

Stunning

A Monologue

The narrator can be male or female. (*Simply change the word father for mother etc.*)

Stunning. This view before me, Scafell Pike rising gloriously from her surrounding mountains, reflecting perfectly in Wastwater Lake, framed by a clear blue sky. I admit it's bracing cold but still I sit and admire such beauty. We would bring her here as a child, her mother and I, she used to love how peaceful it was and enjoyed breaking the silence with her loudest screams, then laughing like a loon as the mountains returned her echoed screams. In the summer months, we would often bring a picnic and sit on the beach. The 'beach' to us was a short stretch of shingle along the shore of the lake, a five-minute walk from the road. Her mother would lay out the blanket, set out the contents of the cool box as Sophie and I dared each other to paddle in the lake, see whose feet can brave the cold water the longest. A little stream runs into the lake, Sophie once marvelled in disbelief as I explained the water was so clean and fresh you can drink it right there. So I proved the point, dangling a tin cup into the clear flowing water and taking a big swig, the chill of the water aching my teeth. For several visits since, Sophie would bring her little Disney bottle to fill up and take her mountain water home to drink at school. I trained her to skim stones across the lakes surface, with little wind and the flattest, smoothest stone it might just reach the far shore. Of course, the lake was far too big for that, but damn did she try! (*beat.*) So there is my reflection, right there is this scene I've set myself in. Such stunning beauty, but so cold.

'Stunning.' That's what the judges called my beautiful daughter, my pride and joy as they crowned her Miss Cumbria 1999. Proud? You bet your life I was, watching her walk forward after hearing her name, glee and total surprise flashed across her pretty young face. She even stumbled slightly, I think her high heel shoe slipped a bit when she jumped for joy in her disbelief. Cameras flashing, people cheering, the other young ladies clapping politely behind fake smiles, Miss Cumbria 1998 very graciously passing over her crown to my little girl, placing it delicately on her head and giving her a heartfelt hug and a whisper in her ear. Then there she was, my girl, my Sophie, center stage for the whole of our little part of England to see, the lakes at her feet, the mountains at her back, the blue sky her only limit. Right there in that moment, in my eyes, she stood on the highest mountain in Cumbria, hell she stood on Mount Everest itself, the top of my world!

(*beat.*)

The following year, Sophie came second in the competition to become Miss UK, narrowly and unjustly coming second to a bolshie Miss Essex! A week later her mother left me, coincidence I'm sure but it was the catalyst that changed the lives of all three of us. Now I'm not even allowed to see my own Grandson, Charlie. Last time I saw him I bounced him on

my knee, telling him stories of what shenanigans his mother got up to as a child, hearing him giggle as I tickled under his arms. I come here, to this cold and quiet lake because it's the only place I remember ever being a real dad to Sophie, a caring dad, a dad who has time for his daughter, his only child. Looking back, I can't honestly tell when it all began, I just wanted the best for her, wanted her to do *her* best, always. Is that such a sin for a father to commit? No, but it's clear to me now that I went too far, way too far. It has a name now, what I did, a big horrible name that was never banded around back then but seems to have become a watchword now. Abuse. There you have it, you see my shame. However, let me make this clear, I never hurt a hair on her body, never raised a hand to her once, even in my wildest rage. I didn't want her to enter that stupid, degrading beauty contest but stubborn like her mother she insisted. I even told her she was *ugly, worthless, fat*, any horrible word I could think of to stop her wanting to sign up for the damned competition. Before then, when she was much younger her mother worked away a lot, sometimes weeks at a time, so it would be just Sophie and I, she would sulk when I turned off her annoying squeaky TV programmes or run to her room and cry when I would not let her go out to see her friends. I would shout at her for spilling her drink, or talking while I watched the cricket. It may not sound much to you, maybe all parents do this sometimes. Looking back, I see now that that's how I behaved to her every day, even when her mother was home. Always quiet little comments in her ear so her mother would not hear and Sophie never said anything, never told on me to anyone. If she did threaten to say anything I would say things like "Why would anyone believe you, you're only a child?" or "If you tell, you'll be a liar and in trouble with the police." Another watchword, Control. I don't mean to control, I never meant to control, certainly not my Sophie, all I wanted was for her to be with me, stay with me so I could protect her from this nasty caustic world. Is that such a horrible thing for a loving father to do? Even when she left me with her mother I tried to keep her with me, I told her no good will come from running away, that she was best to stay with me. I should consider myself lucky to have been allowed to attend her wedding, I know I was. She was as beautiful as the day she was born, as stunning as the day she won Miss Cumbria 1999. I watched from the back of the church with the best effort of a smile as I could muster, but that day was the hardest day of my life, having to watch another man take her away from me.

I called Sophie last week, she told me to go to hell. Right now, as I stand in this desolate lake I think I'm already there. My feet are so freezing cold I can barely move my toes, so before I lose all feeling in my legs I walk forwards and never turn back.