

Summary and Analysis Act I: Scene 3

Summary

Scene 3 shifts back in time. Willy is actually in the kitchen, drinking a glass of milk; however, the action that he observes is in the past. Willy coaches Biff and Happy as they polish the old 1928 Chevy. He also surprises them with a punching bag. Happy mentions he is losing weight and asks if Willy has noticed. Biff shows Willy his new football and admits that he stole the ball from the school locker room. Willy disapproves and instructs Biff to return the ball, but then he defends Biff's action and praises his "initiative." Biff is nervous about the upcoming football game but promises to make a touchdown for Willy, even though he has been instructed to pass the ball. Willy is pleased and excited at the thought of telling everyone in Boston about the game.

Willy tells the boys about his recent trip to Providence, Waterbury, Boston, Portland, and Bangor. He shares a secret plan of owning a business so he will no longer have to travel. Willy also promises to take the boys with him on business trips during the summer. He imagines a grand entrance with Biff and Happy carrying his sample cases into the stores.

Analysis

Scene 3 is the first scene that takes place entirely in the past. This is important because the audience is observing the events as Willy remembers them. This scene is one of Willy's cherished memories because, in it, his children idealize him. Everything that Willy says or does is perfect, and he is an authority figure within the scene, instructing the boys on the proper technique to polish the car. He also plans to trim the tree branch over the house. This job is a pleasure because Willy and the boys delight in manual labor. The punching bag is the ideal gift because it represents the physical strength and dominance that Willy and the boys achieve through physical labor.

Scene 3 presents the audience with the first example of tension between Biff and Happy. This is an example of disorder even in Willy's orderly memories. Happy reveals that Biff has stolen a football. Willy immediately disapproves; however, he defends Biff when Happy criticizes him. Biff's action reflects his own struggle for order within his life. He steals the ball to practice so that he can play well during the Ebbet's Field game. His goal is to please Willy, but he goes about it the wrong way. The fact that Willy reprimands him and then praises him for stealing only leads to further confusion and disorder later in Biff's life. When Willy sanctions Biff's theft, he emphasizes the idea that it is permissible to break the rules to get ahead. Furthermore, Willy reinforces the notion that Biff is immune to boundaries that bind other members of society.

Glossary

insinuate to introduce or work into gradually, indirectly, and artfully.

immerse to absorb deeply; engross.

incipient in the first stage of existence; just beginning to exist or to come to notice.

initiative the action of taking the first step or move; responsibility for beginning or originating.

open sesame any unfailing means of gaining admission or achieving some other end; these words were spoken to open the door of the thieves' den in the story of Ali Baba in *The Arabian Nights*.

<https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/d/death-of-a-salesman/summary-and-analysis/act-i-scene-3>