

PLAYBOY INTERVIEW: HUGH LAURIE

A candid conversation with the actor behind TV's grouchiest character about Brits versus Yanks, his conflicted view of success and why we love a misanthrope

Not often does someone become a star by playing an unlikable curmudgeon week after miserable week. But that's what happened to Hugh Laurie with *House*, the phenomenally popular medical drama on which he has turned the limping, pill-popping misanthrope Dr. Gregory House into one of the most memorable and oddly appealing characters on TV.

With shades of Sherlock Holmes by way of Hawkeye Pierce on a crabby day, *House* isn't out to heal the world or make patients happy. He doesn't have a soft spot for kids and old ladies, and he would rather watch monster-truck jams than read a stupid CT scan. No matter how antisocial he is, no matter how bitter (his favorite diagnosis is "The patient is lying"), *House* inevitably saves the day—even when it kills him to.

But those are mere character tics. What really separates *House* is Laurie's star quality. Unlike almost every other hit drama series now—*Lost*, *E.R.*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *Desperate Housewives*, *Heroes*, the *CSI* trilogy—this one isn't about the ensemble cast. *House* is about *House* the way *Kojak* was about *Kojak* and *All in the Family* was about *Archie*. Okay, yes, there's Kiefer Sutherland on *24*, but nobody holds together a top drama quite the way Laurie does.

Watching him rattle off American medical speak week after week, it's easy to forget Laurie is British. Born in Oxford, England in 1959,

he is the youngest of four children. His mother died following a lengthy illness shortly before Laurie turned 30, and his father, a physician who won an Olympic gold medal for rowing, died just before Laurie landed *House*.

A national youth rowing champion himself, Laurie contemplated an athletic career but let those dreams go after being sidelined by a nasty case of mononucleosis while at Cambridge University. He took up acting instead and was soon part of a talented circle that included Emma Thompson, whom he briefly dated, and Stephen Fry, who became his comedy partner. No highlight reel of U.K. comedy from the 1980s or 1990s would be complete without a clip of Fry and Laurie in *twit* or *fop* mode on sketch programs like *Blackadder* or their own *A Bit of Fry and Laurie*.

Those antics made Laurie a household name among BBC viewers, but he never quite broke through in the States. There were one-off guest roles on *Friends* and *Family Guy*, and he voiced the dad in *Stuart Little*. But the audition tape he recorded in a hotel bathroom in Namibia, where he was filming *Flight of the Phoenix*, was what got Laurie the role of his career. Since 2004 *House* has earned him a pair of Golden Globes, three Emmy nominations and the distinction of being one of the most-watched scripted TV programs, even though the actor has never quite let go of England. His wife of

20 years, Jo Green, and their three children still live in north London. It's anyone's guess how the California house Laurie bought last summer will change things.

PLAYBOY dispatched Contributing Editor David Hochman to meet with Laurie over the course of several weeks as *House*'s fifth season got under way. They met at various hotels and on the show's set at 20th Century Fox Studios in Los Angeles. Hochman's report: "For all *House*'s crankiness and sarcasm, you would expect him to be played by an actor with at least a trace of mean-spiritedness. But Laurie is as gentle and self-effacing as *House* is a grouch. Each time the issue of his success came up, he looked as if he wanted to hide under a pillow. It embarrasses him to celebrate his achievements, even though he has done so much. It's almost as though he's afraid if he believes in his success, he'll lose the jones for all the long hours *House* demands. Every actor should take a cue from the way Laurie handles his fame."

PLAYBOY: You recently bought a house—a big one—in Los Angeles after years of commuting back and forth to London. Has Hugh Laurie gone Hollywood at last?

LAURIE: I've put down, not quite roots but more like a flowerpot. My family still lives in London, but I finally had to accept that *House* has some sort of permanence. I was



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"Insurance in many ways is the elephant in the room on *House*. It's something we rarely address, but the question remains: Who's paying for all this treatment? Do all these people really have the insurance to cover these procedures?"

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIZUNO

so convinced in the first few years that it was never going to last—because nothing does. Simply statistically, the odds are very much against it in television. But here we are.

PLAYBOY: In fact, you're coming up on the 100th episode. That makes Dr. House one of the crankiest success stories on TV since Archie Bunker, right?

LAURIE: Oh dear God. Don't say that. Success on a cosmic level like that completely eludes me. I'm deeply suspicious of things being too good. It's part of my superstition, I think, to generate pain in order to give the illusion of gain. That's my MO. I'm not saying I reject success, but honestly, I don't quite know how to deal with it. It's an old feeling: As soon as you have the thing you've been going after all your life, that reasonable degree of security, you start kicking against it, doubting it. That's why I get uneasy whenever journalists assemble lists. The best! The crankiest! I don't feel worthy of any list. Lists are for bright and shiny people. Lists are for people on big and shiny shows like *Lost*, *Desperate Housewives*, *Heroes*. I'm more stubby and grumpy than bright and shiny.

PLAYBOY: That sounds a little like House talking. How much of you is in him, and vice versa?

