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A Writer's Workshop by Mail



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Move Over Fast Food Workers—Here Come the MFAs

New Stories and Poems

Markets, Columns and More...

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THE HOUSE OF DAVID

BY DANIEL ROSS GOODMAN

“We really need to move,” David’s

mother Eva said to him as he lay face down on his bed. “I know you love this house, but I can’t afford it anymore.” David did not respond. “David...look, honey,” said Eva, as she tenderly massaged his thick head of peach-colored hair. “I know you’re only five years old, but you should be able to understand this. I’ve already explained it to you a hundred times: when your father and I divorced last month, I got to keep the house, but I can’t afford to keep making the payments on it with my salary alone. I don’t have enough money for us to keep living here, so that means we have to look for another that will cost less money. Do you understand?”

David nodded his head, hardly moving it off of the pillow. His mother, a thirty-five-year-old woman with clear gray eyes and shoulder-length brown hair, eyed him with concern. “Honey, I know you’re mad at me now and don’t want to talk to me, but everything’s gonna be alright. I promise. Tomorrow I’ll take you to see the new house Ezra found for us. You’re gonna love it, honey, I know it...David, you remember Ezra, don’t you? The real estate agent? Remember when we were driving around with him all across town last week? He was showing us houses. All kinds. Kinds we can afford. We saw lots and lots of houses, honey, don’t you remember?”

David stared blankly at the pillow. His big green eyes were unreadable.

“Oh, *honey*...” said Eva, shaking her head, still stroking David’s hair. “Maybe you were sleeping in the car when we—well...the important thing is, Ezra’s found us a house. A great house, honey—and it’s affordable. When he showed it to me yesterday, I fell in love with it on

the spot. And tomorrow when I take you to see it, I think you will too...do you want to do any reading tonight, honey? From one of your books? Do you want me to read you a story?”

David shook his head.

“Okay, honey...I understand.” Eva kissed him on the top of his head. “Get some rest...I love you.”

David’s lips were locked; he would not respond. Eva turned off his bedside lamp, stepped out of his room, and wished him goodnight.

The next day, after Eva picked up

David from school and gave him a snack of chocolate chip cookies and milk, she took him to see their new house. They drove to the other side of the town, with Eva humming David’s favorite nursery rhymes along the way. After twenty minutes, they arrived at their destination.

The house was up on a hill, overlooking the entire town. “Isn’t it wonderful?” exclaimed Eva as they climbed out of the car. “Isn’t it just the most wonderful house you’ve ever seen?”

“I always dreamed of living in one of those long, rectangular houses,” Eva continued, as they strained their necks to look up at the house, “and now we’re finally moving into one! Aren’t you excited, honey? Ezra told me the measurements were about ninety feet by sixty feet, which may not make it sound like such a big house, but it’s so spacious once you get inside, honey, trust me...and all those columns that you see at the front and the back, and all around the house? Do you see those, honey?”

Eva pointed to the eight columns at the house’s front and back and fifteen columns on

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both of its sides supporting a simple classical entablature. Inside the entablature's frieze were bas-relief sculptures of strange figures which had the torsos of men and the lower bodies of horses.

David nodded grimly. "Those are called 'Doric' columns, Ezra told me; I don't know what that means—some old-fashioned architectural term, I think—but none of that matters, right, honey? What matters is that we've found a wonderful new home..." Eva exhaled an extended sigh of satisfaction, wrapped her left arm around David's shoulders, and pulled him close to her for a quick, tender hug.

"Well, David?" asked Eva. "What do you think? Isn't it beautiful?"

He did not respond.

"C'mon, honey," said Eva. "Let's go inside."

They climbed up the hill, ascended

three marble steps, and entered the house. It was completely empty inside, utterly devoid of all content except for the mosaic-tiled floor upon which David tread warily, his vacant eyes as hollow as the expansive rectangular space in front of him.

"Don't you just love all the *space* we'll have here?" said Eva, her excited eyes twinkling with contentment. "Sure, it needs a lot of work, but Ezra said the builders will be coming next week to start putting in the bedrooms and bathrooms. Then the plumbers will come to install the plumbing, and then the electricians for the wiring—and the best part of it is, I don't have to pay for *any* of it, it's all included. The previous owner's already paid for everything, even the renovations..."

