

FINAL EDITION

A One-Act Play

By Eden Lane

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CHARACTERS

CLAIRE MACAVOY (50s–60s) — Editor/Owner. Inherited the paper from her father. Does every job except ad sales.

SAM HARPER (20s–30s) — Young Reporter. Human interest beat. Eager, idealistic, carrying a secret.

DOT CARNEY (70s+) — Press Operator. Runs the old press and the police blotter. Granddaughter of the original press operator.

MARTY BLAKE (40s–60s) — Layout/Desk Person. Sports and religion beat. Calm, organized, observant. (May be cast as any gender.)

SETTING

A small-town newspaper office, present day (or close enough). The final day of print publication.

The room shows decades of accumulated history: mismatched desks, filing cabinets, a battered couch, stacks of old editions, a cork board dense with pinned articles and photos. A large whiteboard lists story assignments. Everything is well-worn but functional.

A doorway leads to the back room where the antique printing press lives. We never see the press—only hear it.

TIME

The last day of print publication. Late morning, moving toward deadline.

PRODUCTION NOTE

The antique press is a constant offstage presence—groaning, clanking, rumbling. We hear it struggle, complain, and eventually run one final time.

The newsroom should feel like organized chaos: overlapping dialogue, repeated routes across the space, and a lived-in sense that these four have been doing this together for years. The set should be mismatched furniture and equipment, collected over many years.

THE PLAY

LIGHTS UP:

The newsroom is already in motion.

MARTY BLAKE sits at a desk, arranging page layouts with calm precision.
SAM HARPER types frantically, surrounded by notebooks.

From offstage, the PRESS makes a low, unsteady mechanical rumble.

DOT CARNEY enters from the press room, wiping ink-stained hands on her apron, muttering about cylinder pressure. She crosses behind, checks something on the whiteboard, exits again.

The day has already begun.

CLAIRE MACAVOY enters carrying a box of donuts and a photo envelope.

The moment she crosses the threshold, the others *feel* her. Movement slows slightly. A subtle lighting shift isolates Claire as she takes in the room—a private, silent inventory.

One deep breath.

Beat.

Lights return to full. Motion resumes.

CLAIRE

Got the photo. And donuts. Let's put out a paper.

Everyone converges for donuts with well-worn ease.

MARTY

(taking a donut)

You went out to Castellano's forge?

CLAIRE

He finished it last night. Wanted us to see it before Tuesday.

She pulls the photo from the envelope.

SAM

(leaning in)
It's beautiful.

CLAIRE

Three hundred pounds of forged steel. He says it'll last a thousand years.

DOT

(taking two donuts)
Longer than we will.

MARTY

Dedication's at the library?

CLAIRE

Tuesday. Two p.m. Front lawn.

They absorb that: Tuesday is after they're gone.

MARTY

Front page?

CLAIRE

Above the fold.

DOT

If this is the last edition, I'm taking three donuts.

SAM

(softly)
Right. The last edition.

MARTY

This is what they'll find in that time capsule in fifty years: donut crumbs and bad coffee

DOT

Better than lemon bars. Claire's dad hated lemon bars. Used to hide them in the supply closet so nobody'd ask him for the recipe.

CLAIRE

He said dessert shouldn't be suspiciously sticky.

MARTY

Dot once wrote a whole editorial about donuts. It was a cry for help.

DOT

It was a public service announcement.

They eat. The banter feels like a long established habit.

CLAIRE sets the photo carefully on her desk, glancing at it but not indulging the emotion.

CLAIRE

We've got about six hours to deadline. Blake, can you make room above the fold?

MARTY

I'll bump the bake sale.

CLAIRE

How'd that turn out?

MARTY

Mrs. Patterson's lemon bars. Again. Reverend Mike came in third with store-bought cookies.

DOT

That man has no shame.

From offstage, the PRESS makes a GRINDING SOUND, then a METALLIC CLUNK. Everyone stops. Listens. Silence.

DOT

(to the press)

Don't you dare.

Beat. The press RUMBLES back to life.

(sighs)

She's showing off 'cause you're here, Claire. Just like your father.

(heading back)

I'll be in the back before she changes her mind.

She exits with her donuts.

SAM

Think she'll be okay?

CLAIRE

The press or Dot?

