

Death of a salesman summary

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



Death of a salesman plot development (I have artificially broken up act one into logical scenes, and while there are no clear markers of scene boundary they are often characterised between alternating between the illusory/nostalgic and the real. [scene 1&2 are the 'thesis (p1-20) where Loman family present is presented, the antithesis is scene 3, 20-31, where Loman family past is shown to be harmonious as opposed to beleaguered and unemployed.] Scene1, Willy is losing it: • Willy enters, having been unable to continue work as he was unable to drive. Linda's concern is evident. • Apparently Willy just seems to forget where he is or what he is doing there and 'zoned-out' " suddenly I'm going sixty miles an hour and I can't remember the last five minutes. • Linda cares for Willy with tender love that can only have been developed through years of marriage – take and aspirin etc. • While describing the journey Willy states " I opened the windshield..." only later to discover the windshield doesn't open and that he was remembering the old car. • Willy also gets excited when he talks of working tomorrow " Goddamit, I could sell them!," and puts back on his jacket...which Linda (tenderly once again) removes • During this scene Willy talks about lots of things that would have eventually happened had circumstances not changed...i. e. if old man Wagner didn't die Willy thinks he's be in charge of New York. • Also during this scene Willy says many things then contradicts them later...(e. g. the windshield, " Biff is a lazy bum" then " and such a hard worker..." there's one thing about Biff, he's not lazy." • Willy complains about cheese, then about " the way they boxed us in here, bricks and windows, windows and bricks." The city is encroaching on Willy's house, just like the stress of the world is beginning to win over Willy's grasp

of reality... " population is getting out of control. The competition is maddening." • At the end of the scene Willy is brought to realise the windshields don't open – the flute cuts in. Willy further reminisces as he leaves the bedroom to go to the kitchen Scene two (p14): Bedroom dialogue between Biff and Happy. • Happy and Biff discuss Willy's current state of mind, " he stops at green lights and when it turns red he goes" • Even then they reminisce about the good old days " about 500 women would like to know what was said in this room" • Happy questions Biff about what happened between him and dad, why he lost the old confidence • Biff alludes to " the woman" but does not mention it – never mind just don't lay it all on me • Biff declares that the notion of money= success is not for him, but realises each spring that without money he's not going to get anywhere in life. Where as Happy apparently even with money is not satisfied and has to sleep with executives wives to feel good. They both decide they should be working in the open • Happy says " it gets like bowling just keep knocking them over...(I long for) somebody with character. somebody like mom. • Finally after a cigarette they retire, however before they do Biff talks about him and Happy working together in the country side on a ranch, he says that he'll see Bill Oliver for a loan and try and buy a ranch. Scene 3 (p21): (set in past) journey to the centre of the earthly salesman- memories of Willy's past are presented • Willy seems Happy, giving instructions about cleaning the car " show him how to do it, Biff! You see, Happy... you're doin' all right Hap." • Willy here is presented as the good-hardworking father who gives advice to his much-adoring sons. • Biff receives compliments far more than Happy, Happy seeks attention through " I'm losing weight pop, you notice?" • Biff is not

reprimanded for stealing but praised for initiative, then Willy declares he will one day own his own business and be bigger than Uncle Charley – (as always Willy is comparing himself to the next guy, and the next guy is usually Charley) • Willy talks about how well liked he is, especially in New England where the cops look after his car for him • Biff talks about breaking from play and scoring just for Willy when he takes his helmet off, – however the topic of sport is quickly contrasted with the entry of Bernard • Bernard talks about study, and Biff being flunked in maths, and he won't graduate and get to accept his scholarships to 3 universities (one of which he has already printed the insignia of on his shoes) • Willy berates Bernard and his principles once he leaves...while he gets good marks he won't be a success because "the man who creates personal interest is the man who gets ahead." • Biff and Happy then exit to boss about Biff's bunch of bandits in the basement as the group cleans it just to please Biff. • EVEN IN THE PAST Willy often contradicts himself (Chervoelt is the best car ever...then "they ought to prohibit the manufacture of those cars") • Willy exaggerates his sales to Linda, first 1200 down to 200, then Linda lists their many debts • Willy complains about how hard he has to work for his average pay packet, when other people say and do less than get money • Tells the story of the walrus comment – the guy who made it got smacked in the face by Willy • Willy praises Uncle Charley who is well respected, he also says that he's very self-conscious of his appearance, Linda as she does in the present as here in the past re-assures him "Willy, you are the most handsomest man in the world, few men are idolised by their boys the way you are" • Willy "cause I get so lonely – especially when business is bad" ... when Willy says "there's

