

Laura Fetner

"He cannot choose but hear."
-Coleridge

I don't really understand why *stop* must get that recipe *listening* and then they'll all understand *must* just a simple removal of the hypotenuse *stop* really feel that he loves *listening* need another drink *to* understand that when the full moon comes *it* finally get what she deserves *all*

Oh, God. Oh, God. Just sit down. Calmly put it out of your head. Ignore the cacophony of voices swirling around your ears, just focus on being here. Being Laura Fetner. Being who you are.

What in God's name is going on here? This can't be happening to you. You're too popular for something like this to happen to you. You're too pretty. You're going places.

You don't understand it. You don't understand anything that has happened in the last three days. All of the voices press in, all of the sounds you shouldn't be hearing, that you can't be hearing, all of them pressing at your ears and filling your brain don't want Wendy to know about *no* obviously getting the worst recruits this side *must* he really loves me I'm sure of *shut* suffering from a inferiority complex that *it* then she'll be back and everything *all* find someone to keep the wards *out*

Everything was fine then. Perfect. You couldn't have wanted more out of life. You were the captain of the Cheerleading Squad at Edwood High, a great student who was looking forward to getting into any college she wanted to, and with James Daniels, the most desirable guy in school, as your boyfriend. Life was wonderful. Sure, you had to put up with some problems, like James feeling a need to crusade against J.D. and his gang of juvenile delinquents, or trying to make a competent cheerleading squad out of a class of fifty students. Still, things were going great for you.

And then Wendy asked a favor of you. Wendy's your best friend, and has been your best friend since elementary school. She has always been a bit of a gossip, and when she got to high school, she turned those efforts into running the school newspaper. You helped her out occasionally. And she wanted you to go check out something for one of her stories.

This guy who calls himself Mr. Memorum had driven a bus into San Inguon and set up a little magic and hypnotism act. Wendy was sure that Mr. Memorum was some sort of hoax, and wanted to expose him. She figured that if her paper showed what a con man Mr. Memorum was, it would be a great story, one that might even get her noticed by the Phoenix *Sun*. Wendy wants nothing more than to write for a big-city newspaper.

So you went off after sunset three days ago to investigate Mr. Memorum's little show. Wendy thought that if you poked around his set a little bit, you might find some of his props and be able to show everyone how he "mesmerizes" his assistants. You thought it would be really cool, sort of a secret agent kind of thing.

While you were looking over his props, you heard voices from a nearby window. You peeked through the window, hoping to see if Mr. Memorum was instructing his assistants on how to perform the tricks. What you saw was Mr. Memorum running through his routine, and hypnotizing a guy you had never seen before. Mr. Memorum was holding out a huge watch, and letting it swing slowly by its chain. He was saying something softly, in an extremely deep voice that you really couldn't understand, but you weren't listening too hard because all of your attention was focused upon watching the watch swing slowly back and forth.

That was the last thing you remember about that night. When you woke up, it was nearly dawn, and you were huddled behind some of the crates outside the window you had been looking through. You realized that your parents were going to be furious, and so you ran home. Luckily, your parents had assumed you were out late with Wendy or James or both, and they hadn't gotten up yet, so you avoided any sort of confrontation or punishment. You ran into your room, changed clothes as quickly as you could, and ran off to school so as not to miss the first bell.

And then the voices started. All of these voices, all of these words, pouring into your head, banging away at your skull in a never-ending torrent that feels like it will drive you insane, making it impossible to have a clear thought unless you concentrate on it enough. It took all of your energy to make it through classes without screaming or crying in pain. When school was over, you ignored James asking you something (you couldn't even hear what he was asking) and ran home. You ducked into your room, turned off the lights, and put your head under the pillow to try and stop the voices. It worked; all you heard was beautiful silence.

Then James dropped by. He came into your room, and sat down on the foot of your bed. He looked extremely concerned for you, and you told him that you were feeling better. And then he started talking. Talking about you, about how he cared for you, but not as much as he really said, it was more of just a closer-than-friends relationship but he didn't really want to tell you that because it would break your heart, so now he was going to ask you if you were feeling up for a movie because you looked horrible, absolutely terrible, and why are you looking at me with such a horrified expression?

At you were looking at him with a horrified expression. Not for what he had said about the relationship; you feel pretty much the same way. But because he hadn't said it. As best as you could tell, all he had said was that he wanted to go to a movie with you that night. You had heard him say everything else; but he never spoke it.

