

Bingo

Bingo was in a big Christian church then Buddhist monastery then Sikh temple with a playground inside and no doors. It hadn't any doors before, but it had had higher ceilings. Because it had no doors and it was often winter, Bingo-goers were dressed up in their Thursday drabbery, their expressions suspiciously hidden under piled scarves and hats with and without pom poms. But mostly with. Jameson tried to count. One, two, three, four, – was that four or five? He needed to start in the corner so he knew who he counted – one two three FOUR FIVE – that was old Mrs. Jones – hi! How are you? Oh yes, I know, I've been thinking just the same thing, one of these days he'll see reason. Okay, take care! Yes, you too! One TWO THREE FOUR FUCK. Someone got in his way. Now the someone was not counted but was on the counted side. He secured his eyebrows in place before setting off to give this gentleman a piece of his mind. Wait – deep breaths, one two three four five six seven like we talked about, in and out, out and in. Okay, let's start again. One two three four five six seven EIGHT NINE IT'S NO USE, it's no use. People poured, streaming, screaming, pushing towards the centre of the temple. The centre of the temple had the very best vantage point, from which you could watch everyone else in the room file in and out out and in, watch where they were going looking thinking and decide if you were going looking thinking better than them. The group knew to fight for this spot at the centre of the room, and to hold their ground no matter who sent what at them. They got to the temple two hours early on the dot every Bingo night to ensure their spot would remain rightfully theirs – no-one else seemed to respect their rights of precedence.

The arches holding the temple in place reached up and out of sight, grasping for the little spot of sunlight illuminating the room. Below, people shuffled and called out to each other, though a response was not necessary for them to move on to someone else. If the temple spires were to turn and look down upon themselves, they would find that they were inhabited by all manners of vermin. The spires would have been invited down had they looked down, for the vermin are a friendly bunch. Vermin took all sorts of forms, some hunched over, buried under layer after layer of moth holes, some called out, catching gazes and reeling them in, yelling fresh fruit perfume, dish washers dead women's wedding rings dead rabbit, watching, waiting for a word to tip a head in their direction, and then they'd pounce. They pounced slowly, talking, giving just a little, then more, more MORE. The trick was the control more than anything else. Knowing what enough was and how to take a little step back without stepping on your own toes.

Jameson said, okay folks, you know the drill. The fathers and Gregor nodded, they knew the drill. The family huddled in a group over their table, discussing strategy, though this was a formality – as already explained, they knew the drill. Gregor wanted a different job, said why can't I get a different job? I want to be making the decisions. Father Simon said you, Gregor, make decisions, just other decisions. Gregor would cause a kerfuffle and would cause a very good one. Gregor grunted, not in agreement, but he did agree. Gregor slouched off to kerfuffle elsewhere. In the midst of the kerfuffle, Father Simon, eagerly approaching the caller with a question about his bingo card, knocked right into the box of cards, dropping his into the mix! He exclaimed with worry, I'm so sorry! I'm so incredibly clumsy, I just didn't see it there! Father Simon leaned down to repair the chaos, searching for his lost card, and settled on one that he thought could have been his. While all this commotion was taking place, the other members of the family gathered, handing out their sympathies and swapping out old bingo cards for new. All the bingo cards had been around since 1976, when a wealthy donor had gifted a large number of bingo cards to what had then been a synagogue, enough to fill a room ceiling to floor, but many of them had been tragically lost in a big fire once. This blue crate is all that's left from the original collection. They're usually only brought out on special occasions, but today was the quarter winter, so prizes were quadrupled.

Stakes, stakes, stakes! The family was excited, today would be a determining factor probably in the godship of Bingo. The godship was just a few corners away, and even Father Charles couldn't keep himself from anticipation when the stakes were high enough. The godships only happen every four-and-a-half-weeks, and they determine whether Father Charles would work on Sundays for the next four-and-a-half-weeks. He always had. But this four-and-a-half-week was a new four-and-a-half-week and Father Charles was imagining staying in his pyjamas all day and reading every page of the newspaper.

They were all very competitive but Jameson was very very competitive. He wasn't competitive with other things, but after all if goats could fly, he could win at bingo, as far as Father Simon was concerned. Father Simon had said this to him once, and Jameson, ever proud of himself, got it engraved on a necklace he always carried in his pocket. Jameson always knew when he was going to win. He smelt his bingo coming around the corner, heard its footsteps before it even saw him (after all, he was sat down so it had no footsteps to listen to). Gregor always knew he was going to lose, after all they couldn't both know they were going to win, but Gregor often won from time to time.

