

# ***If These Walls***

An article by Susan Meissner

Step into any house where a significant but quiet event took place and you might be tempted to whisper, “If these walls could talk . . .” We know houses don’t speak, and they don’t remember; nor do they have minds that they should. But we often attach sentiment to the home we live in, especially when that house was the setting for a crucial, life-defining event. In our hearts we often feel toward our houses what we might feel for a trusted ally, a kind and benevolent friend, or maybe even a silent witness to our pain.

These thoughts were heavy on my mind as I crafted the story that lines the pages of *A Sound Among the Trees*. At the heart of this story is a house. Nearly the entire tale takes place inside it. The story is told through the points of view of a new bride named Marielle and an 83-year-old matriarch named Adelaide – as well as the historical point of view of Susannah Page, a young woman attempting to survive the emotional upheaval of love during a time of war.

The Civil War comprises four years of intense human drama and human drama is always the backdrop of a compelling story. I chose to set this book in Fredericksburg because of the particular events that occurred there during the War Between the States. Adelaide imagines that her house, which was her great-grandmother’s house during the Civil War, is aware of its past, that it aches over what happened inside it. Houses are supposed to be places of safety and refuge, and this house, Holly Oak, was unable to be what it was designed to be. As a new bride at Holly Oak, Marielle struggles to find her place as second wife and mother to her formerly widowed husband and his children. Echoes of the past are everywhere.

Through the pages of this story we discover it is not the house that is unable to accept the past for what it was, it is the people inside it. The past is part of who we are and how God is shaping us. This is what Adelaide, Marielle and even Susannah must embrace. If the walls of our houses could talk, perhaps they would tell us, “Trust your Architect, even if you can’t see what He is building. He knows what He is doing. And you are safe here.”