

CONFESSION

Written by

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**POV: CELL PHONE SCREEN**

A blurred figure fumbles to steady a selfie. The shot wobbles, until...

The agonized face of CARDIFF (50s) eclipses the view. Voice halting. Skin pale from lack of sleep.

But his clothing: prim and proper, what little can be seen. A modest CHAIN glints at his neck: the end tucked in.

CARDIFF

Hello, phone? That is - whoever is watching later. Please forgive my presentation. Lord knows, I've made many speeches in my time. But all before old fashioned congregations. These high tech gadgets require a very different touch. Such a far cry from flesh and blood. Social media seems so... so... UNSocial. Call *me* old fashioned. Not my thing.

Cardiff fishes the chain from his collar. Nothing on it - just plain gold braid.

CARDIFF

For the record, my name is Cardiff Lore. Abbott of Drake Seminary, CoFounder of the Bring Him Unto You Partnership Project with the University of Bloomington's Temporal Research Division.

(chuckles)

Emphasis on research. I doubt you've heard of it. It's confidential. Fringe, one could say.

(beat)

And now it must be cancelled. I want it known I take full responsibility for the action I am poised to undertake. After which, I don't know if this recording will even exist. But this is my formal confession, either way. Forgive me, for I have sinned. Or, more correctly, I WILL sin. Previously. Father help me, I can't keep it all straight.

Cardiff leans back, fishes in a pocket.

The new angle reveals more of his clothing: White science smock half covers religious garb.

Cardiff extracts an ID CARD - thrusts it at the screen.

On the card: A different, younger face. Glasses magnify intense eyes over soft cheeks.

Under the photo: A name. BRADLEY FOSTER (late 20s).

CARDIFF

This is Bradley Foster. For our project here at Bloomington, I have always endeavored to supply spiritual guidance and the wisdom of my years... such as that may be. Whereas Dr. Foster has been my counterpoint - a fount of arcane, WORLDLY knowledge. The Lord, they say, works in mysterious ways. Though no man can transcend to His divine heights, Bradley's insight has been invaluable. He's... what exactly do they call him here?

Cardiff taps the TITLE on Bradley's ID next.

CARDIFF

A quantum researcher. But by no means a secular man devoid of faith! Prior to hiring Dr. Foster for our humble project, I prayed dearly for guidance. I researched his character - absolutely no stone unturned. Heaven help me, I thought I had chosen properly, having found in Dr. Foster a rare combination of genius and piety.

A tear runs down Cardiff's cheek.

CARDIFF

What could go wrong? Until one month ago, not much.

#### **INT. SCIENCE LAB1 - NIGHT - FLASHBACK**

A cramped, dark space. High tech equipment fills every nook. In one corner: a small, modest looking PLATFORM.

CARDIFF (V.O.)

When I hired him, Dr. Foster swore his theories of how time propagates could - if properly funded - enable us to look directly into the past. A front row seat into what "once was". While I'm confessing, it's best I also admit: I largely viewed our research as just an exercise in goodwill; a genial demonstration of how faith and science can coexist. Perhaps a convenient source of income, too. But never in my wildest dreams did I expect our project to bear fruit-

Cardiff and Bradley hover over a MONITOR. Bradley points to a blip onscreen.

BRADLEY

Don't you see that?

CARDIFF

(squints)

Well, yes. I do. But as to what it is - I've no clue.

BRADLEY

Oh, for Heck's... it's an Agathis Jurassica. Just look!

A blank look from Cardiff prompts Bradley to tap the screen.

BRADLEY

An extinct plant from the Jurassic period. We're looking at it in real time. Here!

CARDIFF

Are you sure it's not some other weed?

Bradley sighs, twists dials. The monitor toggles to: A second tech-filled room. A tighter space, similar vibe.

CARDIFF

First you show me a plant. Now a closet, too?

BRADLEY

It's no closet. That's Lab 2!

CARDIFF

I know - I see it every day. And if I wanted to do so now, I could just walk in. It's just five feet away!

Cardiff waves behind him, towards a door.

CARDIFF

Speaking as a Trustee of Unto Me, I must say: spending millions on glorified security cameras isn't a prudent use of donor funds.

Rising, Bradley gently guides Cardiff towards the door.

BRADLEY

Let's conduct a small experiment, Abbott Lore. I want you to visit Lab Two. Go alone. Take your time. While there, pick out something small. Anything you want, and place it on the floor. Then close your eyes and count to twenty.

