

# WEDLOCK

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# Chapter One

I can hear the God-awful noise half a block away and consider turning around. Seriously, I should just turn around right now and walk straight to Rosie's house. I should! Come on! It's only 5pm and the guitars have already reached that naff power-chord jamming stage. I bet heaps of beer, a bottle of Jack Daniel's and a big bag of dope are lead characters in this balls-up. And the house will be a pig sty; pantry emptied, gear and bodies sprawled all over the lounge. Again! Well stuff the lot of them! I'm not going to put up with it any longer.

I kick our crappy old gate open so hard one of the rusted hinges rips right off the post and then the broken gate lurches back with a vengeance and cracks me on the knee. "Shit!" I hate-march up the path towards the front door but a gasping shout rises above a lull in the bedlam.

"Lucy? That you, love?" Then louder and more strangled. "Quick love, in here. I need some help." I sprint for the garage and there he is,

on his back, pinned beneath a heavily laden weights bar. The veins on his gnarled old shoulders and neck are at popping point.

“Not again, granddad! How many times have I told you not to bench press by yourself? Are you okayay? Oh, Poppa! Look how much you’ve loaded this time. You’ve got over 100 kg on the bar. That’s ridiculous for someone your age, let alone someone with . . . how long have you been stuck here this time?”

“Eh? Quit yakkin’ and just get the bloody thing off me chest.” I fumble with the screw caps securing the weights to each end of the bar.

“No time for that. Get behind me and lift. Bend ya knees like I showed ya and keep ya head up. Come on. That’s it, come on, harder love! Lift it, keep going.”

I half crouch behind him and then with a straight back and looking towards the garage roof slowly straighten my legs and manage to haul the bar a few inches off Poppa’s chest and then together we manage to wrestle it safely onto the cradle. I collapse down beside him.

“You just can’t keep doing this, Poppa. What if I’d had another late drama practice and hadn’t come home for ages? Or just had my headphones on? Those irresponsible dickheads inside wouldn’t have heard you! One day you’ll strangle yourself. The bar will simply roll down your chest and end up over your throat. End of story. Poppa? Are you listening to me? Poppa, is your hearing aid in?” I stand and stare directly into his face. He drags himself to a sitting position and tries to regain his ragged breath.

“What’s that, love?”

“Where’s your hearing aid?” I bellow into his ear. He reels back and swears at me.

“. . . No need to shout. Anyways, I took it out. Can’t be havin’ me hearing aid in with that bloody noise inside the house. Sounds like they’re killin’ cats! I came out here for a bit of peace ‘n quiet. And now you’re havin’ a go at me, too.”

I sit wearily on the bench beside the old man and take hold of one of his enormous, fluttery hands.

“You can’t keep doing this Poppa. You’re 75 years old. You shouldn’t be bench-pressing half this much weight at your age. You know what the specialist said last week. The headaches and the shaking are getting worst, and straining like this is the worst thing for it. Remember what she said? The new medication won’t work unless you keep your blood pressure down. Why are you doing this?”

“Got to keep my strength up, that’s why. Not ready to throw in the towel yet, love.”

“And no one wants you to, but why can’t you . . . oh I don’t know, like, join a lawn bowls club or something?”

“Bowling club? That’ll be the bloody day! Poncin’ around with a bunch of dozy old puffers in white flannels? Shoot me first! Can you tell them to stop that awful racket, love? He doesn’t listen to a word I say.”

I stand behind him and begin to knead the heavily muscled flesh around his neck.

“What time did they start?” I say loudly.

“Oh yes, that’s corker love. Bit lower, crikey, you’ve got great hands. Just like my Miriam. I could have used you in my corner when I was fightin’, that’s for sure. When did they start? Dunno, maybe 11 o’clock. That’s why I came out here in the first place. The noise is drivin’ me crazy. He knows I get the headaches. Make him chuck it in before noise control come around again. In fact, I hope they do come around again. Serve him bloody right if they impound all his gear. Go on love, the young bugger might listen to you.”

