God and Bingo

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Abstract

Bingo walked slowly down the narrow street, carefully kicking a battered tin can ahead of him...
BINGO walked slowly down the narrow street, carefully kicking a battered tin can ahead of him. His grimy hands were pushed into the side pockets of his short jacket, and one tired-looking book was tucked under his arm. A passing dog nosed at his feet, then turned away. Bingo took no notice of the dog—nor of Clancy's Candy Store window. Bingo was thinking.

His small mouth moved as he murmured to himself the unbelievable words. Miss Fuller had said, "God." Bingo's father said God many times but it was usually followed by several other words. Even Bingo had said God once when he hit his finger while trying to hammer a nail. His father had immediately threatened to slap him across the room for it. It had all been very confusing to Bingo, because his father had used the same word the day before when he hit his finger with the same hammer. He and Skinny, the kid that lived upstairs, talked about it and decided it was just the way big people are. And now Miss Fuller had said God. Bingo had been in Miss Fuller's second grade room since last fall and she hadn't ever said darn, even, before. Of course, he reasoned with himself, she had said the word different—sorta like you say Christmas.

He gave the tin can a final farewell kick that sent it spinning into the gutter, and went up the steps into the apartment house. Panting from his run up the two flights of steps, he stopped in front of the door marked 316. He tugged at the string that was tied securely to the second button on his jacket and a key appeared, dangling. After a few seconds of fumbling with the lock, the door opened. Bingo threw his jacket and the book at the cot in the corner and hurried to the kitchen.

He drank the milk in short gulps leaving cookie crumbs clinging around the rim of the glass. He set the empty glass down and sighed with contentment, then let his thoughts drift back to God. Miss Fuller had talked about God like He was a person, and she called Him Our Father. But God couldn't be his father because God was supposed to live up in the sky in a place called heaven where he sat on a big throne. Bingo's father lived right here with him and worked at Armour's packing plant.
down on 14th. The only place Bingo had ever seen him sitting much was at Oscar's Bar across the street.

Miss Fuller had said a lot of other things about God, too. He had a son they called Jesus Christ. Sometimes Bingo's father said that, but maybe he didn't know about how God's son came down to earth a long time ago and tried to save people, and how they didn't like Him and killed Him. Bingo had grown quite interested in the story at this point and had expected that Jesus Christ's dad, who was God and all-powerful, would open up the sky and dump hailstones and brimstones down on the people that killed His son. But God and His son just got together afterwards and talked it over and forgave the people.

Bingo looked up and saw his father coming in the door. He was carrying a big bag of groceries on one arm and his dinner pail hung from the other hand.

"Hi Pop." Bingo slid off his chair and waited for his Dad to set the groceries down on the table.

"Bingo," his father's voice was sharp and tired at the same time, "pick up your jacket, I damn near tripped over it coming in."

Bingo trotted into the living room, picked up the battered jacket, and aimed it again in the direction of the cot. He thumbed his nose at it and turned to go back to the kitchen.

"And hang it up—don't just throw it some where else."

"I'm hanging it up, Pop." Bingo picked the jacket up and stuffed it onto a hanger at the foot of his cot. He could hear his father putting away the groceries. The icebox door slammed... there went the milk and meat. The cupboard door slammed... there went the bread and canned stuff. Then the water at the sink gurgled and he knew his father was washing out his dinner bucket.

Bingo stood in the doorway of the kitchen tracing a pattern in the linoleum with the toe of his shoe. He watched his father's big hands turning the dinner bucket slowly over and over, under the steaming water. His shirt clung to his back where the wet spot was between the shoulders.

"Pop..." Bingo began.

His father turned around and looked at him, then his eyes fixed on the shoe tracing a circle on the floor. "What the hell have you done to the toe of that shoe?"

Bingo examined his shoe. The toe was scuffed and torn where
he'd kicked the tin can. "I . . I guess it just got rubbed a little, 'cause I was kickin' at an old can—it was in the way . . ."

"Rubbed a little! It looks like you tried to kick that can clear across to Jersey. Damn it boy, I've asked you to watch your clothes. Oh - Hell, . . . what's the use . . ." His father turned back to the sink and started scrubbing the bucket again.

Bingo slunk into the living room and sat down on the cot. He looked at the shoe. The leather was rubbed all right—and in two or three places it was gone altogether. He pulled out his handkerchief and spit on it and began to rub the spots. He wanted to ask his father about God but now his father was mad at him and he was afraid to ask. As soon as supper was over, his father would go over to Oscar's and he wouldn't have a chance then. He opened a much-read comic book and lost his troubles in the adventures of Superman.

"Bingo—wash your hands and come and eat." Bingo looked up to see his father standing in the doorway, wiping his hands on the towel he had tied around his waist.

Bingo scrubbed his hands with the little brush in the sink like his father always did and wiped his hands hard on the towel hanging by the stove. He sat down at the table and his father filled his plate with food.