SAM

Yes.

MARTY

They've been together longer than most marriages. They'll figure it out.

CLAIRE picks up the time capsule photo.

CLAIRE

How's your goodbye piece coming?

SAM

(hesitates)

It's... coming.

CLAIRE

Don't overthink it. Just tell the truth.

Sam doesn't quite meet her eyes.

MARTY

We still need the blotter. Dot was supposed to—

DOT (O.S.)

I'M WORKING ON IT!

MARTY

—transcribe the incident reports.

CLAIRE

I'll handle it. What else?

SAM

Waiting on a quote from the principal. They want to say something for the final edition.

CLAIRE

Good. Chase that.

SAM returns to their desk. CLAIRE crosses to the whiteboard, scanning assignments, absently straightening magnets that don't need straightening.

MARTY

You okay?

CLAIRE

(still looking at the board)

Ask me tomorrow.

MARTY

Fair enough.

The room settles deeper into work mode. The offstage press finds an uneven rhythm.

Lights shift—time moves forward.

BEAT 2: THE WORK BEGINS

CLAIRE

(still in "editor mode")

Okay. Let's see where we are.

SAM

(looking up)

School board lede is fixed. Can you look?

CLAIRE

Bring it over.

MARTY's desk phone rings.

MARTY

(into phone)

Weekly Herald, Marty Blake...

(listens)

Yes, Reverend Mike, I've got the farewell announcement.

He turns slightly, half-facing away.

Sam crosses with their laptop. CLAIRE pours herself coffee.

SAM

Okay, I shortened it to: "The school board voted Tuesday to form a subcommittee to study cafeteria vending machine options."

CLAIRE

(reading)

Better. Change "voted to form" to "formed" - cuts a word and loses the double 'to.'

SAM

Oh. Right.

CLAIRE

And "study" to "review." Sounds more active. (reading further)

Where's Mrs. Patterson?

SAM

Third paragraph, under public comments.

CLAIRE

Good.

Sam doesn't move away.

MARTY

(on phone)

We're very tight on space this week...

No, I can't guarantee above the fold...

Sam fidgets. Glances at their phone. It BUZZES softly in their pocket. They flinch.

CLAIRE

You're vibrating.

SAM

It's just... spam.

shoves the phone a little too quickly into a drawer.

CLAIRE

Sam.

SAM

Yeah?

CLAIRE

You're doing the look-away-while-lying thing again.

SAM

I don't have a look-away-while-lying thing.

MARTY

(still on phone, but interjecting a dry comment)

You absolutely do.

(into phone)

Reverend, I promise we'll spell "potluck" correctly this time.

Sam exhales, still hovering.

SAM

Claire... can I ask you something?

CLAIRE

Of course.

SAM

After today—when everything goes digital—they're going to need somebody local, right? Someone who knows the stories?

CLAIRE

Probably.

SAM

Someone who could cover school board, city council, runaway llamas...

CLAIRE

(studying Sam)

Sam.

A small, terrified beat.

SAM

They offered me the job.

CLAIRE

When?

SAM

Last week. I didn't know how to tell you.

Marty hangs up.

MARTY

Claire, do you want the football game above or below the fold?

Claire keeps her eyes on Sam.

CLAIRE

Above.

(to Sam, low)

We'll talk about this later.

Sam nods, miserable.

SAM

I'm sorry.

CLAIRE

Don't be sorry. Just—

(beat)

Let's get through today first.

They separate: SAM back to their desk, CLAIRE to hers. MARTY watches the energy, clocking something but not asking.

The press GROANS again.

MARTY

(to no one in particular)

The game's Friday. We won't be here Friday.

CLAIRE

I know.

MARTY

Above the fold, then.

Marty makes a note.

Sam sits, fingers hovering over the keys. Types a few words. Stops. Erases. Types again.

Claire picks up the photo of the sculpture.

MARTY

(nods at the photo)

When did Castellano finish it?

CLAIRE

Last night. My dad would've liked the welds—I stopped by the forge first thing. That's why the donuts are still warm.

MARTY

You got donuts after visiting a forge at dawn?

CLAIRE

The donut hut is on the way back from Castellano's.

MARTY

Dedication's Tuesday?

CLAIRE

Tuesday at two. Library lawn.

