

Second Opinion

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/1012101) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/1012101>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Tin Man (2007) , House M.D. , The Wizard of Oz & Related Fandoms
Relationship:	Wyatt Cain/Glitch
Characters:	Wyatt Cain , Glitch (Tin Man) , Raw (Tin Man) , DG (Tin Man) , Greg House , Eric Foreman , James Wilson , Allison Cameron , Lawrence Kutner , Chris Taub , Remy "Thirteen" Hadley , Robert Chase
Additional Tags:	Established Relationship , Crossover
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2013-10-21 Words: 3,056 Chapters: 1/1

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by [Amedia](#)

Summary

Glitch isn't sure about the rebrainment procedure, so his friends take him to see a famous diagnostician.

Notes

Many thanks are due to my beta-reader, TODS, who performed yeoman service on this story, with incredibly fast turnaround as well.

The story is set after the end of the *Tin Man* miniseries and early in the fifth season of *House*.

It was originally supposed to be a drabble in response to the tinman100 prompt "crossover."
Posted on LiveJournal July 12-14, 2008.

Kutner is thinking of [Runaround](#) by Blues Traveler.

"Wilson!" Cameron called, hurrying through the hallway to catch up.

Wilson turned, coffee cup in hand, and waited. Cameron looked unusually cheerful, her eyes sparkling.

"Do you want to see House drool in excitement?" she asked as she reached him.

Wilson groaned. "Of course, but my sex life really can't take any more complications right now."

"That's not what I meant," Cameron said, lightly punching his arm. She was in too good a mood to be irritated. "I was doing a shift in the walk-in clinic this morning and I have a guy who came in with half a brain."

"Well, that's moderately unusual," Wilson allowed.

Cameron looked smug. "But that's not the best part!"

"What's the best part?"

"There's a *zipper* built into the top of his *skull*."

"You're kidding," said Wilson.

"No, seriously! You can open it up and see inside. He says it was installed when they took out part of his brain."

Wilson rolled his eyes. "That must have been some operation," he said. "I have a feeling we're not in Kansas any more."

"I *knew* a man with a zipper in his head would pique your interest," said Wilson triumphantly to House as they walked to the clinic, trailed by Cameron and House's team. "Look at you, actually hobbling out to meet the patient first thing."

"Don't sound so smug," said House. "I might change my mind."

"That seems unlikely," Wilson said. "Tell you what, if this doesn't turn out to be everything Cameron promised, I'll buy dinner."

"Of course you will," said House.

Wilson looked at his watch. "Damn. I'll have to catch up with you later. Take lots of pictures, okay?"

House waved noncommittally as Wilson moved off.

"Don't we have enough to do?" Kutner asked Taub and Thirteen, keeping his voice down as they followed House and Cameron. "We're already looking at three possible cases for House to take on."

"It never rains but it pours," said Taub philosophically.

"Besides," said Thirteen, "remember how House was when he went three weeks without an interesting patient?"

Kutner shuddered. "You're right. Busy is better."

"Oh look," said House as they entered the exam room, where Chase was chatting with a small group of people. "It's the man from Oz."

"Cameron asked me to wait here in case the patient decided to wander away," said Chase.

"What is he, an Australian sheepdog? It must be handy having a puppy in your back pocket." House snarked at Cameron.

"So that's what the kids are calling it these days," she responded, wagging her eyebrows. "Come on, Chase, we're late for lunch."

"Right away," said Chase, following her out.

House rolled his eyes. "Throw him a biscuit, Cameron, he's a good doggie!" he shouted down the hallway after them. Then he turned and looked at the four strangers in the exam room. "So which of you has only half a brain?" he demanded. "Kutner, don't answer that, I'm not talking to you."

"Hi, I'm Glitch," announced the man sitting on the exam table. "Sometimes my synapses don't fire right." He took off his hat to reveal dark brown dreadlocks and - yes, there it was - a zipper down the middle of his scalp.

"I'm surprised they fire at all," said Foreman, coming around House to stare at the new patient.

"Who are you people?" demanded one of the others, a blond man with a glowering expression.

"I'm Greg House. Best diagnostician in the country. Probably in the world."

"We're not looking for a diagnosis."

