

Act Two: Scene Three

Summary

Howard's office disappears as Scene 3 shifts into the past. Ben approaches Willy on his way to Alaska. Willy asks Ben for advice because things are not going as planned. Ben offers Willy a job overseeing his timberland in Alaska, and Willy accepts. Linda comes back and scolds Ben for putting ideas of Alaska in Willy's head. She reminds Willy of his promising future as a salesman, as well as the successful Dave Singleman. Willy attempts to convince Ben that his job as a salesman is just as remarkable as working in Alaska. Willy is convinced he and the boys will become just as rich and successful as Ben, even though they remain in Brooklyn.

Analysis

The placement of Scene 3 makes it particularly effective. Willy attempts to deal with what has happened with Howard and escape from it at the same time by reverting back to Ben. Ben has always been successful, so he is the natural choice for advice. Willy wants Ben to analyze the current situation and tell him what to do. Instead, Ben offers Willy a job in Alaska — the same offer he made when he actually visited in the past — but Willy can no longer separate the past from the present; they are blending together.

The fact that Willy turns down the offer is very poignant in light of what happened in Scene 2. In the past, Willy refused Ben's offer because he was determined to be a successful salesman, just like Dave Singleman. Now that he has been fired, he is overwhelmed by his feelings: regret, for not accepting Ben's offer and moving to Alaska; shame, for losing his job; and despair, for having devoted his life to a company that could discard him so easily.

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