Sam has stopped typing.

SAM

(quiet, not looking up)

We won't be here to cover it.

CLAIRE

No.

A small silence.

She sets the photo down with deliberate care.

But we'll cover the story today. That's what matters.

SAM

(back to typing)

Right. Today.

The sound of typing. The hum of the computer. The distant press warming up.

MARTY

You want me to scan that photo for the front page?

CLAIRE

Please.

MARTY crosses to the scanner, takes the photo. CLAIRE returns to her desk. Sam types, the rhythm heavier than before.

From offstage, a hopeful press sound—like it's trying to hit its stride.

Lights shift.

BEAT 3: DOT'S ENTRANCE

DOT marches in from the press room with a coffee cup in one hand and a test proof in the other.

DOT

(holding up the cup)

Marty.

MARTY

Not the plate-maker.

DOT

On the plate-maker. Again!

MARTY

I'll stop.

DOT

No, you won't. You'll just feel guilty about it.

She sets the cup down far from danger, hands CLAIRE the test sheet.

Registration's off. Cyan's drifting left, magenta's too eager.

CLAIRE

Can you fix it?

DOT

(sharp; incredulous)

Can I fix it? Can I— Yes. I can fix it. I always fix it.

(then, gentler)

I've been babysitting this thing since your dad still thought a bow tie was a personality trait.

SAM

Is it bad?

DOT

It's a fifty-year-old press on its last legs. "Bad" is relative.

(looks toward the back)

She printed three mayors, four divorces, and one scandal we swore to bury. She's earned the right to be dramatic.

CLAIRE

How long?

DOT

Twenty minutes to recalibrate. Thirty if she decides she's a linotype machine from 1952 again.

CLAIRE

Take what you need.

DOT

(to Sam)

How's the llama party?

SAM

Done. With photo. Emma Henderson's eighth birthday, llama in a party hat, the whole thing.

DOT

Good. Emma deserves to see her birthday in the paper. Her grandma and I used to cut class to—well. To read the funnies. Back when your granddad ran this place, Claire..

SAM

Oh.

DOT

It's a family business. We just... forgot to retire.

(a beat, Sam and Claire exchange a look)

I'm gonna get one more good run out of her if it's the last thing I do.

She hears herself, grimaces.

I mean the press. Not me. Probably.

She exits toward the press. Silence for a moment.

MARTY

She's in a good mood.

CLAIRE

That was a good mood.

SAM

Will she really get it to run?

CLAIRE

Yes.

From offstage, a small, hopeful WHIR.

Lights shift again—the rhythm picks up.

BEAT 4: DEADLINE MONTAGE

The energy spikes. This is deadline mode: fast, overlapping, funny, a little desperate. No one waits for their turn.

[Note: Dialogue in this section should flow rapidly with interruptions and overlaps. Characters finish each other's thoughts, talk over each other, and move constantly.]

SAM

Okay—time capsule feature, school board recap, garden club controversy, llama birthday, Little League scores—

MARTY

There's a garden club / controversy?

SAM

Red petunias in the public planter. Unauthorized. The official / town flower is the yellow rose.

MARTY

Of course it is.

CLAIRE

Llama piece is ready?

SAM

Caption and everything. “Llama Drama Delights at Birthday Bash.”

MARTY

Hard-hitting / journalism.

SAM

Hey, that llama made a kid’s birthday special.

CLAIRE

And thirty years from now, she’ll remember that it made the paper.

DOT appears in the doorway, test sheet in hand.

DOT

Cyan drift on the masthead. / I’m chasing it.

CLAIRE

Can you—

DOT

I said I’m chasing it, not losing a fistfight.

She disappears. Chaos blooms.

MARTY

Claire, I need four inches in church announcements.

CLAIRE

Cut the bake sale.

MARTY

It's for the youth group / mission trip.

CLAIRE

Fine. Cut the potluck.

MARTY

Farewell potluck. For Reverend / Mike.

CLAIRE

Of course it is.

(beat)

Combine them. "Farewell potluck and bake sale." Single brief.

MARTY

The Methodists are gonna / call.

CLAIRE

The Methodists always call.

The PRESS CLANKS loudly.

DOT (O.S.)

Feeder's jamming every third sheet!

