**All My Sons Act 3**

 by

**Arthur Miller**

**Analysis**

At the beginning of this short, final Act, [Jim](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/dr-jim-bayliss) finds [Kate](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/kate-keller) outside, rocking on the porch by the backyard, at two in the morning. Kate tells Jim she is waiting for [Chris](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/chris-keller) to come back; he took the car, after his argument with [Joe](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/joe-keller), and drove to an unknown place. Kate also tells Jim that [Annie](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/ann-deever) is upstairs in her room, and that she has been there since [George](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/george-deever) took his cab away from the Keller house.

Unity of time and place is maintained—we are in the same set, the set of the entire play, and it is within one 24-hour period after the start of the play, although we are passed midnight and therefore technically on a different calendar day.

[Jim](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/dr-jim-bayliss) alludes to the possibility of an argument between [Chris](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/chris-keller) and [Joe](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/joe-keller) over [Annie](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/ann-deever), but [Kate](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/kate-keller) tells him, flat-out, that the argument was about [George](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/george-deever) and [Steve](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/steve-deever). Jim reveals that he has known, too, that Joe was responsible for the faulty parts, and that Joe, Kate, and he himself have a “talent for lying” that Chris does not possess—his father’s secret has destroyed Chris, though it did not destroy the rest of the neighborhood. Jim tells Kate that he once left [Sue](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/sue-bayliss) for two months, and drove down to New Orleans, but that Sue came after him, found him, and brought him home.

Jim’s revelation is another important one. Like Sue before him, Jim admits that he knew all along that Joe was probably guilty, and he was OK with that knowledge, because he felt that Joe was enough of a pillar in the community, and a courageous enough man, to deal with the mistake he had made during the war. Jim wonders if Chris has this same ability to forget his wrongdoings.

[Joe](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/joe-keller) comes outside to see how [Kate](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/kate-keller) is doing, and [Jim](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/dr-jim-bayliss) goes offstage, saying he will take his car and drive around the park looking for [Chris](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/chris-keller). Joe and Kate have a small argument, in which Kate says Joe always get angry when the chips are down, but that getting angry won’t solve their current crisis. Kate tells Joe she believes that [Annie](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/ann-deever) has figured out the nature of Chris’s argument with Joe, and that she therefore knows Joe is responsible for the parts. Kate tells Joe that Chris will want Joe to go to prison, but Joe says he can’t do that, now, that decisions have been made and his life and family are settled. Kate says that she worries that war “changed” something in Chris, and Joe wonders aloud whether Larry wouldn’t have been better equipped to deal with the “necessary compromises” Joe had to make to protect his business and his family.

One of the great and shocking ironies of the play. Joe believes that Larry was somehow the better son because he was more prepared to do what was necessary to preserve the family business, to make a profit, to ensure the material success of the family for the future. But, of course, Larry was even more affected by Joe’s wrongdoing than Chris was—Larry could not live with the thought of it, and Larry’s suicide is based entirely on his father’s and Steve’s actions in the war. Thus Joe has completely misjudged his son’s character.

**Active Themes**

At this, [Annie](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/ann-deever) comes out to the porch, and sits silently for a moment with [Joe](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/joe-keller) and [Kate](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/kate-keller). They find they have difficulty saying anything to one another—they all know what has transpired that night. But Annie finally speaks—she tells Kate that she wants Kate to speak directly to Chris, apologizing for keeping the memory of [Larry](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/larry-keller) alive. Annie vows that Larry is in fact dead, and that Kate knows it. But Kate protests—she feels that there is still hope Larry is alive. Annie says she has proof Larry is dead, and as Chris walks back onto the stage, exhausted after his night of ruminating, Kate reads the letter and moans, knowing that it proves Larry’s death. Kate does not reveal the contents of the letter aloud, however, nor does Annie.

Another instance of using dramatic tension for great effect. Miller here knows that the audience probably understands, generally speaking, what is in Larry’s letter, but Miller also knows that this revelation will be more powerful if he waits several moments to make the information public. In this way, Miller also shows how different characters react to the news—here, Kate is stricken silently, completely crushed inside, but still wanting to protect Joe from this information.

In the meantime, [Joe](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/joe-keller) has gone upstairs, unable to handle the family’s trauma, and so he does not learn of the letter immediately. [Chris](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/chris-keller) asks [Annie](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/ann-deever) and [Kate](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/kate-keller), who is in morbid shock, to sit down: he announces to both that he is leaving the small town to take a job in Cleveland, that he always doubted his father’s innocence but worked for his father anyway, and that this action, this unwillingness to believe the truth, is proof of his own cowardice. But Annie says that she will go with Chris whether he wants, and Chris weighs whether or not to take her with him.

