Famously in 1956 Arthur Miller — oh, I guess he was probably — well, he may still be this tall. He looks to me to be about 6’4” and probably weighs 70 pounds soaking wet. Very intellectual. The big horn-rimmed glasses, the whole thing. Married Marilyn Monroe who had been previously married to Joe DiMaggio, of course, who was her most recent husband. And everybody thought that was the strangest combination. But Monroe was attracted to intellectual men and he said he valued her for her mind. So I was thirsty. I wasn’t to let that — a brim shot.

In fact, he wrote a wonderful screenplay for her called The Misfits. It may have been — no, it wasn’t. She was in another film when she died, but it was near the end of her career. Have you ever seen that, The Misfits, the film? It’s really good. I don’t know. Did Howard Hawks direct that? But it co-starred Clark Gable. I believe that was his last film. And, oh, I should start things when I can’t — when I’m gonna have to remember names. It’ll come to me in a minute. It’ll be right in the middle of that. Has that ever happened to you? Two or three hours from now I’ll be driving down the road and I’ll go “Strother Martin.” Although it wasn’t Strother Martin. Montgomery Clift. It was his last film as well. I think the only person who starred in that that survived the next couple of years was Martin Balsam. But it’s a good, good movie and Marilyn Monroe was excellent in it.

They divorced in 1961. He remarried Ingeborg Morath who’s a photographer and photo journalist, a writer in her own right, and they’ve been together ever since then. Traveling the world, crusading for peace and justice, among other things. And putting on Death of a Salesman from time to time. The last time I heard of him personally
having a hand in it was in China, if you can imagine *Death of a Salesman* in a Chinese production. I’ve seen a production of *Death of a Salesman* with children, little kids playing the parts, and it was still good. And that’s what’s amazing about this play.

That’s what I want to say about it.

The staging is very important in *Death of a Salesman*. They have this — on top of 2111, a quote from Miller. Middle of that he says:

> I had known all along that this play could not be encompassed by conventional realism, and for one integral reason: in Willy the past was as alive as what was happening at the moment, sometimes even crashing in to completely overwhelm his mind.

And so he wanted that fluidity onstage and Joe Mielziner is the one who designed it. He was also the designer of the staging for the set for *Streetcar*.

> And the walls of the set are just lines painted on the stage floor. The back, the cyclorama, is either all green leaves or it’s tall buildings. They use these things back and forth to indicate time changes. Also music cues. Everybody has a theme. Everybody has his own musical theme and this is another way that Miller signals when we’re in Willy’s mind, who’s dwelling on the past or hallucinating, and when we’re in the so-called present. The present, of course, is the last day of Willy Loman’s life before he kills himself — I hope I haven’t spoiled that for you, but that is how that ends — expecting to set Biff up with his insurance money. Willy Loman was played on Broadway by Lee J. Cobb who was a great actor of his time and who
literally followed Arthur Miller back and forth from coast to coast, dogged him until he

got Kazan to cast him in the part.

I feel like I have some special knowledge of *Death of a Salesman* because I

actually acted in this. And I’m glad I did because I had the experience of knowing that

this play is so badly written and yet is such a great play, and maybe I can try to explain

why I say that when we’re talking about it. I taught at a women’s college in South

Carolina for three years and they had a nice drama department but they needed men to

play the male parts. You can’t put on *The House of Bernard Albe* or *Little Women*, you

know, every semester. You have to have a real play.

And so they decided to do *Death of a Salesman* which I thought was bizarre

because there was only one strong female part in the whole play, namely Linda. And so

they asked me if I’d play Willy Loman. And I had trod the boards in college a little bit

and so I said sure. So at 24, I played Willy Loman. They padded my gut and they dyed

my hair gray, and they lined me up and all this, and I looked really tired and old. Now

they wouldn’t have to do anything. It’s just walk right up there and walk right into the

play.

