

The Cricket

This was one of the first stories I wrote, inspired by a conversation that happened at my parents' house in 2015. I started drafting it in my mind as I tossed and turned on an uncomfortable couch, booted out of the guest room by my 1-year-old baby. And by guest room, I mean death trap, where fraying extension cords could at any moment explode into sparks and the rickety card table set up for changing diapers could collapse.

I read this story at two open mics, and then submitted this story to a number of venues and it was rejected by all!

“We have a cricket!” Edna called out to Louise and Ron, as they made their way up the front steps burdened with suitcases, a baby seat, and bags of all shapes and sizes hanging from their arms like Christmas tree ornaments. Edna was 82 and lived in this house with her husband Arthur, 86. Their daughter Louise and her husband Ron, both in their 30s, were visiting Louise’s childhood home in Massachusetts with *their* daughter, who was almost 2. Three generations in one house, *and*, evidently, a cricket.

Resignation lined Edna’s voice. As if the cricket had some kind of real estate rights, had moved in unannounced but with the proper paperwork. “He’s been there for weeks,” Edna went on, speaking above the confusion of transporting items from the car to the house and determining what went where. After unpacking, the cricket’s chirping took centerstage. Louise heard it in all corners of the house. “CHIRP!” The 40th chirp of what was sure to be a long weekend.

“Do you hear the cricket?”, she hissed to Ron, upstairs, a full two floors higher than the basement, the cricket’s new quarters. She wondered about the likelihood of any sleep

whatsoever during their stay, as the chirp reverberated through two flights of stairs and a door. Making matters worse, Arthur had recently repainted the guest room and chemical fumes saturated the air. "I can't sleep in here," Louise stated, and in a huff made camp in the downstairs "den", a tiny, cramped, claustrophobic room just feet away from the basement door.

Edna helped her daughter spread sheets over the couch. "That sound is really annoying, Mom." "I know it," said Edna, shaking her head, and then, in a softer voice, as if sharing a secret, "*They say* that crickets can *nest*", her eyes grew wide, "and eat through your carpets." Louise imagined the house devoured from the inside-out, by an army of nesting crickets. She felt that familiar annoyance of her mother's reverence to what *They Say*.

Later, Louise and Ron sat in the den. Ron watched football. The cricket's song was a metronome.

Louise had an idea. She would time the chirps. At the next chirp she pressed start on her phone's stopwatch. 50 seconds passed. CHIRP! 50 seconds, again. CHIRP! This time, 54 seconds. "Odd," Louise said.

She tried again. Same thing. Intervals of 50, 50, then 54 seconds. A few more rounds confirmed it.

She jostled Ron out of his football trance. "Look at this!", she exclaimed, holding the data up triumphantly. "Do crickets chirp in intervals like *that?*", she asked.

"I'm going down to investigate," Ron said. The sound of the basement door opening sent Edna approaching.

"Be careful!" she called after Ron, who was already halfway down the stairs. "I get goosebumps every time I go down there to do the wash," she said, and peered suspiciously down the staircase.

Louise kept timing, believing the pattern would change in the presence of a human visitor. The pattern held. "That's no cricket," Louise said to herself.

Just then Ron emerged, something in hand.

“This is your Cricket,” he said, laying down a white square object.

“What’s that?”, asked Edna.

“A carbon monoxide detector,” he replied. “I found it on the shelf. It was tucked in between Scrabble and Battleship. It’s low on batteries. I disabled it.” Sure enough, the chirping had ended.

“For Heaven’s sakes! Arthurrrrrrrrrrrr!” Edna yelled, “Ron found the cricket!”

“What?!”, Arthur staggered into the kitchen, aroused from an accidental early evening snooze. “The cricket? You found him?”

“I found the carbon monoxide detector,” Ron said. “The sound you heard was the low battery signal.”

“The what detector?!”, Arthur shouted. This, from the man who upon being shown a North Face windbreaker on a recent birthday shopping trip for Edna, exclaimed in recognition, “Facebook! Oh yeah! That’s a good brand!”

“We were trying to trap it with a bowl of molasses!,” Edna said, “And all we got was mold!”, Arthur continued. Both Edna and Arthur laughed hard. They were good sports.

Later that night, when everyone was asleep, Louise relished in the restored silence. “What would they do without me?”, she uttered, feeling superior. Edna and Arthur had Louise later in life, and she felt she was always opening their eyes to the world.

About to fall asleep, she stopped, went to the window, and looked out, scanning for branches, stray wires, or perhaps a fallen antenna. She wondered if the woodpecker attacking the side of the house Edna talked about last year was still an issue.

