

WHEN THE GHOSTS WENT

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INT. BINGO HALL - EVENING

The hall is like Death's waiting room. OLD PEOPLE packaged around tables looking miserable as hell. The CALLER calls out numbers and if a player dares dab at their card their neighbour gives them a glare.

Amongst the near-dead of the bingo playing folk are some GHOSTS. We can tell they're different from the others because they're paler than the live ones, and they emit a slight glow. They stand beside or behind the players, watching the game unfold.

No one pays them any attention, as no one can see them, except --

JOHN ARKWRIGHT (70s). He watches the ghosts as they wander around the room. He's clearly seen them all before, he just appears to like watching them. He watches a ghost called DES (80s), hunched and slow, a vicious glare on his face. Des stands behind a player, snapping something inaudible at them.

John's attention turns to a ghost called ALICE TAYLOR (17). She would have been beautiful in life. Alice stands glaring at John. She catches his eye. He quickly looks down at his bingo card.

BARBARA ELLIS (70s), sat beside John, notices the look on his face.

BARBARA

You still seeing them ghosts?

JOHN

What of it?

She looks at him for a moment.

BARBARA

Nowt.

CALLER

Knock at the door - it's number 4.

PLAYER

Bingo!

There are GROANS from around the room. The winning player received glares rather than congratulations.

The sound of chairs SCRAPING along the floor fills the hall as half the players get up and shuffle towards the door.

Barbara mimes smoking a cigarette at John. He nods, looks back towards Alice. She's still glaring at him. He looks away quickly, stands and heads out with the crowd.

EXT. BINGO HALL - LATER

SMOKERS huddle for shelter at the entrance to the bingo hall, coats wrapped tight around them as they puff on their cigarettes.

Barbara flicks hers to the ground, grinds it with her heel. She looks at John like she's about to say something, looks away. Looks at him again for a long moment.

JOHN
What's up with you?

BARBARA
Nowt.

She lights another cigarette, turning away. She takes a long drag. Most of the other smokers drag themselves back inside the building. It's just John, Barbara and a couple more stragglers left.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
We going back in?

JOHN
Better get home.

BARBARA
What for?

JOHN
Got some tidying I need doing.

BARBARA
At this time of night?

John throws down his cigarette, stomps it out. Shoves his hands in his pockets.

JOHN
Bitter tonight.
(beat)
Why'd you ask about the ghosts?

Barbara gives him a long, contemplative look as she takes a long drag on her cigarette. Changes her mind about saying anything, flicks the cigarette to the ground.

BARBARA
No reason.

JOHN
What's up with you tonight?

BARBARA
Better get going for the bus.

She starts walking away. Though she's not exactly quick at her age, John's still slower.

JOHN

Hold up.

EXT. BUS STOP - LATER

Barbara sits at the bus stop, smoking again. John limps in to view, out of breath.

BARBARA

Thought you needed to get home and tidy up.

JOHN

What's up with you, woman?

Barbara stares at him. Then she stares over his shoulder, behind him. She tries to bring her eyes back to John, but struggles to remove her gaze from whatever's caught her attention.

She sucks on her cigarette. Her hand trembles a little.

BARBARA

I don't know. It's like there's something there. Something around you.

John looks around. Can't see anything.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Like something dark. Something black.

JOHN

(laughing)

You're being bloody ridiculous.

He turns all the way around, holding out his hands, laughing as he does so.

JOHN (CONT'D)

See? There's nowt there. Else I just felt up the invisible man.

BARBARA

I'm being serious, John. Deadly serious.

The hair on the back of his head ruffles like it's been blown, gently. There's a low but audible GROWL. John reacts - whirls around, rubs the back of his neck.

Nothing there.

He looks back towards the bus stop. A bus has pulled up. Barbara stands partly through the bus door. She looks back at him.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
God help you, John Arkwright. God
help you.

She disappears in to the bus. The doors close and the bus HISSES off down the street.

John watches it go.

INT. JOHN'S HOUSE - LATER

Dark inside the house. The front door opens. John steps in, flicks on a light. He kicks off his shoes, hangs up his coat.