House ignored him. "And this is Eric Foreman. I hate to admit it, but he's the sexiest neurologist in the country. He has to keep moving or women attach themselves to him like ticks. Plus he's at least partially competent. And you are?"

"Wyatt Cain. This is DG, this is Raw," Cain said, gesturing to a petite dark-haired woman and a bearded man muffled in a long cloak. There was something odd about the latter. "Glitch

you've met. He's the only one you need to be concerned with. Surgery's been recommended for him and he needs a second opinion."

"Mind if I take a look?" asked House, pointing to the zipper.

"Go right ahead," said Glitch cheerfully.

House cautiously pulled the zipper back and looked inside. "Sweeeet," he said. "Foreman, get a load of this."

Foreman joined him and the rest of the team crowded around, craning their necks. "Amazing. I'd like to ask you some questions," Foreman said to Glitch, closing the zipper.

"All yours, Foreman," said House, taking the rest of his team aside. "This doesn't exactly look like the family," he said dubiously, leaning heavily on his cane and eyeing Glitch's odd assortment of companions, staring at Raw in particular. "This lot looks more like... Come to think of it, what do they look like?"

"I know!" said Kutner, suddenly excited. "They look like those people in the music video, you know, the one with the big guy playing the harmonica, and they can't get into the nightclub, and the dog runs away?"

House didn't dignify that with a response.

Thirteen, eyeing the group, whispered to Taub, who thought for a moment and nodded.

During this conversation, Foreman had been running a cursory examination of Glitch, shining a light into his eyes, having him follow a moving finger, asking some simple questions. "Dr. House, I'd like to run some more extensive tests."

"Man with half-a-brain can't sign a consent form," House said briskly.

Glitch looked up. "Are you suggesting I'm incompetent?" he asked sharply.

"No, just deficient," said House.

Cain stepped forward. "He's as competent as any of us. More than some," he said, looking pointedly at House. "He can sign his own damn papers."

House glared at him with a withering stare that usually made protective family members wilt. Cain glared right back. House sighed. "All right, then. Jeez, you can back off now."

DG took House aside and said quietly, "Uh, Mr. Cain is ..." she looked as if she were trying to remember a language she hadn't used in a while, "Mr. Glitch's uh ... domestic partner."

Thirteen held out her hand. Taub sighed, pulled out his wallet, and gave her a twenty-dollar bill.

"Fine," said House. "Foreman, run your tests and let me know what you find in there." He turned toward Glitch again. "What are you, anyway? Some kind of secret government project

gone horribly wrong?"

Glitch smiled serenely. "That's as good a description as any. Except I like to think I've gone horribly *right*."

House snorted. "I can't deal with that much sweetness and light at this hour of the day. Foreman, I'll see you later. Come on, kids, we've got other work to do."

While Foreman took Glitch for tests, a remarkably grumpy nurse came and moved his companions to a private room to wait for Glitch's return, explaining testily that the walk-in clinic needed the space. "I'll put you near House's other patients," she said, leading them down a quiet hallway. "He has a bumper crop this week."

"She's not mad at us," Raw said quietly to Cain and DG. "Mad at House."

"Like we couldn't figure that out for ourselves," said Cain.

"Is there anyone in the hospital who isn't mad at House?" DG asked. "Wait, Raw, that was a rhetorical question. I don't want you to wear yourself out trying to find someone."

Glitch's tests took a couple of hours. Cain paced. DG looked at magazines. Raw sat in a corner, periodically mumbling to himself and getting up, making as if to go out into the hallway, but then sitting down again. "It must be hard for you to be here," said DG sympathetically. "All these people in distress."

Raw nodded. Silently he got up and went out into the hallway. He returned several minutes later, looking a bit happier. It happened a couple more times over the next hour. DG decided it was better not to ask questions.

Cain went down the hall to get coffee and juice from the vending machines in the waiting room. When he returned, he looked puzzled. "The other rooms on this hallway are empty, although the beds are unmade," he said, "and there are three perfectly healthy people playing poker in the waiting room." He looked suspiciously at Raw, who shrugged.

"Imagine that," said DG innocently.