so much I want to make for... ' the woman' but in Scene 4 p29 really a sub-scene of scene 3, dialogue between ' the woman' and Willy: • Woman came on to Willy, (because he's so sweet. And such a kidder) • It is made clear Willy is having an affair on the road, the woman and him interact like new lovers making stupid jokes and Willy yells " keep your pores open as she leaves." • It appears this is for Willy's self-justification, to feel good about himself • Then Willy leaves and returns to Linda who is mending stockings which Willy promptly puts an end to. • Enter Bernard who is searching for Biff to make him study, this is when a series of dialogues surrounds Willy with all the problems of Biff and it seems to overwhelm him..(h's not studying.. too rough with the girls.. driving the car without a liscense) he then kicks Bernard out • " you want him to become a worm like Bernard.? ...I never told him anything but decent thins" this is a lie but Willy feels entirely responsible for Biffs successes or his failures as a personal reflection on him. • This emotionall hardship which he is then putting himself through brings him from the past to the present as Happy enters and tries to coax Willy to bed. Scene 5/6 p(32) • This is set in present. • Willy tells story of uncle ben the rich miing tycoon who at 17 had nothing, and at 21 was very rich • Willy berates Happy, ' how are you gonna retire me for life on \$70 a week...the woods are burning.. i can't drive a car." The woods are burning is in reference to the fact that Willy will not be able to work unless he can drive to make his sales. The woods are burning expresses a time constraint and imminent danger, that is that Happy wil have to start making more money soon otherwise the family will lose financial security. • Charley comes in to gamble, and is tolf that he doesn't know much about vitamins or how to use

tools and is therefore not a real man • Willy gets insulted when offered a job by Charley, as he is too proud to accept and sees it as charity Ben enters p34 (starts scene 6) • Ben enters to music as Willy talks about him • It is soon revealed that the Ben character on stage exists only in Willy's mind, " didn't Linda tell you...he died." • Willy becomes confused as Ben speaks to him as does Charley, Charley and Ben are unaware of each other. • Willy talks of missed opportunity with Ben • Charley exits after being accused of cheating, and Linda(past) enters, Willy has now slipped into memory again • Life story of ben – looked for his father, got lost ended up in Africa, " when I was seventeen I walked into the jungle and when I was twenty-one I walked out. And by god I was rich. • Willy seeks to learn about his folks, ben talks about his father the INVENTOR OF FLUTES. • Ben fights Biff, trips him and uses his umbrella " never fight fair with a stranger – you'll never get out of the jungle that way." • Willy wants to demonstrate his relationship with his boys, sends Biff and Happy to get material from the construction site to rebuild the stoop. He belittles Charley and Bernard who are not ' manly' enough to know how to handle tools or be great athletes. • Willy seeks reassurance (and finds it)from Ben on how to raise his children. " you're being first-rate with your boys, outstanding ' manly' chaps....." oh, Ben that's good to hear.." • Ben exits to the" when I walked into the jungle speech." Scene 7 • Breaks back to present, Linda is unable to find Willy in kitchen and sees him talking to ben and staring at the stars in the garden. • Biff and Happy see Willy outside, " shouldn't we do anything" L: " oh my dear you should have done a lot of things, but theres nothing to do, go to sleep" • linda explains why he is like that, his condition only deteriorates as Biff is coming