SAM

Is that—

DOT (O.S.)

Use your context clues, / kid!

Sam jumps, then types faster.

SAM

(to self, typing)

“Mayor Foster says the capsule is a promise to the future...”

(stops)

Does “promise to the future” sound corny?

MARTY

Yes. /

CLAIRE

Keep it. He said it.

SAM

Right. Quote the corny.

A phone rings. CLAIRE picks up mid-walk.

CLAIRE

Weekly Herald... Hi, Mrs. Patterson...

(listens; scribbles)

Yes, your lemon bars are mentioned... No, I don't think we can run a recipe / this week...

While she's on the phone, across the room:

MARTY

(to Sam)

Did you get the final Little League score?

SAM

They emailed it. Or tried. I think it went to spam.

MARTY

That's where dreams go.

Sam digs frantically through an inbox window.

SAM

Found it. Ten to eight. Extra innings. The coach cried.

MARTY

We're not printing the crying.

SAM

But it was like... proud / crying.

MARTY

(two beats)

One line. "The coach was moved."

SAM

Got it.

Claire hangs up, crosses back through them.

CLAIRE

Patterson wants us to use the phrase "beloved community baker."

MARTY

That's going to start a butter / war.

SAM

Who's her rival?

MARTY

Half the church ladies. I'm not printing that map.

From offstage, a horrible SQUEALING NOISE from the press.

All three freeze.

DOT (O.S.)

Somebody left a paper clip in the infeed / again!

MARTY

(sotto, already standing)

That wasn't me.

SAM

I don't even know where the infed is.

CLAIRE

Nobody confess. Just fix it.

MARTY hurries off with a page in hand.

MARTY

Calling it "page three" feels / optimistic.

He exits. Sam and Claire alone in the swirl.

SAM

Claire?

CLAIRE

Mm?

SAM

What happens to all these stories when there's no paper?

CLAIRE

They still happened.

SAM

But if nobody writes them down—

CLAIRE

Then we write what we can today.

She moves off to another pile. The chaos continues.

BEAT 5: CLAIRE & SAM QUIET

The soundscape drops a notch. MARTY is in the back with Dot; for a moment, this is just Claire and Sam. Sam closes a window on the computer. Opens it again. Closes it.

CLAIRE

You're going to wear out the "undo" function.

SAM

Can I ask you something? For real this time?

CLAIRE

You just did.

SAM

Did you ever... think about doing something else? Not newspaper work.

CLAIRE

Why are you asking?

SAM

I'm just trying to picture you not here. And I can't.

Claire sets down her pen, really looks at Sam.

CLAIRE

I tried to stray. For about three months in my twenties. Office job in a building that didn't smell like ink or burned coffee.

(beat)

I lasted until the first time I missed hearing the press come up to speed.

Sam smiles, a little.

SAM

Did your dad freak out?

CLAIRE

He pretended not to. But he kept a red pen in his shirt pocket even at dinner. Just in case I came back with copy.

SAM

That's... sweet. And slightly terrifying.

CLAIRE

He believed this place would outlive him. Maybe he was right. Maybe this is what "outliving" looks like.

A softer silence.

Sam swallows.

SAM

I wasn't ready to leave yet. That's the truth. I know how it looks—everybody else has to go and I get to stay—and I feel sick about it. But also... I'm not done learning. I need more work. More llamas.

CLAIRE

You're right.

SAM

I really was expecting a pep talk.

CLAIRE

Why argue with the truth? You're not ready to leave. You need another year. Maybe two. So yes—you should stay.

SAM

But you—

CLAIRE

The world's changing. Again. And this time, I can't afford to go with it.

(beat, dry)

Apparently you need money to run a newspaper. Who knew?

SAM

Claire—

CLAIRE

I sold the paper, Sam. I had to.

She lets that sit.

SAM

You did everything you could.

CLAIRE

I did everything I knew how to do. Your generation will know different things. You'll figure out how to do good work anyway. You'll find the Emma Hendersons and the runaway llamas and the school board meetings that matter to someone.

SAM

The stories that matter to someone.

CLAIRE

Exactly.

From offstage:

DOT (O.S.)

If you two are done having feelings, I need the front page!

They both laugh, the tension broken.

CLAIRE

(calling)

Two minutes!

