

Carillon Tower Park was buzzing with activity when Bay arrived for rehearsal. Desmond Carver, the director, was only steps ahead of her, so she dashed to catch up. Bay smiled at his signature bobbing walk on those extra-long legs that might belong to a pro basketball player instead of a theater professor.

“Desmond, hey. Looks like the students are psyched about the show.” Bay nodded toward the outdoor theater area where a portable tech booth had been set up. People inside were testing spotlights and sound effects.

The stage was midway through set construction showing false stone walls and two framed second story balconies. Someone was sweeping the stage free of pine needles, while a couple of others were taping the floor where furniture would go. Bay waved at Jen Yoo, her art professor friend, who was painting a flat with some students.

“It’s a positive sign when they show up early. Believe me, once we’re in the trenches, some will find reasons not to show up at all.” Desmond set a stack of scripts on one of the seats near the middle of the theater. “Actors,” he said using air quotes around the word.

Bay’s optimism didn’t dwindle. She was pleased with the turnout for auditions, considering it was a summer production, meaning many students were gone or working. The fact she and Desmond had backups for the main roles revealed enthusiasm for the show.

Desmond handed her a theater badge and key for the rooms beyond the stage. “By the way, in case I forget later, thanks so much for volunteering to help with the play. It can be a thankless job.”

Bay grinned but wondered why Desmond was being so pessimistic. He wasn’t close to retirement, maybe ten years older than Bay, and she’d pegged him as carefree and upbeat. Then again, in the two years she’d been a Flourish professor, she’d had a handful of short conversations with him.

At seven p.m. on the dot, the clock tower bell rang out the hour and Desmond spoke through a megaphone he’d brought to rehearsal. “Let’s get going. We start on time. We end on time. That’s my number one rule.”

To Bay's surprise, every student hushed without delay. She'd heard Desmond was respected, and he knew these students from past plays. Many were seniors doing a final postgraduation show before entering the real world.

"For the first few rehearsals, we're going to need to work around the set builders and the tech crew setting up lights and testing sounds. This isn't a typical show. Summer theater is a shortened schedule, so we're putting an entire production together in short order." Desmond handed printed schedules to Bay, who passed them out to the actors and crew.

It wasn't quite June, thankfully, because performances were marked for the last week of that month, just past the celebration of Midsummer on June twenty-fourth.

"You'll notice on the schedule that all lines must be memorized by June tenth. That's two weeks, my friends. Let's make it happen." Desmond used his teacher voice. Even Bay snapped to attention.

"Places everyone. We'll start with the prologue and go straight through from act one as far as we can until eight-thirty. The script notes some introductory music, but we won't add that for a couple of weeks. Proceed, Kitt."

Bay and Desmond watched from the back third of the theater, taking notes as lines were delivered, stopping when necessary to help with enunciation or cadence. At the end of the second act, Desmond announced a seven-minute break, then headed to the tech booth to talk about lighting.

Bay noticed he seemed nervous about the tech crew being run by an intern. His normal production partner, Leo, another theater professor, was spending summer break in New York City at a Broadway intensive master class. Leo recommended a theater grad student from Madison to take his place.

As lights flashed on and off in different positions, Bay watched the techies at the booth. Desmond pointed at the script as intern Evan made notes, then flashed the light Desmond asked for. Bay noticed Evan's body posture: alert, attentive, like a golden retriever eager to please. In contrast, Desmond alternated running a hand through the twists on top of his head, placing his hands on his hips, then rubbing the back of his neck before repeating the moves again.

“That looks intense.” Jen Yoo was sitting by Bay, a clean paint brush in one hand.

“Hey, Jen. Yes, I’ve never seen this side of Desmond. How about you?”

Jen shrugged. “I haven’t worked on a summer production in some time. The younger Desmond was laid-back. But some of us lose our patience as we age. Thankfully, I don’t have that problem.” She snickered.

Bay turned her full attention to Jen. “Why are you working on this production, anyway?”

“Two reasons. One: It fulfills my volunteer hours for the whole year. Two: It’s a show you wrote. I’m proud of you and want to see how it turns out.” Jen leaned her head over to meet Bay’s.

With break wrapping up, chatter from the stage echoed around the quiet outdoors. When a commotion ensued, Bay chalked it up to high energy from a new show, the honeymoon period. But then a loud thud sounded, someone began shrieking, and a cacophony of shouts and running feet ensued.

Bay, Jen, and Desmond ran to the stage, with the tech crew close behind. The adults vaulted onto the stage where the lead actor, Talon Hunt, lay crumpled in a twisted heap.

“Everybody back up,” Desmond shouted.

“He fell off the balcony,” one of the students called out.

“I didn’t mean to. We were goofing around, practicing a duel.” Jackson Lange knelt over Talon, his chest heaving, his face distraught.

Desmond, Jen, and Bay knelt beside Talon too, and Jackson stood up and looked away. Desmond checked Talon’s pulse, shook his head, listened for a heartbeat, and shook his head again. Bay called 911.

“Let’s straighten him a bit so I can do CPR.” Desmond motioned for Jen and Bay to get on either side of his legs and they gingerly turned him.

Desmond was still administering chest compressions and breaths when the emergency team arrived to take over. Thirty minutes later, the EMTs pronounced Talon dead.