

The Clockmaker's Missing Hour

120-minute plan · 4 players · Follow the evidence

The town remembers eleven and then noon, with nothing between. A signed bread receipt and a repeating kite story are the first things that disagree.

Content notice: Temporary memory loss and grief for a parent. The father's story may be replaced with an old festival song; nobody must disclose a personal memory.

GM overview

The mystery has two questions: did the missing hour occur, and can it be returned without deleting the older story? Ask players to lay observations under those headings. The receipt shows physical activity during the gap; the drum inventory identifies a silver recording from that interval. The blue ribbon and delivery trace independently connect the tower mechanism to the gap. A diagram alone does not establish which recording may be released. Sella is protective, not evasive: she describes the two tracks as soon as someone listens, and asks the group to demonstrate the separation before touching the catch. Attention counters limit lengthy copying and reconstruction, not ordinary questions. Accept a correct explanation in the players' own words before the protected release action.

What is really happening

Sella's cracked memory catch recorded the town's hour onto the same drum as her father's story. The hour exists as a separate silver track. Holding the amber track, or making a spoken copy first, protects the story while an aligned catch releases the silver recording. Disconnecting the blue cord stops future loss but retains today's hour in the drum.

Opening agreement and read-aloud

Agree on subjects to soften or skip. Each player names an ordinary skill and a reason to help. Evidence does not require a successful roll; uncertainty changes time, cost or obligations.

Noon strikes twice. Bram holds a receipt bearing his signature at 11:34. "I signed for warm bread," he says, "but I remember neither the bread nor the hand that gave it to me." Above the square a voice begins, for the third time, a story about a kite.

Time and preparation

120 minutes: Give the older story a future

Opening agreement: 10 minutes

Test the town's contradictory records: 25 minutes

Compare the delivery trail and catch: 20 minutes

Hear and preserve the kite story: 30 minutes

Demonstrate and execute the release: 25 minutes

Closure and debrief: 10 minutes

Visit the yard and let different characters defend each inference. The larger budget permits a copied story plus a reconstruction if one document is lost; the blue cord remains a meaningful choice because it retains the missing hour.

Starting information: Discover cards in play

Starting state: Careful work intervals = 6; Father's story preserved = false; Catch aligned = false; Missing record reconstructed = false

With 4 players: share the roles of mapper, evidence keeper, speaker and timekeeper.

If the group gets stuck

If a card is missing, the balcony reconstruction costs two intervals and explicitly documents the direct inspection. With too few intervals, disconnect in the chamber or call-watch from any location. A missing observation changes the method and cost, never the availability of a safe close.

Clock square

Read aloud: Bram turns a receipt over as if the missing hour might be on the back.

GM: Give the receipt when inspected. Bram recalls everything before eleven and after noon; repeated questioning cannot create memories he lacks.

Choice: Compare receipt and stall

Ask: Which details would remain even if nobody remembered the delivery?

Requires: Available. Reveal Bread receipt

Result: The two receipt halves and flour impression match.

Watch shop

Read aloud: Two metal teeth lie on felt. One is smooth; a crack splits the other.

GM: Neri offers the catch diagram without charge. She will not claim the diagram identifies the drum's recordings.

Choice: Compare the cracked catch with its drawing

Ask: Trace the tooth through the three strokes without moving the clock.

Requires: Available. Reveal Three-stroke catch drawing

Result: Neri shows where the spring catches too early.

Delivery yard

Read aloud: A blue thread clings to a floury cart rail, and a half-unloaded sack leans against the tower door.

GM: The route trace combines Pell's signed delivery time and a physical ribbon; neither requires believing Sella's explanation.

Choice: Reconstruct Pell's two stops

Ask: Use the written strip and ribbon; distinguish observation from recollection.

Requires: Available. Reveal Pell's route strip

Result: The ribbon links the tower apparatus to the earlier delivery.

Story landing

Read aloud: Sella holds a pencil over a blank page. "Listen to the ending before you decide what can be lost."

