

In this excerpt from Act I, Scene 1, Bridget and Sarah meet for the first time at the grocery store owned by Sarah's brother-in-law Hiram. Sarah's 12 year old nephew Jacob interrupts their talk.

BRIDGET

You're Sarah Weissmann? The midwife?

SARAH (wryly)

I was. At the moment, that's under debate. And you are...

BRIDGET

Oh, Jaysis, I'm sorry! I'm Bridget. Bridget Gallagher. I need your treatment.

SARAH

What is your complaint?

BRIDGET (this is very difficult)

I'm not certain, but I think I may be...with child.

SARAH

And you're not married.

(BRIDGET shakes her head. SARAH takes a careful pause.)

Why did you come to me?

BRIDGET

One of the other women at American Woolen. She said she had a problem like mine, and you helped her. Sarah, I don't know what to do.

SARAH

I'm sorry, Bridget. But I'm not allowed to treat anyone right now. If I do, I could be arrested.

BRIDGET

Please, just listen. There's six more at home. My da's a dear man, but he's no miracle worker. If I hadn't left Ireland, sure I'd have been married off by now, with at least two kids. I couldn't bear that. I don't know if I ever want babies, but I can't have one now, that's sure.

SARAH

Maybe you should have thought of that before...

BRIDGET

Before Collins forced himself on me?

SARAH

Who?

BRIDGET

Albert Collins. My boss at Everett. (pause) I'm not thick. I've seen what happens to girls who... like being looked at. They get into trouble. But I came to Lawrence to help my family and to make something of myself. And all I've had is trouble even so. You're my last hope. I was sure...

SARAH

You poor girl.

BRIDGET

It's your treatment I'd be needing, Sarah, not your pity. He forced himself on me. I swear it.

SARAH

I believe you. But isn't there anyone you can talk to? Family? Friends?

BRIDGET

I've two great useless brothers in Boston. And my uncle. If he finds out, he'll have me head.

SARAH

Your uncle?

BRIDGET

Aye, he's a priest here in Lawrence.

SARAH

What's his name?

BRIDGET

Are you Catholic?

SARAH (laughs)

No. Jewish.

BRIDGET

You won't have heard of him.

SARAH

Try me.

BRIDGET

Father O'Connor. Over at St. Mary's.

SARAH

Not Paul O'Connor?

BRIDGET

The very one.

SARAH

I've heard him called the Holy Terror. By his own congregants, yet.

BRIDGET (dryly)

'Twas I coined the phrase.

SARAH

Bridget, how old are you?

BRIDGET

I'm seventeen. How old are you?

SARAH

I'm...eighteen. Times two. (smiles)

BRIDGET

Ah, you're messin'! My Mum's not much older than you, and she looks sixty.

SARAH
Are you in good health?

BRIDGET
Aye. At least, I was.

JACOB (running in)
Aunt Sarah! Father says to come right away. (stops) Hello, miss...

BRIDGET
Call me Bridget. If I can have your name in return?

JACOB
Jacob Stern. (he shakes her hand)

BRIDGET
Pleased to meet you.

JACOB
I ain't...I mean, I've never heard anyone talk like you before. Where are you from?

BRIDGET
From the green hills of Ireland, Master Stern.

JACOB
Jacob, please. Or Jake. My friends call me Jake.

SARAH
Did you need something...Jake?

JACOB
Oh. Yeah. Father needs your help. It's getting busy.

SARAH
I'll be there directly! Leave us, Jacob.

JACOB
Nice to meet you...Bridget. (HE exits)

BRIDGET
He's a charming one.

SARAH
I guess he's growing up.

BRIDGET
I've a wee brother his age. They do surprise you. (beat) I'd better leave so.

SARAH
Go out the back way. Oh, and Bridget - can you join us for supper tomorrow?

BRIDGET
Aye, but what for?

SARAH

Let's take one thing at a time. We don't even know if you are expecting. If I'm going to look after you, I need to examine you first. Come by at five. We can talk after you've eaten.

BRIDGET

You're open on Saturday? But isn't that your Sunday? I mean...

SARAH

We open at noon, after services. We've got to eat too. I'll see you then.

BRIDGET (tensely)

And you'll help me?

SARAH

I'm tired of being pushed around by arrogant doctors. I'm tired of seeing women die of consumption before they turn twenty-five. And I'm especially tired of seeing the mill bosses take what they want, when they want, and the devil take the hindmost. Your uncle, and people like him, aren't much better. So yes, I'll help you, Bridget. I think you need someone on your side.

BRIDGET

Praise God!

LIGHTS FADE - END SCENE ONE

The rest of this sample comprises the end of the first act. Bridget seeks out her uncle, Father Paul O'Connor, for guidance, and ultimately decides to join in the picketing. Violence breaks out in her first night on the line.