LAURIE: I guess we have certain similarities. We both look at the world with one eyebrow arched. We're both quite serious but also have a childishness. He and I are eternal adolescents but with this morbid gravity. The other thing is, we both have issues with joy, in so much as we think it's beyond us. I often picture that scene in the Woody Allen movie when he's on the subway and looks into another car that's full of people laughing. They're drinking champagne; somebody has a trombone. And Woody is very much on the outside of that, looking in. I'd say that sums up my view of the world, as well as House's.

PLAYBOY: Hasn't the show's continued success improved your mood?

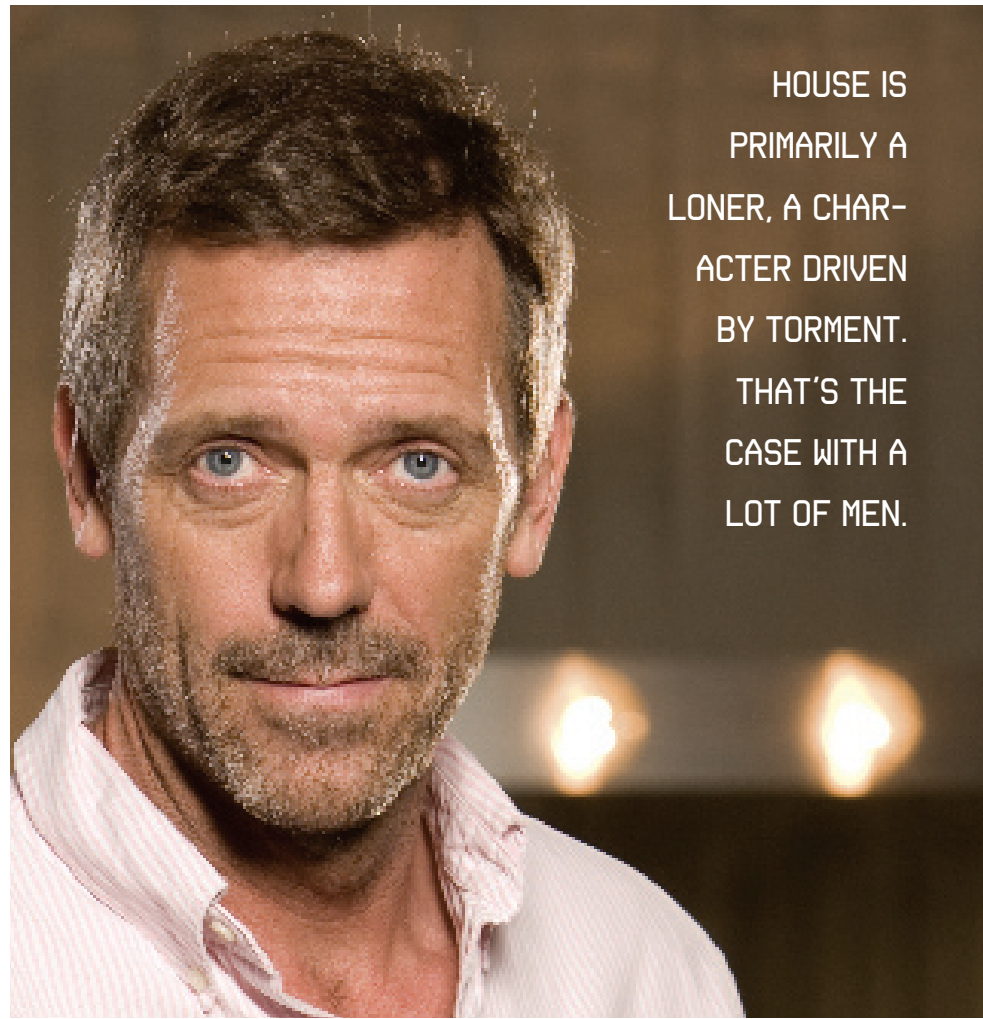
LAURIE: Not really. I think being moody is part of my nature, though looking back, I am much less moody and depressed now than when I was 25. Gradually I've mellowed. I was probably depressed all the time back then. Now it's more occasional.

PLAYBOY: What changed?

LAURIE: It's tiresome to be so wound up in yourself and dark, and it's hard on others. My moodiness probably has a greater effect on other people—the people I live and work with—than it does on me. Nobody likes being around someone who's bemoaning his fate all the time, and I didn't want to be that person. I also understand now what gets me out of my head when I get depressed: physical exercise, doing a chore. I'll hang a picture, let's say. Or perhaps I'll take a toothbrush and clean the spokes on my motorcycle.

PLAYBOY: What about antidepressants?

LAURIE: They have been an answer, yes. They're something I've tried that has helped. They're probably good for my work because they help with confidence,



HOUSE IS
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and confidence is the prerequisite of all successful endeavors. But then again, as I said, I get suspicious if things start to feel too easy or comfortable, so that's not a perfect solution either.

PLAYBOY: Do you worry that being under the spell of medication will overthrow your powers as an actor, particularly when you're playing a curmudgeon like House?