GM: Listening reveals the drum inventory. Let players invent one harmless detail of the kite tale. Sella consents to HOLD or copying when their purpose is stated.

Choice: Listen to both drum tracks

Ask: Which sounds belong to today, and which belong to the older recording?

Requires: Available. Reveal Drum listening inventory

Result: Sella identifies the old voice while you record the two distinct grooves.

Choice: Make a spoken and written copy

Ask: Spend two careful intervals preserving the whole kite story together?

Requires: Drum listening inventory. Spend 2 Careful work intervals. Father's story preserved: true

Result: The table finishes the kite tale, and Sella places its written copy in her pocket.

Clock chamber

Read aloud: An amber thread turns inside a silver ring. A blue cord hangs clear of the moving wheel.

GM: Align only after the party has both the inventory and diagram, or the costly reconstruction flag. Release requires preserved story and alignment. Pulling the blue cord is always legitimate here.

Choice: Place only the amber track on HOLD

Ask: Show Sella which observed groove stays, and ask her to set its hold.

Requires: Drum listening inventory + Three-stroke catch drawing. Spend 1 Careful work intervals. Father's story preserved: true

Result: The amber thread remains still while the silver ring continues turning.

Choice: Align the catch at the third stroke

Ask: Explain which track will be released and which evidence supports that choice.

Requires: (Drum listening inventory + Three-stroke catch drawing or Missing record reconstructed is true).

Spend 1 Careful work intervals. Catch aligned: true

Result: The tooth meets the third stroke; the silver ring stops skipping.

Choice: Hold the amber track using the reconstructed record

Ask: Let Sella inspect the documented separation before setting HOLD?

Requires: Missing record reconstructed is true. Spend 1 Careful work intervals. Father's story preserved: true

Result: Sella checks the record and holds her father's track.

Choice: Release today's hour

Ask: Return the silver recording while the older story stays protected?

Requires: Father's story preserved is true and Catch aligned is true and (Bread receipt + Drum listening inventory or Pell's route strip + Drum listening inventory or Missing record reconstructed is true).

Result: Bread deliveries, small conversations, and a dropped button return to their owners' memories.

Closure: An honest noon

Choice: Pull the blue recording cord

Ask: Stop future loss and leave the missing hour sealed for later repair?

Requires: Available.

Result: The wheel disengages. The drum keeps both recordings, and ordinary time resumes.

Closure: The hour in the glass

Public chime balcony

Read aloud: A narrow roll of inked chime marks sits behind weathered glass.

GM: Two work intervals let Neri compare chime impressions and physical tracks, reconstructing a lost observation. This provides knowledge, not a magically recovered missing card.

Choice: Reconstruct a lost observation from the chime roll

Ask: Spend two intervals comparing the roll with Neri's direct view of the drum?

Requires: Available. Spend 2 Careful work intervals. Missing record reconstructed: true

Result: Neri documents the separate amber story, today's silver record, and the third-stroke latch. The missing card remains missing.

Connections and changing routes

Clock square - Watch shop: Watchmakers' lane. Available.

Clock square - Delivery yard: Bread route. Available.

Watch shop - Story landing: Winding stair. Available.

Delivery yard - Story landing: Delivery stair. Available.

Delivery yard - Watch shop: Covered arcade. Available.

Story landing - Clock chamber: Short upper stair. Available.

Story landing - Public chime balcony: Chime gallery. Available.

Public chime balcony - Clock square: Exterior stairs. Available.

Bram - Bread seller

Goal: Know whether he accepted a delivery.

Offers: His receipt and permission to check the stall.

Will not accept: Cannot remember the gap by trying harder.

Voice: Repeats the exact time, never a theory.

Neri - Catch maker

Goal: Repair a defect without blaming its owner.

Offers: The alignment diagram and a slow reconstruction.

Will not accept: Will not release an unidentified track.

Voice: Explains by putting two objects side by side.