But why would I say something like this is badly written? Did you have moments

when you were reading this that you groaned? Difficult? When you’re reading

Tennessee Williams’ dialogue, it’s poetry. But these people talked more like real

people, apparently. Clumsily. There are just little moments like that when Biff says,

“When I take my helmut off, that means this touchdown’s for you.” Or something like

that. I find that a little bizarre. Don’t you find that a little bizarre? Or when Happy is
sitting in the restaurant and the girls come in, and he goes, “Strudel. What’s that? I need some seeds. I’m gonna plant some beets.” Beets? Didn’t that not strike you as strange? And Willy Loman, he’s so tired from this awful job and this awful trip, and he comes in — “Is there any cheese? I want some cheese. Why do you give me Swiss cheese when I don’t --” “It’s okay, Willy dear.” And Linda never — she’s always got a basket of laundry. No one lives there.

At any rate, I’ll be unable to not point out a couple of places in here where I think this was written — was handed. But a lot of powerful writing is not written very well. Dorothy Parker said Theodore Dryser ought to write nicer. And by that, I think she was talking about the fact that stylistically he was awful. But books like An American Tragedy or Sister Carrie, they’ll move us because of the power of the characters.

Miller has an essential story here. All of us have fathers or have had fathers. There’s always the generational thing. There’s always the father-son thing and I think the father-daughter thing can work pretty well, too. In fact, when I wrote home that I was going to play Willy Loman in Death of a Salesman, my mother called me and she said, “Have you read that play?” And I said yes. She said, “Are you sure you really want to do it?” Because there are resonances there in my own relationship with my father and that you probably have picked up yourself in that play. You know, maybe it is kind of dangerous territory. But, as I said, the children putting it on, it was still effective.

My favorite scene is the very end. Let’s talk about the end first and then get back to the beginning. This is what convinced me of the greatness of this play. I mean, this was — the production I was in was an amateur college production with a 24-year-old
Willy Loman and an 18-year-old Linda. We recruited a couple of local men to play the boys. One of 'em was a high school kid, in fact. Supposed to be playing 34-year-old men. The set was well done. The set was a duplicate, or as close as they could come, of the original set, so I'm accustomed to that. But there was — the boys' bedroom is up here and Willy and Linda's bedroom is over here. This area is the kitchen sometimes and sometimes it's the parking lot and sometimes it's the jungles that Ben walked into and came out with the diamonds.

But for all that, at the end of the play, after I exit or after Willy exits, and you hear this car revving up and then you hear errrrrrrrr, and screechings of brakes and crashing, although they don't have it in this text. Then you had a little funeral, and Linda comes out and Charley, and Charley makes his famous "Nobody d'ast criticize this man. A smile and a shoe-shine is all a salesman's got going for him." And he does all that.

And then Linda does her little eulogy. I used to — I wouldn't break curtain 'cause I had all this makeup and stuff on, but after one performance I went down underneath the apron of the stage where I could see the audience through the little gratings. More than that, I could hear them. It's hard for me even to try to paraphrase this even now. When Linda gets up there — and she was a good actress. In fact, one of the reasons they put on this play was this one young woman wanted to play Linda so badly. She gets out there and she says, "I can't cry, Willy. I can't cry." And then she starts to cry. And the audience starts to cry.

And, of course, at the time I was thinking it was my great acting that had brought them to this point. But now I know that what it was is the power of this play. They wept
for her and they wept for Willy. And in spite of the fact that this was — so you can
imagine what could happen to an audience if you had actors like Lee J. Cobb and so
forth playing it. So there’s my story, but let’s look at the play.

The entire setting is wholly or in some places partially transparent. You really
had to get used to this. You had to — you know, one minute there’s not a wall there but
then you had to observe that that wall was there.

Whenever the action is in the present, the actors observed the imaginary wall-
lines, entering the house only through its door at the left. But in the scenes of the
past, these boundaries are broken, and characters enter or leave a room by
stepping “through” a wall onto the forestage.

And it works. The audience immediately accepts it with the help of the lighting and the
help of the music.

Well, Willy has come home, exhausted, and he’s apparently nearly had another
wreck. And he tells Linda that if he had — if the old man had been alive, he’d be in
charge of New York. More important, Biff has come home. Biff is 34. Biff is the oldest
son and, as you know, Biff is the light of Willy’s life, and his hopes and his aspirations
are all Biff. And Biff has not had a very successful life so far. Linda tells him that he’s
trying to find himself.