“Only if you promise not to lift any more weights today. And never to load up the bar like today. Go on, promise!”

“Yes, yes I promise.”

“Properly, Poppa. Like you mean it!”

“Jeez you’re a bossy little bugger; just like your mum. All right then. I, Basil Sorrenson, widower of the parish, hereby promise I will only bench press when my lovely granddaughter is with me. There, satisfied?”

“Hey, I didn’t say that, but okay, that’s a deal. And if I find you have been pressing alone, you just wait. I know. I’ll sell all your weights on Trade Me. That’s what.”

“Yeah, your mum would have said something like that too. And you can bet your last penny his Lordship inside wouldn’t be getting legless with his dumb mates if she was still here too. Good on ya love.

Here, come and give ya silly old Poppa a hug. What would we do without you, eh?"

I leave the old man sitting on the bench slowly rubbing his temples and, drawing a deep breath, I advance on the house. When I open the front door the noise punches me in the chest and I have to almost lean into it as I force my way into the cluttered lounge.

"Dad, stop it! Dad, you've got to stop now! Stop it!" I shout against the wall of noise.

Two of the men look up vacantly but continue playing so I stomp to the fuse box and flick off the main power switch. When I return to the shocking silence of the lounge the men are still crouched over their dead instruments, then in cartoon delayed reaction they lurch into life.

The first to react is Max, the bass player, a gaunt man of indeterminate age with ravaged, Keith Richards features.

"What the. . .? Far out Marty, it's too much man, it's too much! She can't just waltz in and do that. Do something man!"

"Hey Lucy, whydya' do that? We were jus. . . we were just getting into the zone. . . I mean we were just about there, just about nailing that song."

"And what song would that be Dad – The Middle-Aged Drunken Loser Blues?"

A slow grin spreads over the florid features of a third band member who up to now has been sprawled lifeless on the couch. Barry's big

jowls shake with silent laughter.

“You’re onto it, girl. We old has-beens sure got a big ol’ dose of dem middle-aged loser blues.” He stumbles to his feet, grabs the microphone and launches into a surprisingly competent blues parody.

*“Well, my baby she done gone and lef me,  
an I sure don’t know what to do,  
all I know is I got a double dose of dem  
middle-aged loser blues,  
yeah, dem middle-aged loser blues . . .”*

The other men join in before collapsing to the couch in raucous, gulping laughter.

“Shut up the lot of you!” I shout. “You’re bloody pathetic. How much have you idiots drunk and smoked?”

“Not much, Luc, jus’ a coupla beers and maybe jus’ an itsy-bitsy joint,” slurs my father, inducing more paroxysms of laughter from the other two.

“Bullshit, you can hardly talk! Clean up all this mess right now.” I suddenly spy a large bag of dope lying among the carnage and before Max can react I snatch it up and empty the entire contents out of the nearest window and into the wilderness that masquerades as our garden.

“No, Lucy! Ah shit, that’s three hundred bucks worth!” Max lurches to his feet and awkwardly manoeuvres his lanky frame through the window. I throw his leather jacket after him.

“Just you wait ‘til I tell Marlene you’ve been spending that much

on dope!”

He pops his head back through the window. “Come on Lucy, you wouldn’t do that would ya? Don’t you dare! You’re only joking, eh Lucy? I didn’t buy it anyway. It . . . it was given to me, as a favour. But don’t tell Marl anyway, because . . .”

I slam the old sash window on the last of his words, and almost his scrawny neck, then turn back to deal with the other two. They sit hunched together on the couch like naughty schoolboys and I actually have to fight away a slight smile.

“Dad, this is crazy stuff! I can’t put up with this crap any more. Did you know that while you lot were pretending to be rock stars and making all this shitty mess your father was being slowly strangled to death by a weights bar in the garage?”

