

This is the rough draft of the first chapter of a novel I started years ago. Since I wrote this, Lilly's character has completely changed, and so has the whole plot of this chapter. I'm currently writing a new draft of this novel. I got the idea because I often thought I heard people saying my name and no one had.

All in My Head

I remember the first day I realized something was wrong with me. My friend William and I were getting on the bus to school. As I sat, I heard someone distinctly say my name. Turning, I searched the vehicle for a familiar face, but no one was looking at me.

"Did you say my name?" I asked William

"No."

"Oh. I must be hearing things again, I guess."

For the past few weeks I'd noticed that I somehow mistook another word or name for my own. After all, Lilly sounded like a lot of things: silly, hilly, really, Billy. My friends and I laughed about my deafness. But it was starting to bother me how often it was happening lately.

When I arrived at Magnet High, I heard it again, but, upon inquiry, I learned that no one around me had said anything. Sometimes I wondered if someone was playing a stupid joke on me, especially since it continued at an annoyingly persistent pace the rest of the day. I figured out that I averaged about once every ten minutes. There were a few times that I could have sworn I heard someone murmur an entire sentence. But as far as I could tell, no one had spoken.

Worried, I told my friends about it at lunch. Jessica giggled, "Maybe you're hearing ghosts." We had a good laugh at that, and I put it from my mind for a while. Until Biology. I'd studied all week for the test, and I was confident. As I bent over my paper, someone murmured, "I can't do this, I don't know anything!"

Glancing up, I tried to determine who could have the audacity to talk during a test. But everyone was silent. Whatever. I read the first question silently, and then heard someone read it aloud. Furrowing my brow in concentration, I waited for Mr. Call to reprimand them, but he did nothing.

"It's gotta be C, right?"

I looked up exasperatedly, and Mr. Call told me to keep my eyes on my own paper.

"Mr. Call," I stated, "someone's talking and I can't think."

The teacher frowned and glared at the students around me. "Quiet during the test, please."

"Lilly is such a know-it-all. She'll get a perfect score no matter what."

"See?" I announced triumphantly.

But Mr. Call only looked back at me confusedly. "I didn't hear anything, Lilly."

The class nodded in agreement.

I swallowed. He asked if I was feeling alright, and, afraid he'd send me to the office without finishing the test, I said yes. But the voices didn't stop. As the class progressed, more and more of them pressed in on my brain. No longer caring about grades, I turned in my exam and ran to find William.

He was just leaving his psychology class when I raced to him and explained what had happened. Though he looked concerned, he didn't tell me I was crazy. That's why William is my best friend. He knows exactly what to say. "Your mind is probably trying to work out some problem. It's like dreaming, but you're awake when you do it. Have you had any large stresses in your life? Maybe trying to keep up in all your AP classes is taking a larger toll than you thought?"

This had to be it. I was in five AP courses this year. Slightly calmer now, I walked toward the bus with him. "How long is this going to last?"

"Until your mind settles whatever is worrying it."

"Does this make me psychologically messed up?" I said with a playful smile.

"How do I put this? We all have mental problems, in my opinion."

He repeated, "We all have mental problems, in my opinion."

I shot a sideways look at him. "You said that."

"Um... yeah, I did."

"No, I mean why did you say it twice?"

"I... didn't."

Stopping, I looked him square in the face. "Say something else."

"What? Why?"

"Everything you say seems to echo slightly."

We stared at each other for a few moments, and then as I watched his lips purse in confusion, I heard him say, "Maybe she has an auditory problem?" But he hadn't opened his mouth.

My breath caught in my throat. He noticed my distress, because he said, "She needs to get home, she's obviously sick." But once again his mouth hadn't moved.

"Think of a number," I instructed. "Don't talk, just think."

Five.

"Five," I repeated.

For a few moments, there was silence, then I heard him think, *Well, that's cool.*