

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.

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