

about to die is knowledge enough. Not knowing, not caring to know, *are* deaths to House, his secret fear.

Marcus Welby, MD, the kindly family practitioner who treated prime-time patients from September 1969 through a final episode in July 1976, rarely faced medical uncertainty. His medicine promised care and kindness within a science that always knew the problem and *how to fix it*. So, too, did the doctors of *St. Elsewhere* (1982–1988) and *Chicago Hope* (1994–2000) for whom medicine's real challenges, as it is on Michael Crichton's *ER*, were economic and hospital bureaucracies within which the fictional doctors practised.

House is the diagnostician for today, a time when emerging infectious diseases are again ascendant and it has become clear to all that our knowledge is often inadequate to easily identifying their nature or reversing their effects. Medicine is again a partial science and *House M.D.* presents it at the frontier where diagnosis is a rigorous art, a balance between ignorance and knowledge.

Working under House in his first 3 seasons were attending physicians in neurology (Dr. Eric Foreman), intensive care medicine (Dr. Robert Chase) and immunology (Dr. Allison Cameron). They tolerated his sarcastic bullying because, all said, he would make them better doctors. He did this by insisting they think beyond their sense of the patient-as-person, and beyond the standardized tests and easy answers, to the nature of the disease itself.

This is another reason for the show's success: Gregory House knows he can't do it alone. Holmes needed his Watson; House needs his underlings and their easy answers if he is to find the hard truths. When they are unavailable he'll take anyone available — in the first issue of the fourth season it is a janitor — as a backboard for his thinking. Those who think House's method is Socratic, misunderstand his method. He does not teach what he knows but uses others to push past the easy and convenient answers to the real truths that lie beyond. House is the doctor of uncertainty, his diagnostics an old medicine rethought and repackaged for a new age of advancing disease.

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FURTHER READING

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Poem

The Script

I watch you watch me,
As I open the door slowly,
Carefully,
As if drawing open the curtain
On the first act
Of this new chapter of your life.
Your eyes drift from my face
To the bright red file I hold
Clutched tightly in my hand.
Almost bursting at the seams,
The script, as it were...
A running commentary on your life.

It is a script you help write
But never actually read.
All you see is the cardboard cover...
The contents are for my eyes only.
Yet I read the words out to you
At each and every visit.

But today is different
Something unexpected in the plot...
A twist, a turn,
Which occurred silently
Deep within you.
You provided the material
But it was an inspiration no one
wanted...
Sometimes the script
Takes on a life of its own.

I, myself, do not want to play this part...
This is a monologue I don't want to
read

But it is part of the performance.
After all, there have been happy
monologues
Soliloquies of joy
Wherein you sat and beamed
Proud of your accomplishments
And the script was punctuated
By the footnotes of your life:
Babies, milestones, triumph over pain,
Personal goals realized.

I close the door behind me
The office clock beats loudly in the
silence
Like a drum roll preceding my
opening words
Should I set the stage
Or jump to the climax?
You shift uncomfortably in your chair
This is not the performance you
bargained for...

But the script is by no means finalized
There is always room for revisions
Your epilogue is yet to be written.
We shall complete it together
And hope for better inspirations
And more positive turns of plot.
As we navigate the story of your life.

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