

Ear pressed to the wall, Max held up a hand to silence Gertrude. He concentrated, trying to hear who the mysterious couple in the other apartment were conversing with. Either they knew someone might overhear them and opted to be cryptic, or Max needed a refresher course in English. Gertrude stood in the doorway, hands resting on ample hips, as she scowled at him.

"Max, stop snooping on the neighbors."

"Loose lips sink ships."

"The war is over, darling."

"Can't be too careful."

Gertrude sighed and watched Max's brow furrow in concentration. For her husband, the war would never end.



For this story, I received the spy genre, the action of eavesdropping on a mysterious conversation, and the word cryptic. This story could've gone in countless directions, but Max unexpectedly became the focus.

If you're wondering about his neighbors, I envisioned them speaking another language. English comes in many forms, something I've reminded of daily when I fail to remember the American term for something. While it's my native tongue, after fifteen years overseas Island Speak takes over.

The best part is when I text my husband and say, "What's the American word for..." And he says, "How should I know? You're the American!"

The Reluctant Author.

