

## Act One: Scene Seven

### Summary

Scene 7 resumes the conversation between Willy and Linda. Linda is unaware of the dialogue exchange from Scene 6, which effectively "interrupted" her discussion with Willy. She repeats her comment from Scene 5 that Willy is an attractive man. Willy, however, is aware of the Woman from Scene 6, and he responds to Linda's comment with a vague apology and a promise to "make it all up to you." Linda is ignorant of what Willy is talking about. Willy observes Linda darning her stockings, and he orders her to throw them away.

Bernard enters, frantically looking for Biff. Willy demands that Bernard give the test answers to Biff. Bernard reveals that he has already been helping Biff cheat, but he cannot help him on the Regents exam. Willy becomes angry at Biff and threatens to beat him. Linda reminds Willy that Biff stole the football, and she also informs him that he is not treating the girls properly. Bernard says Biff is driving without a license. Willy is growing more disturbed with each comment. The Woman from Scene 6 laughs and Willy screams "Shut up!" Bernard continues to criticize Biff until Willy orders him to leave. Linda defends Bernard, but Willy counters her, maintaining that Biff is fine. Linda leaves, and then Willy reverts back to his initial condemnation of Biff at the beginning of the scene.

### Analysis

Willy's mental faculties are deteriorating in Scene 7. He is no longer capable of separating the present and the past. In Willy's mind all of the events are occurring at the same time, leaving him confused and bewildered. He does not know if he is in the past or the present, if he still has a chance to make things right with his family, or if he can still achieve success. He remembers the most important events relating to Linda and Biff, but he cannot separate them in his mind. He is in the present at the beginning of the scene, but the sight of Linda's stockings moves him back into the past to the moment of his interlude with the Woman.

Willy's guilt and agitation shift to anger as he focuses on Biff. Willy is already confused, but his anger increases when he learns of Biff's unacceptable behavior. It is not a coincidence that Willy focuses on his own failure — the affair — and on Biff's failure during this scene. Willy denies his own self-incrimination and instead directs all of his castigation upon Biff. Finally, Willy contradicts the majority of the scene when he defends Biff. Rather than admit his son is an imminent failure, Willy ignores the warning signs and praises him instead.

### Glossary

**liable** subject to the possibility of; likely.

**buckle down** to apply oneself energetically; set to work with effort.

**worm** an abject, wretched, or contemptible person.

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## **Act One: Scene Eight**

### **Summary**

Scene 8 shifts back completely to the present. Happy comes downstairs and attempts to walk Willy to bed. Willy tells Happy that he came home because he was having difficulty driving, plus he almost hit someone with the car in Yonkers. Willy recalls his Uncle Ben who became wealthy mining diamonds. Willy regrets not acting on the opportunity to go to Alaska when Ben offered it to him.

Charley comes over and plays cards with Willy. They talk about vitamins, car trouble, and a trip to California. Charley offers Willy a job, but Willy angrily refuses. He reveals his distress over Biff returning to Texas, along with his inability to assist Biff financially. Charley assures him that Biff will be fine. Willy ridicules Charley's inadequacy with tools.

Uncle Ben enters, but he is only visible and audible to Willy. He is not real; he is just another projection of Willy's memory. Willy begins to converse with Ben at the same time he is talking to Charley. As a result, Charley becomes confused when Willy answers questions that Ben is asking. Willy is unable to separate his discussion with Ben from his discussion with Charley, so he becomes flustered and loses his composure. He accuses Charley of cheating. Charley becomes angry and leaves.

### **Analysis**

Willy experiences confusion in Scene 7 as a result of fusing multiple memories. This confusion, along with his anger toward Happy regarding his spending habits, compels him to recall his favorite illusion: Uncle Ben and the diamond mines. Willy cannot accept his recent failures, nor can he accept the fact that his life has been one of mediocrity. Whenever he feels overwhelmed by his lack of success and blasé existence, Willy re-creates his life based on Uncle Ben's lost proposition. If only he had gone to work for Ben, he would be rich. If only he had gone to Alaska, he and the boys would be thriving in the great outdoors. If only he had had the courage of Ben, he might have established himself as a highly successful salesman.

The fact that Willy observes and speaks to Ben is significant for two reasons. First, he is an interactive creation of Willy's mind. Willy is not just hearing voices; he is actively hallucinating. As far as Willy is concerned, Ben is just as real as Charley. So it is not surprising that Willy becomes confused during the card game. He believes he is talking to two real people who are unaware of each other and engaged in completely different conversations.