Pell - Delivery driver

Goal: Settle a delivery without accusing a stranger.

Offers: The cart and his written stop record.

Will not accept: Separates written notes from what he presently remembers.

Voice: "The note says; I cannot swear I recall."

Sella - Clockmaker

Goal: Return the hour while keeping her father's story.

Offers: Access to the drum and consent to a separate HOLD track.

Will not accept: Asks for a visible copy or hold before release.

Voice: Quiet until someone names the two tracks accurately.

Reasoning: The hour happened and was recorded

A material record from the missing interval combines with the dated silver recording. The town lost access to memories, not the events themselves.

Evidence combinations: Bread receipt + Drum listening inventory OR Pell's route strip + Drum listening inventory

Reasoning: Return today without deleting the older story

The inventory distinguishes the recordings; the drawing provides the hold, align, release order. Neither proves a safe release alone.

Evidence combinations: Drum listening inventory + Three-stroke catch drawing

Discovery card: Bread receipt

Give only when revealed in play.

11:34 - two warm trays received. Signed Bram. Flour fingerprint crosses both receipt halves. Bram remembers the empty stall at eleven and the full stall at noon.

Player task: Put physical observations and uncertain memories in separate columns.

GM answer: Activity occurred during the gap; it was not an hour removed from time.

Discovery card: Pell's route strip

Give only when revealed in play.

11:12 tower delivery: glass drum, blue return ribbon. 11:34 bread stall. A torn blue ribbon is caught on the tower stair; the same ribbon is tied to the drum crate.

Player task: Connect the two stops and identify which details have physical support.

GM answer: The recording apparatus was installed before the documented activity. This backs the inventory even if the receipt is unavailable.

Discovery card: Drum listening inventory

Give only when revealed in play.

Amber groove: one voice, "the kite caught the morning wind," dated many years ago. Silver groove: carts, bread trays, and today's eleven chimes. Switch slots: amber HOLD; silver RELEASE. Copy the sound assigned to each color.

Player task: Assign HOLD and RELEASE to the two observed recordings.

GM answer: Today's hour and the older story have separate tracks, so the old story need not be erased.

Discovery card: Three-stroke catch drawing

Give only when revealed in play.

Cracked catch: tooth rests before stroke I; spring catches between II and III. Maintenance order: hold selected track; line tooth with III; latch; release other track. Blue cord disengages recording without opening the drum.

Player task: Arrange three numbered marks and explain the order before acting.

GM answer: Together with the inventory, the drawing supports a protected release. It also documents disconnection as an incomplete but safe option.

State sheet

Careful work intervals: 6 (resource, minimum 0, maximum 6)

Father's story preserved: false (knowledge)

Catch aligned: false (flag)

Missing record reconstructed: false (knowledge)

Event: Sella asks for the plan

Trigger: Visit Clock chamber and Not Father's story preserved is true

Sella asks, "Which part will still be here afterward?" Invite the players to point to a track, a copy, or the blue cord.

At any place: Suspend the clock and appoint a public watch

Keep everyone's written records and ask Neri to shut the recording down?

Requires: Available.

Neri disengages the recording under witnesses. The town uses ordinary watches while the evidence is preserved.

Ending: An honest noon

Requires: Father's story preserved is true and Catch aligned is true

The square recognizes its missing hour. Sella hears the kite story again, now because she chooses to play it.

Next: What ordinary recovered moment matters most to Bram or Pell?

Ending: The hour in the glass

Requires: Available

Tomorrow can be ordinary. Today's hour remains inside the protected drum, beside a story nobody had to sacrifice.

Next: Who witnesses the later repair, and who keeps the physical receipts?