The caller called out a number! The caller had more control than anyone, she said something and anyone and everyone rose to their tippy tippy toes to watch her say it. But when she called, boy, you knew that she held everyone's eyes in her lips before she even knew what the next number might be. THIIIIRTY-FIIIVE. A pause then a frantic shuffle as everyone scoured their boards for the number. Upon finding they didn't have it, they peered over the shoulder of the person in front of them and next to and behind them, looking for more empty boards and scowling faces – it alleviated to find they were in company.

Father Charles was tapped on the shoulder. He turned around to find Jameson's face pressed up against his, and a hurried whisper, where is Father Simon? Father Charles gestured to the empty chair next to him, take your glasses off your nose pipe he's right there! He was right there. His furrowed brows raised to encompass the enormity of the situation. Where did he go, he doesn't go, he can't go during bingo, and he really can't go during the bingo godship. What was this insanity. Father Charles left his chair, placed his foot on it and leaned on his leg, a casual but powerful pose he had learned from the strip club he frequented, Peppermint Hippo. He announced, we must find our dear Father Simon, as he may be in great fear and pain and in desperate need of our help. Father Charles' pose worked, the room rallied to his command, taking his word as law and his thoughts as prayer and scattered across the temple in search of Father Simon. Father Charles remained still, put with one leg up one leg down and chanting at those scurrying around below him. These scurriers (all but Father Charles) ran about, with seeming order-less-ness, finding crevices that had never been seen before: they took nails out of floor boards and ran up the temple arches to investigate the chandelier (before discovering there wasn't one), but Father Simon was not to be seen. They climbed on top of and hid under tables to get different points of vantage, but Father Simon was nowhere to be seen.

After a little while, the scurrying subsided as people ran out of places to look and out of hope to find. They slowly came to gather around the single person who remained immobile, Father Charles, as though he were about to make a speech. Then he announced, Father Simon has betrayed us, gone to work for the enemy, for another. Now more than ever we must unite and cooperate and we will prevail, we will find the numbers we need, the numbers we came here for.

All at once, he, Father Simon, strode out from the wings step by step (not everyone walks step by step), swung his head around as though his gorgeous locks of golden hair were tumbling in front of his eyes. He brought his hand around from behind his back and placed it stretched out in front of him as though resting on a finely carved wooden staff topped with a glistening golden eagle, might be bronze. He proclaimed proudly to the scene, My dearest family, I hope you

accept my deepest condolences for any unwarranted and warranted concern you might have bestowed upon me. I am here to announce that, as of today, for not one but TWO four-and-a-half-week terms we shall be the official godships of bingo. The silence that had hung slightly above them up to this point descended upon them.

Gregor was the first to break the silence – but we haven't even played yet! We haven't played, how have we won! I know I haven't! Jameson chimed in, yeah, who's won? I want to win!

They were silenced by the crash of Father Simon's imaginary staff hitting the ground. We have won, he announced. We have won as I went and made a secretive game of my own, raised the stakes by double and I won and now we have won!

We haven't won, you won! We can't take your crown knowing it's not ours. Are you even giving it to us, or are you telling us it's all of ours when actually you know perfectly well it's yours? We can't be taking crowns from other people. I want to win and I didn't get a chance!

Father Simon, in an attempt to reclaim his title or an attempt to reclaim peace said that the bingo was done but if we weren't happy with having won, could resort to barbaric solutions such as a vote for the bingo godship. All acknowledged that, while this was not an ideal solution (which did not involve them playing bingo), this was more fair than accepting the stolen crown bestowed upon them. The room got smaller as everyone crowded around the caller. She called the name of every person in the room, waiting for a response from the rest of said room. Most got none, but many got large cheers and whoos and a couple boos. Each member of the family got a large number of cheers, their presence in the bingo world being so well established and all, also Father Simon had just co-opted their crown. Father Charles got maybe the biggest who but who's counting. The caller called herself last and the room erupted into applause. But I've never even played the bingo, I've just called! She protested. No, but that's exactly why you should get the crown – you never tried to win or usurp the rest of us, you were happy to just give the crown!

A little gang of bingo-goers pushed the caller to centre stage, pulling her by the back of her robes. They snatched the crown from off of Father Simon's head and placed it on the centre of the caller's, announcing her place as leading god of the godship of bingo, as decided by the people of bingo. The outcome was unequivocally supported by all, even Father Charles, who would rather someone else win, anyone, than Father Simon.