home, but before that when he first finds out that Biff is coming he is all smiles. • Linda and Biff have dialogue – about grey hair about Willy and her dying and strange people occupying the house. • Biff says " stop making excuses for him" to Linda, " charley wouldn't do this – spewing out that vomit from his mind • B&H find out Willy has lost his salary • Linda soliloquy – all his old friends are dead or retired, he drives 1400 miles without selling – Happy is a philandering bum – Biff what happened to the love you had for him • Biff responds because he's a fake and its between me and him • Linda reveals he's been trying to kill himself with the gas pipe, and the car accidents were all intentional according to the insurance inspector • " Biff I swear to god his life is in your hands" • also during this conversation the " L: theres a woman" " b: What woman" " L: and this woman" – alluding to Biffs knowledge of Willy's affair and linda's ignorance • Happy tells Biff why he's not a success – whistling in the elevator • Willy and Biff argue a little, then Happy chimes in " he's going to see bill Oliver tomorrow" • Willy's conversation is illogical as Biff tries to explain he hasn't seen him yet but is going to tomorrow " W: Ah, you're counting your chickens" • Happy proposes business idea about the water-polo/basketball team Loman line • Happy talks about " the old honour and comradeship -it'd be a million dollars worth of publicity." • Willy talks about Biff not selling himself short, -ask for fifteen, where as Biff only wants to ask for 10 • Willy talks over Linda and Biff tells him not to – dialogue breaks down as Willy feels his authority in the house is being questioned. • Willy goes to bed, but before they go to sleep Happy and Biff go to say good night and apologise • Happy says " I'm going to get married mom," probably hurt by the philandering bum comment, linda

replies " go to sleep dear" • Willy reminisces to the ebbots field game, with 3 uni representatives watching Biff with the crowd chanting " loman, loman, loman." • Linda asks Willy what Biff has against him, Willy dodges the question and says " I'm so tired. Don't talk anymore." • Biff goes to look for tubing, which he finds, horrified he takes it away and goes to bed. Act II • Act opens with music, gay and Happy, Willy seems please that his sons have some prospects. • Linda is relieved because Willy is Happy • Willy says ' Gee,' which he told his son never to say • Willy thinks about buying some seeds (even though they won't grow due to the enclosing of the garden by the apartment blocks) • Willy suggests hope of his sons marrying and settling down, building a guest house • Willy mentions he's going to talk to Howard about getting moved to a desk job • Willy's happiness is quickly removed by the news that his fridge, car and insurance need paying • " We should have bought a well-advertised machine. Charley bought a general electric..." Willy before said that his fridge was well-advertised Willy compares himself to Charlie again. • I'm in a race with the junkyard.... The refrigerator consumes belts like a goddamn maniac • Linda mentions they've also survived the 25 years mortgage • Linda tells Willy he's meant to meet his sons for dinner • Willy responds " gee whiz, That's really something.... and I'll come home with a new York job • Linda " It's changing; I can feel its changing." • Willy tells Linda to stop mending stockings • Willy exits to " maybe beets would grow..." • The phone rings and its Biff who talks to Linda once Willy has vanished • Linda is excited that Wily removed the gas pipe • Linda is let down because Biff actually moved it • Linda tells Biff to be nice to Willy at dinner " he's only a little boat looking for a harbour." Scene 2 p59 •

Howard's office, Howard is playing with his voice recorder • Howard shows up Willy and constantly talks over him or tells him to be quiet so he can hear his own family – he has pride in his family • Howard's son recites state capitals, his daughter whistles – Howard has a maid (sign of wealth,) • "They're only a hundred and a half," money is no object to the rich. • Howard pays very little attention to Willy, but when he does he treats Willy like an old Looney • " You didn't crack up again...you had me worried." • Willy puts forward his request and is denied, despite his reference to Howard's promise at the Christmas party • Willy makes reference to naming Howard, and is received with little sympathy and lack of interest • Willy makes his big monologue about the salesman who inspired Willy into his career. – 84 year old, only needed to call buyers, well-loved and had hundreds of salesman at his funeral UNLIKE WILLY AS WE WILL SEE. " What could be more satisfying then to be able to go, at age 84, into 20 or 30 different cities and be remembered and loved." • " in those days there was personality in it" • Willy's volume increase as Howard makes to leave " a man is not a piece of fruit –you can't eat the orange and throw away the peel" • Howard leaves the office. Willy in silence realises what he was doing and is bewildered – • The tension is furthered, and we see Willy is even more overwhelmed by his environment when he switches on the recorder accidentally. • Howard rushes in and after a short discussion fires Willy, says " I think you need a good long rest." He then asks " where are your sons? You've got 2 great boys haven't you?" • Willy replies " I can't throw myself on my sons, I'm not a cripple" • Howard; " pull yourself together... there are people outside." (exits) Scene 3: p66 Willy's memory • Bens' music approaches- he carries a