LAURIE: It's a tricky question, isn't it? Pharmaceuticals do raise the question of who we are as human beings. What are moods and feelings if we can change or even do away with them? Does that reduce the essence of who we are? Then again, I tend to overthink these things. I overthink everything, I think. But if your eyesight fails, it's okay to wear glasses or contact lenses, is it not? If you feel cold, you put on a sweater. Is that changing the nature of who you are? No.

I worry sometimes that I've said too much on this subject. It gives the idea that I'm some sort of near basket case who has to be coaxed out of his cave on weekends. I'm okay. Really, I am.

PLAYBOY: Speaking of pharmaceuticals, House sure does love his Vicodin. He doesn't have any close friends or family. He has that famous limp, and he's nasty to just about everyone. Remind us again: What's his appeal?

LAURIE: It's a combination of things.

His being a skilled healer is an attractive quality. We'd all like to feel there is somebody out there who can save us when we're up against it, when our life or our loved ones are in peril. God knows it would be nice if someone out there right now had the answer, and House almost always has the answer.

Also he's free from the social gravity that holds us all down and prevents us from saying what we think and doing what we want. That gravity keeps us down. But because he doesn't seem to obey those laws, because he doesn't care if people like him or approve of him, he's a character who flies. Dreams of flight or weightlessness are very common to us. We all dream of being able to rise and sort of float above the world, and I think that's what House is doing socially.

PLAYBOY: He's also funny.

LAURIE: Right. There's that, too. I find him a very funny character, but it's not just that he's funny. There was a line, a moment of absolute encapsulation for me, from a scene in which House has to interrupt an operation. His colleague Wilson is in the operating theater, and House has to take a patient in to introduce him to Wilson. The first line, to one of the other surgeons, is "Mind if we play through?"

PLAYBOY: That's funny.

LAURIE: I remember thinking at the time that the line was somehow superfluous to the scene, which was actually about Wilson's appraisal of the patient. All it called for was a line to the effect of "Hey, Wilson, meet this guy." But [head writer and show creator] David Shore found exactly the right phrase to characterize House in that moment. Yes, House is dark and tortured and lonely and gruff and all those things, but there's something terrifically connected and exuberant about him. He takes pleasure in language, pleasure in a good joke. He is a believer, as I am, in the power of humor. In a world of death and misery where people are dropping all around him, where fate is often cruel rather than kind, humor is his only meaningful response to existence.

PLAYBOY: Not to make this a "list" question, but what are some of your all-time favorite *House* episodes?

LAURIE: There are good things in lots of them, but as a complete episode, I think "Three Stories" is the best—very ambitious and by and large very successful as these things go. It's the one in which House gives three lectures, and each one tells a different story about human suffering—in particular, leg pain, which is his malady. It's the story of what happened to House's leg, and it's told with great compassion and ingenuity. The show's brilliant writers found a way to tie all three stories together, involve the entire cast and create a fantasy sequence featuring Carmen Electra playing golf. You can't ask for more than that in a single episode.

The other one that comes to mind is also one of the very first we did, called "Autopsy," written by Larry Kaplow. Absolutely exquisite. It's about a little girl suffering from a brain tumor, and everybody in the hospital constantly sings her praises as a brave little angel. But House commits this absolute blasphemy of doubting her bravery. You're not allowed to do that, especially on TV and especially with children. People who suffer from cancer are sanctified. But House being House, he makes the shocking but nonetheless inarguable point that not everybody can be as brave as everybody else. If everyone's a hero, the word has no meaning. I love House for being able to say things like that. It's quite liberating to go against the grain, even as an actor reciting lines. House then goes further and actually starts to doubt the bravery is hers but is rather a symptom, a tumor, perhaps, that's affecting her personality. But the most brilliant element of it is that he's wrong!

PLAYBOY: But House is never wrong.

LAURIE: Precisely. But he is wrong. And it forces him to admit there are eternal qualities and inarguable virtues like bravery. It's moments like those—or like the ones this season when House reveals just

how vulnerable and alone he is, to the point where he sends a private investigator to keep an eye on Wilson, his only real friend—that bring this character alive. Honestly, though, I've seen only about 10 of the 100 episodes we've made, so I'm probably not the best judge.

PLAYBOY: You don't watch the show?

LAURIE: I would if I weren't on it. The attitude and the wit are very much in keeping with my sensibilities, but it's simply too hard to watch myself acting.

PLAYBOY: Does your American accent bother you?

LAURIE: Well, that's certainly difficult to get my head around. I'm still an Englishman to my core. And being British, I'm quite dubious anytime I hear any of my countrymen playing American. I think that's why House doesn't do so well in England. The show has done stupendously well in other European countries. It may even be the number one program in Spain and Germany. But the British are wise to me. Any sort of linguistic affectation drives the English absolutely mad. I mean, we are a nation of Professor Higginses, and we're all out to detect falsehood and artifice in the way English speakers speak.

PLAYBOY: Are there certain words that especially trip you up?

LAURIE: Well, the *r* words are the biggest problem. *Coronary artery*—that's a bad day when that comes up. *Court order*—also bad. *New York*, oddly, is a nightmare. The most difficult is any speech in which I have to repeat a word. It's impossible to maintain the same inflection. So if you watch the show and I'm going on about cancer, listen to the way the word *cancer* changes each time I say it. You'll understand why I can't watch the show.

