

House md

Season 6 episode 1 (double episode)

Broken

This episode includes issues of drugs and medication, mental illness, love, friendship, commitment, trust, salvation

Synopsis

The episode opens Dr House at Mayfield Psychiatric Hospital, with dark tinted scenes of Dr House experiencing withdrawal symptoms as he comes off his addiction to opiate painkillers. He is seen struggling with pain, vomiting and screaming 'help me'. He ends up in restraints. As the scene resumes colour, House is clean and gets up ready to leave. Dr Nolan, House's doctor, says his issues run deeper than his addiction to painkillers, especially the deaths of his father, Kutner and Amber, and he should stay to work them out. House still wants to go, so Dr Nolan says he can't have his licence to practice medicine returned unless he accepts treatment.

House is furious at being blackmailed so decides to make everyone's life miserable to force Dr Nolan to let him go. He meets his room-mate Alvie who is a manic depressive in a hyperactive state, rapping all the time without stopping to listen, Annie, who conversely has been mute for 10 years and Connor, an anorexic who is called Hal because of his desire for the drug Haldol. House goes to group therapy and traumatises the whole group by playing on his fellows' mental illness problems: claustrophobia, paranoia, anorexia, suicide attempt. He ends up in a padded cell on his own.

Dr Beasley tells House in the yard he has to develop some social skills, so he goes out to play basketball and traumatises everyone on the court. He stalks off upstairs to find a visitor called Lydia playing Schumann to Annie. As Annie used to be a professional musician Lydia thinks she might be able to get through to her. House says there's no response and is then sent off back to his padded cell.

His next strategy is to stir up the inmates to revolt. Finding them playing table tennis without paddles he gets them to start shouting and demanding to be treated like adults. To House's surprise, Dr Nolan walks in and gives them the paddles. He tells House he is a natural leader, but does he really want to keep fighting? Dr Nolan says he's just as stubborn as House. Alvie now hero-worships House and keeps asking him what the next plan is to fight the system.

Steve arrives. He calls himself 'Freedom Master', specially chosen to fight against evil. Alvie says 'we got more Jesuses than super heroes'. Steve focuses on Annie saying she needs somebody to save her and that he can fly. House sees Dr Nolan with a woman and decides he might be able to blackmail him. He recruits Alvie to break into Dr Nolan's office.

Alvie doesn't get much information, but House has a new plan. He and Alvie have a fake fight and House is restrained and given Haldol. He doesn't swallow the pills but retrieves them to give to Hal in return for phone privileges. He phones Wilson and asks him to get information on the woman with Dr Nolan, but Dr Nolan has beaten House to it and told Wilson not to help him. Wilson says he's sorry and hangs up. House returns to Alvie and says he's his only friend and 'I hate you'.

House's new strategy is to co-operate. He starts getting points for good behaviour, teaching the inmates bluffing games, but still not taking the pills. He suggests to Lydia she bring in Annie's cello.

Dr Medina is suspicious of House's new demeanour. The fight and the medication don't add up. House volunteers a urine test but gets Hal to provide it. Medina then pushes Steve, suggesting that he should use his powers to move the piano. House objects to the confrontation. Steve cries out that he can save Annie and that they stole her voice box. Medina continues to push that Steve was unable to save his wife because nobody could, good does not always beat evil.

Susan the suicide patient goes home in a 're-birthing' ceremony. House wants to know where 'Freedom Master' is. Finding him unresponsive in his room, House argues with Medina. He then rages at Dr Nolan that Susan was allowed to go but he is not. Dr Nolan then reveals that he'd been giving House sugar pills not meds, so he knew he was faking about taking them when he got Hal's sample. He again tells House to stop fighting the system.

House is determined to do something about Steve. He recruits Lydia's help, takes her car and drives Steve to a funfair where he can have the experience of flying. Steve smiles and laughs, but things go drastically wrong at the car park where Steve thanks House and 'flies' out of the park, causing himself terrible injury. Dr Nolan faces up Dr House to the fact that he got it wrong: reinforcing a sick man's delusion. He says he can go, but House says he wants to stay, that he's sick of being miserable, and wants to get better. He acknowledges that he needs help.