ACT ONE

SCENE SIX

SETTING: St. Mary's. Sunday, January 21. Afternoon.

AT RISE: FATHER O'CONNOR is hearing confessions. BRIDGET enters the booth.

BRIDGET

Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It's been...six weeks since my last confession.

FR. O'CONNOR

That long? (pause) Yes, my child. What is your confession?

BRIDGET (hesitantly)

I have told untruths, and half-truths. I have contemplated evil actions. Father, I received poor treatment at the hands of one I was led to trust. For some time I was filled with pain, sorrow, and confusion. I was not able to take Communion while I struggled with this. Now, it seems that my prayers have been answered. And still I feel only doubt, and anger.

FR. O'CONNOR

Your prayers have been answered, and yet you cannot offer thanks to God? Do you doubt His love? Or His power?

BRIDGET

No, Father. But all around me I see people starving, beaten, and mistreated. How can He let such things go on? Do these people deserve what is happening to them? Did I?

FR. O'CONNOR

These are difficult questions, I will not say otherwise. But you must be patient. How can you be sure God's hand is not guiding these events? After all, we cannot hope to understand all of His plans for us. But it is because He loves us that we are strong enough to endure all that we must. And it is for His love that we endure it gladly. For who would He have loved more than His own son? And who among man has been asked to endure more than our good Lord Jesus Christ?

(BRIDGET slides open the door and confronts him face to face.)

BRIDGET

Do you expect me to reap love from hatred and anger and pain? Uncle Paul?

FR. O'CONNOR

I speak not as your uncle, but as your priest.

BRIDGET

But you are both. And yet you neither help me nor comfort me. Where am I now to turn?

FR. O'CONNOR

I cannot counsel you on this matter. But you must have faith.

BRIDGET

I vow that my faith is not at issue here. It's guidance I seek. But I won't stay where I'm not welcome. Will you give me absolution, Father?

FR. O'CONNOR

What meaning would it have to you? You must find the love of God in your heart before you can truly repent. And until you do, I cannot in good faith welcome you back into His flock.

BRIDGET

Very well. You may choose to stand by and do nothing. That doesn't mean I must do the same.

FR. O'CONNOR (heavily)

You take too many liberties, my girl.

BRIDGET

Aye, well, someone's got to. People are suffering, and the Church is meant to be a haven.

FR. O'CONNOR

You know nothing of the people, my child! You know nothing of life.

BRIDGET

I know a great deal more than you'd think, Uncle. And what I don't know, I'll learn. There are many who feel as I do, you must know that. The women I have spoken to...

FR. O'CONNOR

They are not your concern. You must not worry about those who are beyond saving. I must warn you - implore you - not to get mixed up in this. It is nothing but a lot of pointless violence.

BRIDGET

It's not pointless to those who are marching. And even people who have done nothing are not safe from harm. Why should I not do what I can to help?

FR. O'CONNOR

There is no good in it, my child. Do not be led astray by these radicals. Their problems are not yours.

BRIDGET

How do you know what my problems are?

FR. O'CONNOR

You do not belong on the streets! You do not belong in physical clashes! You must know your place, Bridget.

BRIDGET

But don't you see, I'm trying to find my place! Am I not part of this struggle? Part of this community?

FR. O'CONNOR

That doesn't mean you should feel compelled to participate in lawless protesting and violence. I don't feel you're able to judge the results of your actions. Take me at my word, Bridget. This is not your realm. A good woman does not interfere in such matters.

BRIDGET

Then perhaps I'm not a good woman.

FR. O'CONNOR

Need I remind you, I am still responsible for your conduct? Don't force me to send you back.

BRIDGET

You wouldn't dare. I can't go back. I'll die first!

FR. O'CONNOR

Then you must not shame me further. Heed me, and stay out of trouble.

BRIDGET

So that's your true concern. Not my soul, but your own reputation!

FR. O'CONNOR

They are both my concerns, child.

BRIDGET

I'd like to believe that. But I must follow my conscience. As you won't give me penance, I'll say nine Hail Marys and return on St. Brigid's Day.

FR. O'CONNOR

In two weeks' time. A pagan feast day. You still mark it.

BRIDGET

Aye, February 1st. It's also the day I turn eighteen. Meanwhile, I will contemplate and pray. But you should know, Uncle, your rejection of your own sister's child will not go unnoticed.

FR. O'CONNOR

Do you dare threaten me now, you impudent girl?

BRIDGET

I would not presume to threaten you, Uncle. Instead, I will turn the other cheek. I absolve you.

FR. O'CONNOR

You? Absolve me? Of what, you rude child?

BRIDGET

Of your indifference to your flock. And of forgetting where you came from.

FR. O'CONNOR

Out! I will not be spoken to in this way. Out of my church!

BRIDGET

And I always thought it was the Lord's church. Good day, Uncle. Perhaps I'll see you on the picket line.

(SHE exits hastily, with a defiant toss of her head. HE is left fuming.)

LIGHTS FADE - END SCENE SIX

ACT ONESCENE SEVEN

SETTING: Garden and Union Streets, near the Everett Mill. Monday, January 29. Evening.

AT RISE: LUCIA, BRIDGET, JOSEFINA, and ANNA are marching with signs.

LUCIA, BRIDGET, JOSEFINA, ANNA (sing)
WE SHALL NOT, WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED.
WE SHALL NOT, WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED.
JUST LIKE A TREE THAT'S STANDING BY THE WATER,
WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED.

(BRIDGET begins to cough. ANNA removes her shawl and hands it to her.)

ANNA
Here, put this on. The nights, they are bad now.

BRIDGET
I can't take that from you.

ANNA
We can take turns wearing it. And next time you will cover up better, eh?

BRIDGET (accepting it)
All right. Thank you.

JACOB (running in)
Bridget! There you are.

BRIDGET
Oh, Jacob! What are you doing here?

JACOB
I followed you after supper. Promise you won't be mad? I want to help.

BRIDGET
You should go home. It's too cold out here. And dark as well. You'll catch your death.

JACOB
I won't. If you're staying, I'm going to stay too.

BRIDGET
If your da hears about this, he'll be very angry. With both of us.

JACOB
He won't find out. And if he did, I'd tell him the truth. It was all my idea.

BRIDGET
If anything happens to you, he'll never forgive me.

JACOB
Aw, c'mon, let me stay. I helped you, didn't I? Please, Bridget, just this once?

ANNA

Let the boy stay, eh? We need every voice.

JACOB

Thanks, Miss Lo Pizzo.

ANNA

This boy, he is brave. *Va bene*, you walk with us. We will sing.
(sings) WE'RE FIGHTING FOR OUR CHILDREN,
WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED...

LUCIA, BRIDGET, JOSEFINA, ANNA (sing)

WE'RE FIGHTING FOR OUR CHILDREN,
WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED.
JUST LIKE A TREE THAT'S STANDING BY THE WATER,
WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED.

(SEAN enters and signals the STRIKERS to be silent.)

SEAN

What's going on? All right, come on, break it up, ladies.

ANNA, LUCIA, BRIDGET, JOSEFINA (sing)

WE'RE FIGHTING FOR OUR FREEDOM,
WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED...

SEAN

You can't stay here. Move it along, now.

JOSEFINA

These are our streets! We don't have to move!

LUCIA

We no want any trouble. But we no move now.

SEAN

Look, ladies, we don't want no trouble either. We don't want to have to take you in.

ANNA

Why not? Afraid of us? Of arresting women? (All the WOMEN laugh)

SEAN (fingering his nightstick)

You'd better watch your step, understand?

ANNA

So? You hit a woman? So brave!

SEAN (taking a step towards them)

Easy, now. Listen, why don't you just clear out and we can make like this never happened?

ANNA, LUCIA, BRIDGET, JOSEFINA (sing)

WE SHALL NOT, WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED...

(Unseen by SEAN, JACOB throws a piece of ice, which hits SEAN squarely.)

SEAN
Ow! Who threw that? (silence) All right, that's enough! Disperse!

(Trembling, he pulls his gun. ANNA approaches him, smiling)

ANNA
Come, now. You wouldn't hurt us.

SEAN (nervously)
Don't come any closer.

(SEAN takes a step back, then another, slips and loses his footing on the ice. As he falls, his gun fires. ANNA is hit and falls. SARAH enters just in time to see this.)

JACOB
Bridget?

SARAH
Jacob! (she sees him and pulls him back towards her)

BRIDGET
Lucia?

LUCIA
Anna! *Madonna mia...*

JOSEFINA
What happened?

SARAH (at ANNA's body)
She's dead!

SEAN (stunned)
Oh, dear God.

BRIDGET
Why did you kill her?

LUCIA
Murderer!

SEAN (desperately)
It was an accident!

(Realizing he is still holding his gun, SEAN quickly puts it away. More softly:)

Please, don't make trouble. No more trouble. Go home, now.

(SARAH takes JACOB's hand and pulls him out. The others slowly exit. BRIDGET conceals herself in the shadows and watches. SEAN kneels by ANNA's body and crosses himself. BRIDGET, emerging, sees this. Surprised and moved, she hesitates slightly before crossing to ANNA, removing her shawl.)

BRIDGET (coldly)
Excuse me. I want to leave this with Anna.

Miss, I...

SEAN (abashed)

If you please.

BRIDGET

(SEAN nods. BRIDGET kneels and crosses herself, and lowers her head for a moment. Then, together, they cover ANNA with the shawl. Across ANNA's body, they make eye contact and hold it as...)

LIGHTS FADE - END ACT ONE