“Hey, ya can’t blame me for that. And what’s the silly old bugger lifting weights for? He’s got Parkinson’s for God’s sake. He knows he can’t be stuffing around with weights any more. Christ, he carries on like he’s still a heavyweight boxing champion.” Barry giggles but freezes at my icy glare. Dad sways to his feet and begins to collect cans and bottles. Barry stands unsteadily and begins to assist, but I quickly relieve him of a large glass bowl.

“Dad, he went to the garage because he couldn’t stand the noise in here!”

“But we didn’t even have Jim here. Would’ve been a hell of a lot louder with the drums, Luc. See? I remembered what you said last time and we told Jim he couldn’t rehearse with us. Like you said.



Wasn't even loud this time, you're just . . ."

"This is the last time, Dad. If this shit happens again, I'm out of here! I mean it this time. You can look after Poppa by yourself!"

"Don't talk daft, Luc, you're only fifteen. Where would you go? You can't leave school and go flatting at fifteen."

"I could move in with Aunty Moira again, she's always on about rescuing me from this dump. And who said anything about leaving school?"

"Oh yeah, perfect," replies my rapidly sobering father. "Yeah, that's great – move in with the bitch of the decade, the leader of the Crush Marty Sorrenson Society. She still goes on about your mum's tumor being stress-related and all my fault. Great idea, Lucy. Hey, has she been on to those bloody social workers again?"

"She does not say it's all your fault. It's just this sort of crap she gets worked up about. That's why I had to go and stay with her last year, and you know it. Look, Dad – I can't keep coming home to this stuff. I've got level 1 NCEA this year, and I'm trying to look after Poppa and trying to keep this place half decent . . . and, and you're not even helping."

Barry looks at us sorrowfully. "Yep, Lucy's right mate. Bit over the top, eh. Sorry about the mess, sweetheart. Won't happen again, eh."

"Gosh, now I wonder where I've heard that before? And don't call me sweetheart. I'm not a child! I mean it this time, Dad – you have to hire a rehearsal room somewhere. If Max can afford three hundred

bucks for weed he can bloody well afford to hire somewhere for you to rehearse.”

Barry puts a fleshy arm around my shoulders and tightens the grip when I try to pull away. “Hey sw – ah, Lucy, why don’t you join us next time? Remember the time you joined us for that Christmas gig in the park? You were only, what . . . twelve? Thirteen? But you blew them all away. Remember when we did ‘Respect’? Man, you just belted it out. R. E. S. P. E. C. T. Tell ya what – I had the old shivers-up-the-backbone routine big time. Just like your mum . . . just like your mum.”

The words hang there like smoke before dissolving and drifting away.

“Sorry, I shouldn’t have said that, but Lucy, you are like your mum. She was just like you; tall, damn fine-looking and a voice to die for. Oh shit, sorry, sorry – I didn’t mean . . . I keep saying dumb things. But, seriously Lucy, you could join us for a couple of dates on the comeback tour.”

I eventually manage to disengage from Barry’s sweaty grasp and push him away. “And why exactly would I want to go anywhere with a bunch of drunken, smelly old has-beens like you lot? You don’t seem to have got it into your thick skulls that your much-heralded comeback tour actually starts in less than three weeks. As in, people will be paying good money expecting to hear real music played by real musicians, but all you lot do is piss about like idiots. The promoter was stupid enough to believe you when you said The Satellites were sounding better than ever. I should invite him around here the next

time you're having a rehearsal so he can fully appreciate the size of the cock-up he's letting himself in for. I'll tell you what, there's a damn sight more chance of the lamest rock band at school being ready for a national tour before you lot. Know what I think? I think that you're all scared. Scared of actually getting out there again and putting yourselves on the line. Scared that without Mum there's nothing there. You're all secretly packing yourselves and the booze and dope are something you'll be able to blame the failure on."