(to Sam)

Back to work.

SAM

Back to work.

They return to their desks. The press makes a more confident, BUILDING SOUND—like it might finally run.

Lights shift.

BEAT 6: DOT'S RETURN / COVID STORY

The press sound has been steady, then stutters, then steadies again.

DOT enters, wiping her hands, a little less ink-smearred than usual.

DOT

We're almost there. Press is cooperating. Mostly.

MARTY

(bringing a page)

That's as close to optimism as she gets.

DOT

Remember COVID? Everybody working from home except me. Insurance said only managers on site.

CLAIRE

So we made you 'Operations Manager'.

DOT

Yeah. Well... The corporate geniuses didn't know that meant "woman who actually shoves paper into angry machinery." They thought I managed operations.

(beat, with relish)

Offered me a position. "Operations and digital synergy." Said I could help "shape the brand."

MARTY

That sounds like a threat.

DOT

I told them exactly where they could put their "synergy."

(beat)

Then I told them who they *should* hire.

She looks directly at Sam.

SAM

You?... you told them about me?

DOT

Who else was I gonna recommend? Blake'd make them cry. Claire'd stage a coup. You actually remember people's kids' names.

Sam is stunned.

SAM

I didn't know.

DOT

Now you do. And before anyone gets misty about it—

(gestures to the back)

—press still needs me. For the next twenty minutes, anyway.

She starts to go, turns back.

DOT (cont)

(to Claire)

Your dad and my grandfather used to fight over that press, Claire. Who got to fine-tune her. Now look at us—two leftovers keeping her breathing.

(shrugs)

Could be worse.

She exits toward the press.

A quiet beat.

MARTY

That was a good thing she did.

SAM

I don't know what to say.

CLAIRE

You don't have to say anything. Just do good work.

From offstage, the press gives a strong, confident RUNNING SOUND.

DOT (O.S.)

We're ready! Sending the first page!

MARTY

I'll help her with the plates.

He exits.

Claire and Sam stand for a moment, listening.

SAM

(to Claire)

Did you really change her title just to keep her here during the shutdown?

CLAIRE

We did what we had to. That's all any of this has ever been.

Lights shift toward the final movement.

BEAT 7: FINAL RUN & ENDING

The press runs full-out now—steady, rhythmic, almost musical. The four gather near the doorway to the press room, listening.

Then, slowly, the rhythm begins to wind down.

Slower.

Slower.

And stops.

Silence.

Footsteps. DOT enters carrying a single printed page—tabloid-sized, fresh from the press, a little crooked.

She holds it like something fragile and precious.

DOT

(to the page, quietly)

Ninety years. Not bad, you old broad.

She hands it to Claire.

Your front page.

Claire takes it. The time capsule photo sits at the top.

CLAIRE

(reading)

“Time Capsule Ready for Library Dedication. Community Invited to Tuesday Ceremony.”

MARTY

After we're gone.

CLAIRE

(reading on)

“Mayor Jim Foster will officiate the dedication at the town library. The capsule, forged by local artist Joe Castellano from steel and reclaimed materials, will be buried on the front lawn and opened in fifty years.”

She looks up.

Fifty years.

DOT

They'll forget we were ever here by then.

MARTY

Maybe.

SAM

(quiet, steady)

Or maybe some kid in 2075 pulls this out of the box and thinks, “Huh. Somebody cared enough to write it down.”

Claire looks at Sam—really sees them.

CLAIRE

My father used to say, “We don't just write the first draft of history. We write the only draft most people ever read.”

She smooths the page.

He thought the paper would outlive him.

(looks at all three)

I think he was right. Just... not in the way he imagined.

A beat.

DOT

It mattered. All of it. The llamas. The lemon bars. The obits that spelled their names right.

MARTY

The pastors and coaches and bake sales.

SAM

Emma's birthday.

They stand together; the history of the town somehow compressed into this moment.

Claire lifts the page slightly, like a quiet toast.

CLAIRE

For one last day... we told the truth.

(beat)

Then we put the paper to bed.

From offstage, the press gives one final MECHANICAL SIGH—less a breakdown than an exhale.

The four stand together—a newsroom, a family, a time capsule of their own—holding the final edition between them.

Lights slowly fade.

Blackout.

END OF PLAY