

insurance company, friends. A million forms to fill out and a million people that I don't know how to deal with. I'm holding your hand for hours while people come in and out acting as if I've already lost you. I want to throw furniture out the window. My whole life has changed in an instant. I don't know if I'm alone in the world. Do you know how that feels? I don't know if my son will ever walk or be able to live with me. I don't know whose fault it is. I should have been with you instead of working on a Saturday. And you shouldn't have driven in that damn weather when you were . . .

SHANNON: *(Beat.)* No . . . I shouldn't have.

ROB: I didn't mean . . . It's just . . . I hear the "if-onlys" in my head too. And all you can do is tell me what I haven't done. What I should have done.

SHANNON: I'm sorry. I guess you're pretty angry with me.

ROB: I don't want to be.

SHANNON: No. *(Beat.)* But you are all the same. I'd be furious at you too, if it were the other way around.

ROB: You would?

SHANNON: *(Nods.)* But the thing is, Rob, I would never put Michael's life in that kind of danger. You can think I'm stupid for driving in that weather. You can think whatever you want about my abilities, but please know that I was not drunk, not even tipsy. Because if I were, I wouldn't have gotten into that car. Not in a million years. *(Beat.)* Do you believe me? I need you to believe me.
(She looks to him for an answer.)

BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE

Tony and Marissa, 30s, have been married for some time. Marissa's quirky hypochondria and obsessive-compulsive behavior has become worse since having their baby a year ago. Lately, her behavior has become less quirky and more harmful to their relationship. In the last few weeks, Tony has received some devastating news about his health. He has Multiple Sclerosis. He cannot bring himself to share the news with Marissa, however, because he believes she will fall apart. Tonight, Tony, who is completely frustrated with Marissa, reveals everything he has been suppressing.

TONY: What are you doing? We're going to be late again.

MARISSA: So we're late. Better to be late than burn down the house. I think I might have left the stove on.

TONY: You didn't. Trust me. Besides, I'm sure Patty will notice. She's a good baby-sitter.

MARISSA: I didn't say she wasn't good. But she's upstairs with Timmy. She won't be anywhere near the kitchen for hours.

TONY: This is the third time we're meeting them late for dinner.

MARISSA: So what? They'll just get a drink. I want to check the stove is all.

TONY: *(He stands in front of the door.)* No.

MARISSA: What? *(Looks at him.)* Okay, I know what you are going to say. What's the big deal? You know I'm like this. I've always been like this.

TONY: Just don't. Okay? Don't. Start by just not doing it once. Stop the thought.

MARISSA: What do you mean, "Stop the thought"? It's no big deal. I just feel like I left the stove on.

TONY: When would you have left the stove on? You didn't cook anything today.

MARISSA: That's not true. I made lunch.

TONY: Yeah, a veggie burger. In the microwave.

MARISSA: But I made tea at some point. I used the kettle.

TONY: Hours ago. We would have noticed if the stove's flame was on.

MARISSA: Maybe I left it on low. That's easy to do without noticing. It's really not that big of a deal. I'll just run in there and make sure it's not on. This conversation is taking longer than if I just checked. Now, you go get the car.

TONY: No. I would let you check it, but you already checked it once. So, no.

MARISSA: No I didn't. When?

TONY: Right before I went to put my jacket on. I saw you in there.

MARISSA: Well, I didn't check it. I maybe looked in that general direction.

TONY: You touched every knob, Marissa. I saw you.

MARISSA: Well, I want to be careful. Besides, you know how I am about things like this. You knew that before you married me. If it bugged you so much . . .

TONY: It's gotten worse.

MARISSA: No, it hasn't. Maybe you've just gotten more sick of it.

TONY: Well, that's true. I have. All this energy wasted on stupid things.

MARISSA: It's not stupid! It could be very serious. The one time I don't check is the one time it'll be on and you know it. So let me just go check it once. Patty's going to hear us and get concerned.

TONY: (*Blocking her way.*) So what if she hears us?! I hate that. Worrying all the time about tiny details. Little nothing things that don't really matter that you preoccupy yourself with. It makes me concerned about what real things you're blocking out?

MARISSA: Oh my God. What are you talking about? There's nothing I'm blocking out.

TONY: Are you unhappy with me?

MARISSA: No. I'm not unhappy with you. Of course not. This is ridiculous. Besides, this stupid habit of mine didn't materialize from nothing.

TONY: I know it didn't materialize from nothing. But you only left the stove burning once in your whole life. You left one pot of eggs boiling. So the hell what—so what?! It was once—one time.

MARISSA: I could have burned down the whole apartment complex.

TONY: But you didn't. And there is nothing you can do about that event now, so you can stop beating yourself up for it. The point is that you're so careful now that you could never do that again.

