

**The
Greatest
Hit**

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LOTHIAN

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FOR TOBIAS VICKERS AND THE MUSIC WE MAKE

A Song

I used to love introducing myself. At the beginning of every year in primary school, whoever our teacher was at the time would make us introduce ourselves with a fun fact. I would always come up with something new. Others would recycle the same line year after year or waltz into class prepared for it. I wouldn't. Whatever my fun fact, I came up with it in that room, on that day. I wouldn't even let myself consider mine until others started reeling off theirs. It was exciting. Dangerous. There was the risk that somebody would say

what I was planning to, and I would have to think up something new. But they never did. I used to love introducing myself. And I was exceptional at it.

We weren't asked for fun facts in high school. I figured we were too old. Then, come my first uni tute, Introduction to Media Studies, the practice was revived.

The ceiling fan rattled like it was two spins away from coming apart. The desks were arranged in a rectangle, so people were either staring at the stranger sitting opposite or pretending to be intensely fascinated by their fingernails. I was doing neither. I was watching people introduce themselves, excitement building as the distance between me and the speaker shortened. It felt like it had in primary school. Granted, the fun facts weren't half as interesting. They started off strong (Jasmine knew pi to forty decimal places

and didn't hesitate to prove it), but as soon as somebody mentioned their professional goal (Quentin, a job in PR), that's all people shared. Copywriter. Newsreader. Editor.

When my turn came, I sat up taller. 'I'm Tessa and at my first job, I made a burger for a member of the British royal family.'

Mine was definitely the best fun fact. Not that it was a competition or anything, but people stopped pretending their fingernails were fascinating. The eyes of the room were on me. The guy beside me didn't speak. At first, I figured everybody wanted details – how far the British royal was from the crown, what their special demands were, if an imposing man wearing an earpiece watched me prepare the burger, that sort of thing. I started rambling, but stopped myself when I heard someone ask their friend if I was the chick who ...

My heart sank. Nobody cared about my fun fact. The tutor's lips curled into an encouraging smile. I knew what he wanted to hear. I cleared my throat and caved. 'Oh and, um, a clip of me went viral a few years—'

Quentin was singing now. 'I love him, I love him, I love him, him, him.'

I grimaced. 'That's the one.'

Jasmine squinted at me until ... a glimmer of recognition. 'Yeah, it is you. Same red hair.'

I should have dyed it. Shaved it. Assumed a new name. Moved to another continent.

I used to love introducing myself ... before I was the 'I Love Him' girl.

While everyone else my age was taking their bold first steps into adulthood, I was just trying to outrun a song that went viral when I was fourteen. Every time I thought I had, somebody like Quentin was there to remind me I hadn't.

I didn't even try in my second tute, The Medieval Imaginary. When we were asked to introduce ourselves, I gave the people what they wanted.

I was Tessa. The 'I Love Him' girl.

If I couldn't outrun the song, I was going all in. When the Quentin of the group (Laila) sang a few bars, I joined her. I shouldn't have enjoyed it as much as I did.

My third tute, Introduction to Film Studies, would have gone the same way had the door not opened before I shared my fun fact.

'Sorry, sorry.' Her voice was melodic, but rough around the edges. It was an instrument I'd heard before.

My head snapped in her direction. Charlie. Only, she wasn't the Charlie I remembered. The bush of frizzy hair that once grew to her waist had been chopped and tamed. A neat blonde bob framed her face. She wore a faded T-shirt,

artfully tattered jeans and ankle boots. My chest was in a vice, tightening and tightening as she claimed the vacant seat beside Amber (fun fact: aspiring journalist).

Charlie was here. In Melbourne. In my Introduction to Film Studies tute.

A voice to my immediate left. ‘Hi, I’m Dylan. I’m in a band with my dad and granddad. We do gigs at the local pub.’

That made Charlie look up. She noticed me. I swallowed. It was like I had daggers lodged in my throat.

I felt the room’s attention shift to me.

I cleared my throat harshly. ‘Hi, um, I’m Tessa. I ...’

Charlie’s gaze bore into my soul. Her expression was blank, but I couldn’t help reading into it ... Shock ... Anger ... Whatever she felt, I knew I couldn’t be the ‘I Love Him’ girl. Not in this tute. Not with her here.

I turned to Dylan and stammered a laugh. 'I ... think I've been to that pub, actually.'

It was a terrible fun fact. It deserved to tank and it did. There was an awkward moment when the tutor expected more, and then she gestured to my right. Charlie's eyes were still on me, and just as Ava began to introduce herself, Charlie asked, 'Don't I know you?'

Ava went quiet.

There was a hint of mischief in Charlie's smile.

Amber gasped, putting it together. 'Yes! You had that song! Was it two years ago?'

'Four,' Charlie said, without breaking eye contact.

Amber began the chorus. When she hit the first *him*, Charlie scrunched up her nose at me. There were a few nods of recognition around the room before the tutor encouraged Ava to resume her introduction. Seven fun

facts later, Charlie was asked to introduce herself.

‘Charlie,’ she said flatly, turning away from me.

I knew hundreds of fun facts about her and was curious which one she’d choose.

‘I had a song written about me once.’