

Act Two: Scene Eleven

Summary

Scene 11 takes place at home. Linda is furious with the boys because they left Willy at the restaurant. She orders them out of the house. Happy attempts to give her flowers, but she knocks them to the floor and then orders him to clean it up. Biff insists on talking with Willy, but Linda forbids him. Willy is outside planting his garden.

Analysis

Scene 11 parallels Act I, Scene 10. Linda is no longer submissive and cowed. Willy intimidates and criticizes her into silence throughout much of the play; however, when Willy is absent, Linda becomes outspoken, especially when defending Willy to their sons. At this point, Linda also realizes that all is lost. Willy is defeated not only because he has lost his job, but also because there is no possibility of reconciliation with Biff. Linda knows that any interaction between Willy and Biff from this point on will only lead to confrontation, and this may ultimately lead to Willy's demise. As a result, she is harsh to Biff for several reasons. First, she is acting defensively to prevent further harm to Willy. Second, she feels betrayed by her own sons who promised to help her "save" Willy. Third, she is disturbed to see Willy's mental faculties so deteriorated that he attempts to plant a garden in the middle of the night. Last, she is desperate because she knows Willy's mental condition will not recover from this. All is lost.

Glossary

louse [Slang] a person regarded as mean, contemptible, etc.

babble to make incoherent sounds, as a baby does; to prattle or talk too much or foolishly.

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Act Two: Scene Twelve

Summary

Scene 12 begins in the backyard. Willy is measuring the dimensions of the garden and talking to himself. Ben enters and discusses Willy's plan to commit suicide. Ben cautions Willy that the insurance company might refuse to pay the life insurance policy. Willy imagines Biff's reaction to a grand funeral. Willy wants Biff to realize that his father was "known" and respected throughout New England. Ben warns him that Biff will consider him a coward.

Analysis

Willy openly discusses his plan to commit suicide in Scene 12. It is only natural that he confers with Ben because Ben will not reveal Willy's intentions, and he represents success. This is Willy's last opportunity to earn a substantial amount of money and acquire the respect of his older brother. In addition, Willy wants to make amends to Linda for betraying her. Leaving her financially stable will help alleviate the guilt that he bears, even though he still cannot admit his unfaithfulness. As a result, suicide serves as a means for Willy to deny his past, establish order and financial stability for his wife, and gain the respect of his idol.

Willy's only hesitation is his uncertainty regarding Biff. Ben warns Willy that Biff will resent him, but Willy wants to believe, and therefore chooses to believe, that Biff will respect him for sacrificing his life. He is certain that Biff will finally forgive him for being unfaithful to Linda. However, Willy does not stop to consider that Biff resents him not only for the affair, but also for his dishonesty. Ben points out that Biff would see committing suicide in order to collect a life insurance policy as just another form of dishonesty. Willy fails to acknowledge this and refuses to believe that Biff could react negatively to his suicide.

Willy's plan to commit suicide is ironic because Willy has been governed by his need for acceptance from an absent father. His plan will absent him from his own son and cause Biff to hate him.

Glossary

thunderstruck struck with amazement.

ruddiness a red or reddish color or complexion.

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Act Two: Scene Thirteen

Summary

Biff informs Willy that he is leaving home forever, severing all ties with the family. Willy refuses to shake Biff's hand and tells him to "rot in hell if you leave this house!" Willy accuses Biff of wasting his life out of spite. Biff confronts Willy with the rubber hose and tells him he will not pity him if he commits suicide. Biff blames Willy for his inability to keep a steady job. According to Biff, the Lomans have not ever been truthful with one another or themselves. Biff is tired of fighting and blaming Willy for his own lack of success. Biff says that he and Willy are nothing but ordinary people who could easily be replaced by others. He and his father argue, and, when Biff breaks down and cries, holding onto Willy, Willy is amazed and "elevated" at Biff's love for him.

Analysis

Scene 13 provides the final break between Willy and Biff. Both men struggle with their emotions and their inability to reconcile. Biff realizes in Scene 8 that he has been reinventing facts just like Willy. His realization is significant because once he verbalizes it to Willy, Linda, and Happy during Scene 13 he separates himself from them. Biff refuses to participate in the charade any longer. He chooses to accept himself on his own terms, not the way Willy imagines or desires him to be. His choice alienates him from Linda and Happy who are committed to maintaining Willy's fantasies at all costs. Biff is able to see beyond their shortsightedness because he realizes that denying reality is more dangerous and costly in the long run. This is exactly the trap Willy is caught in.

For Willy to admit that he is "a dime a dozen" is too painful. Such an admission would force him to openly contradict every grand story he has ever told or is planning to tell. Willy cannot deprive himself of his dreams by admitting he is only average. Even though he knows that he has failed his family, he cannot acknowledge such failure openly; instead, only Ben can share in this revelation. As a result, it is not surprising that Willy responds so dramatically to Biff's claim that their lives have been based on deception. To condemn Willy's fantasies is to threaten Willy's existence. Biff levels the final blow when he confronts Willy with the rubber hose. Not only does Biff force Willy to recognize the hose and his suicidal intention, but in so doing, Biff destroys Willy's dream that his suicide will redeem him.

Glossary

spite a mean or evil feeling toward another, characterized by the inclination to hurt, humiliate, annoy, frustrate, and so on; ill will; malice.

blow [Informal] to brag; boast.

contemptuous full of contempt; scornful or disdainful.

dime a dozen an expression used to imply that something is available in large quantities. The fact that the item is not rare suggests that it is not of great value.

mutt a mixed-breed dog; an insult if applied to an individual

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Act Two: Scene Fourteen

Summary

Willy is overwhelmed by Biff's reaction at the end of Scene 13. He is amazed that Biff cares for him. Everyone goes to bed, but Willy lingers because Ben has reappeared. Ben reminds him of the \$20,000 insurance policy. Willy is convinced that Biff will respect him even more if he commits suicide in order to gain the policy. Willy drives away.

Linda, Biff, Happy, Charley, and Bernard gather together at Willy's grave.

Analysis

Willy finally achieves a sense of peace and order in Scene 14 because he knows Biff loves him. He is overwhelmed by the fact that his estranged son wept for him. For the first time in the play, Willy has received the attention and respect that he desires. But, even though Biff cries to his father because he can no longer pretend, Willy still tries to manipulate reality. Biff's reaction gives Willy the order he has been seeking, but it also compels him to create an even more desirable future. Willy believes he has been given another opportunity to achieve success now that he is reconciled to Biff. He can make Biff love him even more by taking charge of the future and leaving him the insurance money.

It is symbolic that Ben convinces Willy to commit suicide. Ben transforms suicide into a final, brief opportunity that must be seized. In the immediacy of the situation, fearing he will lose this chance and fail yet again, Willy denies his own son's statement, "There'll be no pity for you, you hear it? No pity!"

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