Multiple footsteps, accompanied by the tap of a cane, were coming down the hallway from the other direction. House's voice became clearer as they came closer. "Taub, you take Patient A. I want a complete CBC, an LP, and anything else you can think of. Thirteen, what was your theory on Patient B again? That's right, do the MRI, and Kutner, put C on a treadmill for the stress test. I'll take two hours off your clinic duty if you can make him collapse. Three if you can make him pee his pants. Four if--*hey!!!!*" The footsteps stopped, then moved more rapidly up and down the corridor. "Where are my patients? Go find them. *Now!*"

The door to Glitch's room opened and House came in, looking furious. "I'll bet you guys had something to do with it," he said.

"To do with what?" asked DG.

"Don't give me those big blue eyes," snarled House. "Where are my patients?"

"They're playing poker in the waiting room," said Cain.

"As if," said House. "One of them's unconscious, one of them's delusional, and the other one can't breathe. No way they're--

"--in the waiting room," interrupted Taub, coming in, followed by Kutner and Thirteen. "And they all look to be in tiptop shape."

"Go examine them," growled House without turning around. Taub and the others fled. House rounded on Raw, who winced visibly at the barrage of negative emotion. "It was you, wasn't it? I thought there was something suspicious about you all along." Raw nodded.

House went on. "What are you, some kind of faith healer? I should say, *fake* healer. False hope is such a cruel gift. I suppose they'll be up just long enough for you to make your convenient getaway."

"No," said Raw calmly. "They're cured."

"I don't believe you," said House.

They were standing practically nose to nose. Raw reached down and put a hand on House's leg.

"Hey!" said House.

"Don't mind him," said Cain. "He has a thigh-injury fetish."

"Well, I do mind, I mind very much," said House, pulling back. Then his expression changed. "Hey, wait a minute ..." He lifted his cane and put his weight tentatively on both legs, then shifted back and forth. "How'd you do that? Where'd the pain go?"

Raw backed away, smiling. "Will he be nicer now?" DG asked.

"Ha," said Raw, shaking his head. "Raw is healer. Not magician."

"That's what you did to my patients, isn't it?" House's curiosity had outpaced his anger. "How did you do that? No, wait. First, what did they have?"

Raw wrinkled his forehead in thought. "Easier to show," he said, and put a hand on the side of House's head.

"Huh," said House, half-closing his eyes to follow the flow of images. "So the first one was a genetic problem. Taub was wrong. Oh, Thirteen'll be happy, the second one really did have a parasite. The third--no way!" He broke contact and glared at Raw. "It's *never* lupus!"

"Was this time," said Raw.

"I *never* get to treat lupus!" House pouted. "And you *fixed* it already!"

"Could you have fixed it?" Cain asked.

"No," said House, "but that's not the point. It would have been fun."

"For the patient?" DG asked.

"For me," said House. "This isn't about the patient." He stared at Raw. "Okay, so you have some sort of healing ability and something resembling telepathy. I've never seen anything like that. How does it work? Can I run an MRI on you?" He advanced toward Raw, who backed further away.

"Hey," Cain said. "He and his people were exploited by the same ... government that took half of Glitch's brain out. I think he's been poked and prodded enough."

"His *people*?" House asked. "What, is he from Mars or something?"

There was a faint ding from the elevator down the hall. "Hey, do I hear Glitch and Dr. Foreman coming back?" DG asked hopefully.

"Not the smoothest change of subject," said House sarcastically. "Oh, wait. I hear them too."

"Aren't there any more tests we can do?" Glitch asked as Foreman pushed him down the hall in a wheelchair. "These have been so much fun. I really liked the sugar-uptake one with the screen to look at." Foreman had been able to show him his brain activity in real time on a new display monitor; his patient had initially shown a childlike joy in observing the results, and then asked some surprisingly penetrating questions, a pattern that persisted throughout every test.

Foreman smiled. "I have to say, you've been the most cooperative patient I've ever had. To say nothing of the easiest to examine. I wish more of my patients had zippers."

Glitch looked suddenly somber.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to embarrass you," said Foreman quickly.

"No, it's just ... it would take too long to explain. Never mind," Glitch said quickly. "Are you sure we can't do the MRI? It sounded so fascinating."