PLAYBOY: Several shows this season have non-Americans playing Yank parts: Aussie Simon Baker and Englishman Rufus Sewell, to name two. On the big screen Russell Crowe, Tilda Swinton and Cate Blanchett frequently speak American English. Are there not enough American actors to fill those roles?

LAURIE: I think it's because people know too much about actors in their home territory. One of the reasons I got the role of House is, coming from England, I was largely unknown to Americans. There were no preconceived notions or expectations about how I was supposed to look or sound. I was new, and that was attractive. It's also a sign of the End of Days, I believe. Once you start having foreigners do your TV shows, it's pretty much over. The Romans found that to be the case. They had a lot of Australians coming into the Colosseum right before the whole thing started to implode.

PLAYBOY: Very funny. When did you realize *House* would be a hit?

LAURIE: Well, it was very gradual. In the first year we went unnoticed. I mean, nobody watched. It

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Even a
grouch falls
in love

Playing Doctor With House



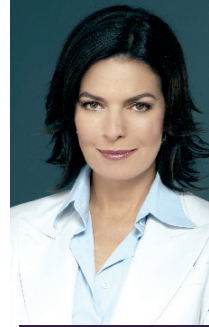
DR. ALLISON CAMERON

Cameron kisses her boss and he kisses back. Things cool when House tells her she always falls in love with charity cases, like himself. When her new beau, Chase, asks if she and House have had sex, she doesn't say yes—or no.



DR. LISA CUDDY

She's House's dream woman (really—he dreams she gives him a striptease). They have a one-night stand, and he's conflicted. But what's the deal between Cuddy and Dr. Wilson? There's more three-way intrigue than any of them can handle.



STACY WARNER

While her husband recovers from porphyria, House's former live-in girlfriend works in the hospital. House wins her back but dumps her. Wilson credits this not to goodwill toward her husband but to House hating his own happiness.

photo TK

PROSTITUTES

When House grumbles things like "Tell that to all the hookers who won't kiss me on the mouth," he's only half joking. And though we haven't seen many House-call girls, his love for escorts is as much a secret as Eliot Spitzer's.



DR. JAMES WILSON

Maybe House is ornery because he doesn't know he's gay for Wilson, who says, "Why not date you? We've known each other for years, we've put up with all kinds of crap from each other, and we keep coming back. We're a couple!"

—Rocky Rakovic

wasn't until we followed *American Idol* in season two that it started to pick up.

PLAYBOY: Did people start saying, "Hey, did I go to high school with you?"

LAURIE: By the second season, people began staring at me, definitely. Or squinting in vague recognition. You suddenly realize the cell phone and the digital camera have changed the nature of what it means to be in public. It's not paparazzi you have worry about anymore as a celebrity. It's everyone.

Then we had some very big episodes, like our Super Bowl episode last year, when 30 million people were watching, and that's when things got really strange. People want to know everything about you. They believe your life has changed. But the truth is, success changes nothing. I think it was General MacArthur who said no piece of news is either as good or as bad as it first appears. That's a wise way to regard fame as well. It's neither as good nor as bad as you expect it to be. Thirty million people watch you on television, but the next day things aren't a different color. They don't taste different. If your back hurt yesterday, your back will hurt today. It may hurt even more.

PLAYBOY: How much have you learned from the show? Do you know the treatment for osteochondritis?

LAURIE: Absolutely not.

PLAYBOY: The cure for fibromyalgia?

LAURIE: I'm not even certain I know what that is.

PLAYBOY: You are a very good actor, indeed.

LAURIE: I might have known those answers a week or two months ago. Or in 2002. But I retain absolutely nothing in the way of medical information. It's frightening, really. The demands on my short-term memory are so great for this show. It's an astonishingly good exercise in keeping my brain fresh and active, but it all goes out of my head 20 minutes after the scene is done.

PLAYBOY: With all those weird diseases on the show, have you become a hypochondriac?

LAURIE: It gives you pause to realize just how close we all are to so many nasty, ravaging ailments. But, touch wood, I've been extremely lucky in that department. We don't deal with too many run-of-the-mill problems on our show, so it often feels like fantasy more than stark reality. We are a drama, after all. Also, if you look at what we do medically, it doesn't really add up. We make a million mistakes. We fix illnesses in 42 minutes that would take eight months to cure in reality, and doctors could never carry out as many procedures as ours do. There would be an MRI technician, a radiologist to interpret the MRI and another doctor to present those findings to the patient. But we can't have a cast of 85 people. It's more satisfying to have these characters do everything rather than show patients waiting around in an office for results. That would be slightly less exciting to watch.

PLAYBOY: About as exciting as watching people try to meet their insurance deductibles.

LAURIE: That's something I do think about, by the way. Coming from England, where we have a very different health care system, I do think about America's in the context of this show. Insurance in many ways is the elephant in the room on *House*. It's something we rarely address, but the question remains: Who's paying for all this treatment? Do all these people really have the insurance to cover these procedures?

PLAYBOY: Right. Because it can't be inexpensive to see Dr. House.