Annie, throughout this entire ordeal, remains an unshakeable rock, one who is devoted to Chris, devoted also to Larry’s memory, devoted to the Keller family despite its flaws, and even devoted to her own father, though she felt that he received far greater punishment than was necessary, since it was Joe, first and foremost, who ordered that the parts be manufactured and put in the planes.

**Active Themes**

[Chris](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/chris-keller) also announces that he would not want his father to go to jail; that jail would not solve anything, now, nor would it truly punish the deed that his father has done. [Joe](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/joe-keller) comes outside to join [Annie](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/ann-deever), [Kate](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/kate-keller), and Chris, and tells Chris that, if Chris wants, he *will* go to jail (he has not heard Chris’s previous words on the subject). Joe tells Chris that Chris also can give away all the family’s earnings if Chris feels they have been tainted with the blood of American soldiers. Chris tells his father simply to get away from him, that he wants nothing to do with Joe.

Joe now realizes that he will do anything to make his son happy. Joe, importantly, does not offer to go to jail because it is the right thing to do—he offers to do it because he believes it’s what Chris wants from him. But Chris doesn’t want Joe to go to jail now—he wants Joe to have faced up to his guilt several years ago. This is the great tragedy—that Joe’s wrong cannot be repaid at this juncture.

**Active Themes**

[Annie](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/ann-deever) takes the letter and, though [Kate](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/kate-keller) tries to intercept her, shoves it in [Chris’s](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/chris-keller) hands, telling Chris it was the last thing [Larry](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/larry-keller) sent her—Annie does this, it seems, to persuade Chris to take her with him, since Larry is truly dead. Chris reads aloud, despite Kate’s efforts to move Joe away from him (to keep Joe from hearing), that Larry was aware, overseas, of [Steve](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/steve-deever) and [Joe’s](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/joe-keller) trial, and that, out of shame, Larry decided, the day after the letter, to pilot his plane intentionally into the sea, committing suicide rather than confronting the wrongs he believes his father has committed.

The play’s second-to-last revelation, immediately preceding the final, which is Joe’s suicide. It is important to note that the report of Larry’s suicide, and then Joe’s suicide, happen in quick succession. This spilling of blood, whether actual or symbolic, in large quantities at the end of a play is another characteristic of Greek tragic drama.

**Active Themes**

This news is horrific and devastates [Joe](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/joe-keller), who always felt that, though he was responsible for the deaths of some pilots, he was not responsible for [Larry’s](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/larry-keller). Joe tells [Annie](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/ann-deever), [Kate](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/kate-keller), and [Chris](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/chris-keller) that, although he always thought he didn’t kill his own son, he has now realized that all the boys, all the soldiers who died because of faulty parts, were “his sons.” Joe says he is going upstairs to get ready to turn himself in in jail, while Kate screams at Chris for reading the letter, and says that Joe will not be able to survive in prison.

A key moment in the text. Joe recognizes that he has responsibilities to others in the world, not just to his family, and that, by allowing the planes to be fitted with defective parts, Joe ruined the lives of other men and other families—families with father and mothers and brothers, families just as important as the Keller clan is to him, and men who depended on him.

Liability, Culpability, and Guilt Theme Icon[Chris](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/chris-keller) tells his mother that, finally, the family is confronting the reality that they have obligations to others in the world, not just to themselves—that their responsibilities lies outside the immediate Keller family. Upstairs, a gunshot is heard, and [Kate](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/kate-keller) screams again, calling for [Jim](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/dr-jim-bayliss); [Joe](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/joe-keller) has shot himself out of grief. Chris is now doubly upset, for he tells his mother he didn’t intend for Joe to kill himself—he simply wanted his father to know the truth. But as [Annie](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons/characters/ann-deever) stands on watching mutely, Kate tells Annie and Chris that now they ought to go away—that they must live as best they can, despite the horrors they have seen. The play ends.

The final act of violence in the play. What is perhaps most stunning about this scene is Kate’s reaction—she almost expects that Joe is going to do this, and she is prepared to live her new life—one without her husband, without Larry—one in which Chris and Annie live far away. Kate seems to acknowledge that the guilt the family has hidden has festered for too long, and she, Kate, must remain alone with it, while Annie and Chris do what they can to escape.

**Active Themes**

Family and Familial Obligation Theme Icon