MARISSA: Oh, no. Don't say never. I'm pretty absentminded.

TONY: What if I told you that I would take full responsibility if the stove were left on tonight?

MARISSA: It doesn't matter who's responsible. We have a son upstairs, remember? The point is that I don't want anyone to get hurt.

TONY: That's not the point anymore. The point now is that you *have* to check it. And it's not for anyone's welfare exactly. And you don't have to just check the stove. You check the sink in the bathroom to make sure the faucet isn't on. And that light switch. I know you do. I've seen you when you think I'm not watching. Then you check the shower. And then you walk over to the candles, that haven't been lit for days, to make sure they're put out.

MARISSA: Well, remember Mrs. Hershel with the potpourri? She had no idea. She lost everything.

TONY: Ha! There are all kinds of mistakes and accidents out there, Marissa. There're undetected gas leaks and carbon dioxide poisons and knives left in wrong places. There are dangerous chemicals left near open flames. Faulty wiring that you would have discovered had you had the electrician come in that one more time. The whole house is a horror if you let it be.

MARISSA: Oh, you're exaggerating about me.

TONY: Am I? And it's not just about the house anymore. Last week do you know how many tests you asked to have run on Timmy?

MARISSA: *(Beat.)* Well, it's better to be safe. I've been reading.

TONY: Don't read, please!

MARISSA: You don't think it's important to be up on health issues? Look, I know you think I'm nuts on the lead poisoning thing but this house could be full of it.

TONY: No, I think health issues are very important. But sometimes, it doesn't matter how careful you are. Things just happen. Do you know Dr. Harrison pulled me aside and asked me if you were obsessive-compulsive?

MARISSA: What? He did not!

TONY: Yes, he did. He didn't blurt it out like that. He said he was concerned with the number of tests you wanted run. Timmy is a perfectly healthy baby . . . and he felt you seemed to be overly concerned about everything. Very casually he asked if you'd ever been tested for obsessive-compulsive behavior. He said it was more common than people think and often caused by anxiety. His mother-in-law has that same problem. I didn't know what to say. He's not the first to bring it up though.

MARISSA: Oh great. Great! Who else?

TONY: My mother. Your sister.

MARISSA: What? She was joking. We just like to joke about it. I'm just picky.

TONY: She wasn't joking. She told me it started when your father lost his job years ago. Right around when he started drinking.

MARISSA: Well, I'm not going to say I wasn't stressed out then. God, everybody's diagnosing me. This is really something. All over a stove.

TONY: I've noticed that ever since you went back to work, things have gotten worse. I've heard there are medications for that kind of thing.

MARISSA: No, no, no. I won't do medication. And it's not like I want to go back to work. I don't want to miss any part of anything Timmy does right now. These years you can't have back. You understand that.

TONY: Yeah, of course. I wish you didn't have to. But we need your insurance right now. I wish I were making enough so you didn't have to go back.

MARISSA: Well, maybe someday soon we'll win the lottery and neither of us will have to go to work ever again. *(Pause.)* What's the matter?

TONY: I think I need you to get help, Marissa.

MARISSA: *(Beat.)* Help? Where is this coming from all of sudden? Help because I check the stove too often? And because I'm a worrisome first mother?

TONY: Yes.

MARISSA: *(Pause.)* You know what would help me? If my husband were home a little more often in the evening instead of out with his buddies all the time. Or that he didn't seem preoccupied with his painting business or whatever has him staring at walls for the last few weeks. Or that he'd make love to me without me having to ask. I don't know! Maybe I am crazy. Maybe I'm a psycho like you all think, but I won't go on medication. And I'm sorry I'm not a deadpan person like you about everything—that I get emotional and worried. Frankly, that may be why you can't get the business going, Tony. Ever think of that? There is a bit of passion needed to make things happen. Even me saying that isn't pissing you off, is it? You just—you just take it. Maybe it's you who needs help instead of me. Now, if you want to go to dinner right now, you go right ahead, but I'm not. You can just tell them I'm sick. It isn't even an excuse, according to everyone's diagnosis apparently. I can see by your face that you think I'm acting irrational. But don't I always? So screw you!

TONY: I have M.S.

MARISSA: *(Beat.)* What did you say?

