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Chapter 3
Punishment

MUSIC: (FADE IN) BLIZZARD OF OSBORN THEME

NARRATOR (V.O)

You're listening to The Blizzard of Osborn by Michael Sheen Cuddy.
Chapter 3: Punishment.

MUSIC: BLIZZARD OF OSBORN THEME (FADE OUT).

Scene One: Int. Hospital – Day.

SOUND: Hospital sounds (phones, intercoms, etc.)

SOUND: Prerecorded telephone voice

ELLIE

I can't get through to my husband either.

MARJORIE

Good luck calling a military base.

NARRATOR

Ellie wanted to curse but she was at work, within earshot of at least one co-worker who was sure to take offense.

RAJIV

The radio just said they're closing the schools early, sending kids

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home ASAP.

ELLIE

The power's out all over the south side. They can't just dump kids at home and expect them to wait around in a cold dark house. Damn it!

MARJORIE

If you're so concerned about your daughter maybe you shouldn't have sent her to school today.

NARRATOR

Ellie drilled a look into Marjorie, stopping herself from shouting the words that boomed in her head.

MUSIC: (tension)

Scene Two: Ext. Cole residence – Night.

NARRATOR

The garage door didn't budge, and squeezing the key fob button harder didn't help. So Ellie got out of her car and manually lifted the door.

SOUND: car door closing

SOUND: garage door opening

NARRATOR (cont.)

The overhead lamp in the garage was also dead. Now she was glad to have the key ring Frank had given to her, a piece of corporate swag he'd picked up at an electronics trade show. She used its tiny but super bright LED to guide herself into the side entrance.

Scene Three: Int. Cole residence – Night.

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NARRATOR (cont.)

From the cabinet under the sink she grabbed a box of candles and safety matches.

SOUND: cabinet drawer sliding open

NARRATOR (cont.)

She lit two candles, set them on the kitchen table, then got a flashlight from a drawer.

SOUND: match lighting

She set up several more candles in the living room and lit them as well.

SOUND: match lighting

NARRATOR (cont.)

Good thing there was a radio, one that ran on batteries, out in the garage. The local AM station, running on its emergency generator, was still broadcasting.

SOUND: radio sounds, tuner dial searching for stations

NARRATOR (cont.)

Along with AM, FM and shortwave frequencies, the radio, another one of Frank's "toys," included a police band, which Ellie tuned in.

SOUND: police band radio

NARRATOR (cont.)

But its mumbled jargon and cryptic codes distressed her even more, a case of partial information being worse than none at all. What she could gather—reports of multi-vehicle accidents all over the county—was nerve-racking, especially since she couldn't do a thing about it.

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SOUND: radio voice (male): The County Sherrif's Office has issued a travel ban for all of Montrail County.

NARRATOR (cont.)

Her seventh attempt to call the school ended when the line went dead.

SOUND: phone dial tone

NARRATOR (cont.)

Now she couldn't even reach the automated answering service to leave another message that got no response. She checked the radio again.

SOUND: radio voice (female): Phone and power lines are down throughout the region due to the massive build-up of freezing ice and snow.

NARRATOR (cont.)

She had no idea when Cassie would get home, no idea when they put her on the bus and sent her out into the storm.

ELLIE

(+> reverb to emulate interior monologue)

What if Cassie's bus got in one of those accidents? Why didn't the school just cancel classes this morning? They knew a blizzard was coming. Even if the storm had fizzled out the kids would have missed one day of school, no big deal. Instead, they risk innocent lives? For what?

NARRATOR

Ellie pulled back the window curtain in the living room.

SOUND: curtains pulling open

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NARRATOR (cont.)

She couldn't see more than a few feet out the window, snow swirling in every direction. The streetlamp in front of their house, normally a beacon in a snowstorm, was invisible. Same with the neighbors' houses, their windows ordinarily a comforting display of softly glowing rectangles, now were all blacked out.

MUSIC: (tension)

NARRATOR (cont.)

She felt a rush of claustrophobia, a panic to run. But seeing what was outside kept her inside. To dash out there would be crazy, she'd go snow-blind in moments, wander astray in the slashing snow or fall blind into the ice-choked river. She let go the curtain and stepped back from the window.

ELLIE

(+> reverb to emulate interior monologue)

When in God's name will they be home?

MUSIC: (tension building)

NARRATOR

It was ten after seven when Frank's Jeep Patriot rumbled up the driveway.

SOUND: engine revving

NARRATOR (cont.)

Ellie grabbed her flashlight and went out to guide Frank through the blizzard.

MUSIC: (tension building)

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NARRATOR

His cell phone still dead, Frank picked up the land line which was also dead.

SOUND: phone dial tone

NARRATOR (cont.)