LAURIE: Not at all. I mean, just look at our set—corridors that would be a ward in Britain, the sort of sumptuous and endless well of resources people who come into the hospital seem to have on the show. But of course, they wouldn't really have that. Only on TV do they have that. We have MRI machines coming out of our ears and every luxury to try experimental treatments and every test in the world. The reality is, for millions of Amer-

icans, the situation is quite different. It's not our role to change a system like that, obviously, but I do think about it.

PLAYBOY: Have you had any lasting effects from limping for five seasons?

LAURIE: Yes, I get some shoulder pain or, as I like to call it, the makings of a massive civil suit against Fox. Then again, the rewards of doing my job make up for any physical distress the show may be causing.

PLAYBOY: Since you bring it up, is it ironic that you are paid far more than most real doctors are?

LAURIE: It's a peculiar aspect of what I do, yes. I often think about my father, who was a physician, and how strange it is that I am better rewarded for faking this job than he ever was for doing the real thing. Go figure. It doesn't seem right. He certainly treated more patients in an average week than I do.

PLAYBOY: Did you ever go on rounds with him?

LAURIE: I went on house calls with him. Usually I would sit in the car while he was inside lancing a boil or whatever. I mostly remember being at home answering the phone for him. This was in the days before answering machines. Being my father's son, I sounded like him, and before I could say, "This isn't the doctor," they would jump in and say, "Doctor, thank God! It's all exploded. I can't stop it." And with no obvious juncture for me to step out of the way, I would, you know...

PLAYBOY: Make a diagnosis?

LAURIE: Let's just say I'd reassure them. You're an adolescent. You're craving stimulation. "Well, it sounds like you're doing the right thing there," I'd say. Or "Oh yes, it will probably be all right. Call back if the swelling worsens." As far as I remember, I never lost any patients.

PLAYBOY: Were you a rebellious teenager or just bored?

LAURIE: I think I suffered from the arrogance of youth. When I was 15, I and a group of school friends took a sort of pledge that we wouldn't live beyond 40. We decided we'd kill ourselves. In fact, there were some hard-core members of the group—I wasn't one of them—who wanted to make it 30. "I hope I die before I get old" sort of thing. Talk about arrogance. The arrogance of youth, it trumps all. We felt we knew absolutely everything there was to be known and

the future held only decay and compromise and defeat. We vowed to get out of here before that happened. It's an interesting problem, isn't it? Because it's hard to know whether your 15-year-old self is the true expression of who you are and everything that follows is a sort of diluted, watered-down, compromised version of that, of all those ideas and dreams you've had and that sort of fiery essence you had at 15. Or whether actually you're just a sort of pencil sketch at 15. Which is the true you?

PLAYBOY: Your father didn't live to see you on *House*. What would he have made of a doctor like that?

LAURIE: He would have been appalled. My father was a very polite man, a very gentle, soft-spoken fellow. He did not like arrogance, and he would have been appalled by the way House occasionally conducts himself. Very English, my dad. Reserved in that way. I remember when I wrote my novel, *The Gun Seller*, I dedicated it to him, which I thought he'd be rather pleased by. But suddenly it dawned on me that actually he was, if anything, slightly embarrassed by the fact that he had received a dedication in a book that contained profanity, not to mention sex and violence. He didn't quite know how to cope with that. But I don't know. I refuse to believe he wouldn't have been pleased to see me on *House*. I think he would have been proud. He would have enjoyed seeing all the medical equipment, if nothing else.

PLAYBOY: I take it your father didn't wear his Olympic medal around the house when you were growing up.

LAURIE: No. He did not wear it around the house. In fact, it was quite odd, but he hid it in a sock drawer. I didn't even know about it until I was around 12. I remember I went fishing with my mother on a lake, or the loch, as they call it in Scotland. We got into this boat and my dad took the oars, and—I remember this moment—I rather anxiously said to Mother, "Does he know how to row?" But then I found this medal. Hey! What the hell is this? Very odd. Although it wasn't actually gold. Because this was the first postwar Olympics, gold, like a lot of things, was in very short supply. It was gold leaf over tin.

PLAYBOY: But still.

LAURIE: Absolutely! And later at university he ended up coaching me in rowing.

I rowed with him; we'd sometimes go out on a boat together. He was ferociously strong, a very powerful force to behold.

PLAYBOY: That was at Cambridge, where you also got your first taste of performing.

LAURIE: My first taste came when I was around 13. That's when I realized I quite liked being onstage. I knew especially I liked making people laugh—and girls, most especially. I was scared to death of girls at that age, but onstage—as a king in a school play, for example—I would actually be seen by them, which is to say I wouldn't be completely invisible, as was my normal condition. When I started performing for a living, I always thought of my audience as female. The audience was to be charmed and flirted with, seduced. But in reality my audiences very quickly became male. I'd go onstage, and it would be a group of very sullen-looking blokes with arms folded as if to say, "Okay, then. Whaddya got?" The audience was something that had to be beaten.

PLAYBOY: Your Cambridge cohort and former girlfriend Emma Thompson once described you as "lugubriously sexy, like a well-hung eel." What exactly did she mean?

