

The New Neighbor

By Nicholas Turchan

Nobody knows that my new neighbor is a ghost. It has been a few days since my new neighbors have moved in. I overheard my parents talking about them a few nights ago. They said they were a family that moved here for a job. I was excited to hear that they might have a child my age, so I have to admit that I peeked out my bedroom window a few times to hopefully see the moving trucks. Unfortunately, I just saw the movers, so I decided that even though it was the middle of summer, and extremely hot outside, I could pull myself away from the air-conditioning and take a walk around the block. There was a beautiful, large willow tree in the front of our neighbor's house and as I looked up to admire it, I swear I saw a girl's face looking back at me. Frightened, I jumped a few feet back and as I did the girl jumped down from her branch and ran to me.

"Are you okay?" she asked.

"Yes, thanks for asking," I said, still shocked but uninjured. I started to rub my head and wonder to myself but instead spit it out, "Are you the new neighbor who moved in?"

"Yes, I am," she replied, and before I had to ask, she said, "my name is Sara."

"Cool, my name is Jack," I told her. "How old are you?"

"14, going into 9th grade, what about you?"

"Same," I said. "So where are you from?"

"Atlanta, we moved for my dad's job." She looked sad but happy.

The conversation flowed easily, but then, there was a brief moment that we stood there, not exactly sure what to say. Sara broke the silence.

"Jack, by the way, my dad is fixing up the tree house. I know it sounds childish, but I promise it will be cool. Do you want to see it?"

I really did, but for some reason I didn't want to seem too excited about it, and so instead of just saying yes, I said, "I told my mom I would be home soon, so how about tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow is great! Same time?" Sara said.

"Sounds good," I replied. I could tell she wanted to make a new friend and I did too. This summer has been kind of boring but maybe not anymore. I took the short walk home feeling like I was floating on air.

When I got home I sat on my couch thinking about the new girl I had just met. She was friendly, with long brown hair, great big brown eyes, and fair white skin that almost glowed. I wanted to tell my mom and dad but they weren't home yet from work. I thought about calling one of my bros, especially my best friend, Cam, but maybe not yet. As I was thinking I must have dozed off, the next thing I knew, I woke up and it was dark outside. I wasn't sure why my parents hadn't woken me up for dinner, but I was still quite tired, so I quietly walked down the hall to my room and fell asleep thinking about Sara and the tree house.

The sun was shining through my window and it was a beautiful day in July and 2 o'clock could not come soon enough. I didn't want to seem too eager but I am pretty sure I had my hand on my front door at 1:59. I casually walked next door, past the willow tree, and quickly turned my head to see Sara sitting on her front step. She smiled and waved as I made my way up her cobblestone path to her front door.

"Hi Sara!" I said.

"Hi Jack. Let's go!" she said as she led me to the fence leading to her backyard.

As we walked, I asked about how the move had been going. She said that she was missing her friends a lot, but she was excited for a new adventure for her parents, especially her dad, and even for her.

She also put a big smile on my face when she said, "And I am very happy to have you living next door."

The time with Sara went fast, we spoke about the woman that lived in the house before her. I told her it was an older lady, her name was Mary and she was awesome. She would bake me cookies all the time. And we spoke about my friends at school and the friends she left in Georgia. She also told me she had an older sister. She was too cool for the tree house, but a very kind person. I was an only child, but I think my parents always wanted more kids. I heard them even talking about it again recently. Before we knew it, it was time for dinner, so we decided to meet again tomorrow.

Days would go by, some days we would sit and watch a movie. Sara loved scary ones and I loved sports and action, so we always took turns. Some days we would just talk, or she would show me pictures most of when she was younger which were usually funny. And then other days she would read the summer reading to me. I would also teach her about the cool spots

to hang out at or things to know before school started. I never had a friend that was a girl before, but summer was flying by and it was one of the best summers I had ever had.

Before we knew it school would be starting the following week. I asked Sara if she would want to walk to school together and for the first time she seemed uncomfortable.

