

## **Curtain Call**

By Katelyn Keyes

The theater was abuzz. Mr Daniel Fisher shuffled and reshuffled his papers, subconsciously swinging his legs from the edge of the stage.

“It’s two-thirty, Mr Fisher.” Autumn piped up next to him, laptop open and ready to take notes on the meeting.

“Thank you.” He responded, and clapped his hands to get everyone’s attention. “I’m very excited to reveal Riverend High School’s spring play,” he said to loud applause. “A Streetcar named Desire, by Tennessee Willaims!” The reactions were instant and loud.

Alexa had read the play last semester in her English class and was telling anyone who would listen about the plot.

Brett was happy it was something famous so he’d have a good resume for theater in college.

Nicole wondered if there was a good girl lead.

Alexa told her that Blanche was the main character.

Kaydence wanted to be Blanche.

Alexa told her that she’d have to kiss whoever played Mitch.

Kaydence hoped it’d be Brett.

“Okay, okay.” Mr Fisher clapped his hands again, and the crowd fell into a sort-of silence. “I’m glad you’re all excited.”

“Whoop whoop!” Bailee shouted from the first row. Mr Fisher chuckled as he set his papers in three stacks on the edge of the stage.

“Alright, in a minute you all can come up here and grab these papers. One is an audition form to fill out, and the other two are monologues. Practice them and be prepared to read one or both at your audition.” Autumn nodded and typed along with him. “Go practice and I’ll hopefully see you at rehearsal next week!”

With that, Autumn closed her computer and a swarm of people came up to the stage. Hands snatched up papers. Pens scribbled in names, grades, and acting experience. Voices started reading off monologues, trying new accents and inflections, and complimenting the person reading next to them while privately thinking they didn’t have a chance. It was all very theater, and Mr Fisher breathed it in. It was always this moment in a show where he felt a deep-seeded certainty he was

where he was meant to be. He forgot how much student debt he had from dropping out of college. This was theater. This was what mattered.

*ONE WEEK LATER...*

Mr Fisher whistled as he walked to the Performing Arts Center. On autopilot from the last four years, he stuck his key in the lock, turned it, and swung the door open. Or rather, tried to. The key didn't turn and the door didn't open. Frustrated all of a sudden, he yanked at the door handle, then sharply turned the key. He saw a shadow moving around inside though and banged on the door. A few seconds later, the door opened and a smartly dressed woman was standing there. Mr Fisher moved forward, expecting to be let in, but the woman didn't budge.

"Sorry, who are you?"

"Daniel Fisher." He said, and she stared back blankly. "The theater director?"

"Sorry, you can't use this space right now."

"Why not?"

"Forms have to be filled out to reserve it, and right now I have it reserved for the rest of the year."

"What? That's ridiculous! What for?" Mr Fisher was losing his cool, and fast.

"Model United Nations." The woman pointed to a globe pin on her lapel. "Students will be effectively running the world for the last month of school and need the space to do it. Now if you'll excuse me." She put her phone to her ear and closed the door in his face.

Fuming, Mr Fisher walked back to the cafeteria, where he found the cast hanging out. Kaydence was chatting animatedly, no doubt excited to be cast as Blanche, with Brett/Mitch and Alexa/Stella. He was happy to see them all excited, but that made his news even worse. "What's wrong?" Alexa asked when she saw the look on his face. Too upset to debate whether or not he should tell them, he sat down.

"We're not going to be able to use the Performing Arts Center for our show. At all." The shock and disappointment on their faces made him feel even worse.

"Is the show canceled?" Brett asked nervously. Mr Fisher let out a long breath.

"I don't want it to be but I don't know what else we can do. We don't have anywhere to rehearse."

"What about here?" Lainie asked. Mr Fisher looked around the cafeteria.

"No, forms have to be filled out in advance to use school buildings for an activity." He said, thinking back to what the woman had told him.

“Then let’s go to the Rec Center across the street.” Kaydence suggested. “They have plenty of room.”

“No, school activities have to mainly take place on school property.”

“Well that’s stupid.” Everyone looked up as Autumn walked in, her “Don’t Mess with the Stage Manager” mug gleaming. “We can’t practice away from school, but we also can’t practice at school?” Something about her wording felt off to Kaydence, and as she ran it through her head, she got it.

“What if we practice outside? It’ll be just like Shakespeare in the park!”