TONY: I have Multiple Sclerosis.
MARISSA: That isn't the least bit funny.
TONY: I wouldn't joke about this. That's where I've been in the evenings. I wasn't out with the guys. I was at the hospital having all kinds of tests run. It's also why I'm so concerned about you lately. About you getting help. I need you to be strong, not worried. And I don't want Timmy panicking about everything as he grows up.
MARISSA: I can't believe this. How come you didn't tell me? How long have you known?
TONY: Two weeks.
MARISSA: Two weeks?!
TONY: Before that, Dr. Shapiro thought it might be some other neurological problem, but then I had numbness in my face and hands. The M.R.I. showed M.S.
MARISSA: So why didn't you tell me all of this?
TONY: At first, I thought it was nothing. No need to tell you. I mean, you get crazy when I go for a routine blood test. I didn't want you to get nervous over nothing. And then, I wanted to make sure first.
MARISSA: So it's for sure?
TONY: *(Nods.)* I didn't even plan on telling you tonight. It just slipped out. I'm sorry, I was afraid to tell you.
MARISSA: Why?
TONY: Because . . . I don't know . . . maybe there wouldn't be room for me to feel my feelings I guess. That all the room would be taken up by you. With your fears and your worries about me. That I couldn't feel my own loss because I'd be spending all my time comforting you.
MARISSA: *(Pause.)* Wow. I sound pretty selfish.
TONY: I don't mean on purpose. But right now I need you to have complete and utter faith, Marissa, no doubts, no worries. To believe I can get better. I started medication this week. There hasn't been much change yet. I've been staring at walls for days because I'm trying to figure out how

to run a business when I have M.S. John said he'd help me out. He's the only one who knows about this.
MARISSA: You didn't tell anyone in your family either? *(He shakes his head no.)* Why were you doing this alone? *(Hugs him hard.)* I love you, Tony. And I'm so sorry you thought you needed to do this alone.
TONY: I don't think you're selfish. I don't think you choose to worry.
MARISSA: *(She hugs him harder.)* You are the man I waited for my whole life. I won't lose you. I'm strong when I need to be.
TONY: I know.
MARISSA: You are meant to have a long, long life, Tony. And you will. I know it. I believe it.
TONY: I'm so scared. I've never been so scared in my whole life. *(Marissa holds him and nods.)* And the worst is I don't want Timmy to grow up without me.
MARISSA: He won't! We'll just follow exactly what the doctor prescribes. And I think we should find someone who specializes in this.
TONY: No reading up on this.
MARISSA: No, I will read everything. Not to worry me, but because we need all the information we can. *(He looks unsure.)* If I were sick, would you expect me to go it alone? *(Beat.)* Would you? *(Tony looks to her.)* I know your fears now . . . about me. And I understand. I'll make an appointment Monday to see someone. I won't promise I'll go on medication, but I will consider it. I just never knew how much . . . I didn't realize it affected you too. Now I do.
TONY: You are the love of my life, Marissa J. Proust.
MARISSA: Now, let's go to dinner. There's no need to stay home and mope. We'll call them from the road. We can say we were having baby-sitter delays. And then tomorrow, we'll spend the day talking about all the things we haven't talked about. I'll make you brunch.
TONY: *(Smiles.)* I just might attack you.

MARISSA: Let's hope. Now, let's go. Let's go and put it away for now.

TONY: What about the stove?

MARISSA: Well, if it were on, I'm pretty sure the house would be burned to the ground by now.

TONY: (*Looking up at it.*) Doesn't seem to be the case. (*She nods. He takes her hands gently.*) Try not to think about it. (*She nods.*)

MARISSA: You too.

THE HOOD'S A BETTER PLACE

Kyra, late 20s, and Eddie, 30s, are former lovers from a rough neighborhood on the North Side of Chicago. Eddie, a lifetime car thief, is sort of a Robin-of-the-Hood. He steals cars and commits petty crimes but is considered a hero in the neighborhood for keeping away the dealers. When Kyra was in high school, he saved her from a terribly abusive family situation. He also taught her the ways of a life of crime. By the time she was twenty-two, she had tired of this lifestyle. Though they were engaged, she decided to leave Eddie and his line of business. Strangely enough, she chose to become a cop. Today, the two lovers meet up under different circumstances. A murder has taken place—a notorious drug dealer from the “hood” is dead. One of Eddie’s neighborhood kids is being charged. Eddie has been called in for questioning as well. Kyra, who has just been promoted and moved to a precinct in her old stomping ground, has been asked to informally get as much out of her former fiancé as possible.

KYRA: (*Feigning surprise.*) Oh my God. What are you doin' here? (*Throws up her hands a little.*) What am I saying?

EDDIE: No, good question. I always ask myself that when I end up in this smelly precinct.

KYRA: Well, you might not end up here if you kept your hands off other people's things.

EDDIE: Hey, I never touch their things. Their cars—yes, but not their *things*. It's a victimless crime as far as I'm concerned. They get their insurance money. I take away their parking nightmare. It's sort of like a service. I should be paid, not charged.

KYRA: Yes, I remember your thinking on it. So . . . Is that why you're here?