CARDIFF

(sarcastic)

Do you want me to dance a jig, too?

BRADLEY

When you're done counting, just put it in your pocket and bring it back out here.

Cardiff stares at Bradley. Has the kid gone nuts?

But humoring's easier than a diagnosis. So Cardiff shrugs, complies.

#### **INT. SCIENCE LAB2 - NIGHT - FLASHBACK**

Cardiff trudges in, closes the door. Emits a sigh, looks around.

CARDIFF

Last year's grant was worth *how* much? Magic parlor tricks like this won't do.

Dismissing a nearby knife, Cardiff spots a PEN FLASHLIGHT on a shelf, picks it up.

CARDIFF

Small. Fits a pocket. This'll do.

Bemused, Cardiff places the flashlight on the floor. Closes his eyes. Breathes deep. Counts.

CARDIFF

One, two, three... This is asinine,  
Foster. But if you insist.

**INT. SCIENCE LAB1 - NIGHT**

Bradley eyes the pen flashlight onscreen.

He speed-types coordinates. On the monitor, the pen GLOWS.

**INT. SCIENCE LAB2 - NIGHT**

Cardiff finishes the count:

CARDIFF

Twenty... About time. All done!

Opening his eyes, Cardiff looks down. The pen flashlight... looks exactly the same. Disappointment floods Cardiff's face:

CARDIFF

Hmmmmph. Still there. What's this  
"experiment" for?

Leaning over, he picks the penlight up. Given Cardiff's age, the effort elicits a pained groan.

He pockets the pen. Shuffles out the door, to -

**INT. SCIENCE LAB1 - NIGHT**

Bradley, still hunched at his monitor. Cardiff pins him with a so-not-impressed glare.

CARDIFF

Let me guess: you're now going to  
tell me what the object was?

Distracted, Bradley keeps typing. Doesn't even look up.

Cardiff fumbles in his pocket for the pen light.

CARDIFF

Suppose you guess right; what does  
that prove? That your security lab  
cameras work?

BRADLEY

They do. But that's not the point.

Bradley smashes a button on his terminal - BEEP. On the platform... something HUMS. SPARKS fly.

Cardiff stumbles back, surprised. In his pocket, his fist closes on... empty AIR?

A goofy grin splits Bradley's face.

BRADLEY

Looking for this, Abbott Lore?

He points to the platform as: the penlight MATERIALIZES. Cardiff sees it. Gasps.

**POV: CELL PHONE SCREEN - PRESENT DAY**

Onscreen, present day Cardiff gulps.

CARDIFF

Moving a penlight five whole feet?  
At first, it seemed such a small,  
unassuming thing. Then staggering -  
once implications sunk in.

Cardiff holds up the penlight to his cell. Two fingers only. Squeamish to touch, as if it were a bug.

CARDIFF

Foster had not only figured out how  
to literally look back in time...  
he could also transport *some*  
objects to present day. As he  
explained to me, only the smallest  
things. Don't ask me the  
calculations involved, but the  
ability to interact with objects  
seemed to fade exponentially with  
mass and years.

(chuckles grimly)

So fishing the Titanic out was no  
option. Though I did ask him that.  
Just for fun.

**INT. SCIENCE LAB1 - NIGHT**

Foster and Cardiff lock eyes across a table. The penlight sits between them, next to a BIBLE.

Cardiff eyes the pen warily. Bradley laughs.

BRADLEY

Why so jumpy? Flashlight pens don't bite!

CARDIFF

I'm not afraid. Just... confused. What does this mean for our research?

BRADLEY

Success, of course! What else?

CARDIFF

"What else" is my question, too! How far can your equipment look back?

BRADLEY

Remember the plant? Jurassic Days. And anything sooner. For instance-

The two lock eyes.

CARDIFF

Thirty AD?

BRADLEY

That era should be a snap. "Relatively", that is.

Bradley snorts at the physics joke. Cardiff doesn't get it. His eyes widen.

CARDIFF

Which means, we now wield the power to get a glimpse of-

BRADLEY

Jesus himself. That's the point! Though - I have to warn you, it's going to take a lot of random searches to find him. He'll be the proverbial needle in a haystack. Maybe decades. It's not like the Bible gives temporal or geographic coordinates.

Cardiff sits back. Brow furrowed in thought.