LAURIE: It's quite a confounding image, isn't it? I mean, are eels even hung at all? Those were blissful days, I must say. We couldn't even imagine a life in Hollywood back then. Hollywood was as distant and impossible as El Dorado. It was all about fun. Watching Emma was like watching the sun or wind or some other elemental force. Her talent even then was inescapable. I remember she once did a monologue as a sort of gushy actress winning an award. I still remember the first line: "This award doesn't really belong to me." We thought, This woman is so gifted, she will win an award like that one day, maybe even an Oscar. That was also around the time I met Stephen Fry.

PLAYBOY: *A Bit of Fry and Laurie* was a huge comedy hit in the U.K., but you two haven't worked together in a while. Any plans for a reunion?

LAURIE: I certainly hope so. It's something we talk about a lot. Neither of us is a very good planner, though, and I think we're both spoken for until, like, 2012, but we have some ideas for the stage, television and movies we think could work really

well. Right now he's putting the finishing touches on a documentary about the U.S. He has traveled to all 50 states. I suspect the people who commissioned the series were half hoping he would do some sort of sardonic satire on the foibles of Americans, but that isn't Stephen's way. I mean, he's capable of being pretty savage, but he's also a very generous and good-hearted soul. He looks to see the good in everything.

PLAYBOY: For those Americans who are unaware, can you please tell us who Ted Cunterblast is?

LAURIE: My God, I haven't thought about that character in a very long time. He was a fictional author we created for a *Fry and Laurie* sketch, and the name got us into a lot of trouble with the controller of BBC Two. He called the producer the next day and said, "They used the word *c-u-n-t!*" And our producer said, "Well, actually, they used a name, *C-u-n-t-erblast*." I wouldn't dream of asserting there was anything clever or witty about that, but for some reason it amused our childish selves at the time.

PLAYBOY: Where do you fall on the famous rift between English and American comedy?

LAURIE: There is an old chestnut English people use to comfort themselves: the notion that, first of all, Americans have no sense of irony. Absolute nonsense. I don't know who came up with that. Demonstrably, manifestly untrue. British comedy is simply more idiosyncratic and a bit less polished, but that's because it's usually done by one or two people rather than a committee of dozens of sitcom writers. When John Cleese did *Fawlty Towers* he and Connie Booth wrote all 20-something of them. Almost all the great landmarks of British television are the product of one or two minds. Basil Fawlty is a magnificent creation because he's a singular creation. As is Captain Mainwaring, from *Dad's Army*, which you probably wouldn't know.

By and large, British people align themselves with the underdog more than Americans do. Americans rather like the idea of being able to top the joke. I remember someone pointing that out in *Animal House*, in the scene when John Belushi is walking up the stairs at a frat party and someone is playing "Kumbaya" on the guitar and he smashes

HOUSE-O-MATIC

WANT TO WIN AN EMMY?
TRY THIS HANDY PLOT GENERATOR



0:00
Opening scene, cue the innocuous:

- Children's birthday party.
- Lover's stroll in the park.
- Woman taking a shower.

2:13

Suddenly, the character (who looks semi-familiar from playing bit parts in movies):

- Has an uncontrollable seizure.
- Hallucinates a giant panda.
- Bleeds from his/her eyes.

6:56

Dean of medicine Dr. Cuddy approaches House, who tells her that she:

- Has "great stems."
- Is showing too much cleavage.
- Has toothpaste on her blouse.

Cuddy doubles House's clinic duties.

13:22

House demands to know if the patient:

- Has taken cheap Mexican drugs.
- Hiked the Appalachian Trail.
- Had sex with Siamese twins.

Regardless of the answer, House says the patient is lying and pops a Vicodin.

18:17

House's team of resident doctors (yep, at least four for one case) concludes that it's:

- Influenza.
- Irregular heartbeat.
- Herpes.

27:38

They're wrong and the patient flatlines, developing even worse symptoms. House blames the doctor who came up with the diagnosis because he/she is:

- Not Caucasian.
 - A lesbian.
 - An idiot.
- House pops another Vicodin.

36:29

Like all good doctors, House orders his staff to break into the patient's home to look for leads. Cancer specialist/BFF Wilson thinks it's:

- Cancer.
- Cancer.
- A Tumor (probably malignant).

48:11

The patient shows even worse symptoms and edges toward death. House:

- Infects himself with patient's blood.
 - Runs invasive tests on patient's next of kin.
 - Tries maverick surgery involving a power tool.
- Vicodin break.

52:35

Things are bleak. Everyone agrees the patient will die. Wilson buys House a cup of coffee. A fly buzzes by. House looks at the fly and—aha!—suddenly all is clear. The patient has:

- Tennis elbow!
- East Indian donovanitis!
- Blah blah blahlitis!

59:04

Success. Wilson forgives House for something. Cuddy creates more sexual tension. The patient recovers. House celebrates by:

- Kicking a neighborhood dog.
- Playing his piano (terribly).
- Snorting Vicodin off a hooker's breasts.

the guitar. If that had been an English film, the guitarist would have been the hero. That would have been Norman Wisdom. Belushi would have come off as a brutish, thuggish lout.

PLAYBOY: How important was it for you to make it in the States?