Foreman shook his head. "Even if the zipper is, as you say, made from an alloy unknown to Western science, there's enough recognizable metal in it that the machine would try to pull it out."

"Hm," said Glitch. "Yes, I suppose that would damage the internal chamber."

"To say nothing of you!"

"Oh, yes, you're quite right." Glitch sat quietly for a moment, then began to fidget. "I can walk, you know."

"Hospital policy," said Foreman. "Err on the side of caution."

"Did you tell me that before?" Glitch asked. There was no sarcasm in his voice.

"Several times," Foreman admitted. He had noted similar lapses during some of the tests, particularly the interview and the memory inventory. Sometimes Glitch had appeared to be dodging questions or giving half-answers, but other times he had clearly gone blank.

"See, that's what worries me," said Glitch. "I told you how I got my nickname, didn't I? Sometimes my synapses--"

"That's something you've only told me once," Foreman interrupted.

They reached Glitch's room.

"What's the news?" Cain asked as soon as they came in. DG went over and put a hand on Glitch's shoulder. He smiled at her and patted her hand. Raw hovered nearby, looking cautiously optimistic at the vibes emanating from patient and doctor.

Foreman handed House a folder. "He exhibits complete proprioception and coordination as well as very high reasoning skills in every area. He clearly has both long-term and short-term memory problems, but with proper therapy I think that both of those can be addressed." He looked serious. "That's the good news. What would be bad news, if the good news wasn't this good, is that I don't think any further surgery is advisable. What's left of his brain has accommodated itself to the current situation for quite a number of years. Trying to reintegrate the missing portion could reduce functionality, rather than improve it. I mean, it could make him worse. Much worse."

The group looked relieved. Cain shook Foreman's hand. "Thank you," he said. "We appreciate your time. This is good news. We'll be leav--"

"Missing portion?" interrupted House. "They were thinking of reintegrating--you mean they've *got* the missing piece?" He looked suspiciously at the group, as if one of them might be hiding half-a-brain in a pocket.

"That's what Glitch told me," said Foreman. "They don't have it here, obviously."

"Obviously," said House, looking disappointed. He flipped through the folder and tossed it onto a table. "I don't agree. I think they should go ahead with the surgery, and that it should be done here."

Foreman pulled him back out into the hall. "You just want to see the missing half-a-brain," he hissed, pushing the door shut.

"Well, yeah," said House. "So?"

"This isn't what's best for the patient!" said Foreman quietly but firmly.

"Might be what's best for a bunch of other patients," House said, also lowering his voice, "if we could keep these people here a while longer."

"That can't be the basis of his decision," said Foreman. "In all probability, the operation would make him worse."

"Look, you don't understand--" House paced a few steps up the hall and came back.

"Hey," Foreman interrupted, staring. "You're not limping."

"That's what I've been trying to tell you. We can't let these people leave. Remember those three patients I was considering? Let me show you something."

Their voices trailed away as they moved further down the hall. DG turned to her companions. "I think it's time we blow this popsicle stand."

"Agreed," said Cain. "We got what we came for."

"I feel bad about leaving without paying," said Glitch. "They really did a lot for me."

"Don't worry," said Raw. "Balance more than equal."

In the waiting room, House's team confirmed the news that the other three patients really were completely well.

"Should we discharge them?" Taub asked, but Foreman and House were already out the door, on their way back to Glitch's room.

"I hate to admit it, House, but you're partly right. We can't let these people leave until we know more about--" Foreman was saying just as they arrived at an empty room. "Hey! Where'd they go? They would have had to go past us to get to the elevator or the stairs."

"The folder's gone, too," said House. He looked at Foreman. Foreman looked at him. They both stared around the empty room for a moment. It was hard to believe that it had once held an empathic healer and a man with a zipper in his head. "Did any of this really happen?"

"Your other patients didn't get well by themselves," Foreman pointed out.

"Maybe they were faking," said House.

"You're not limping any more."

"Maybe I was faking, too." House sighed. "Wilson is definitely buying dinner."

"Why? The guy was everything Cameron promised."

"Yeah, but all my promising cases got solved and the guy's gone and I'm pissed. So Wilson's buying both of us dinner. Come on."

Foreman shrugged. "Works for me," he said and followed House to the stairs.

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