Second, Willy refuses to acknowledge that his opportunity to work for Ben no longer exists. Willy talks about Ben's job offer to the boys, and he appears to realize that the opportunity has been lost. However, Willy conjures Ben each time he experiences overwhelming conflict in an attempt to re-create his life by imagining what could have been. Ben's offer still remains valid in Willy's mind because he is incapable of

separating the past and the present. Once again, Willy tries to create order by shuffling the past and creating new possibilities.

### **Glossary**

**build** to form a sequence according to suit, number, etc.

**Ignoramus** an ignorant and stupid person.

<https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/d/death-of-a-salesman/summary-and-analysis/act-i-scene-8>

## **Act One: Scene Nine**

### **Summary**

Scene 9 shifts back to the past. Willy finally meets his brother Ben. Ben is on his way to catch a train, but he and Willy talk briefly about Ben's successful venture into African diamond mining. Willy begs Ben to tell the boys about his father. Willy only remembers vague images of a campfire, a large bearded man, and flute music. Ben describes the large profits their father made selling homemade flutes while traveling across the United States.

Biff and Ben begin boxing. Ben defeats Biff and warns him to use any resources available when fighting a stranger, even if that means being unfair. Linda is uncomfortable as a result of Ben's advice. As Ben prepares to leave, Willy boasts that Brooklyn has all of the qualities of the great outdoors, including animals, large trees, numerous opportunities to hunt, and so forth. He then sends the boys to steal some sand from the apartment construction site. Willy instructs them to remodel the porch in order to demonstrate their building skills.

Charley comes over and warns Willy that the building watchman will have the boys arrested if they are caught again. Willy criticizes Charley and his son Bernard in front of Ben. Bernard arrives, informing everyone that the watchman is pursuing Biff. Willy is momentarily upset, but dismisses his anxiety when Ben compliments Biff's courage.

Charley leaves after Willy insults him again. Willy entreats Ben to stay because he needs someone to talk to. Willy feels insecure and "kind of temporary" since he never had the opportunity to talk to his father. Willy asks Ben to show him how and what to teach the boys. Ben responds by reciting the facts of his African adventure: He was 17 years old when he went in the jungle, 21 years old when he came out, and he was rich.

### **Analysis**

Scene 9 demonstrates Willy's dependence upon his memories and the insecurity that prompts him to rearrange events and facts in an attempt to create order or success.

Once Charley leaves at the end of Scene 8, Willy is free to immerse himself completely in his recollection of Ben's visit. Willy is thrilled by Ben's story of the diamond mines, not only because it proves that individual greatness is possible within the Loman family, but because Willy projects a portion of that success upon himself. Willy believes that he is connected to Ben's accomplishment because Ben offered him a job. It does not matter that Willy refused the position; just the fact that the position was offered links him to Ben and his fortune.

The greatest revelation of Scene 9 comes about with Willy's discussion of his father. Willy is insecure, and he traces his own insecurity to the absence of his father. Having been denied approval from his father, Willy is driven by a need to gain approval and recognition from everyone. This accounts for his "temporary" view of himself. Willy

cannot be content with his life, job, or his marriage because he is continually evaluating himself based upon the success of others. As a result, Willy has created a cycle of eager acceptance and rejection of himself. So long as Willy is received favorably, he is momentarily content; however, these moments occur rarely within the play.

More often than not, Willy feels compelled to prove to others that he is successful, as a salesman, as a father, and as an American living in the "great outdoors" of Brooklyn. Willy creates the illusion of success needed to gain approval by rearranging events and facts as he wishes them to be. This reinvention of reality allows him to appear successful to others and to himself, but Willy also realizes that it is only an illusion. Therefore, his satisfaction is fleeting. Whenever Willy acknowledges to himself that he is not successful, in fact is nothing but average, he denies the truth because it is too painful for him to believe that he is a failure. Once again, Willy begins to reconstruct his life in an attempt to create order.

The cycle of acceptance and rejection accounts for Willy's continual contradictions as well. He responds to others, depending on where he is in the cycle. Problems arise because Willy constantly moves back and forth within the cycle; as a result, his comments or behavior must change accordingly. For example, while trying to win approval from Ben, Willy tells Biff to steal building supplies and remodel the porch. Willy's attitude changes once Bernard announces that the watchman is pursuing Biff. Willy denies that Biff was stealing and denies that he is responsible for Biff's actions. It appears that Willy has failed again because Ben will surely disapprove; however, Ben's praise moves Willy back into eager acceptance of himself and his family.