Middle of page 2114:

LINDA He’s finding himself, Willy.

WILLY Not finding yourself at the age of thirty-four is a disgrace.

LINDA Shh!
WILLY The trouble is he’s lazy, goddammit!

LINDA Willy, please!

WILLY Biff is a lazy bum!

LINDA They’re sleeping. Get something to eat. Go on down.

WILLY Why did he come home? I would like to know what brought him home.

LINDA I don’t know. I think he’s still lost, Willy. I think he’s very lost.

WILLY Biff Loman is lost. In the greatest country in the world a young man with such—personal attractiveness, gets lost. And such a hard worker. There’s one thing about Biff—he’s not lazy.

Well, right away we can see that Willy has a problem. Going from how lazy he is to he’s not lazy. It’s bothered me. He’s talking about the spring, back when. He says, “This time of year it was lilac and wisteria.” Makes me think of mid-April and late April. And he says, “And then the peonies would come out, and the daffodils.” I don’t know what Spring is like in New York, but it’s going exactly backwards to the way Spring works down here. First there are the daffodils and then there are the peonies and then there are the lilacs and then, if you’re lucky, there’s the wisteria. But I’m not trying to fault Mr. Miller on his gardening. It’s just that sometimes I have a feeling that he doesn’t know anything about football anymore than he knows about gardening. Oh, well.

Couple of other things.

At any rate, he’s been thinking about that old Chevy. The lights go down on them and the lights come up on the boys, and it’s perfectly natural for the audience.
And Biff and Happy talking. And Biff just doesn’t want to do what the world wants him to do. Past the middle on 2117:

    BIFF: Well, I spent six or seven years after high school trying to work myself up. Shipping clerk, salesman, business of one kind or another. And it’s a measly manner of existence. To get on that subway on the hot mornings in summer. To devote your whole life to keeping stock, or making phone calls, or selling or buying. To suffer fifty weeks of the year for the sake of a two-week vacation, when all you really desire is to be outdoors, with your shirt off. And always to have to get ahead of the next fella. And still—thats how you build a future.

    He thinks Happy is a success but we find out at the end of the play that Happy was lying about all that, too. About the money that he’s making. But Happy claims he’s lonely which is kinda odd for — a thing to say for a man who appears to be something of a womanizer. But they think they’ll go out and raise cattle and use their muscles. And then Biff says things like, “Men built like we are should be working out in the open.” I’m sorry. I won’t point this out over and over, but that just gets a groan from me. If I were that actor, I would hesitate very much before I’d be willing to say a line like that.

    Did you notice the money things in here? He says, “Can you lend me ten dollars? I need to go buy some ties.” Plural. If I could find one decent tie for ten dollars, that’d be nice. Or Happy’s talking about this executive. “Yeah, but when he walks into the store that’s fifty-two thousand dollars a year coming through the revolving door.” Oh my. 1949. Well. And Happy has been seducing the fiancees of the various
men he works for.

Do basketballs come in cartons? That’d be a big carton, wouldn’t it? I guess. I don’t know. They’re flat? Oh, they’re not inflated. Well, that makes sense. Why, of course not. That’s why I’m not in the sporting goods business.

Notice these stage directions, 2120. Happy and Biff are trying to go to sleep and Willy is downstairs, hallucinating. Their light goes out and it says, “The apartment houses are fading out, and the entire house and surroundings become covered with leaves. Music insinuates itself as the leaves appear.” And so here’s our key that Willy is remembering the past. Talking to Biff:

WILLY Just wanna be careful with those girls, Biff, that’s all. Don’t make any promises. No promises of any kind. Because a girl, y’know, they always believe what you tell ’em, and you’re very young, Biff, you’re too young to be talking seriously to girls.

Course he says he’s gonna bring a hammock back and they’ll hang it between those two elms. Just earlier, in talking to Linda, she mentioned the fact — or one of them mentioned that the elms were now cut down.