valise and an umbrella • Ben suggests Willy work in Alaska " screw on your fists and you can fight for a fortune up there," • Enter Linda of old - Linda is tentative tells Ben not to suggest things like that to him, " you're well liked here - why must everybody conquer the world • Willy says I'm building something with the firm..... a hope that was shut down in the previous scene • Ben says " lay your hands on it..." Willy's goals are ephemeral - can't be touched or held • Willy suggests that Biff (enters dressed in footy gear) will get by through being liked - " you can't feel it but its there." • Ben exits [the gay music of the boys is heard] • Bernard enters, wanting to hold Biff's shoulder guards [music dies away after Biff has made his entrance] • Charley enters (of old) and pretends to be unaware of Biff's game - which infuriates Willy • Charley makes fun of Willy, Willy challenges him to a duel - [music rises to a mocking frenzy] Scene 4: p70 Willy returns to present - in Charleys office • Bernard (much older and ' quiet, earnest but self-assured young man') greets Willy and tries to calm him down from his argument with the Charley of old from his memory. • Bernard is going to Washington to argue a case there • Willy is very impressed by the fact Bernard's friends have a tennis court " must be fine people" • Bernard is now a father twice, again impressing Willy • Willy talks up Biff as having a big deal; Willy again shows he is in awe of Bernard having friends with their own court. (possibly a little strained) " I'm over-joyed to see how you made the grade Bernard, overjoyed" Willy seems a little overcome by the fact Bernard is so much better than Biff • Bernard questions why Biff was so dejected after the Ebbots field game • Willy blames the math teacher for flunking him and ruining Biffs life - when all he had to do was go to summer school and make

up the grades • When Bernard says he disappeared, Willy gets edgy - " so he came to Boston - what about it?" • Bernard says Biff burnt his sneakers (with the university of Virginia printed on them) when he came back - " what happened in Boston Willy? • [Willy looks at him as an intruder] - Willy gets defensive - save by [charley enters] • [Charley give Bernard a bottle of bourbon as he leaves = luxury= wealth] - " thanks dad" • Charley tells Willy that his son is arguing before the supreme court - Willy is astounded that he didn't even mention it - Shows Bernard is modest - unlike the Loman family and he doesn't need to talk big to be big • Charley offers Willy a job after he asks for money - Willy is too proud and refuses • Charley tells Willy things like naming someone don't count anymore " the only thing you got in this world is what you can sell - and the funny thing is you're a salesman and you don't know that." • Charley says " I know you don't like me and no one can say I love you...." Then later Willy says " you're the only friend I've got Charley" • Willy says " I just can't work for you charley." • Charley " you've been jealous of me all your life" then he gives him the money • Willy " one day they'll all be big - play tennis together" Scene 5 p78 - at the bar [raucous music is heard]: • Happy demonstrates his wannabe affluence by buying lobsters and champagne • Happy says ' strudels coming' with his eyes closed before the woman enters • Happy starts chatting her up, offering her champagne ' it's all company money' • The woman is a cover girl • [Biff enters] Happy lies about him being a great football player • Happy gets the girl to go find a friend • Biff got rejected by Oliver - he had to wait six hours, then left and stole his pen • Biff had a revelation " I realise what a ridiculous lie my whole life has been. We've been talking in a dream for

fifteen years. I was a shipping clerk." • Happy is quick to cover up Biff's failure and tells him to tell Willy that Oliver is thinking it over, until the notion fades away from Willy's mind – "and nobody's the worse" (expect the whole family is living in an illusion' • [Willy enters] Happy says Biff went terrific Climax • Biff tries to straighten the facts out with Willy, Willy is reluctant to be brought into Biff's line of thinking • Willy announces he was fired "the words are burning boys there's a big blaze going on all around." • Willy again starts asking about what happened with Oliver, whereas Biff is more interested in Willy being fired and they are shocked • Willy is given little bits of information like he asks "what kind of welcome did he give you, was it a warm welcome...?" to which Happy says "sure pop sure," and Willy believes that everything went well he manufactures the ideal situation in his head, which Happy does nothing to curb despite Biff's best-meaning intentions to break the true news gently, • Willy leaps into all of Biff's sentences, anticipating the good outcome and gives Biff no chance to say the truth • Willy starts to zone out "you insulted him didn't you," Biff says "I can't talk to him, he's not letting me answer," Scene 6 p 86 MORE CLIMAX – WILLY'S CONFUSION MANIFESTS ITSELF ON STAGE [A single trumpet note jars the ear] • Young Bernard announces Biff flunked math 'Birnbaum flunked him' – this conversation is intertwined with the conversation at the restaurant, whilst they are separated on stage they are mashed together in Willy's mind and he is overwhelmed. • Bernard announces that Biff went to the train station [light on house snaps out] attention goes back to the restaurant • Willy is still trying to convince himself Biff succeeded; this also takes place whilst the operator at Willy's hotel in the past tries to contact him to which

