

Summary and Analysis Act I: Scene 4

Summary

Scene 4 is also set in the past and continues with Willy's reverie in the kitchen. Bernard enters and asks Biff why he has not come over to study with him as planned. Bernard informs Willy that Biff will fail math and not graduate unless he begins to prepare for his exams. Willy and the boys ridicule Bernard. After Bernard leaves, Willy criticizes him and guarantees that Biff and Happy will be more successful than Bernard because they both have attractive physical features. Biff then tells Willy that Bernard is "liked, but he is not well-liked."

Analysis

The description of Biff's theft in **Scene 3** lets the audience know that Biff is not the perfect person Willy might hope for him to be. Scene 4 is significant because it reveals that Biff has serious problems that may negatively impact his future. Although Willy teases Bernard, he does react responsibly to the news that Biff is in danger of failing math, as well as not graduating. Willy tells Biff to study, but he revels in the fact that his boys are superior in strength and popularity to everyone else. Their prowess functions as an extension of Willy, for he considers himself greater because of his children's abilities. They are "well liked," and therefore Willy is too.

The fact that Biff and Happy obviously outdo Bernard is significant because Willy has always felt threatened by and jealous of Bernard's father, Charley. Even though Willy instructs Biff to study, he does not emphasize the consequences if Biff fails, but instead stresses the fact that Bernard is not "well-liked." Willy denies that Biff could fail, so he does not communicate the possibility of failure to his son. Once again, Willy reinforces the idea that Biff is not answerable to the same social boundaries as others. Willy and his boys can achieve order and success in their lives so long as they follow their own rules.

Glossary

anemia a condition in which there is a reduction of the number, or volume, of red blood corpuscles or of the total amount of hemoglobin in the bloodstream, resulting in paleness, generalized weakness.

Adonis any very handsome young man.

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