What’s this with Biff’s kleptomania? He seems to constantly be stealing something. In fact, he even stole this football or took it without permission. And then look at Willy’s reaction. Happy says, “I told you he wouldn’t like it!” and Biff says, “Well, I’m bringing it back!” And Willy says, “Sure, he’s gotta practice with a regulation ball, doesn’t he?” And then says to Biff, “Coach’ll probably congratulate you on your initiative!” Biff says, “Oh, he keeps congratulating my initiative all the time, Pop.” Willy
says, “That’s because he likes you. If somebody else took that ball there’d be an uproar. So what’s the report, boys, what’s the report?”

It’s another thing that’s difficult about this play is Happy and Biff have to play 35-year-old men during part of it and then they have to switch back and be teenagers. And it’s done just with costume and attitude and their own body language. The two guys, when I was doing this, were pretty good at it. Being older men is really a little harder to do. At any rate, Willy is saying someday he’ll have his own business and never have to leave home anymore.

HAPPY Like Uncle Charley, heh?

WILLY Bigger than Uncle Charley! Because Charley is not--liked. He’s liked, but he’s not--well liked.

Notice how often that came up? Willy Loman? I guess it’s unnecessary to point out Willy Low Man. He seems convinced that it’s personality that wins the day.

And here comes Bernard. Bernard says, “Biff, where are you? You’re supposed to study with me today.” And Willy says, “Hey, looka Bernard. What’re you lookin’ so anemic about, Bernard?” Well, isn’t that a good father? Isn’t that a nice way to treat the neighbor kid? Particularly the — well, this is the past.

BERNARD He’s gotta study, Uncle Willy. He’s got Regents next week.

HAPPY Let’s box, Bernard.

BERNARD Biff! Listen, Biff, I heard Mr. Birnbaum say that if you don’t start studyin’ math he’s gonna flunk you, and you won’t graduate. I heard him!
After Bernard leaves, Willy says, “Bernard is not well liked, is he?” and Biff says, “He’s liked, but he’s not well liked.” Ha, ha, ha. Emulating the father.

And then Willy puts out part of his philosophy.

WILLY That’s just what I mean. Bernard can get the best marks in school, y’understand, but when he gets out in the business world, y’understand, you are going to be five times ahead of him. That’s why I thank Almighty God you’re both built like Adonises. Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want. Yhou take me, for instance. I never have to wait in line to see a buyer. “Willy Loman is here!” That’s all they have to know, and I go right through.

And so forth. And apparently at one point he was successful as a salesman.

Linda’s always darning socks — stockings when she’s not doing laundry, and we understand the significance of that after the incident with the woman in Boston. But we’re back to the present now and Willy’s upset because he doesn’t think he’s succeeding. He says that he talks too much perhaps and then she says, “Oh, you’re just lively.” And he says, “Well, I figure, what the hell, life is short, a couple of jokes.” Then, “I joke too much!” And off and on throughout the play you will hear the laughter of this woman.

Why is it that Biff doesn’t go back and take the summer school course? Why doesn’t he graduate so he can go to the University of Virginia? Another odd choice, it
seems to me, for this kid from Brooklyn. But why is it that he doesn’t? Why does he drop out? ‘Cause he catches his father with this woman in the hotel room in Boston. Is that believable? You think that that could be believable? Not that he caught him. I can see how he caught him. But that the boy would be that destroyed? I see nodding. I see nodding. I’ve asked students this before and they’ve all agreed. They’ve all said yes, mostly. They said I can see how that would be enough. It seems a little outrageous to me. It seems awfully self-destructive to me. But at the same time, I don’t know. Maybe you’re being more realistic than I am.

[Inaudible student response]

Linda says, “Why doesn’t he want you around?” and he says, “I know he’s a phony. I know he’s a fake.” Okay

Well, at any rate. The woman thanks him for the stockings and she says, “I love a lot of stockings” — which, of course, will make us all feel bad for Linda. He says, “Good night. And keep your pores open!” I don’t understand that. I don’t know what that means. And, of course, immediate juxtaposition with Linda mending stockings.

