

House Next Door

by Foster Trecost

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

When they broke ground on the last empty lot, I braced for the final assault on my peace, but it wasn't just noise that bothered me. The new homes went up cheap. Price seemed more important than quality. I awaited the next eyesore, thankful it would be the last.

But this one turned out different. The house blended with the landscape. The lines were clean, the design sublime. I became curious about the family who had commissioned such a fine dwelling, and I extended the grandeur of the house to those who would live there.

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Youngsters don't pay much attention to the elderly, which may be why she overlooked me. My appearance marked me as one from a previous generation, and perhaps she had no time for relics. She was new, busy with her family; I was empty and old.

Often I heard music wafting through her windows and wished I could walk over, admire her from up close. Just a harmless neighbor who wanted to welcome her, tell her what a fine addition she made, and then maybe I'd go too far, speak of her beauty, comment on how well she had been put together, but maybe I'd just say something about the music instead.

I'll never forget the flames, those hungry tongues that lapped her away. I felt their heat, but what could I do? I watched through my windows. I could still hear the music, and still hear it today. In the months that followed, they cleared the lot, smoothed it over, planted sod. But it's still empty, a vacant reminder of the past.

As for me, I'm again filled with life. They fixed me up, made me young, or at least made me look that way. But even the most skilled carpenter can only repair blemishes people 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 am a haunted house just the same.