LAURIE: It wasn't at all. No disrespect, but in England there's an element of treachery in going abroad to ply one's trade. It's rather frowned upon. There were two beacons on that front: Peter Cook and Dudley Moore. Both were fantastically talented, but Peter stayed in London and Dudley left. Because he left and because he lived in glorious California, Moore was widely assumed to have made a deal with the devil that involved beautiful blonde women and beaches and sunshine and Ferraris. Peter maintained the slightly drizzly temperament we revere in England. Moore was perceived as a traitor.

PLAYBOY: Do you worry people in England say that about you now?

LAURIE: Not really, but it's because my life is still in England, even though I have a house in Los Angeles. It would have been different if I had relocated my entire family here, but my kids go to school and university there, and my wife still lives there. I suppose I have too much of a Presbyterian streak from my parents ever to rejoice in the fruits of my labors and give over completely to whatever it was Dudley Moore succumbed to. I've actually always rather enjoyed Los Angeles. It's partly to do with what people tell you to expect. People said, "Los Angeles is the most terrible place of all. You'll go crazy. You won't last a month. You'll be going out of your mind, it's so superficial." Well, I am superficial, so it suits me down to the ground. For instance, I like fast cars and motorcycles, and there's no better place to be for that.

PLAYBOY: It must drive Fox crazy that you risk life and limb. Have they tried to add a no-adrenaline clause to your contract?

LAURIE: Fortunately, I signed the contract before anybody was watching the show, so they couldn't be bothered whether I wiped out or not. I hope it doesn't bother them too much that I drive my motorcycle to work, for instance, and generally enjoy speeding around the hills of L.A. But I maintain that no one has a greater interest in my not falling off than I do. I claim supremacy in that area.

PLAYBOY: By the way, are you the guy on the 405 freeway zipping by at 80 miles an hour while we sit in traffic?

LAURIE: I may be that guy. Are you the guy in the four-ton SUV who's texting? I mean, I have had moments when I actually wondered about the way I'm going to die. To see some bleached blonde putting on eyeliner at 60 miles an hour in her Humvee without any concept of the forces involved in controlling that vehicle or its capabilities or limitations! None whatsoever. It's absolutely amazing to me. I pass an accident in Los Angeles at

NO FLAT LINES

No one pulls
off better
one-liners
than Gregory
House.
Here's the
snarky proof



least twice a week. In London—and I'm not saying we do things better over there; I don't believe in that—but I'd say it's about twice a year. Here people just cannon into one another almost as a sport. It's just a gigantic pinball machine. Dry sunny days, no traffic, and some cars on its roof. I don't think it's America. I think it's limited to Los Angeles, but it makes the ride to work interesting.

PLAYBOY: Has it been a strain on your marriage to be so far away from home? What kind of husband are you?

LAURIE: Wow. I have no idea, having no idea what to compare it with. I do my best, though I suspect it's not great a lot of the time. I don't know. I've probably created a fair amount of disruption and frustration for the family, but my wife is very grounded, and things could be worse. I once met a guy who worked on a nuclear submarine. He had to check a box on a piece of paper, saying whether he wanted to be informed in the event that something horrible happened back home, because if something horrible did happen, he wasn't getting off that sub. Something did happen to a friend of his, and he didn't hear about it until they returned to land. At least I don't have to make that choice. I know if something happens, I can always fly home.

PLAYBOY: Does it surprise you that people

"Seizures are fun to watch, boring to diagnose."

"Are you comparing me to God? I mean, it's great, but so you know, I've never made a tree."

"My friends called me the Cane. Even before I messed up my leg."

"Physician-patient confidentiality protects me from annoying conversations."

"Here's to women. Can't live with them, can't kill them and tell the neighbors they're stripping in Atlantic City."

"CT.... That's, like, short for MRI, right? Excellent. Well, I guess that saves us a lot of time."

"Union rules. I can't check out this guy's seeping gonorrhoea this close to lunch."

"I've moved past threesomes. I'm now into foursomes. If someone backs out, then you've still got a threesome. If two people back out, you're still having sex. You'd be amazed. Even if three people—"

"Don't worry, it's treatable. Being a bitch, though...nothing we can do about that."

"No, if you talk to God, you're religious. If God talks to you, you're psychotic."

"I can be a jerk to people I haven't slept with. I am that good."

view House—and you—as a sex symbol?

LAURIE: Completely. It's utterly absurd. Weird. Deranged. I can't explain it.

PLAYBOY: How do you explain it?

LAURIE: House is a sexy character in his own way. You know, he's that sort of wounded genius. There's a *Beauty and the Beast* element and a bit of the *Phantom of the Opera* thrown in. House is a scarred figure hiding in the upper reaches of the opera house. I can see there's something attractive about that. Women want to fix him. For some reason women find that terribly sexy.

PLAYBOY: But he doesn't get a ton of action. Why doesn't House have more sex?

LAURIE: I think he does want that, and I think he's getting it somewhere, somehow. I hesitate to speculate on the liaisons he has when he's not at Princeton-Plainsboro. But he's primarily a loner, a character driven by torment. It's hard to get close to someone like that. But that's the case with a lot of men.