I don't know why they'd do that, but why ask questions if you're getting the deal of the century—right, honey? Ezra said they're really motivated sellers...well, *that* was obvious! I—I'm sorry, honey...sorry for going on like that...I'm just so excited over what we're getting for this amount of money, that's all...what do you think, David? Just look at all this *space*! Do you really want them to put in walls? I'd almost prefer they

wouldn't put in any...the space is so refreshing...liberating, in a way...you can really breathe in here..."

David gazed up at the cedar-wood

ceiling, and looked back at his mother. She was illuminated by the dull sunlight streaming through the narrow arrow slits which flecked the long, marble walls and which provided the house with its only light.

"I got such a great deal on this house, David, you'll never believe it," she said, glowing with satisfaction, as David's eyes were fixed firmly on the floor. "They wanted me to pay 550 for it—they originally listed it at 575, but Ezra and I got them to go down to 515. I only had to put twenty down for it, and I got a thirty-year mortgage at 3.66...I know all these numbers are probably meaningless to you, David...how could you possibly understand such things yet...but don't you just love this house, David?...David?...honey?"

David was expressionless, his facial muscles and mouth as solid as the marble walls which surrounded them.

"What's the matter, honey? You don't like it?"

David shook his head.

"Oh, *honey...really?* You don't like this house? I can't believe it...why not?"

David pointed to the floor in front of their feet. "What's that, mommy?"

Eva gasped; her face paled, and her

powers of speech evaporated within the tightening hollow of her fear-constricted throat. The blue-and-green mosaic tiles, arrayed in a pattern which they had not at first recognized, spelled out three unmistakable words:

Hic mortuus Deus.

Here God Died.

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on this day. Does Independence Day mean anything to you other than you probably get paid double for working a holiday? This country, this world, yeah, it's all messed up, isn't it? Baseball? Patriotism? Just screwed, isn't it? Have you even ever had a piece of apple pie? I doubt it. And you got no one but yourself to thank. Think about it, jerkoff. Think about that the next time you wonder why the hell this is such a cesspool."

"Whatever . . ."

I spin on my heel and walk furiously

away from him at a ninety degree angle without a thought as to destination or direction.

" . . . like I said, a real Barry McGuire."

"Yeah, *whatever!*" I shout without looking back.

I walk across the soft and giving asphalt then correct my path towards the parking lot, hot—just hot—under the collar, beneath the pits, inside my briefs, against the knees of my jeans, between my socks and the soles of my feet.

Hot. Unendurably steaming hot.

Above the few scattered automobiles, the speakers blare another hit from the '60s, some protest song I could lip-synch perfectly back in the day with all the conviction and righteousness of youth.

"That's right . . . whatever . . ." I sputter upon reaching my car. "Barry McGuire. Yeah, right."

●●

About The Author

Bruce Wodhams is a retired public school teacher/administrator and has been writing poetry, songs, novels, etc., forever. He has been a member of Mensa since 1980 (or thereabouts) and joined the Writers' SIG about a year ago. He says, "I am greatly enjoying *Calliope* and am now taking the leap to submit some of my fiction."

This is his first published story.

Continued from page 34

About The Author

Daniel Ross Goodman, a writer, rabbi and Ph.D. candidate at the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) of America in New York, is studying English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University. A contributor to the Books & Arts section of *The Weekly Standard*, he has published in numerous academic and popular journals, magazines and newspapers, including *The Wall Street Journal*, *Tablet*, *Haaretz*, and *Harvard Divinity School Bulletin*.

His short stories have appeared in *The Acen-tos Review* ("Solids and Stripes," 2017), *aaduna* ("Prélude à l'après-midi d'un rhinoplastie," 2016), *The Cortland Review* ("The Tryst," 2017), *Bewildering Stories* ("The End of Days," winner of the 2015 Spitzer Prize and Mariner Award), and here in *Calliope*.

Coffee Break, continued from page 3

I sincerely apologize for missing all three of the scheduled chats announced in the spring issue. I don't know if anyone showed up for the chat, but every time an event was scheduled, I got caught up in something else and missed it. I'll post a chat schedule for fall in "Last Call" (page 43). Please feel free to announce a chat on the Whiteboard—pick a date and time, and if you want, a topic. If you send me a note (Cynthia@theriver.com) at least a day ahead, I will participate if I'm able.

As Sandy mentioned in "Over the Transom," our winter issue comes out in early January, so this is our last opportunity to wish you happy holidays for 2017. To our staff: Thank you for all you do to make *Calliope* a thriving endeavor. To our members: Thanks for your loyalty, your ideas and contributions. Enjoy the many festivities from now to the end of the year. Keep writing!

--Cynthia