Dad puts on his well-known blustering face. "Scared? Yeah, right! Hey Bazza, like we've never been on a tour before, eh? I mean, like we've never experienced any sort of success before, have we? Scared my arse. We just need time to sort out a few blockages and then we'll be away, eh Bazza?"

I decide to call Dad's bluff. "OK then, tell me the playlist for the opening night in New Plymouth."

"What? The playlist? Um. . . well – aah, I s'pose we'll open with 'Red Moon', like we always used to, and then . . ."

"No way, man," interrupts Barry. "We talked about that, didn't we? Thought we agreed we'd save that for first encore."

"Did we? Oh well, if you say so. But, New Plymouth? I thought we're opening here in Wellington . . . we are, aren't we?"

"What's the use?" I reply. "You haven't a clue what you're playing and you don't even know where the tour starts. Like I said – pathetic! I'm going out to check on Poppa and when I come back I want all this mess cleaned up, and I mean properly, not just chucked behind

the furniture like last time! And you bloody well close the tour in Wellington, and by the sound of you when I came home that'll be a huge relief for all concerned."

I listen outside the door to make sure they start cleaning up.

"Shit, she's got us sussed, eh? Wanna know something though, Marty? She's amazing. She's amazing! Doesn't let us get away with a damn thing, and every time I look at her I see Justine."

Dad sighs. "Yeah, I know, tell me about it. She even gets on my case like Justine. Come on, we'll clear this mess up then sit down and work out a playlist. 'Bout time we did. I told Hannah we had it worked out ages ago."

"Hannah, eh? And when are you going to introduce the mystery woman to your good mates?"

"Never, if I've got any sense. Na – sometime soon. Don't want to muck this one up, eh." I slam the door loudly on my way out, so Dad gets the message that I heard this last bit of bad news loud and clear.

It's after 11 o'clock when I finally get grandad off to bed and put the house back into some sort of order. Dad made almost as much mess in the kitchen cooking a conciliatory dinner – a fish curry, his specialty unfortunately. I sit on my bed, script in hand, struggling to focus on how Lady Macbeth would feel receiving news that the king was about to pay a visit to her castle. I think I know what my drama teacher, Mr Gerrard, or Phil, as he insists on being called, would say.

"Feel the lines, Lucy, show us, don't tell us. If you believe you are

Lady Macbeth, then so will we." Then he'll stand just that little bit too close and smile radiantly at me. "I believe in you Lucy. I gave you this part over Grace because I know you won't let me down. And hey, I know a couple of them are giving you a bit of a hard time, but they'll get over it, and anyway, don't you think Grace makes the most perfect witch?"

An hour later I toss the script aside in frustration and prepare for bed. I drag a brush through my thick hair while staring critically at my reflection in the mirror, then throw the brush down, angry at the dark-haired young woman who stares back. I don't want to, but something always makes me do this. I take off my top and look at myself from various angles to see how absurd my balloon body looks. I hate the attention my body gets from men like Barry, and even my friends don't really understand. It's kind of like one day you're a girl, happily invisible to most adults, and the next day you explode and your body is a male magnet. Yeah, thanks God, like I really need this. People like Rosie always think I'm overreacting and say things like, 'At least you're not flat as a board like me.' I quickly pull on my pyjama top then continue my nightly ritual by picking up a silver-framed photo and wiping away any spots of dust. It's a family shot of the three of us at a Silver Scroll Music Awards evening. I am a beaming five year old proudly holding the band's framed award in one hand and Dad's hand in the other and my drop-dead gorgeous mum, Justine, is standing behind me.

Barry is right, unfortunately. There's no denying it; the older I get the

more I look like my mother. Before the tumour, that is; before the hair loss, the weight loss, the everything loss. A dead ringer for my drop-dead-gorgeous mother, five years dead.