"Did the laundry come, Bingo?" his father asked, pouring the milk.

"It wasn't outside when I came from school."

"Three-day service they said. I sent it a week ago . . what the hell are they waiting for?" Bingo brightened. He was glad to see his father was mad at the laundry now. Maybe he'd forgotten about the scuffed shoes.

They ate hungrily with no conversation. His Dad always said, "Eating food is to fill the stomach—talking's for the mind."

Bingo finished the last of his canned peaches with a final flourish of his spoon and waited patiently for his father to push back from the table and light his pipe.

"Pop," he said, as his father blew out the match. "Who's God?"

"God?" echoed his father, staring at him.

"Miss Fuller—that's my teacher at school, well . . she talked about God today and she said He's our father. But you're my father, aren't you, and . . ." Bingo struggled for the words to explain this problem. "And, Pop, she said Mary was our mother . . . but I remember my mother, even though you told me she's
gone to heaven and wouldn’t ever come back any . . any . . .” Bingo felt his mouth begin to tighten into a small tight knot, and he fought the stinging tears. His father had never talked of his mother after that night the men had come and taken her away. Now a sudden wave of loneliness settled over him and he didn’t feel big and strong anymore; he wanted to crawl up into his mother’s lap like he used to.

“Bingo!” his father thundered. “Stop that sniffling and that nonsense . . . all this business that this Miss Fuller’s been telling you is a lot of nonsense. Sentimental garbage for weak sentimental people. You might as well know it now as later. Then it won’t break you.” His father’s face softened a minute and he put a hand on Bingo’s shoulder. “I’m your father, boy, and I’m gonna take care of you.” His father got up and put on his coat.

“I’m going out awhile, Bingo . . . but I’ll be back early.”

His father’s face was stern again, and it seemed to have forgotten all about him. He heard the key turn in the lock. Bingo went to the window resting his chin in the cupped palm of one hand, watching to see his father come out on the street below. He’d be going to Oscar’s again and when he came back he would smell bad and say God and the other words when he bumped into the furniture. Bingo would be real quiet so his father would think he was asleep. He pressed his nose against the pane noticing that Skinny was down there bouncing his ball on the steps when his father came out.

Suddenly the ball jumped out of Skinny’s reach and went bounding out into the street. Skinny darted after it and Bingo saw his father’s mouth open to call to him and he was waving his hands. Then Bingo noticed the truck just as it hit Skinny. It seemed as if Skinny’s body lifted and flew in the air and landed crumpled in the gutter. His father was bending over Skinny and people were crowding around so that Bingo could hardly see. Then his father had Skinny in his arms and was pushing his way toward a stopped car. He yelled something to the driver, got in holding Skinny carefully, and the car roared away.

Then Bingo couldn’t see anymore as tears began to push at his eyelids and he shut his eyes tight and went over and lay down on the cot. Bingo didn’t know what it was, but something terrible had happened to Skinny. He lay there and the blackness of fear kept closing in tighter and tighter. The sobs kept coming and coming until finally a dull greyness pushed aside the blackness.
Then he felt arms around him, rocking him gently. He was in a brightly lit room and his mother’s face smiled at him. He started to speak but she put a cool finger to his lips and pointed toward a bright blob of light. It hurt his eyes at first but then he saw the tired man who sat there on the throne. He was looking at Bingo and smiling. He said something that Bingo couldn’t understand, but he felt his body relaxing and happiness flooded him.

“Bingo! Bingo!” Bingo opened his eyes and saw his father’s face bending over him. His father’s eyes were tender, almost like the man’s on the throne, and he held Bingo tightly against his strong chest.

His father was saying things that Bingo couldn’t understand at first, then he knew his father was telling him about God, just like Miss Fuller had. Bingo closed his eyes and saw the throne again, but this time his father was sitting beside the throne and the Man smiled again and placed His hand on his father’s head.

—Patrick Minear, Sci. Sr.

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**Biologic Reveille**

Be THOU my strength and shield; be Thou still my strength and shield.... hummmmm, hum, hummmmm . . .” The wail from the girl standing at the bus stop was swept up by the wind and compressed with one swirl. Her bony frame vibrated uncontrollably as each gust of wind tried to blow through her.

“I am weeeak,” chattering teeth, “but Thou art mightyyyyy . . .” She sang more softly now but clutched her New Testament more firmly. Two eight o’clock stragglers sauntered up to the stop as the bus groaned around the corner and halted. Naomi’s frizzy, unkempt hair whirled goodbye to the wind as she ran into the shelter of the bus.

She dropped her coin into the box, marched to the vacant double seat, her vacant double seat, and arranged her coat carefully just as she always arranged her coat on the bus every morning at eight o’clock on the way to work. She ignored the robust gang of students on their way to college as she yanked out her Testament and stuck her scrubbed face close to its pages as though the closer she got the easier it was to transplant herself to Palestine.