

House Next Door

by Foster Trecost

It all began with me. I was first and for many years, the only. No neighbors, nothing but trees. But over time the trees came down and houses went up. But I was the first.

When they broke ground on the last empty lot, I braced for another assault on my long-forgotten solitude, but it wasn't just the noise. Houses no longer reflected an architectural intent. Price seemed more important than quality, and both had dropped. I awaited the next eyesore, thankful it would be the last.

But this one turned out different. She blended with the landscape, an extension of nature. Her lines were clean with a sublime design. I became curious about the family who'd commissioned such a fine dwelling and extended the grandeur of the house to those who would live there, though it was not returned. Youngsters these days pay little attention to the elderly, a category to which I clearly belonged, and maybe that's why she overlooked me. My appearance marked me as one from a prior generation and perhaps she had no time for relics. She was new, busy with her family; I was empty and old.

When the wind carried just right, I could hear music wafting through her windows. During these times I wished I could walk over, admire her from up close. Just a harmless neighbor who wished to welcome her, say what a fine addition she'd made. Then maybe I'd go too far and speak of her beauty, comment on how well she'd been put together, but I like to think common sense would have prevailed and I'd say something about the music instead. But I'll never know.

I've tried to forget the flames, those hungry tongues that lapped her away, but images remain. So does the music. While I watched it seemed I could hear it, that soundtrack I'd come to adore. Now it's just another reminder; memories of music, even sounds that once brought feelings of joy, can be the most painful. In the months that followed they cleared the lot, laid sod. Many seasons have passed

and with them, many changes, but one thing hasn't changed: her lot is still empty, a vacant reminder of the past.

Thankfully some people see beauty in old things. They fixed me up, made me young, or at least made me look that way. But even the most skilled of carpenters only repair the blemishes they can see; my deepest scars are tucked out of sight. There are more ways than one for a house to be haunted, and mine is with her memory. No ghosts dwell within my walls, but I'm haunted just the same.