House agrees to take medications although he's worried they will change his personality. Dr Nolan says he must trust him. House calls the pills his 'communion wafer'. Alvie is upset House is capitulating and says 'they broke you'. House says simply 'I AM broken' and tells Alvie to stop worshipping him. Alvie says 'I hate you'.

Dr Nolan sends House to a fund raising party to work on relationships. House recruits Lydia to back him up when he presents himself as gay to one person and as a philanderer to another. Dr Nolan points out that the people he scammed didn't rat him out, so he can trust people. Lydia says what House did for Steve was nice even if it didn't work out and that she visits Annie because she was her best friend and she misses her. She married Annie's brother for that reason. She kisses House.

House discusses the kiss with Dr Nolan. Dr Nolan wants to know if House is bothered by the fact that Lydia is married. House deflects by diagnosing Dr Nolan as lonely and friendless, but Dr Nolan pushes him to think about how the relationship with Lydia will end. House plays jazzed up Schumann for Lydia but things take a downturn when Steve returns bandaged and in plaster. Dr Nolan encourages House not to be scarred forever by failure but to move past it by apologising. House claims this isn't fair. Nolan says that House is not God, he does not have to suffer forever if there is human pain. He needs to learn how to feel better.

House says hello to Steve but nothing else. As Dr Beasley tells the patients about a forthcoming talent show, House realises that Steve's 'voice box' was a music box in the nurses' station. He cries out that he can 'save him'. Steve takes the box as House insists that he can be healed as all his physical parts work. Dr Nolan tells House that he is trying to fix Steve instead of moving on.

Lydia suggests she and House play the piano together. She thinks they are just having fun but House has now thought the relationship through and says it will all end in tears. Lydia says they should just enjoy the moment but House leaves.

Dr Nolan asks House to visit him at another hospital where Dr Nolan's father has suffered a massive stroke. House analyses him, - that he has no other family, no friends, so needs his patient to tell him what he already knows and give him permission to turn off life support. House says Nolan needs absolution. Dr Nolan, in distress tells House to stop playing the game. House takes off his coat and stays with him. Later, back at the hospital, House finds Lydia crying with hopelessness about ever helping Annie. House comforts her. They hold hands, hug, slowly dance together, kiss and make love. Finally House cries too.

At the talent show House hides at the back, but when Alvie's spontaneity breaks down and his rap falters, House helps him out with some rhymes and finally joins him on stage. They end up working together, arms round one another. When House meets Dr Nolan again, he asks him how he is doing rather than the other way round. House says 'I'm good' and goes to apologise to Steve.

Steve now gives the music box to Annie who opens it listens and says 'thank you'. Steve says 'you're welcome'. Annie plays the cello again. The music (Bach) affects all the patients. Annie then has her re-birthday party. However, with Annie's release, Lydia and her family intend to move to Arizona. House asks Dr Nolan for an overnight pass, goes to Lydia's house and tells her he doesn't want her to go. Lydia says she's sorry but she won't break up her family or leave her children. Dr Nolan finds House back at the hospital saying 'I'm lost' but Dr Nolan says House got hurt, recognised the pain and talked about it and went to find someone who could help. He connected enough with another person to miss them. This is good.

House has his own re-birthday party and amuses everyone by diving head first into the cake. He hugs Alvie and catches the bus wearing Alvie's T shirt with a smiley face on the front. Alvie looks sorrowfully after him but then goes to the nurses' station to ask for his medication because he too wants to get better. On the bus, House smiles.

Some excerpts to watch:

- House and Steve at the funfair and Steve jumping off the car park
- House and Dr Nolan talking about suffering and not being God
- The talent show

It might also be interesting to compare this episode to *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, to which a number of references are made.

Some questions:

- In what sense do you think House progresses on a spiritual journey?
- What do you think about the portrayal of mental illness in this episode?
- What do you make of the references to God and Jesus?
- What does 'salvation' mean in this episode?
- What does 'friendship' mean in this episode?

Some Bible passages to look at in relation to this episode:

Mark 5. 1-20

John 10.19-21

John 5.1-15