

DEAD PRESS

A small newspaper publisher is forced to confront his conscience when a headline he prints comes back to haunt him.

INT. PETER'S PRESS - NIGHT

The front section of the print shop is smaller than it appears from the outside. In the front, the walls are lined with posters, signs, and T-shirt prints. Behind the register is a big window that peers into the back room.

Through the window HUM two medium-sized mechanical printing presses that haven't been updated since the 80's. They churn out newspaper pages like they are trying to keep up with the times. Sitting in a chair next to the machines is PETER, a tall thin man wearing a shabby shirt and ragged pants.

Peter grabs a newspaper off the stack; the headline reads "Mayoral Candidate Cheats on Wife." He looks uneasy, rubbing his forehead intently. The humming grows louder.

INT. PETER'S PRESS - DAY

The bell on the front door RINGS. Two well-dressed women walk into the print shop. They are smiling from ear-to-ear.

SYDNEY

Peter! Peter honey this front page is amazing. Greg is going to get buried by this.

CATHERINE

The mayor is overjoyed. We were walking down the street and the news stands were EMPTY! Feels like how it was when your dad ran the place in the 70's.

Peter goes to greet the women, his demeanor is curiously dour.

PETER

Well he didn't have to go up against the internet. But that's good to hear.

SYDNEY

Why do you look so down? You're helping the mayor beat Greg for re-election, your newspaper sales will probably skyrocket this week, and...

Sydney gestures her head towards Catherine. Catherine flaps open her coat pocket and pulls out an envelope. She hands it to Peter. He reluctantly accepts. Inside lies a check for \$75,000.

CATHERINE

That should cover the cost for a front page story and, well...

SYDNEY

(mouthing)

Your silence.

Peter quickly puts the check in his pocket.

PETER

I think you two should go.

SYDNEY

Hey I get it. You did a good thing, even if it doesn't feel like it yet. We'll see ya around.

The two women exit the store.

INT. PETER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Peter enters his home and heads straight to the kitchen. He opens the fridge to the sight of barren shelves. He scavenges together a skimpy meal: bacon and waffles. The bacon is thrown into the microwave, the waffles into a rusted toaster.

Peter walks over to a small table in front of a beat-up couch in his living room and turns on the tv. The sounds of the news ANCHOR fills the quiet household. He sets down a glass of water on the table and a bottle of syrup. DING. The waffles are ready.

The waffles sit unevenly cooked and unappetizing. Peter plops them on his plate along with the bacon he microwaved and sits down in front of the tv.

ANCHOR

We have breaking news today in the mayoral race.

Peter starts to drench his waffles in syrup.

ANCHOR (O.C.) (CONT'D)

Hopeful mayoral candidate Greg Fuller has been found dead in his home today. Authorities believe suicide is the cause of death.

The sound of the tv drowns out. A high pitched ringing fills Peter's head, followed by the sound of his printing presses; BANGING and THUDDING violently. The syrup overflows off his plate and drips onto his shoes.

He lifelessly reaches into his pocket and grabs his cell phone. He tries to call Sydney. No answer.

INT. PETER'S PRESS - NIGHT

Peter barges into his shop in a feverish state. He marches straight into the back room to pull the plugs on both his printing presses. The noise quiets. He picks up one of his printed papers in disgust and reads the front page again just to punish himself.

He bunches up all of the printed papers and stuffs them into a garbage can up front. He exits the store to go to his car.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Peter hastily walks to his car, flings open the door, and pulls down his glove box to pull out a box of matches. He heads back inside.

INT. PETER'S PRESS - NIGHT

Peter storms back in to his shop, ready to burn his mistake. The noise is back, the machines in the back are whirling and spinning their gears again. The sounds pound in his head.

PETER

I thought I shut those off.

He sets the box of matches next to the register.

PETER (CONT'D)

Hello?

Peter creeps into the back room. The printing presses are turned back on, churning out newspapers. The front page catches his eye; it looks different than it did before. Peter approaches the new stack of papers and takes one off the top.

The front page reads "Local Newspaper Publisher Dies in Freak Accident." Peter drops the paper in shock.

CRASH.

Peter jolts at the sound of his wall decorations upfront crashing to the ground. Through the window he sees a silhouette of a man with a knife sticking out of his neck. Peters walks towards him.

PETER (CONT'D)

Jesus! Who's there? Hello?

When he crosses the doorway to the front, no one is there. HUM. The machine start spinning louder. Peter's panic rises.

On the floor lie the crumpled newspapers he had stuffed in the trashcan earlier. They are scattered throughout the store with "LIAR" smeared of the front page. The sound of the machinery makes Peter insane.

He runs into the back room and unplugs the printing presses, but they keep whirling; the newspapers keep printing. The headline has changed now "Too Hot Off the Press! Peter's Press Bursts into Flames."

PETER (CONT'D)

Who is doing this? Stop it please!

Peter is now in tears. He stumbles back out to the front of the store, frantic.

PETER (CONT'D)

I don't know what's happening!

He collapses on the floor, mustering all of his emotional strength to lean his back against a wall. His phone rings.

SYDNEY (V.O.)

Peter, I'm on my way to you. I'm going to need you to listen. I know we were keeping the truth quiet, but it is now going to have to be dead silent do you hear me?

PETER

He is dead isn't he? Because of what we wrote. We lied about a good man and now he is dead.

SYDNEY (V.O.)

Greg slitting his throat with a kitchen knife isn't on us, okay? He probably had a ton of other stuff going on. Peter?

The phone slides down Peter's hand and onto the floor. His attention is drawn back through the mirror and towards the printing presses. The silhouette is back. He slowly pulls the knife from his neck and scrapes it across the printers.

SYDNEY (V.O.)

What's that noise? Shit, are you at the shop? I'm close to you, stay put. Peter? Stay put.

Peter slowly makes his way to the back of the store. This time when he crosses the doorway the silhouette is still standing there; up close he's starting to look more like a man.

PETER

Greg? Greg, I'm sorry.

There is no response. Greg violently stabs himself in the neck. Peter rushes over to him in some final plea to help. Greg grabs Peter's outstretched hand and sticks it into part of the printing machine.

His hand gets crushed and blood overflows out onto his shoes. Peter screams in agony. The newspapers continue to print, but the front page is blotched in red. Peter finally dislodges what is left of his hand. The weight of his emotions break him; the fear, the pain, and the guilt turn him numb.

PETER (CONT'D)

Maybe I deserve this.

The machines crank louder and louder. He turns and looks out the window to the front of the store, now completely covered in newspaper. The silhouette is standing there holding the box of matches. He pulls one out and ignites it.

The slight glow of the match finally illuminates the silhouette's face fully. Greg's eyes are welled with tears, his neck bloodied and gashed. He stares at Peter with mournful confusion. A voice shrieks through all the noise and commotion.

SYDNEY

Peter stop! Put that down!

The deafening sounds of the printing presses stop. No cranking, no whirling, no spinning. The only sound is a light crackling of the match in Peter's good hand.

He blankly stares into Sydney's eyes and drops the match into the match box. It erupts into flames. The heat causing him to drop the box.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

Oh my God.

Sydney runs out the front of the store and back to her car. The flames catch on all the newspaper lying throughout the store. Peter stands motionless, unconcerned with his own safety. The fire spreads like a story out of control.