

## **Act I: Scene Two**

### **Summary and Analysis Act I: Scene 2**

#### **Summary**

Scene 2 begins in the boys' bedroom. Willy's sons, Biff and Happy, overhear him. Happy tells Biff that Willy has started talking to himself nearly all of the time. According to Happy, Willy is usually talking to Biff during his private reveries. The boys reminisce about old times and women. Biff explains that he has returned home because he is dissatisfied with his job and future prospects. Because Biff enjoys outdoor labor, working on the farm is ideal; however, Biff is discontent toiling for someone else. Biff dreams of owning his own ranch and working it with Happy. He contemplates asking Bill Oliver for financial support but is hesitant because he is afraid Bill will remember that he stole some basketballs from him as a teenager.

Happy becomes enthusiastic listening to Biff talk about the ranch and the possibility of working together. Although Happy has obtained all of the material things he desires — an apartment, a car, and a seemingly unending supply of women — he is also dissatisfied with his current lifestyle. He cannot be promoted until the merchandise manager leaves or dies, and he realizes that if he is promoted, he will be too busy worrying about obtaining more money and material goods to enjoy what he has.

#### **Analysis**

Scene 2 is important because it is the first time that the audience encounters Willy's sons firsthand. Now the audience has an opportunity to determine if Willy's opinion of Biff is justified.

Biff has changed a great deal from the time he was in high school when he thought anything was possible. Happy believes that he is more like Biff used to be than Biff himself because Happy's own actions stem from the belief that all things are possible and all goals are obtainable. Biff is no longer governed by these beliefs. In fact, Biff is overwhelmed by his own contradictory desires: He enjoys working outside on a farm, but when spring comes, he becomes impatient and feels the need to return to New York and "make something of himself." Biff's instability stems not only from his inability to maintain a steady job but his conflicting emotions for his father. Biff resents Willy's antagonism toward him, but he is also driven by a desire to please his father — a desire that he denies and hides from himself.

Biff is horrified by Happy's report of Willy's mumblings and imagined conversations. Biff hints that his father is troubled because of "other things" — namely Willy's affair — besides the fact that Biff is working as a lowly farmhand. On one hand, Biff feels that Willy's conduct is a manifestation of well-deserved guilt. On the other hand, he is disturbed to learn that Willy talks to him or about him during his reveries. Biff denies responsibility for his father's condition, but he is forced to acknowledge that he is linked to his father's guilt and irrational actions.

Biff attempts to establish order in his life by encouraging Happy to join him in Texas. Both of the boys have difficulty dealing with authority. According to Biff, "we weren't brought up to grub for money. I don't know how to do it." Therefore, Biff believes owning their own business would be the ideal job for both of them.

Biff knows what he needs in order to be content; Happy however, is incapable of finding contentment. He is a man driven by sexuality and a need for power. He has obtained material desires — an apartment, a car, and lots of women — but he cannot acquire peace. He targets women connected to his superiors and "ruins" them in order to prove to himself that he can. Although he is forced to endure working for individuals he feels are incompetent, he exacts revenge by stealing their women and "spoiling" them, thus forcing disorder into the order of his superiors.

#### Glossary

**like** here the meaning is closer to likeable, having qualities that inspire liking; easy to like because attractive, pleasant, genial, and so on.

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