He turned the radio up, hoping for an update on school closings, the whereabouts of their daughter's school bus.

SOUND: radio sounds ("Thunder 106.1...")

NARRATOR (cont.)

In between "New Country" hits and earnest appeals to pray for quick deliverance from the "worst blizzard to hit Osborn in over one-hundred years," the weather and traffic updates only fueled their anxiety.

SOUND: radio voice (female): Another major collision involving a tractor trailer and multiple cars has resulted in...

ELLIE

I knew it -- I just knew it. I had a bad feeling this morning. I should have followed my hunch, kept Cassie at home.

FRANK

Ellie, don't beat yourself up, this isn't your fault.

ELLIE

Frank, are we just gonna sit here and do nothing?

FRANK

What can we do? We can't drive out there in this storm. Power lines are down, trees are down, cars are spinning out of control, we're stuck!

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ELLIE

I never thought I'd hear you say that, just sit there and say 'we're stuck'.

FRANK

Ellie, listen to me: this is driving me crazy too. But right now, right this minute, just trying anything for the sake of doing something could backfire. Jumping in the car and going out to search for Cassie could get us killed. Then where is Cassie?

ELLIE

Oh God! What the hell are we doing here anyway? Why did we come to this god-forsaken place?

FRANK

You know why.

ELLIE

Those bastards! Those racist bastards did this to us! This is our punishment. Those ignorant white trash crackers are laughing their asses off down in Biloxi right now.

SOUND: radio in background (actual ND FM radio clip)

NARRATOR

Frank sat on the couch, elbows on knees, hands holding his head. A flurry of emotions swirled through his mind, things he could say but knew they'd only make Ellie angrier.

SOUND: radio sounds ("Thunder 106.1...")

NARRATOR (cont.)

The tribunal had been a farce, a kangaroo court. His worst suspicions had been confirmed: lodging a formal complaint against a superior

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officer and testifying against him would tank his career. In good conscience he knew it was the right thing to do, reporting flagrant sexual harassment and supporting the powerless Marcia Vaughan. But he also knew how the real world works, the world of military hierarchy, where you turn a blind eye to certain things. A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do. A roving eye is no crime, it's in the genes. Biology. Chemistry. Testosterone....

Still. There's a line. And when someone goes over the line—especially when they go over the line repeatedly—after a point something's gotta give. Somebody's gotta stand up. Somebody's got to put aside their comfort, their security, sometimes even their career, to protect the innocent from harm....

Ellie stood up and walked out of the room. Frank thought about going after her to try and calm her down. But what could he say? Trying to put a better face on things right now would only insult her. Their daughter was out there somewhere in a killer storm—God knows where—unreachable, stuck in a school bus at best, at worst.... He shut that thought down. Ellie was right: this was their punishment: getting transferred from Biloxi, Mississippi to Osborn, North Dakota. It was a lesson in towing the line, keeping a low profile, not rocking the boat.

The tribunal couldn't court-martial Frank, he'd done nothing illegal. Furthermore, there was enough evidence and corroborating witness support to introduce at least an element of doubt into the defendant's claims. At the very least the sexual predator Hardigan came under a cloud of suspicion. In the end he wasn't charged. He was reprimanded and warned to steer clear of "fraternizing with female subordinates."

Six weeks after the tribunal Frank got his transfer orders. He wasn't surprised, he'd expected them. Osborn, North Dakota was the twisted joke. Top brass knew it would sting. They knew Frank was born and raised along the Mississippi Gulf coast, that he had extended family in the Biloxi area. It wouldn't even surprise Frank if some of the anonymous judges had learned of his wife's and daughter's love of the Gulf coast beaches, and figured that of all the places they could

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exile him to, Osborn, North Dakota would be the coldest, most remote, socially and culturally barren. So they did.

SOUND: radio in foreground (actual ND FM radio clip)

NARRATOR

Ellie came back into the living room and tossed onto the coffee table a sheaf of 8" x 10" glossy black and white photos.

SOUND: papers landing on desk

NARRATOR

These were the pictures Frank had taken of their vandalized garage back in Biloxi. When he discovered the spray painted slur on his garage he got his camera, knowing he'd need evidence of the damage; merely claiming his property had been vandalized wouldn't stand up in court, it would be dismissed as "hearsay." Frank brought the photos to a legal advisor, photos that showed the rear wall of his garage. Sprayed all over the wall in large crude letters was the ignorantly misspelled N-word. And below that, a hateful one-word modifier: RAT.

MUSIC: (Tension build)(FADE IN / OUT)

MUSIC: Blizzard Theme (FADE IN / OUT)

NARRATOR

Next, Cassie seems to wake up on the school bus, but one look out the window shows that she can't be in North Dakota any longer.

[end Chapter 3]