

## **Act Two: Scene One**

### **Summary**

Act II begins the next morning. Biff and Happy have already gone, and Linda serves Willy breakfast. Biff has gone to borrow money from Bill Oliver so he can open the sporting goods line. Willy is excited and confident that Biff will obtain the money and finally be successful. Willy dreams of growing vegetables, moving to the country, and building two guest houses for the boys and their wives. Willy is convinced that everything is getting better, and he feels certain Howard will give him a job in New York.

Linda reminds Willy to request an advance because there is not enough money to pay the bills. Willy's mood changes, and he becomes angry. He complains about the Studebaker, as well as the refrigerator. Linda points out that the mortgage will be paid in full after this month. Willy reminisces about the house and the work he put into it during the last 25 years. Willy is supposed to meet Biff and Happy at Frank's Chop House for a surprise dinner. He instructs Linda again to quit repairing her stockings. Biff calls Linda, and she tells him Willy removed the rubber pipe, but Biff informs her that he got rid of the pipe himself.

### **Analysis**

A shift takes place between Act I and Act II. This first scene seems very promising because things appear to be working out. Although Act I, Scene 12 ends amicably, the only reason Biff and Willy are no longer fighting is because it is bedtime. If the scene continued, another argument would likely erupt. Surprisingly enough, things still remain peaceful in the morning, when Act II begins. Biff is finally pursuing gainful employment, and Willy is more optimistic and confident than he has been throughout the entire play. He does not exaggerate anything, nor is he afflicted by distant memories of happier times. He is cordial to Linda, and resolute in his decision to confront Howard. Linda is relieved and ecstatic that Willy is acting like his old self. It appears that everything is finally looking up for Willy and his family.

In reality, nothing has changed. Willy's rapid mood change when Linda mentions the bills demonstrates his inability to achieve order in his life. He feels he is racing the clock when it comes to material items such as the car, the refrigerator, and even the house. Willy fails to recognize that the very things he complains about provide business to a salesman. For example, once he pays off the refrigerator it begins to need service. Sooner or later, he will be forced to purchase another one. As a salesman, he depends upon customer needs and desires, yet he does not see the connection between supply and demand in relation to himself. Ironically, he holds out from doing what he tries to convince his clients to do: buy more products.

The eruption in Willy's calm demeanor leads to a series of contradictions in the scene. He marvels over the house and the joyful memories of working on it. Linda assumes her previous role of assuring and encouraging him in order to restore Willy to his previous serenity. If he makes a statement, such as what an accomplishment it is to pay off a mortgage or how well the house is built, she agrees with him. However, the contradiction comes when Willy negates his own sense of satisfaction by remarking

that it is all for nothing. Once again, Willy is caught in a cycle of acceptance and rejection, even of himself. He congratulates himself for working many years to pay off the house, but then he deflates himself and considers all of his work pointless.

Linda realizes that Willy is caught in the cycle again, but she is still optimistic because she believes he has given up his thoughts of suicide. She considers his attitude over the bills and the house as nothing serious, because (she believes) he removed the rubber hose. At least now she does not have to worry about Willy asphyxiating himself with gas from the heater.

Linda is also living in denial. Even when Biff tells her that he removed the hose, she remains hopeful that everything will be okay. However, her doubt and fear are revealed by her desperation as she describes Willy as "a little boat looking for a harbor," and as she pleads with Biff to "save his life." She realizes that suicide is still a possibility, but she refuses to acknowledge it.

### **Glossary**

**saccharine** a sugar substitute in diabetic diets.

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