Willy wonders why he didn’t go to Alaska that time with his brother, Ben, and what a big mistake that was. And he says — middle of 3237:

WILLY What’s the mystery? The man knew what he wanted and went out and got it! Walked into a jungle, and comes out, the age of twenty-one, and he’s rich! The world is an oyster, but you don’t crack it open on a mattress! . . . Where are you guys, where are you? The woods are burning! I can’t drive a car!
And then Ben appears. Here’s another one of these ghostly images and it’s — he’s not supposed to be realistic and he’s not always memory. Sometimes it’s memory and sometimes it’s not. Sometimes, like in this case, it’s just plain hallucination. It’s Willy’s idea of his older brother and his success — if indeed he had it. “He is a stolid man, in his sixties, with a mustache and an authoritative air. “ And this umbrella — and there’s a neat little bit of choreography that you have to go through when he wrestles the boys and gets one of them down on the ground with his umbrella.

Actually, we’d like to try — I need two male volunteers to do a scene with me. This is not gonna work with the tape, but we can always probably cut it out. Because the sound will just be me. I’m true.

[Inaudible student response]

Long ago. Since the beginning you never knew how to play cards. See how awful that is? Trying to just get through a rehearsal, trying to do that, was awful. Plus the fact that the guy that played Uncle Charley read “What are you doing, Willy?” It’s “What’s yer doin’, Willy?” And it used to drive me — “What’s yer doin’, Willy?” I’m dying up here is what I’m doing. I’m dying up here.

But at any rate, Willy slams the door after Charley leaves. Thank you, gentlemen. You did a good job. And then, as Willy comes through the wall-line of the kitchen — and people just start beginning to walk through walls — he calls his sons over to meet Ben. Bottom of 2130:

WILLY Boys! Boys! Listen to this. This is your Uncle Ben, a great man!
Tell my boys, Ben!

BEN Why, boys, when I was seventeen I walked into the jungle, and when I was twenty-one I walked out. [hahaha] And by God I was rich.

That’s the image that Willy has of him.

And we find out that Biff is stealing building materials and with Willy’s approbation, apparently. Then Willy is talking to his brother about how he felt about — he never had a chance to talk to their father. Bottom of 2132:

WILLY Ben, my boys--can’t we talk? They’d go into the jaws of hell for me, see, but I—

BEN William, you’re being first-rate with your boys. Outstanding, manly chaps. . . . William, when I walked into the jungle, I was seventeen. When I walked out I was twenty-one. And, by God, I was rich!

That’s his opening and closing line.

WILLY . . . was rich! That’s just the spirit I want to imbue them with! To walk into a jungle! I was right! I was right! I was right!

And, of course, Linda comes in and the man is babbling to himself. She says that it’s always — she tells Biff that it’s always the worst — Willy’s always the worst when Biff comes home. That he’d be all right for awhile, he’s excited when he hears he’s coming, but the closer he gets the more uptight he gets.

And then she tells Biff, in the middle of the next page — she says:

LINDA Biff, dear, if you don’t have any feeling for him, then you can’t have any
feeling for me.

BIFF: Sure, I can, Mom.

LINDA No. You can’t just come to see me, because I love him. He’s the dearest man in the world to me, and I won’t have anyone making him feel unwanted and low and blue.

Now, the audience doesn’t have the advantage that you do, having read the play, of knowing about the woman and knowing about Biff’s discovery of his father’s infidelity.

But we have that woman laugh from time to time to keep it before us.

Famous speech by Linda — the bottom of that page.

BIFF People are worse off than Willy Loman. Believe me, I’ve seen them.

LINDA Then make Charley your father, Biff. You can’t do that, can you? I don’t say he’s a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He’s not the finest character that ever lived. But he’s a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. [That’s her famous line. Attention must be paid.] He’s not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person.

And then she goes on to say that she just thinks he’s exhausted.

And what has happened is he’s outlived everybody. His old friends are dead or retired, that he used to do business with, and that would be something. And then he
drives 700 miles and when he gets there no one knows him anymore, no one welcomes him. “Why shouldn’t he talk to himself?”, Linda says.

LINDA Why? When he has to go to Charley and borrow fifty dollars a week and pretend to me that it’s his pay?

BIFF: He threw me out of the house, remember that.

LINDA Why did he do that? I never knew why.

BIFF Because I know he’s a fake and he doesn’t like anybody around who knows!

But they don’t get this straightened out because she tells him that his father’s been attempting to kill himself and that all these car wrecks are suspicious. And that perhaps they’re not accidents.

