

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.

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