PLAYBOY: Men are loners by nature?

LAURIE: I was having a chat on the set recently; we were discussing what the bathroom stands for besides the obvious function of what the bathroom stands for. Most of the men agreed the bathroom was sort of a refuge, a place of "Oh, world, please go away," whatever that may mean—either the conversation or the worry or the phone call you don't

want to take. It's a sanctuary where you can retreat and silence the world. By contrast, most of the women were thinking, I go to the bathroom because I want to chat with other women, then they rush to get back to the table because they fear they're missing something. Men and women are very different in how they relate to other human beings. Except on Facebook, of course.

PLAYBOY: What do you mean?

LAURIE: Well, I was with a group of people the other night who were comparing—I don't have a Facebook page—their own Facebooks or however you put it. "Oh, I've got 450," one said. "Oh, I've got 600," said another. It turned out they were talking about friends—Facebook friends. Now, I don't think I've met 450 people in my life. I certainly can't keep track of them, and I certainly don't want to stay in touch with that many people. I don't know how on earth you do that. I realized very quickly I am too old for this level of social engagement.

PLAYBOY: You're about to turn 50—

LAURIE: It sounds so ominous when you put it like that.

PLAYBOY: What are some things you wish you knew earlier in life?

LAURIE: To tell you the truth, the older I get, the less I know. I keep meeting people, both older and younger, who seem to have accrued so much more knowledge or expertise or certainty about who they are and the jobs they do. I just marvel at it. I don't know how they get that certain about what they're doing. I certainly don't have that. I look back on what we've done on *House* and think, Wow, it's like we've come through a minefield. One wrong move, one bad casting decision, one story line that didn't work and the air would have gone out of the thing. People would have started to whisper, "Oh, that show? It's not very good." And suddenly we'd be canceled. I don't know how anything works, frankly. I'm quite conscious of the fact that no secrets are being revealed to me with age.

Which is not to say I don't have things I want to learn and do as I look ahead. For example, I had my first earthquake the other day. We were shooting, the camera was rolling, and everything started to sway. The lamps started to move. I loved it. I *loved* it. It passed quickly, and we were back to work. But let's say that had been, you know, the big one, if that were the end. I can't tell you how many things I would regret not having done. The list would have a billion things on it, a billion things. I do feel it's something about, I suppose, my infantile nature. I don't really feel as if I've got going yet. Like so many eternally adolescent males, I still feel I'm going to live another thousand years and there's plenty of time.

PLAYBOY: But then the earth starts rocking and—

LAURIE: Exactly. You're shaken out of your dream. I'm deluded, obviously,

because, as you say, I am approaching 50. But part of me still fears, for instance, that I haven't chosen my profession yet. I certainly haven't worked out who I am. I haven't worked out what to do with my life. I haven't made half the choices and decisions I want to make. It's insane, I know, but that's sort of how I felt. I think that's what I like about boxing: You're forced to live intensely.

PLAYBOY: Boxing? Are you any good?

LAURIE: I'm hopeless, but I love it. I absolutely love it. Well, I sort of love it. But it's love mixed with fear. Not fear of physical harm, because unless you do it repeatedly and get hit in the head a lot, you'll survive. It's more the fear of being humiliated, which sort of messes with your perceptions of, I suppose, maleness. To question your maleness is a very intense experience. But there's something else. When I'm making a television show, eight months go by just like that. It's a wonderful thing to have a completely opposite experience, which is to get into the ring for three minutes and have time essentially stop. You cannot believe how long three minutes is until you've spent time in a boxing ring. If we could live our lives as intensely as one does in those three minutes, it would be like living for 10,000 years. I love that feeling.

PLAYBOY: Do you ever wonder where you would be if *House* hadn't come along?

LAURIE: Yes, I do. I mean, I was aware of the fact that this was my shot. Not a shot at just anything but a shot at doing an American network television show—to play the lead on one, anyway. Because I was already too old for that. I think if their dreams had come true, Fox would have found some chiseled fellow of 28 who could have kept going for 20 years, for one thing. That would have suited their demographics. So this was my shot. I thought, If it doesn't work, fine. I'll be playing the neighbor or the kindly uncle or Mr. Smithers, the geography teacher, but I won't be the main guy. Fortunately, things worked out differently.

PLAYBOY: How would you like to see things end up for *House*? What do you imagine he'll be like in the final episode?

LAURIE: Happy. In a relationship with a kindred spirit. Understood. But if it doesn't happen, it's probably just as well. See, I have these practical theories about television, which is that characters don't grow and change. They can't, or you wouldn't have a series. *Columbo* didn't grow and change; he just solved more stuff. My theory with *House* is he'll continue to be separated from joy right to the end. That's just who he is.

PLAYBOY: And what about you?

LAURIE: No, no. Joy is absolutely the essential thing for me. It has become my obsession to find it, to hold on to it. One of the biggest things I fear is happiness. Fear is probably my only obstacle to it right now. I have a very good life. I

am fortunate in so many ways. Now the secret is simply to delight in every breath and every step. Oh my God, that was a Sting song! I can't believe I'm ending this on a Sting song.