Willy replies " no I'm not in my room stop it...etc..." • As Willy realises Biff has no chance with Oliver Willy [strikes Biff and falters away from the table] " you rotten little louse are you spiting me?" • Immediately after this the woman says " there's someone at the door Willy..." – the tension and calamity of the situation is building – the audience sees Willy is in an inescapable situation • Happy's girls come back, the WOMAN (OF WILLY'S) continues to nag him, similarities between Happy and Willy come through... Willy exits to the washroom • Mrs Forsythe says ' he's not really your father,' • Biff replies " Miss Forsythe, you've just seen a prince walk by, a fine troubled prince. A hard-working unappreciated prince. A pal you understand, a good companion." • Biff and Happy quarrel about Happy never doing anything for Willy, Biff thinks Happy does nothing; Happy says Biff causes all the problems anyway. • Biff storms off, • Happy in a truly dogey act abandons his father " no, that's not my father. He's just a guy. Scene 7 The revelation p91 • [Raw, sensuous music accompanies their speech.] makes it clear to the audience Willy is cheating • Willy says ' I'm so lonely" testament to the salesman lifestyle searching for self-justification • When Willy hears Biff knocking at the door ' his terror rising' he packs of the woman to the washroom and opens the door to a young Biff • Willy is told that Biff flunked math, Biff is confident Willy can talk his teacher into giving Biff the grades, Willy believes he can sort it out – but he is also hastily trying to get Biff out the room • Biff explains why his teacher hates him " the thquare root of thwixty thwee.." to which the woman laughs as well • [Willy looks at Biff who is staring open-mouthed and horrified at the woman.] • Willy tries the ' they were painting her room excuse.' • It doesn't work, Willy packs the woman off

after giving her stockings, [angry, humiliated] she exits • Biff starts crying, Willy tries a variety of responses, - she's just a buyer...how dare you cry...I gave you an order.... when you grow up you'll understand about these things." • Biff tells Willy to not bother about seeing his maths teacher • Willy " she's nothing to me, Biff. I was lonely, I was terribly lonely. • Biff replies " you gave her mom's stockings!!...." then later " don't touch me you liar..."" you phoney little fake! You fake!" MAX CLIMAX Scene 8 p96 – back at the restaurant, Stanley comes in to help Willy • [music is heard - Willy's theme] – keep in mind this theme is a flute – it is fragile and evokes sympathy for Willy in his frailty of mind • Willy gives Stanley all his money, which in a gesture of VERY good nature, Stanley slips it all back into his pocket • Willy asks if there's a nearby seed store • Stanley replies ' it may be too late now" which is a metaphor for willies life – not having tended his seeds well enough at the start. Willy leaves and Stanley clears up. Scene 9 p97 [the flute music rises] lights come up on the kitchen after a long pause] • Happy is carrying flowers for Linda • Linda knocks the flowers to the floor when Happy offers them to her. • Linda says " don't you care whether he lives or dies" Biff replies " no ones dying around here; I want to see the boss." Linda denies him access • Linda talks about Biff and Happy deserting their father, she tells them to go live in Happy's apartment, " pick it up, you bum, you!" • " Linda says " he was so humiliated he nearly limped when he came home." • Biff accepts guilt whilst happy does upstairs. – Happy once again avoids the problem and essentially through his actions blames it on Biff. Happy leaves so Biff cops the lecture. Biff reflects " left him babbling in a toilet...how do you like that heh?" Biff has realised what he has done. He calls himself ' the

