

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.

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