You were reading his mind.

You did go to the movies with him that night. But you never watched the movie. You were more interested in listening to the voices. And every time you were around other people, their voices, what they were thinking, rang out clear to you. Of course, standing in the middle of five people meant that the voices you were hearing all crashed together into unintelligible garbage even if no one was actually speaking. But you began to work on blocking the voices out. You would envision a wall, surrounding your head and blocking out all of the voices. It usually works, and you've learned to get through the day acting normally while keeping that wall up constantly. Of course, sometimes the wall crashes down, and you're assaulted by the voices until you can gather enough concentration to stop them. But if you take things nice and slowly, you can keep the voices out.

Once, while feeling extremely daring, you tried to open a chink in that wall, letting only a single other voice in. For a minute or two, you could hear James thinking about how bad the movie you had seen was, but how pretty you had looked afterwards, with that strange smile on your face. Then the break in the wall split open, and all of the voices spilled in again. It took you a couple of minutes to fight the onslaught of babble and get the wall placed back up again. You might be able to do it again, but it's not something you want to work too hard on. You have enough trouble keeping the wall up as it is.

Somehow, you don't think this is the story that Wendy was looking for.

Stock quote: "Oh, like, that is so cool!"

Mannerisms: Wendy is the basic All-American girl; a happy, perky, sunny, and exceedingly shallow cheerleader who sees the good side of everything and everyone. She is slowly learning to deal with her new "ability," but certainly doesn't have the hang of it yet.

People You Know:

J.D. Koln: Class trouble-maker. He runs this gang called The Killers who try to cause as much mischief as they possibly can. He's been getting really violent lately, and you worry that he might try to hurt someone.

Robert Sherman: One of The Killers. He's the brains in the outfit. You don't know why he hangs around J.D. so much; he seemed like such a nice guy back in junior high.

Nick Kerensky: Another of The Killers. He's the muscle of the outfit. Big, strong, and dumb.

James Daniels: Your boyfriend. The All-American boy: captain of the football team, class president, and valedictorian. Every girl in the school would love to be dating him.

Timmy Carroll: The class geek. Always has his head buried in some science textbook. A grade-A bore.

Tony Turrelli: The class clown. He's going out with Wendy, which you think is her loss, personally. Sure, he's fun to hang around at times, but it's not like he's achieving things with his life like James is.

Mark Sturvin: The richest kid in class. Son of Harold Sturvin, the richest man in San Inguon. He seems really obnoxious and stuck up.

Mary Jenkins: J.D.'s girl friend. You don't know how anyone could put up with him. Some people just have no taste.

Teresa Kerensky: One of Wendy's friends. She used to be a big tomboy, but now she's gotten interested in boys in a big way. Still, with Nick threatening to beat up any guy who so much as looks at her the wrong way, you doubt she'll get very far.

Catherine Thomas: A complete and utter loser. Absolutely out of current styles, and doesn't really seem to care.

Margaret Smith: The class airhead. You'd feel smug and superior about her if it weren't for the fact that some people (who must have no taste) think she's more attractive than you.

Wendy Mitchell: Your best friend. She's a bit nosy and a bit of a gossip, and she did get you into this mess that you're in, but she's still your best friend.

Adele Siegelski: Principal of Edwood High. A really strict disciplinarian. She's such a drag.

Darla Hotchkins: School nurse. A lot of guys at school really lust for her. You personally think she's kind of spooky. Especially given the glow in her eyes when she was doing class vaccinations last week.

Goals:

1. Keep your new-found "ability" a secret. Lord knows you don't want to become some sort of social outcast or pariah because of this. And you don't want anything spoiling your chance of being elected Queen of San Inguon at the sock hop tonight. So make sure no one finds out about what's going on. Especially not James. That might mean he'd want to break up with you, and that would just wreck your social standings.

2. Find out what's going on with this "ability." It couldn't have been just the hypnotism; you were hypnotized by a magician on your thirteenth birthday, and if it was just the hypnotism, then it would have kicked in then.

3. Find out what the deal is with Mr. Memorum. Okay, so he's obviously a real hypnotist. What's the deal with him coming to San Inguon? This is such a small town with such a dead social life that he couldn't possibly be here to make money. Wendy's still counting on you to figure this out.