“Maybe. I have to ask my parents if they are driving me,” Sara said. “Oh, and I have dinner with some new friends of my parents so I have to go get ready.”

Her whole attitude changed with that one question. And when I went to the tree house the next day she wasn’t there. Thoughts swirled in my head, maybe she wanted to make her own friends when she got to school. And for the last few days of summer she wasn’t there, she disappeared.

The first day of school came and Sara wasn’t outside waiting for me to walk together. I waited a few minutes but assumed one of her parents took her, so I started the walk alone. I looked back a few times, but never saw her. I was disappointed, but excited to get to school to see some of my other friends I hadn’t seen this summer.

The first day of school is always pretty great, but when I walked up to the school I ran up to my soccer pals and they were all completely ignoring me.

“Real funny, guys!” I said. “OK, good joke.”

Still there was no response. Now, I was getting mad. What happened? Did I forget about a game or practice? What is going on?

“Guys, really?” I looked directly at my best friend Cam and as I did I swear I saw him shiver as if he couldn’t stand being around me.

I have been friends with a lot of these guys since kindergarten. It just did not make sense. I didn’t want to embarrass myself any further so I decided to just move on and try again later. I walked into the school and went to my homeroom and sat in the back of the class. The bell rang and still not one person even said hello to me. I was looking for Sara’s friendly face and did not see her either. Our teacher, Mr. Phillips, took attendance and skipped my name. I raised my hand and tried to get his attention to correct his mistake but he just went on with the class. At that point I couldn’t take it anymore. I ran out of the class and didn’t stop until I realized I was back home and on my bed. The morning was a disaster and I had no idea why or what happened.

As I lay there I tried to think if there was something I forgot, a friend’s birthday, a camp, a fight that I had with one of the guys, but I really had not spoken to anyone. Maybe that was it.

They were mad at me for not keeping in touch more? I should have called. I should have told Cam about Sara. I was also thinking about Sara, and hoping her first day at a new school was going well. I really wanted to be there for her and introduce her to my friends and teachers. I was just failing all day today. Before I knew it the school day was over, I sulked the entire day away. I knew I had to pull myself together because I had my first freshman soccer practice, so I got out of my bed and went to make one thing right today.

When I got to the field I noticed the guys all huddled together. Some of my closest friends had their heads down and I noticed Coach Jimmy passing a band out. I thought they had picked the captain without me, but then I saw the band. It had the initials J.S. and #13. Those were my initials and my number.

“Guys, what is going on? GUYS!” I shouted louder than I ever had before.

And like before no one answered me. And as I looked at my friends, I realized they were crying and Coach Jimmy was saying how my memory will never be forgotten and we will play this season for me. It couldn't have been a joke, the coach would never have gone along with something like this.

“CAM! CAM! CAM!” I yelled right in his ear and tried to reach out to grab him. And even though I was yelling I wasn't expecting a response this time. But what did surprise me was the fact that I fell right through Cam. As I was picking myself up, I noticed Cam looking down confused, but he put a hand out as he always would to help me up and he was shivering once again.

I started to run and as I did, I ran through the school and past my old locker that was covered with notes and flowers and then quickly to the exit that was floor to ceiling windows and I realized I couldn't see my reflection. I fell to the ground and began to cry. I realized I hadn't eaten or drunk anything, that I hadn't spoken to my parents or friends, I hadn't gone swimming or played a video game this entire summer. All I do is sleep and hang out with Sara. How did I not notice this and for so long? What happened to me? And how can I talk to Sara? So I had to find her and hopefully get the answers I needed.

I peeled myself off the school floor, wiped my tears, and made my way to the tree house, fingers crossed, hoping Sara would be there. I passed the willow tree and remember looking up and seeing her face so many weeks ago and just like before there she was. It was at that moment

that I started to put things together, nobody knew my neighbor was a ghost, including me, until now. And I was also a ghost.