CARDIFF

I placed that penlight in my pocket. I know that for a fact. But when I came out of Lab 2, it was -



BRADLEY

Gone. Or rather: once I extracted it, the timeline altered. It's what they call the Butterfly Effect. Things change. As they always do.

Cardiff fishes his necklace from his collar. On it now, a GOLD CRUCIFIX. He fingers the emblem gently.

CARDIFF

We must be quite careful once we locate Him.

BRADLEY

(shrugs)

We won't try to move him. Mere sightseeing does no harm.

CARDIFF

Speaking of "looking": that plant you showed was so blurry. Even if -

BRADLEY

No "ifs". When!

CARDIFF

WHEN we find Him - will we even be able to look upon His face?

Bradley grins.

BRADLEY

I've got a workaround for that. Gimme time!

**POV: CELL PHONE SCREEN - PRESENT DAY**

Somewhere behind Cardiff - FOOTSTEPS.

Suddenly nervous, the Abbott jumps! Sudden movement jostles the cell phone...

Enough to reveal he's in Lab 2. Steadying the device and his hand, Cardiff...

Tiptoes to the door, ensures it's locked.

He sits down with the cell again: growing guilt in his eyes.

CARDIFF

Apologies for the interruption. I simply cannot let myself be discovered. Until, well... the deed is done. Where was I?

CARDIFF (CONT'D)

Oh yes, the Experiment. Lord help me, when that pen first disappeared, I *should* have seen the Devil's Hand at work. I *should* have shut the project down then and there. But the temptation of seeing Our Savior's face with mine own eyes was too great. As for Bradley - I knew his faith was unshakeable. What risk was there?

**INT. SCIENCE LAB1 - NIGHT**

SUPER: ONE MONTH LATER

On the monitor: Desert sand blows. BLURRY FIGURES trudge across the screen... Figures which appear to wear Roman garb.

PRISONERS follow, bearing large objects: CROSSES?

Though resolution's low, Cardiff marvels at what he sees.

CARDIFF

Are you certain? It's really Him?

Bradley energetically stuffs CAMERA EQUIPMENT into a bag. He counts and double counts to ensure nothing's missed.

BRADLEY

Well, seeing is believing. So until the leap, I can't be sure.

CARDIFF

Excuse me? What's that for?

Bradley types keys, strides suddenly towards the platform. The device hums, glows.

Cardiff raises a hand - trails after him.

CARDIFF

You promised you wouldn't take anything. We must leave such things alone!

BRADLEY

I'm not taking anything. Think of me as Mohammed going to the Mountain. Not the other way around!

Bradley shoulders his gear, steps onto the platform. Electricity crackles around him, outlines his form.

Cardiff stops short - terrified at the display.

CARDIFF

Why not wait and consult the Board?

BRADLEY

That bureaucratic albatross?  
History awaits. If they get out of  
our way.

(beat)

Abbott Lore, I'll be back in a  
minute. With pictures. Have faith!

The static FLARES. Then...

Bradley and his gear are gone.

Cardiff stares. SOMETHING rocks him - an existential after  
shock? He swoons, blacks out:

**EXT. DESERT - THE CRUCIFIXION**

Air above the desert glows - the proverbial eye of the storm.

Foster materializes feet from JESUS and the ROMAN GUARDS.  
Strangely - or fortunately - they don't seem to see.

Foster's jaw drops. He watches the iconic scene unfold.

Unaware of his audience, Jesus trudges through sand. Foster  
swings a camera towards him, records.

BRADLEY

Wait until Abbott Lore sees. This  
is amazing...

Jesus stumbles. Bradley frowns.

BRADLEY

And so, so wrong.

Bradley's eyes drift to a PEBBLE by his foot. He picks it up.

**INT. SCIENCE LAB1 - NIGHT**

Cardiff moans - holds his head. Sparks from the platform  
chase the mental fog away.

Foster rematerializes. Dropping gear, he hops to the floor.

BRADLEY

You're not going to believe this -

Cardiff tries to stand. Stumbles.

BRADLEY  
Abbott, are you OK?

CARDIFF  
(gasps)  
I... I guess so. But - enough of  
me. Did you see Him?

BRADLEY  
SEE HIM? There's so much more!

Cardiff stares at Bradley's exuberance.

CARDIFF  
You look... giddy.

BRADLEY  
Like a kid before Christmas!

Bradley grabs the camera, plays footage back.

