

BEING FAITHFUL

By the time the news had spread, the wait was estimated to be something close to a year, and Jackie, Anglican priest, had already been there, in the middle-of-nowhere, China, for four months. When the news came, she did what most everyone else around her did and began crying, her one question, written on a crumpled piece of paper in her pocket, there to remain unanswered for all time now. And then, after the weeping ended, she took to moving around to her "neighbors" in the camp of the last few months and tried to comfort them, and even though many of them did not speak English, there was no need for language, for everyone was united in knowing just what the world had lost that day. Within a day, the whole of the world sat in crowds and held hands, put their heads down and shed tears. At one moment, the world, the Internet itself, was quiet.

He, with a capital 'H', had appeared in the Bijie, China, and for a very long time no one knew that He was here. An old man, walking from out of the hills, He traveled about, asking people for room and board and food and in exchange, told them that He was God, and that He had come to answer as many questions as he could. People asked parlor trick questions at first like, "When is my mother's birthday?" or "What did I have for breakfast last Monday?" and he patiently answered any and all them; correctly. It wasn't long before the Internet got wind of the story and it began to rapidly spread, at first through stories and tweets, and then photographs and footage. Here was an ancient-looking asian man claiming that he was God come to Earth. He began to gather attendants who would retrieve questions from forums and email and twitter and ask him and then relay the answers to the world. A hundred thousand web sites bloomed, some well-intentioned, some claiming the ability to get to the top of the question queue for a hundred bucks. And for a time too, the Chinese government did what it could to quash the story, but that didn't last long either. Word spread by mouth too, and people began migrating to China in droves. The world's flight traffic re-focused itself on China, slowly jamming infrastructure, and bringing some businesses to a crippling halt. News teams from every country in the world descended. And when visas and papers and the like were denied, people just walked. People walked from Nepal, from Myanmar, from Laos. The whole affair had an immensely destabilizing effect on North Vietnam as the world arrived on the country's doorstep just to get in to China, stories of God arriving with them and infecting the whole of the population like a virus.

Jackie was an early believer, having caught whispers of the arrival through some friends she'd met at a conference, and who were missionaries in Myanmar. They had told her stories that were too unbelievable to not warrant investigation. By then, by April of 2013, she discovered evidence revealing that an international consulting firm had been hired to build a massive database to store and order all the questions for God as well catalog the answers. The existence of such a massive investment was enough evidence for her to get up and go. She packed and took a nearly eighteen hour flight to Beijing from London. And that was nothing compared to getting to Bijie without speaking any Mandarin. But she persevered and there was lots of help. All along the way, she continually met up with fellow travelers from all over the world, and they made happy chatting traveling bands, doing what they could to translate one another's thoughts into loose conversations, bumping along in buses and cars, going to see God.

The man calling himself God, had stated that he was simply there to answer any and all the questions he could in the order that he received them. Presidents, pontiffs, dictators and billionaires were told to get in line. The Chinese government weighed in heavily on God's consulting firm in order to insure that every question's number was quadruply verified, and various contacts and monied sources made sure that any verification included showing that *certain* people had lower numbers. One day in early June, God asked his attendants for a brief hour-long respite from seeing people and also a laptop. After that, the database's programmers were left scratching their heads as the program rumbled along without them and without anyone any longer having security access to the system. In a press release, the chief consultant for the database project declared that the database had been massively re-distributed to the entire Internet through a virtually infinite sequence of IP addresses, the program existing on millions of machines worldwide simultaneously and that now, there was no longer any way to reasonably write to it. Wired magazine declared, "God is a hacker!"

And millions of questions, so many of them trivial, asked before anyone knew that *God* was going to answer them, were all answered and only in the order that they arrived, virtually or personally. The world grew impatient as God answered questions like "Where are my keys?" and "Will I win in the match this Sunday?" And when the occasional child arrived to see Him, he could not be bothered with anything else, sitting him or her on his lap and listening to them for seemingly forever while the United Nations waited for some answer to a border dispute. The questions eventually became more complex, of course. The inevitable, "Why are

you Chinese?" came up and he said, "China is a country and I am not a citizen of any country." And when asked the follow-up, "Why do you look Chinese?" he said, "Statistical likelihood," and left it at that. Many questions revolved around why there was "evil" in the world. Again and again, He admonished humanity that the nature of Life in the Universe was a complicated affair and that since the Universe had to be entropic in Nature, and that things had to fall apart for the laws of Physics to operate in such a way that the DNA molecule could come about, a certain amount of churn was to be expected, etc. etc. He calmed us and said that much of what humanity thought was evil was just par for the course. When asked about War, He largely explained that that was our fault, not his. Are we alone? "No. Never in any sense of the word." And when asked about Terrorism in his name, he only cried. When one physicist asked what, exactly Dark Energy was, and received an answer that was not only plausible but demonstrated and verified several weeks later at the CERN particle collider, the matter was largely settled for the scientific community. God was here. After that, things spiraled out of control as humanity traveled to China.

The weeks that Jackie spent there in the countryside, waiting to see God, were filled with amazing conversations and an enormous amount of love and very little preaching. What was there to preach? God was here. He was going to answer our questions---all of them! The nights were filled with drinking and singing and fires, the collection of which could be seen from space. The answers started to matter less and less, because, maybe fifteen miles from where she slept, He was there, in some room, seeing us, day and night (he didn't sleep) and she was on his list. She felt warm and loved and safe, even with nothing in her possession and her home a hundred thousand miles away.

Then it happened. God asked everyone in his chambers to leave His presence, but for one young child, a girl named Sukie, arrived from Australia. He told the child, in a comforting Australian accent, "You must tell everyone that everything is fine and that what is about to happen is natural. It's all fine. Ok?" Sukie said "Okay." And God, with Sukie in his lap, sat back in his chair, a simple wooden thing that he had been sitting in since before anyone believed who He was, and he closed his eyes and died. After sitting quietly with Him for a while, Sukie got up and went to tell everyone, and everyone, the world over, heard the news. God had died, but everything was fine.

After hugging and holding and crying with a hundred strangers, Jackie sat on the ground by a campfire with her new close friends and fellow travelers, and for the first time since that hour that He left us, she opened the piece of paper in her pocket and looked at her own handwriting.

"Do you love me?"

And she knew the question was selfish, and she didn't care, and she knew the answer, too. Surely she did. But as beautiful as it was surely true, the little question crushed her heart.