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Opening extract from

Wasted

Written by

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Wasted

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Contents

For every Luke and Gemma

1	The Bottle	1
2	On the Street	11
3	Big John	21
4	The Party	30
5	Polly	41
	Afterwards: My Song	51

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Chapter 1

The Bottle

I've got this dream. I know it's stupid. But I think about it a lot. I think about it whenever there's a crap lesson at school. Or when I'm lying in bed at night, then the dream will pop into my head.

It feels so real.

In my dream I'm up on a stage, playing my guitar. The lights are hot and bright, and girls are screaming my name. I hardly notice them. I'm too much into my music. It's like a wall of sound, the only thing that matters.

That's my dream. I want to play in a band. I want everyone to know my name – *Luke Kendall, Rock Star!* That's me.

I know it won't be easy, but I'm going to do it someday. I have to. Playing the guitar is all I can do. My marks are rubbish. The teachers are always telling me off. They think I'm not trying.

Polly, my mum, says I'm thick. Maybe I am. I get mixed up in exams. The letters jumble up so that I can't read them. That happens to stupid people, doesn't it? So I must be stupid. Then I push my paper away and don't bother. It drives my teachers mad.

Anyway, to hell with school. Who needs it?

I'm thinking about all of this in Maths. I'm sitting at the back of the room with my legs out in front of me. I'm dreaming my dream. Mrs Green knows I'm not paying attention, but she leaves me alone. I think she's scared of me. I'm pretty big. Last term I broke this kid's nose in a fight. I didn't mean to. But ever since that, everyone's shown me respect.

The last bell rings, and I grab my stuff. I'm the first one out the door.

Gemma hurries to catch up with me. She's a girl in my year. She's in a few of my classes. She has long blonde hair, and light blue eyes. "Luke, where are you off to?" she asks.

I start to tell her it's none of her business. Then I work out she's just being friendly. I give a shrug. She's a *nice* girl – one of the ones who always get good marks. The teachers love her. Why is she talking to me?

"I saw you playing your guitar in town the other day," she goes on. "You're really good."

I stop and stare at her. No one's ever told me that before. I mean, I sort of knew it, but it's still good to hear.

"You think so?" I say.

She nods. "I even saw a man put a pound in your guitar case. You must get loads of money, playing."

"Not that much," I say. I wish I did. Then I'd move out of my mum's flat and be on my

own. But who'd take care of my mum if I did that?

I start to walk down the corridor again. I'm heading for Mr King's room. He lets me keep my guitar in there during the day. I'd never leave it at home. Once she tried to play it when she was drunk, and she spilled a mug of tea all over it. It's never sounded the same since.

"Is that where you're going now?" asks Gemma as she walks along with me. "To play your guitar in town?"

I'm not going to town now. I've got to go home - to Polly, my mum. I've been trying to forget about her all day. This morning she had a really bad fight with her boyfriend, Steve. They were up all last night, drinking and shouting at each other. And they were still yelling at each other when I left this morning.

I texted her at lunch. But she didn't answer.

Maybe it doesn't mean anything. Maybe she's just so drunk that she's passed out. But

I'm worried about her. If that bastard Steve's done anything to hurt her, I'll kill him.

"I can't go to town now," I tell Gemma.

My voice sounds hard. It's like I'm shutting a door and not letting her in. She looks hurt, but I can't help it. I'm not going to tell her about my drunken mum. It's something that no one knows about.

Except for you, now.

When I get home, the flat is dark and silent. I go into all the rooms to look for Polly. She's in her bedroom, lying in bed. There's a bottle of vodka next to her. It's half empty.

Her eyes are closed, and she's not moving. I sit down beside her. "Polly?" I whisper. I hardly ever call her Mum. She doesn't like it, plus she doesn't seem much like a mum anyway.

Her eyes open, and she stares at me. Normally, when she's had a lot to drink she can hardly focus, but now she just looks angry, like she wishes I wasn't there.

“You!” she snaps. She sits up. Vodka spills onto the bed.

“What?” I say. I feel nervous. What have I done now?

She starts to cry – big sobs that make her shake all over. “Steve’s left me,” she says. “He’s gone, he’s not coming back.”

“Really?” I say.

I try not to show it, but I’m glad. Steve is bad news. With him around, Polly drinks more than ever. And a few weeks ago she had a black eye. She told me she fell down some stairs, but I think he hit her.

She’s crying so hard now that I can’t make out her words. “He says he’s not ready to be tied down yet,” she sobs. “He wants someone younger, with no kids. Kids are too much hassle, he says.”

That’s rubbish. I’m hardly ever home, so how can I be too much hassle for Steve? I reckon he just got fed up with her. I’m fed up with her, too, but I don’t have any place else to go.

Then I feel bad for thinking that. Polly can be OK sometimes. She just likes to drink, that’s all.

“Listen, you’re better off without him,” I tell her. “He was a loser.”

I try to pat her arm, but she jerks away. “Leave me alone!” she shouts. “Get out, just get out!”

Fine, if that’s what she wants. I grab my things and go into my room. My heart’s thumping like I’ve just run a race.

I sit down on my bed and take my guitar out. It makes me feel better just to look at it. I got it at a second-hand shop. It cost me a tenner. It sounds OK, even if the D string keeps slipping.

I start to play, softly so that Polly won’t hear. I’ve never had any lessons, I just taught myself. At first I made loads of mistakes. Now I’ve been playing for a few years, and I’m not bad.

First I play that Robbie Williams song, ‘Angel’. Then I start to play a song that I wrote myself. It’s not finished yet, but I like it.

Suddenly my bedroom door bangs open, and I jump. Polly's standing there. She's got the bottle of vodka in her hand. It's empty now. Before I can do anything she starts swinging it around.

"It's all your fault!" she shouts. She hits the bottle on my clock and it goes flying.

I can't move. I've seen her drunk hundreds of times, but never as bad as this before. Her eyes are blank and staring, like she doesn't know who I am. Only she must do, because she's talking to me.

"Why did I ever have to have you?" she spits out. "Single mum at fifteen. God, what an idiot I was! I had to give up my life, my future - everything -"

SMASH! She slams the bottle on the wall. It shatters, and bits of glass go everywhere.

I'm scared, but I'm angry, too. My room is the one place in the flat that's not a tip, and now she's messing it up. The rest of the flat is full of old fag ends and empty beer cans. She never cleans, all she ever does is drink. What sort of mum is she?

"Stop it!" I shout at her.

She stares at me, breathing hard. She's still holding the bottle's neck. Its ends are jagged and pointy. "I'm going to put things right now, Luke," she says. "I'm going to get my life back on track."

I don't know what she means. Then she comes at me, she tries to cut my neck with the broken glass.

I shout out and push her away. She almost falls but then she's back at me again, snarling like an animal. She shoves the bottle neck at my face. I see a flash of sharp glass, and I put my arm up. The glass goes right into it, ripping at my skin.

Suddenly there's blood everywhere. It's on the bed, on the floor. How can all that blood come from me? Polly's still trying to get at my face, and I push her away as hard as I can. She falls onto the floor.

I feel sick as I look down at her. She's not moving. Jesus. Has she passed out? Or ... or is she dead?

Then Polly's eyelids flutter. She looks up at me.

"Get out before I kill you," she whispers.

I don't wait. Before she can move, I've grabbed my guitar and my school bag and run out the front door.