## **Glossary**

**temporary** for a time only; not permanent.

<https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/d/death-of-a-salesman/summary-and-analysis/act-i-scene-9>

## **Act One: Scene Ten**

### **Summary**

Scene 10 shifts back to the present. Linda looks for Willy and finds him talking to himself outside. Willy asks Linda if she still has the diamond watch fob that Ben gave him when he visited. Linda reminds him that he pawned it over 12 years ago to pay for one of Biff's classes. Willy mumbles to himself about Ben and goes for a walk in his slippers.

Biff and Happy come outside and talk with Linda about Willy. Biff is angry and ashamed of Willy's behavior. He asks Linda why she never wrote to him of Willy's condition. Linda becomes upset and reminds Biff that he did not write or provide her with an address where he could be reached. Linda informs Biff that Willy is always excited to hear that Biff is returning home, but he becomes increasingly agitated the closer to Biff's arrival. By the time Biff reaches home, Willy is angry and argumentative.

Linda chastises Biff's tendency to wander from place to place and job to job. She explains that she and Willy are getting older, and that they will die one day. Biff reacts to Linda's statement, but only in relation to her, not Willy. He denies the possibility that she could die anytime soon. She gives Biff an ultimatum: Respect your father or do not come home.

Linda continues to defend Willy, insisting that he is not "crazy" but "exhausted." Linda attributes Willy's behavior to the fact that he is working straight commission, just like a beginning salesman. Willy has been secretly borrowing money from Charley in order to pay the bills. Linda blames Biff and Happy for abandoning their father in order to pursue their own selfish desires.

Biff agrees to stay at home and help out financially, but Linda refuses unless he and Willy can reconcile their differences. Biff reminds her that Willy threw him out of the house because Biff discovered Willy was a fraud. Linda questions Biff, but he refuses to explain his meaning. Linda tells the boys that Willy has attempted to commit suicide several times. She recently discovered a rubber hose attached to the gas pipe. Every day she struggles with the idea of removing it. Biff agrees to stay and find a job, although he does not like the business world. According to Biff, the Lomans should be working outside.

### **Analysis**

Scene 10 belongs to Linda. Up until this point, Linda appears quiet and submissive as she gently encourages Willy and attempts to reconcile her husband and her children. During Scene 10, Linda changes. She is angry, vocal, and determined. In many ways, Linda is the only character who is able to see the truth. She knows that Willy is borrowing money from Charley and lying to her about it. She recognizes that Happy is nothing but an over-achieving womanizer incapable of settling down. She also realizes Biff's drifting is the result of his insecurity and his failure to understand his own needs and desires. Even though Linda "sees" the members of her family as they really are, she is not immune to the denial and contradiction that plagues them. Linda

actively participates in the fantasies Willy creates by encouraging his dreams of grandeur. She also chastises the boys when they say or do anything to dispel Willy's imaginings. Thus, even though Linda knows the truth, she actively attempts to conceal it in order to help Willy achieve order in his life. This requires Linda to deny the truth in her outward actions and act in a manner contradictory to the truth. In many ways, Linda's situation is much worse than Willy's: He cannot distinguish between fantasy and reality; she does but acts contrary to it.

Biff's comment that Willy is a "fake" startles Linda, but her reaction is muted so that the audience perceives she is not entirely surprised. Her reaction can even be seen as shock that Biff perceives Willy is not what he appears to be. Even so, Linda gracefully discards Biff's statement and continues with her duty: maintain and protect Willy's fantasy as long as possible. She loves Willy, and that is why she is willing to overlook his irrationality and his cruelty. She will do anything to protect him from reality, from his sons' insensitivity, and ultimately from himself.

### **Glossary**

**surly** bad-tempered; sullenly rude; hostile and uncivil.

**spewing** throwing up (something) from or as from the stomach; vomiting.

**bastard** a slang term for a person regarded with contempt, hatred, pity, resentment, and so on.

**philander** to engage lightly in passing love affairs; make love insincerely.

<https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/d/death-of-a-salesman/summary-and-analysis/act-i-scene-10>

## **Act One: Scene Eleven**

### **Summary**

Willy returns from his walk and overhears that some people think he is "crazy," while others just laugh at him. Willy confronts Biff and tells him to go back to Texas. Willy becomes excited when Happy informs him of Biff's plan to speak to Bill Oliver. Biff describes his plan to open his own business. Willy instructs Biff on how much money to ask for, what to wear, how to speak, and what to talk about. First, he directs Biff to be serious and avoid telling jokes, and then he contradicts himself and advises Biff to assume a confident air and tell old stories. Happy recommends going into business with Biff with a line of sporting goods known as the Loman Line.

