually be happiness.

**********

It was dark when he woke up. Wilson was snoring softly beside him, his arm across his chest. He didn’t want to disturb him, but his thigh was trapped under Wilson’s leg and it was killing him. So he kissed Wilson’s forehead. Wilson murmured something and then snuggled in closer, burying his nose in House’s neck. House sighed and nudged Wilson’s arm. Tapped Wilson’s head. Rubbed Wilson’s back. Took Wilson’s hand and laced his fingers through. Felt Wilson’s pulse. Slow. Steady. Warm. Present.

Finally, House couldn’t stand it anymore and shoved Wilson off him, slipping his leg out from under and swinging himself around to sit on the edge of the bed. He massaged his thigh and looked at the clock. It blinked 12:00, 12:00. Sometime during the night they had unplugged everything during something Wilson had called The Tahitian. Neither one of them had bothered to reset anything after that. Neither one of them could hardly move after that.

“You okay?”

House felt a hand rubbing his back. Wilson was awake, lying on his back, yawning. House felt a stitch in his chest when he turned and looked at him and hoped he wasn’t going to have a heart attack. Or start crying. Which was worse.

“I’m never going to Tahiti, that’s for sure.”

Wilson chuckled and pulled House back against him. “Guess we got carried away.”
House lay back down, and Wilson crawled back onto his chest, careful to avoid his leg.

“You slept all night.” House drew circles on Wilson’s shoulder blade.

“No nightmares.”

“Healing cock – delayed reaction.”

“More like three beers and lots of exercise.”

“Is that what we were doing?”

Wilson sighed. “I know I got a workout.”

House chuckled and turned and kissed Wilson on the head. And then kissed him again. He couldn’t help himself. He just wanted to kiss Wilson. All the time. Which was going to prove to be a problem at work. Especially in front of Cameron. Who would cry.

Wilson lifted his head and looked at the clock. “What time is it?”

“It’s hammer time.”

“No, really. I have to go to work.”

“No, you don’t.”

“Yes, I do.” Wilson rolled over and sat on the edge of the bed. “I have an appointment.”

House pulled himself up so he was sitting against the headboard. “Yours or hers?”

“Huh?”

“Cancer kid or Shrinky Dink?”

“Dr. Haynes. Her name is Dr. Haynes. She’s expecting you, too, you know.”

House shuddered and crossed his arms. “Not again. She scarred me for life. Inappropriate caress. Besides, she cured us.”

“Us? How does that work exactly?”

“Put you on Valium, made you tell her your deep dark secrets. One session and no nightmares. Cured.”

“It’s not like that.”

“Really? So, what did you tell her? Anything juicy? What did she say about you?”

“She thinks it’s stress. Anxiety. Maybe a little depression. And if I have to admit it, I think she’s right.”

“She’s a shrink. What else is she going to say? Lupus?”

“She said that you might factor in.”

“Me?” House laughed. “I’m the one with the healing cock, remember?”
“Well, this thing has gotten . . . intense lately.”

“This thing?”

Wilson stood and faced House. “Yes. This. Us.” He held out his hands. “What is this, House? She said we should work on clarification. I think I have to know.”

“You think? You’re not sure?”

“Don’t do that.”

“What?”

“This is important to me. I can’t just be your fuck buddy, House. I can’t.”

“You’re not.” House swallowed hard and ran a hand through his hair. “You’re not.” Wilson walked over and sat on the bed next to House. “Then what?”

“How should I know? Why do I have to have the answers? Maybe I’m just as confused as you.”

“Are you?”

“No, but I thought it might get you to shut up.”

Wilson pointed. “See? That. You can’t do that.”

“What? Talk to you?” House scooted up so that he was face to face with Wilson. “What do you want? Me to get on my knees and proclaim my undying love for you? To tell you I have a fucking clue where this is going? To tell you that I think this is a good idea and not a really really bad idea that is going to end up with you hating me? Sorry. I can’t.”

“I just want you to tell me how you feel.”

“No you don’t. You want me to tell you it’s all going to work out.”

“Nothing works out, House. I just want to know that we’re on the same page here.”

“You seem to be skipping to the end.”

Wilson leaned over and kissed House. “Are we going to do this, then? Do you want me to stay here with you?”

House sat back against the pillows. Of course he did. Every corner of his house came alive when Wilson was home. Their home. Something skittered up his spine and he shuddered.

Wilson frowned. “I didn’t realize it was such a difficult question.” He started to get up and House hauled him back down on top of him.

“Don’t be an ass. Of course I want you to stay here. You belong here. With me. You can’t just cook for me and then leave me. I need you now.”

Wilson kissed him again and then wriggled out of his grasp and stood. House crossed his arms and stuck his lower lip out in a pout.

“Come on, Jimmmmmeee.”
“I really do have an appointment. And you need to go to work. I’ll cook you something tonight.” Wilson walked toward the bathroom. He turned back to House as he got to the door. “Oh, and stay away from my files. I’ve warned Dr. Haynes about you and have instructed any maintenance crew who sees you lurking about her office to shoot first.”

“Buzzkill.” House muttered. He heard the shower curtain creak. The water turn on. Wilson whistling. The odd warmth was back in his chest. Definitely not a heart attack. And he didn’t really feel like crying. And then his stomach flipped. Could it really be happiness? He stayed very still for a long time, listening, diagnosing. Yep, happiness. Confirmed. The differential fit. He was happy.


“And if you’re really good?” Wilson tilted his head and droplets went flying.

“I am good, Jimmy. Wanna come over here so I can show you?”

“Raincheck.” Wilson walked further into the room and picked up a comb from House’s dresser. “If you’re really good, I’ll even let you run tests on me. I know you’re dying to prove Dr. Haynes wrong. Find some obscure disease that causes dizziness and nightmares and sprained ankles and busted heads. Something chronic that explains why after years of wanting to pop you one, I now feel a great urge to pop you one.”

House threw his head back and laughed. Hard. Felt good. Felt right. Looked at Wilson, who was laughing and who was walking toward him, the towel slipping off his hips, his skin damp, his intentions clear.

“I thought you had an appointment. Some mental health to acquire.”

“I can reschedule. Tomorrow is soon enough,” Wilson murmured and climbed onto the edge of the bed, crawling slowly toward House. Toward the possibilities. Toward the future.

fin

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!