I put the picture back on the dresser and climb into bed, hoping that I can slip off to sleep, like an exhausted person should, and not go over and over recent events, but, per usual, sleep doesn't come and I give in to the nightly video and sound track that plays in my head. Same title every night 'A typical day in the stuffed-up life of Lucy', starring me.

Scene one: Dad and the band getting trashed again instead of rehearsing properly – and at this rate there's no way they can do their comeback tour. If they fail to get this tour off the ground he'll probably drink himself to death!

And speaking of death, scene two: Poppa almost strangling himself in the garage. His Parkinson's is starting to be more obvious now and I don't know what to do. The nurse comes around twice a week to see how he's getting on, but he's too proud to tell her much. Dad doesn't seem to know what to do and either ignores it or pretends that somehow it's Grandad's fault. I think he's just as frightened as I am.

Scene three: Aunty Moira wanting me to go and live with her in Upper Hutt again. Part of me sort of wants to. Be good to just let someone take over and do everything for me, like she did after Mum died. And it was okay for a while when I stayed for half of last year, being looked after like a baby. Someone else making all the decisions.

But that's the problem, though. I went from being an adult by default here, to a little kid there. I didn't let Dad know but I felt totally

smothered most of the time. Maybe I could go and stay for a few weeks after the production. But how can I just up and leave Dad and Poppa? They're hopeless. Who would do the thousand-and-one things that need to be done to keep a house running? And Dad can't cook for shit.

Scene four: The school production! I wish I hadn't let Rosie talk me into auditioning for the stupid play. I'll never learn all the lines in the two weeks left. I should just have signed up for set building, like her. And my part should have gone to Grace and now she's being a mega bitch and telling people that the only reason I got the part is that I let Phil slobber all over me. Yuk, that's sick!

Scene five: At last a good scene. The only decent thing about being in the production is Troy, who's got the part of Macduff. He's so lovely and funny and doesn't seem scared of me, like most of the okay guys at school. Why the hell do I scare them off, anyway? Troy's quite hot, in a Justin Bieber sort of way. Rosie goes on about Troy being gay but I don't think so. Definitely not! But I wouldn't care if he was anyway. I love it that he hasn't tried to come on to me. He's just a good friend – mind you I wouldn't mind if he tried to come on just a little bit. He's got really cute eyes and kind of little-boy dimples. And he's really clever and funny and said he can give me some maths tuition if I need it. That's great 'cos there's no way I'll pass level one maths without some help, especially since I've done zero maths homework all year. Just can't seem to fit it in.

Scene six: Saw the crazy lady again today. Ultrabad timing, too. Just when I was about to catch the bus she walks right up to me, with all the other kids there, and says in this loud-as-mad voice, "Not

long now, my child!” and then she reaches out, squeezes my hand real hard and just walks off as if saying weird things to strangers and grabbing them is like a normal part of her crazy day. Bronson was a total tosser about it and on the bus kept calling out, “Not long now, my child!” in a silly falsetto voice and then cracking up with his try-hard mates. This is the first time she has actually spoken to me. The other times she just stared at me and that’s bad enough but I can handle a crazy person staring at me. Next time I’ll tell her to piss off and leave me alone. What a creepoid!

Scene seven: What is it with weirdos hanging around our school lately? Last week there was the ferret-faced pervert in the car who was filming me and Rosie on his phone as we were coming out of the dairy after school. I was really freaked out because he was just sitting there clear as day filming us. He even leaned right out the window to get a better angle and he only stopped and drove off when Rosie ran up and threw her full can of Coke at the car. Cracked the windscreen too – good job! Next time I’ll remember to take down the numberplate so we can go to the police about the perv.

Oh God, got to get a few hours sleep so I can stay awake at school tomorrow. Almost forgot. Dad bought a shirt and a pair of jeans yesterday so he’s definitely hiding a new girlfriend somewhere. Heard him referring to her as Hannah. I bet she’s as stupid as the last one.

And then, thankfully, my film slows down enough for me to drift off to sleep.