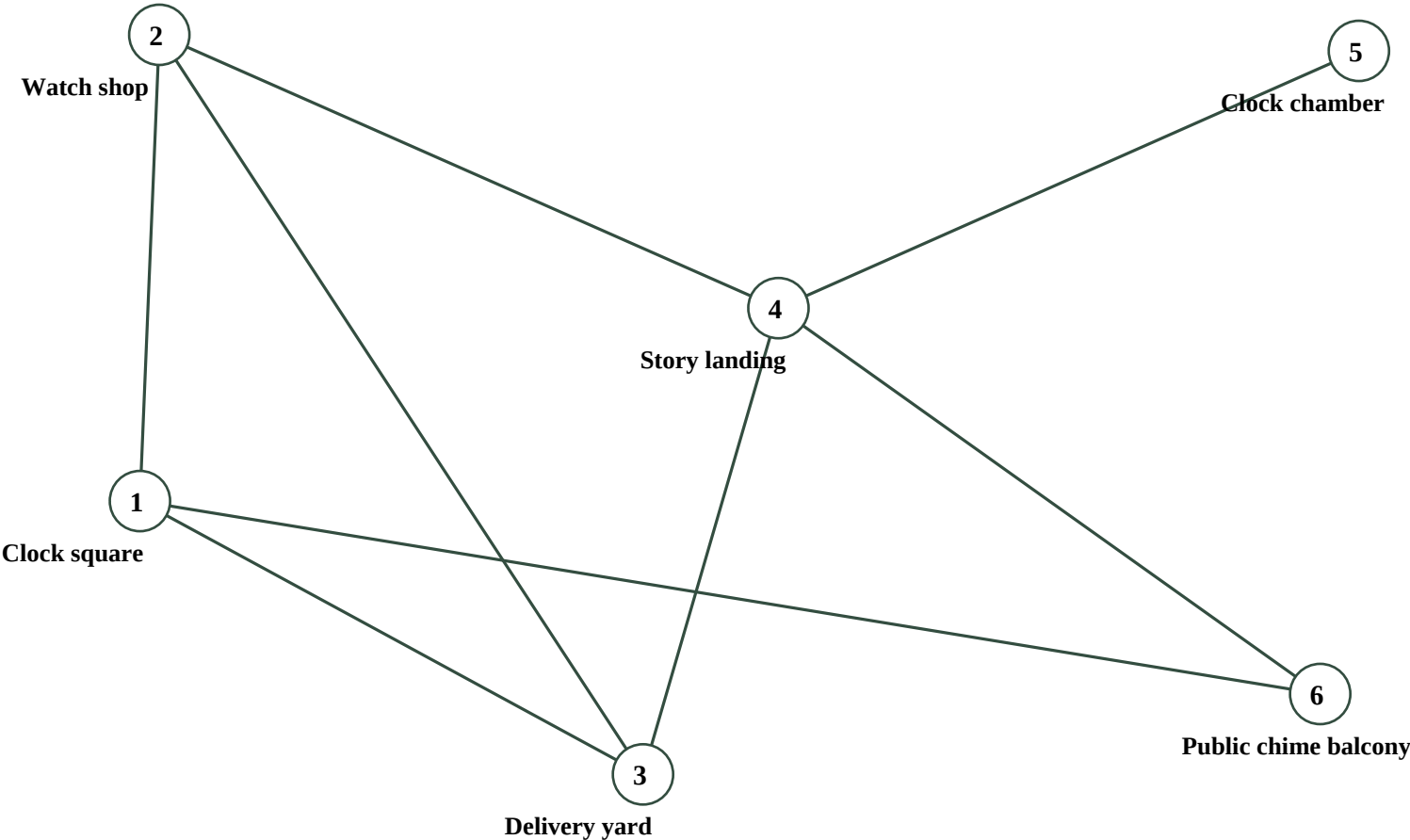
Ending: Time by small watches

Requires: Available

The tower falls quiet and the recording is suspended. The town preserves its contradictory records for a careful repair instead of guessing at its lost hour.

Next: Choose a place where people can safely leave written accounts.

The Clockmaker's Missing Hour - GM decision map



Dashed paths need conditions. Read Connections and changing routes for costs and direction.