BRADLEY  
Look - I not only witnessed Jesus.  
I SAVED HIM!

CARDIFF  
He saves US. Excuse me?

Bradley plugs the camera into his terminal, downloads files.

BRADLEY  
It was so surprisingly simple - as  
if my hand were guided by God! All  
it took was one pebble. I  
distracted the guards, and he  
escaped!

Cardiff gawks, appalled.

CARDIFF  
The crucifixion was...

BRADLEY  
Cancelled. Yeah!

Cardiff fumbles, fishes his necklace from his collar - And  
finds the gold cross - GONE!

CARDIFF  
It can't be!

He darts to the Bible on the table, flips it open. The pages are BLANK. Cardiff whips around in horror to a still-triumphant Bradley.

BRADLEY

What?

CARDIFF

Dear God, what have you done?

Bradley's face falls, unsure.

BRADLEY

Jesus living is a *good* thing. No?

**POV: CELL PHONE SCREEN - PRESENT DAY**

Cardiff rubs sore eyes, blinks into the lens.

CARDIFF

The Road to Hell is paved with Good Intentions. A more true aphorism has never passed Man's lips. With that single stone, Bradley saved a man - yet unraveled the moral world.

Reaching across a table, Cardiff retrieves -

A KNIFE. He fingers it. Tragic thoughts etch harsh lines in his face.

CARDIFF

(soft)

It was God's will Jesus sacrificed for our sins. Compared to me, Dr. Foster is just a boy. He meant well, but in erasing that foretold moment, he has obliterated eons of hard won religious knowledge. Destroyed salvation itself. Such treasures absolutely, positively must be restored. No matter the hideous price on my poor soul.

Cardiff stands, carries the cell and knife towards the door.

CARDIFF

It's taken all night, and I'm no student of such arcane things. I pray I've read enough of Bradley's notes to understand the rudiments of how that "platform" works.

CARDIFF (CONT'D)

With God's Grace, I can use it alone, no mistakes. I'll only have one opportunity. In preparation, I've sent out Bradley to inform the Board. That buys me time. Given he's a man of faith as well as science, it's really best Bradley DOESN'T know what must come next.

Sniffing, Cardiff steps through the door into:

**INT. SCIENCE LAB1 - NIGHT**

Bradley isn't there.

Cardiff hunts and pecks keys. Eventually, the platform glows.

He steps onto it, draws a labored breath.

CARDIFF

Taking it into my hands to ensure God's Will is done, and his Son sacrificed a second time? What monstrous hubris is this? God, I am forever your servant. But I would never have foreseen you'd ask such a thing!

The platform FLASHES. For a moment, Cardiff vanishes.

Then - he reappears.

Cardiff studies the cell in his hand. The date rolls back. A few days - not much at all.

Glancing up, he sees - now he's NOT alone.

Feet away, Bradley holds a coffee. Stares at Cardiff, stunned.

BRADLEY

Where'd you come from?

Cardiff smiles, gentle. He takes the coffee from Bradley, sets it down.

CARDIFF

Good evening, Bradley. What date is this?

BRADLEY

Uh, May 15th? What question is that, you mean?

CARDIFF

The 15th? Good. That means you haven't made the leap yet.

BRADLEY

Abbott Lore? I didn't know you were the type for practical jokes...

Cardiff removes Bradley's glasses. Fondly ruffles his hair.

CARDIFF

I know you didn't mean to sin, my son. Please know, this is done with love. Both for you. And the world.

BRADLEY

Excuse m-

Cardiff's knife FLASHES. Slashes Bradley's throat!

The young scientist falls, jets blood. He reaches up towards Cardiff -

BRADLEY

What... did I do?

Cardiff smiles sadly, shakes his head. Bradley gurgles, dies.

The Abbott reaches into his collar, pulls out his necklace. Once again, the chain BEARS A CROSS.

CARDIFF

A steep price. But all's restored. Occam's Razor: I couldn't bring myself to doom Jesus directly. Better to stop you... both for simplicity's sake. And my soul.

His eyes drift to Bradley's corpse.

CARDIFF

Forgive him, Father. I prostrate myself to your judgement. Dr. Foster didn't know what he did. But I do.

Cardiff picks up the coffee and POURS it over the keyboard. Sparks spit as equipment fries.

Flipping the knife around to its hilt, Cardiff CRACKS the monitor. Starts smashing keys, too...

FINAL FADE OUT: