**All My Sons Summary and Analysis of Act III**

It is now the middle of the night. Mother is outside on a rocking chair, waiting for Chris to come home. Jim appears and asks about the fight. He knows the truth about Keller and Steve--he figured it out a long time ago. Mother says she thought that Chris sort of knew, as well, and she did not realize it would be such a shock to him. Jim says that Chris would never know how to live with a thing like that. But he will come back, because every man has to compromise his ideals sometime. Chris probably just wanted to be alone to watch "the star of his honesty" go out. Jim points out that he returned to his wife after having left her to do medical research, because he is a good husband; likewise, Chris will return because he is a good son. Jim leaves.

Keller enters. Mother tells him that when Chris returns, Keller will have to explain himself, making sure that Chris knows that Keller understands the gravity of his offense. That is, she wants Keller to offer to go to prison, should Chris ask him to. Keller does not like this plan, because he thinks he made the choice for the sake of his wife and son. Furthermore, he spoiled them rather than making them earn their keep. Mother says that these points do not excuse his crime. Keller insists that nothing is greater than the family, but there is something still greater in Chris's mind. Keller says starkly that Chris will forgive him, because "I'm his father and he's my son, and if there's something bigger than that I'll put a bullet in my head." Keller says that Larry would have understood; Larry had a head for business.

Ann enters and presents a plan to the Kellers. They have made Chris feel guilty for loving her, so she insists that Mother tell Chris that Larry is dead and she knows it, so that they can go away and be happy. "You had two sons. But you've only got one now," she says. But Mother refuses, because she knows in her heart that Larry is alive, and she knows that Chris and Ann must feel the same in their hearts. Ann says that she knows that Larry is dead. "Would I have looked at anyone else if I wasn't sure?" she asks rhetorically. Mother senses that there is something Ann is not saying.

Ann removes a letter from her pocket. It is a letter from Larry, which she never intended to show anyone unless it was necessary to allow her and Chris to get married. He wrote it right before he disappeared. As Mother reads the letter, she begins to moan, and Ann insists that the circumstances forced her to show the letter, since Mother would not believe Ann's word.

Chris returns and says that he will leave town because he cannot bear to be around his father with the knowledge he now has. He could jail him if he were human any more, but "I'm like everybody else now. You made me practical." Ann says she will go with him, but he says no, because in her heart she will always be asking him to send his father to jail. She says he should do what he has to do, but he cannot find a reason to make Keller suffer; after all, putting him behind bars will not raise the dead.

Keller returns and Chris walks away, saying that he has nothing to say to him. Keller asks what is bothering Chris--too much money? Then give it to charity. Chris can do what he wants with it; the money is his. Chris responds that the issue is what Keller wants to do. Keller rejoins that Chris cannot tell him to go to jail, because Keller clearly does not belong there. Besides, no one worked for free during the war. Wartime is profit time, and if he has to go to jail then half the country has to go with him. Chris understands but had thought Keller was better than the average, being his father. Chris feels unable to look at Keller or himself.

Ann gives Chris the letter, though Mother tries to stop him, or at least stop him from telling Keller what is in the letter. But Chris reads the letter aloud. Larry's letter is from the day he died. He had just seen the papers and heard about his father and the planes crashing. Larry felt full of guilt and anger, and wrote that he could not face anybody. He wrote that he was about to go out on a mission and that he would be reported missing. The letter implies suicide. Larry's letter to Ann adds that he loves her but that she must not wait for him.

Keller is quiet. He understands. He calls for the car and is ready to go upstairs to get a jacket. Mother tries to stop him, saying that Larry would not have sent him to jail. But Keller says that this is exactly what Larry is saying in the letter. "I think to him they were all my sons"--all the pilots who died. He goes upstairs. Mother turns to Chris and pleads with him not to take Keller to jail, but Chris says that nobody could stop Keller now. Mother says that the war is over--all these things are over--he cannot take away her husband. Chris responds that Keller should not just feel sorry; Larry died not just for that. She asks what more could be done, and Chris gives her a way to become better: "Once and for all you can know there's a universe of people outside and you're responsible to it, and unless you know that, you threw away your son because that's why he died."