scum of the earth.' • Biff hears noises from the garden ' we're gonna have an abrupt conversation him and me" • Linda pleads for him to leave Willy alone. • They go to the garden where Willy is planting. • [enter Ben] • Willy discusses ' the policy' with Ben, we soon realise this is the life insurance policy, which he referred to in Charleys office ' sometimes a man's worth more dead than alive.' (Which charley replied – no one's worth nothing dead.' • Willy then talks up his own funeral, and how it will impress Biff. • Ben suggests Biff will call Willy a coward – he'll hate you Willy" –a prospect which frightens Willy. • [gay music of boys is heard] Willy reminisces of better times. To which [Biff enters] • Biff tries in a supreme effort to set things straight with Willy ' let's just wrap it up, we'll tell mom' Biff wants to fix things (as best he can) then leave and never come back. • Willy is [frozen, immobile with guilt] due to his reminiscence of Biff finding him in the room with the woman. • Biff and Willy move to the house, Biff tries to free Willy of any paternal duty to him, " if people ask where I am, you don't know and you don't care." • [Biff moves to shake his hand] Linda says " shake his hand dear [Willy rejects his son] • Biff leaves, Willy explodes, saying Biff has ruined his life for spite, despite Biff telling him he doesn't blame his dad. • Happy comes back down the stairs. Biff has had enough and puts the gas pipe down on the table Willy [caged wanting to escape] " I never saw that.' • Biff continues his assault ' we never told the truth for 10 minutes in this house' • Biff then turns on Happy and states that he's not in the position he tells everyone he is. • Biff reveals he was in jail. Linda is sobbing as he speaks • Biff blames Willy for " blowing me so full of hot air I could never stand taking orders from anybody." • Biff talks about his realization after he

stole the pen. • Biff struggles to come to terms with realising who he is and what he wants. " why can't I say that Willy" - he calls his dad Willy not pop, = a lack of affection • Biff finishes " I'm a dime a dozen, and so are you." This really hurts Willy. " I AM NOT A DIME A DOZEN, I AM Willy Loman and you are Biff Loman." • [at the peak of his fury] " Pop I'm nothing, can't you understand that? There's no spite in it any more." • Biff breaks down sobbing on Willy's shoulder, he goes to bed, and says he'll leave in the morning. • " Willy is surprised - and not really with the situation at all. " isn't that remarkable he likes me," • Linda as always reassures her husband " he loves you dear." Ben starts to chime in, emphasising the fact Willy has made up his mind about what he will do • Ben says in reference to Biff's brilliance " yes, outstanding with 20, 000 behind him." • [In accents of dread, Ben's idyllic music starts up." • Happy tells Linda he's going to get married, and then goes to bed. • Biff tells Linda to go to bed, he'll be up in a minute • Linda struggles to contain her fear, but reluctantly goes to bed. • Ben and Willy talk about Biff with money, Ben urges Willy to hurry up. • Willy contemplates " when the mail comes, he'll be ahead of Bernard again" the only thing that ever really mattered to Willy was being ahead of the next guy. • When Ben fades out, Willy is surrounded by sounds [suddenly music faint and high, stops him. It rises in intensity, almost to and unbearable scream.] Willy is confused but then rushes around the side of the house. • Linda's calls to Willy are met by silence until ...[sound of car starting] • Biff leaps down stairs, but is too late. [Music crashes into a frenzy of sound, which then becomes the soft pulsation of a cello string...the music has developed into a dead march.] Requiem • Everyone except Happy is solemn

" he had no right to do that." • Linda wonders where are all the people he knew - probably dead or didn't like him - Linda wonders if they blame him, but Charley replies that in this rough world they wouldn't. • Biff reflects " there's more of him in the front stoop than in all the sales he ever made" - man of his hands and what he can make. • Biff says " he had the wrong dreams all wrong" which angers Happy greatly • Charley sums up the life of the salesman " and when they start not smiling back - that's an earth quake. ...Nobody dast blame him, A salesman has got to dream. It comes with the territory." • Biff says " the man didn't know who he was." Once again Happy's anger is visible and incites the " I'm gonna show you and everybody else that Willy Loman did not die in vain. He had a good dream. It's the only dream you can have - to come out number one man... this is where I'm gonna win it for him. • [flute music begins] - Fragile Willy. Linda says " I can't cry. I made the last payments on the house today - and there'll be nobody home. We're free and clear. We're free ...we're free." • [Only the music of the flute is left on the darkening stage as over the house the hard towers of the apartment buildings rise into sharp focus.