He looks through the lounge doorway. Looks something of a mess, papers and things all over, a laptop in the middle of some documents on the coffee table.

John contemplates the scene for a moment, changes his mind, heads up the stairs.

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

John walks along the aisles, clutching a basket containing a few essentials.

He browses the cereal racks distractedly. Pulls a box of muesli from the shelves and starts reading the packaging. He looks up from the box.

A ghost looks straight at him from down the aisle.

John turns to look the other direction. There's another ghost there. Staring. The other CUSTOMERS go about their shopping, unaware.

John replaces the cereal box, walks down the aisle. He skirts around the first ghost, who turns to watch him go.

John turns down the next aisle.

There are four ghosts.

All staring at him.

He moves on to the next aisle.

More of them there.

JOHN
(shouting)
Why are you doing this?

A CONCERNED SHOPPER approaches him.

CONCERNED SHOPPER
You all right, love?

John ignores her, watches the ghosts, his eyes wide, his hands trembling.

The Concerned Shopper walks away, looks back at him as she goes.

The lights flicker.

John looks more terrified. The other shoppers don't seem to notice.

John backs up, towards a wall.

The ghosts head towards him.

The lights flicker again. The glow of the ghosts more visible.

John staggers backwards, lands against the milk cabinet, falls to the ground.

The lights go out. Darkness.

The ghost glow moves ever closer towards John.

A low growl. John's hair moves in a breeze.

John screams.

Black.

INT. BINGO HALL - EVENING

The usual crowd in the hall, except no ghosts and no John.

An excited murmur in the air, even as numbers are called.

The door opens and Barbara walks in. The room goes silent. Even the Caller stops calling.

Barbara falters, but regains her strength and walks in to the room. As she walks on, various whispers and murmurs become audible.

GLADYS
Never made it out of the
supermarket.

EDNA
Massive stroke, apparently.

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

John's still form slumped against the milk cabinet. The Concerned Shopper rushes over, lifts his wrist and checks for a pulse.

CONCERNED SHOPPER
(to nearby shoppers)
Get some help, quickly!

She rummages in John's coat pocket, pulls out his wallet. She opens the wallet, checks his driver's license.

CONCERNED SHOPPER (CONT'D)
John? Can you hear me?

She flicks through other items in his wallet. Pulls out a photograph. Her face changes to a look of horror.

She drops the wallet on top of John.

INT. BINGO HALL - EVENING

Barbara sits down at her table. The whispers become louder; loud enough for her to hear.

GEORGE
Bloody disgusting.

RITA
Filthy old man by all accounts.

Barbara lifts her chin, focusses intently on the Caller.

EXT. JOHN'S HOUSE - DAY

Police cars pull up outside the house. POLICE OFFICERS climb out and walk towards the front door.

One peers through the front window while another tries the door. It's locked. He shoves his shoulder against the door, slamming against it until it finally opens.

All of the Police Officers troop inside.

INT. BINGO HALL - EVENING

The whole room is buzzing with conversation; more alive than it's seemed in years.

Barbara sits alone amongst the talk. Tears fall from her eyes but she refuses to lower her head.

PETER
It's against nature. Unforgivable.

AGNES

Margaret must never have known
about it while she were alive.
She'd never have stood for it.

INT. JOHN'S HOUSE, LOUNGE - DAY

A Police Officer wearing forensic gloves carefully lifts the lid of the laptop. He looks at the screen.

GLOVED OFFICER

Sarge. You'd better take a look at
this.

The SERGEANT steps from the hallway in to the lounge. Peers at the screen. He looks away again quickly, shuts the lid.

SERGEANT

Bag it.

He indicates towards the photos and papers on the coffee table.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)

This lot too. Get it out of my
site.

INT. BINGO HALL - EVENING

The volume of chatter has become so great that the Caller has given up even trying.

Certain words seem to come through the chatter louder than others - 'unsavoury', 'ashamed', 'disgusting' - they make Barbara flinch whenever she hears one.

She jumps out of her chair, knocks it over and rushes across the hall, tears streaming.

As we watch her leave, we see John standing behind her table, paler than before with a slight glow about him.

He calls out to her, his words inaudible.

Unseen and unheard.

FADE TO BLACK.