And then this strange little deal with the rubber hose attached to the gas downstairs which, again, I find a rather bizarre way for Willy to make an exit if that’s what he’s going to do. But again, who am I? You know, Arthur Miller’s the one who won the Pulitzer Prize and made that audience cry every night. So.

Then, of course, the minute Willy gets there he and Biff fight. But Willy loves Biff so much, reminds Biff so much, that he gets over the fight pretty quick and then he gets right back into it. Like on page 2138:

HAPPY He’s going to see Bill Oliver, Pop.

WILLY Oliver? For what?

BIFF He always said he’d stake me. I’d like to go into business, so maybe I can take him up on it.
LINDA Isn't that wonderful?

WILLY Don't interrupt. What's wonderful about it? There's fifty men in the City of New York who'd stake him.

This is the lazy bum, this is the kid who's no good. And then they say the'll go into the Loman Brothers. This scene really plays very well, by the way, when Willy contradicts himself so much. He tells Biff how to dress.

WILLY But don't wear sport jacket and slacks when you see Oliver. A business suit, and talk as little as possible, and don't crack any jokes. . . . Walk in very serious. You are not applying for a boy's job. Money is to pass. Be quiet, fine, and serious. Everybody likes a kidder, but nobody lends him money.

Not three speeches from that he says:

WILLY Walk in with a big laugh. Don't look worried. Start off with a couple of your good stories.

And ask for fifteen thousand.

I have to tell you one more anecdote from this play, from that production. On the next page, Willy is preparing for bed and Linda's straightening the bed. He's in the bathroom and Linda calls him.

LINDA: Can you do anything about the shower? It drips.

WILLY [from offstage] All of a sudden everything falls to pieces! God-dam plumbing, oughta be sued, those people. I hardly finished putting it in and the thing . . . [His words rumble off.]
Anyway, she continues to talk and Willy comes out in his pajamas.

    WILLY  You don’t know the average caliber any more. The average young man today--[he is getting into bed]--is got a caliber of zero.

There was a great set and they had raked the bedroom thing so that you could see Willy and Linda when they’re sitting on the bed and talking. So it was kind of at a slant anyway. So here I come in my pajamas, my Willy Loman pajamas, and I’m told and tired, and I sit down on that bed and the thing collapses. “I gotta get the God-damned bed fixed, too.” After all the plumbing. It worked pretty well. I’m not gonna tell you any more anecdotes about my acting experiences. Absolutely boring. Anyway, she says, “Willy dear, what has he got against you?” and he says, “I’m so tired. Don’t talk any more.”

He goes to Howard and tells Howard — he says, “I named you,” and so forth, and yet Howard is tossing him aside like an old dog. Regardless of what he’s done for this company and the amount of time he’s spent with it. And Willy winds up hallucinating and talking to the imagined father of Howard, and Howard doesn’t have anything for him and calls him “kid.”

And we find out in another flashback that apparently Ben really had tried to make a business deal with Willy to go to Alaska. And now we run into Bernard. “Why are you so anemic about Bernard?” And Bernard has two children now and is a successful attorney, and he’s gonna argue a case in front of the Supreme Court. The irony is piling on. And Bernard asks him — he says, “I thought that he went to find you in Boston. Did he run into you? ’Cause when he came back he burned his sneakers.”
Do you like that in the bar or the restaurant actually, waiting for Willy, when Happy attempts to pick up these two girls? And he says to one, “Are you familiar” — after he’s introduced her to Biff — he says, “Are you familiar with football?” She says, “No, I’m afraid I’m not.” “Biff’s a quarterback for the New York Giants.” Uh-huh.

And we find out that he stole Oliver’s pen. And before this scene is over, Willy actually strikes Biff. That’s another thing that’s very daring, I think, to put in a play, to put violence on stage. It’s hard to do. The audience says, “Oooh, that looked too real” or “Oooh, that was too fake.” I didn’t particularly like the actor who played Biff. At this point I was doing a little Method and so I really let him have it one time. But it was — it’s still an interesting thing to do. Because later, before the play is over, Biff will dissolve in sobs and Willy is about to collapse, and they hold each other and they embrace. And that’s another thing that’s very effective on stage is to see two men embracing. It’s sort of a shocking image and it’s kind of an unusual image, and that moves people, too.