A gunshot is heard in the house. Chris runs inside and tells Ann to find the doctor. Mother stays outside and moans her husband's name. Chris comes out in tears and says, "Mother, I didn't mean to-" But she interrupts him and tells him not to take the blame for his father's suicide. "Forget now. Live."

Analysis

Like her husband, Mother is in denial. She knows about Keller's guilt, and it is the source of her anxiety and headaches throughout the play. She is complicit in Keller's denial, and as for her own denial, she is forcing her son to stay alive, if only in her mind, in order to allow her to continue to live with her husband in some acceptable way. That is, if she had to accept that her husband effectively killed their son, then she could not bear it. But her loyalty to Keller ironically serves to separate the couple, since her knowledge of his guilt strains their relationship. Like her husband, she prefers to believe that there are forces outside her control--in her case, astrology and God's choice, both on Larry's side--that ultimately dictate life or death more than individual choice does.

But all this is not the blind trust of a grief-stricken mother. Just as she mistakenly thought that Chris always knew in the back of his mind that Keller was guilty, she always knew in her heart that Larry was dead, despite a play full of protestations to the contrary. When Ann shows her the letter that proves Larry's death, Mother suffers no great shock. Like Martha in Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, she learns the "death" of a son who did not really exist anymore anyway. She knew--she always knew. What mattered was that no one said it aloud, because that way she would not have to examine the implications. And again like Albee's Martha, what truly died was not the son, but the mother's self-deception, the universe she had constructed inside her head in order to cope with the painful truth.

The title of the play becomes clear in Keller's final line. After years of denial, he is forced to acknowledge that the soldiers who died as a direct result of his actions were someone's sons, and they all might as well have been his sons. But this line, with the title, actually serves two independent arguments that run through the work. "[All My Sons](http://www.gradesaver.com/all-my-sons)" has both an emotional center and an intellectual center. The emotional "All My Sons" has the Keller family at its core, being primarily concerned with the impact of shameful secrets on family relationships, in particular how their past can come back to haunt the present. When the work is performed, audiences are usually struck the hardest by the story of the crime and its consequences for the Keller family.

But the intellectual "All My Sons" is the story of that same crime and its consequences not for the Keller family, but for the world. If Miller is proposing a world-scale ethic of concern for everyone's sons, he proposes that Keller (and each member of the audience) should find in himself a kind of generalized care for all of the sons and daughters in the world. Miller later wrote that he wanted the play to be about "unrelatedness," describing Keller as a man who "cannot admit that he, personally, has any viable connection with his world, his universe, or his society." The admission that the pilots were "all my sons" is, for Keller, an admission that he might as well have killed his own child. The admission is also a new understanding that it should not matter whether the dead pilots could have been his sons; rather, we all have an obligation to society to value everyone's sons as though they were our own. Whether that level of concern is possible or feasible, indeed whether it is healthy and desirable to refuse to help your own children and neighbors while you try to help the whole world, is a different question, but the idealist might give it a try.

The tension among these values is highlighted throughout the play in Keller's and Chris's conflicting moralities. For Keller, there is nothing more important in this world than the family. For Chris, the destruction of the war wrought a new "kind of--responsibility. Man for man." And in the play, Keller's morality actually eclipses Chris's, even though Miller is giving the audience a shot at accepting Chris's leftist argument. In the end, what draws audiences is the emotion of a comprehensible, identifiable unit of society--that is, the drama of the nuclear family. The primacy of Miller's unrelatedness argument is defeated by its own truth. We will always care more about the one son whose father we see before us and with whom we identify, than the twenty-one dead sons who are not our own. At least, however, we can rise to the responsibility of making wise and prudent decisions to honor both the one and the twenty-one as well as we can.