Throughout the scene, Linda repeatedly says words of encouragement as Biff and Happy describe the plan; however, Willy yells at her for interrupting the conversation. Biff argues with Willy over his treatment of Linda. Linda attempts to stop the argument, but then Willy accuses her of siding with Biff. Willy gives in and goes to bed.

### **Analysis**

For the first time since the play's beginning, everything appears to be coming together for Willy during Scene 11. Although the scene opens with an argument between Willy and Biff, the scene shifts as Biff attempts to reconcile with his father. Up until this point, Willy has relied upon favorite memories — memories in which Biff adores him — rather than accept the disintegrating relationship with his oldest son. Willy feels he has finally achieved a position of authority and respect again. As a result, he immediately begins to dictate what Biff should do when he visits Oliver.

The problem is that Biff wants to be honest with Willy, but Willy will not give him the chance. Each time Biff makes a statement, Willy interrupts him and interprets the partial statement as he wants it to be. Thus, Willy believes Oliver is already funding Biff, while Biff desperately tries to tell him he has not even seen Oliver yet. As the discussion continues, Biff, Happy, and Linda exaggerate facts, add details, and adopt confident attitudes in order to maintain Willy's fantasy.

Tension arises when Biff and Willy begin to argue over Linda. Even though Linda is determined and vocal within Scene 10, she remains submissive in Willy's presence. Biff resents how Willy treats Linda for two reasons. First, he despises the fact that Willy degrades his mother and insults her, especially when she is merely trying to encourage Willy and the boys. Second, Biff is incapable of forgiving Willy for his affair. As far as Biff is concerned, Willy betrayed his mother, even if the Woman meant "nothing" to him. As a result, Biff assumes a protective air around Linda, and he will defend her against anyone, even his father.

### **Glossary**

**exhibitions** public shows or displays, as of art, industrial products, athletic feats, and so on.

**lick** to overcome, vanquish, or control.

<https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/d/death-of-a-salesman/summary-and-analysis/act-i-scene-11>

## Act One: Scene Twelve

### Summary

Linda tells Biff to tell Willy goodnight so that he will end the day on a positive note. Biff borrows money from Happy to buy some new ties. Happy tells Biff to move into his apartment with him. Linda tells Willy the shower needs repair, and he becomes irate. Linda wonders if Bill Oliver will remember Biff, but Willy assures her that he will. Willy proclaims that Biff's experience wandering from job to job will prove valuable. Biff tells Willy and Linda goodnight, and Willy advises Biff to ask for fifteen thousand dollars, and he assures Biff that he (Biff) has "all kinds of greatness" in him. Willy ignores Linda's comments and tells her to quit interrupting. Willy reminisces about one of Biff's football games. Linda asks Willy what Biff knows about his past that he is holding against him, but Willy refuses to answer. Downstairs, Biff finds the rubber tubing behind the heater and removes it.

### Analysis

Scene 12 continues the uneasy truce between Willy and Biff. Willy is exhausted, but he seems to be at peace as he anticipates Biff's imminent success. In addition, he feels confident that Howard will give him a job in New York, thereby eliminating the need for travel. He will finally be able to work in town, raise vegetables in the garden, and observe Biff succeed.

Linda's hesitant question suggests that she is not quite convinced that everything is okay. Likewise, Biff does not believe he and Willy have reestablished their relationship. In fact, as he removes the rubber tubing, Biff assumes the peace in the house is only temporary. Linda's uncertainty and Biff's doubt leave the audience with the expectation that the "order" achieved is only short-lived.

### Glossary

**buck up** [Informal] to cheer up.

**caliber** degree of worth or value of a person or thing; quality or ability.

**Hercules** in Greek and Roman myth, the son of Zeus and Alcmene, renowned for his strength and courage, especially, as shown in his performance of twelve labors imposed on him.

<https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/d/death-of-a-salesman/summary-and-analysis/act-i-scene-12>