But Happy is such a Brutus. He says, “Is that really your dad? “Nah, he’s just some guy.” Wasn’t that awful? Ooooh. Well, of course, the woman wants stockings, two boxes of stockings, and Willy tells Biff — here’s the great discovery — “Now, look, Biff. When you grow up you’ll understand about these things. You mustn’t over-emphasize a thing like this. I’ll see Birnbaum first thing in the morning.” And he tells him, “She’s nothing to me, Biff. I was lonely, I was terribly lonely.” Biff says, “You--you gave her Mama’s stockings!” And he cries.

Well, it’s a $20,000 proposition he’s discussing with Ben. That’s apparently the
worth of his life insurance. And at the bottom of page 2169, we get the whole — the whole thing. Ben says, “You don’t want to make a fool of yourself. They might not honor the policy.” Well, obviously Ben’s not telling him that but part of his conscience that has any sense is telling him that. Willy says,

Oh, Ben, that’s the whole beauty of it! I see it like a diamond, shining in the dark, hard and rough, that I can pick up and touch in my hand. Not like—like an appointment! This would not be another damned-fool appointment, Ben, and it changes all the aspects. Because he thinks I’m nothing, see, and so he spites me. But the funeral—Ben, that funeral will be massive! They’ll come from Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont — and so forth and so on. That’s a particularly tragic and moving speech, I think, that he’s looking forward to his funeral — which he will not be there for.

At any rate, Biff’s leaving. Biff has had a revelation. Biff has figured out who he is. He’s leaving that office building with that fan in his hand. He realizes he doesn’t want business, he doesn’t want commerce, he doesn’t want that kind of life. He wants to go back and work outdoors and be a cowboy. And he tells the old man, “If I strike oil I’ll send you a check. Meantime forget I’m alive.”

And then they have that fight. And Biff confesses that he was in jail in Kansas City for three months for stealing. Bottom of page 2172. He kept saying — Biff kept saying he doesn’t know who he is, the man doesn’t know who he is, and he tells him, “Pop! I’m a dime a dozen, and so are you!” And Willy says, “I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman!” And Biff says,
I am not a leader of men, Willy, and neither are you. You were never anything but a hard-working drummer who landed in the ash can like all the rest of them!

I’m one dollar an hour, Willy! I tried seven states and couldn’t raise it. A buck an hour! Do you gather my meaning? I’m not bringing home any prizes any more, and you’re going to stop waiting for me to bring them home!

And Willy says, “You vengeful, spiteful mut!”

And Happy has to keep them apart but then this is when they break down, sobbing and hugging. And when Biff leaves, Willy says to Linda, “Isn’t that remarkable. Biff-- he likes me.” “He loves you, Willy.” Happy says, “Always did, Pop.” And Willy says, “Oh, Biff! He cried! Cried to me. That boy--that boy is going to be magnificent!” And then Ben says, “Yeah, with twenty thousand dollars behind him.” Ben says, “The jungle is dark but full of diamonds, Willy.” So in this case Ben has sort of become another part of Willy’s consciousness.

Well, then Willy dies and sneaks downstairs and goes out under the scrim and under the apron of the stage so he can listen to the audience weeping — which is the best part. Biff says he never knew who he was and Happy keeps telling him to not say that. And Charley makes that famous speech in the Requiem.

Nobody dast blame this man. You don’t understand; Willy was a salesman. And for a salesman, there is no rock bottom to the life. He don’t put a bolt to a nut, he don’t tell you the law or give you medicine. He’s a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine. And when they start not smiling back--that’s an earthquake. And then you get yourself a couple of spots on your hat, and
you’re finished. Nobody dast blame this man. A salesman is got to dream, boy.

It comes with the territory.

And Biff says, “I know who I am, kid.” And several critics have pointed out that if there’s anything positive about the conclusion of Death of a Salesman that Biff, at least, at thirty-four, has found himself and has come to some kind of authenticity and understands who he is, and he’s not the imaginary Biff that his father had built up over all these years as the conquering football hero who will go on to conquer the business world. At any rate, Linda remains behind because she never had a chance to say good-bye.