“N-” Mr Fisher was about to shoot it down when he realized he didn’t have to. “That’s a great idea!” He sprung out of his chair, feeling revitalized, and led the charge down to the parking lot.

For a month, the Riverend High School Theater Department rehearsed on a concrete stage. It did not go flawlessly. The first week the technicians realized that not being allowed in the PAC meant that they didn’t have any light, sound, or construction equipment. As a solution they sold Louise’s famous cookies door to door and went on a group trip to Home Depot. The second week a car alarm was going off at every rehearsal the entire time. Mr Fisher was seriously thinking about having the dang car impounded when Autumn had her police officer father look up the license plate and politely asked the owner to shut it off or park across the street.

The third week was unbearably hot. On the plus side, everyone was so irritated that all the fight scenes were very authentic. Finally, the fourth week was a football tournament, so it was a game of dodging fans and cars.

At last, the cast and crew of “A Streetcar Named Desire” held hands in a circle. The techs had pulled off a miraculous set and the actors had practiced all day every day.

“Are you ready for Curtain Call?”

“Yes, we’re ready for Curtain Call!!” Mr Fisher led the traditional opening night cheer and the company repeated it, getting louder and louder each time until they were screaming with excitement. “Okay, okay, save your voices!” Mr Fisher waved his hands. Whispering, the actors made it to their places as the audience sat on picnic blankets in front of them. Kaydence was ‘backstage’, which was just a curtain hung between two trees, and prepared for her entrance.

She wrung her hands to get the jitters out, and a cold drop of water fell on them. Oh no. Soon the drops were coming faster and faster, the audience was holding jackets over their heads and the techs were swarming trying to protect the set. There was no way they could perform now. Kaydence couldn’t tell if it was rain on her face or tears. Watching her, Mr Fisher felt a wave of guilt. Desperate, he ran to the Performing Arts Center and banged on the door again. Luckily the woman was in the lobby and she reluctantly came to the door.

“Wha-” She stopped as she saw the chaos.

“Please.” Mr Fisher looked her in the eyes. “Not for me, for them.” She eyed him suspiciously, then looked past him.

“Come on in children! Yes, and you too. Bring the wooden thing if you need it, just hurry! I’m catching a cold in this draft!” Actors and technicians pitched in to lug the wooden set through the doors, and the audience wrung out their sopping blankets and found a seat in the theater. The techs immediately swarmed the stage, figuring out what they were going to do, while the actors met in the greenroom. Kaydence surveyed the people around her and felt a pit of dread in her stomach. Stage makeup was melting off faces and emotions were all over the place. It would be a miracle if they could still perform. Mr Fisher realized this and, though he wanted to do the show no matter what, he knew everyone had their limits.

“Listen. I just want you to know how incredibly proud I am of all the hard work you have done this month. Whether we can do the show or not, you all are some of the most talented actors I have ever worked with.”

“Thank you Mr Fisher.” Kaydence said as she and Brett stood up and shared a smile. “But I think I speak for all of us when I say that we’re going to do this show.” The other actors stood up one by one until they were all on their feet and determined.

“There must be some dust in the air or something.” Mr Fisher wiped his eyes and smiled as everyone split up and did what they needed to do. In only thirty minutes, the actors were made up and ready and the techs had saved the set. They were truly ready for Curtain Call. A little worried about the audience, Mr Fisher popped his head into the theater. Shocked, he saw that every seat was full.

*How?* He thought.

“It’s important to be well cultured to run the world.” He turned around to see the Model United Nations woman somewhat smiling. She saw his grateful expression and scowled. “Not for you. For the children.”

“Of course.” Mr Fisher tried to match her scowl.

“Well, I’d better find my seat.” She went to the door, then turned back. “Helena.”

“What?”

“I’m Helena Tracy, I could tell you were wondering.” With that she left.

*What a curious woman.* Mr Fisher shook his head, smiling.

“Mr Fisher?” He turned around to see a group of technicians. “We need you to let us into the booth.” Still smiling, he obliged, leading them up behind the seats to the room where they could control the lighting and sound. Then he went and found a seat of his own. He trusted his company at this point, they didn’t need him backstage. Still, he held his breath as the curtain rose, and didn’t let it out again until Kaydence, under the spotlight, said his favorite line. “They told me to take the streetcar named Desire.”