

JEREMY BECK

THE BIDDLE BOYS AND MRS. SOFFEL

(2000)

a lyric opera in three acts

THE BIDDLE BOYS AND MRS. SOFFEL

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Music and Libretto by

JEREMY BECK

commissioned by Tuesday Musical Club of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania,
with support from The Heinz Endowment Fund.

Time: Winter, 1902

Place: Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Locations:

On the back streets of Pittsburgh

Allegheny County Prison, in Pittsburgh (interiors: the jail, a courtroom, an office)

Interior of the Soffels' home

In the fields of Butler County, Pennsylvania; cutaway house in the country

nb: all scenes should be as minimally dressed as possible, to allow for an optimum flux and fluidity of motion through time and place. Lighting and costumes should be considered more powerful and defining than set construction, furniture and/or props.

note on casting: While this is a period piece set in Victorian Pittsburgh, the intent of the composer is that casting should be race-neutral; a singer's ethnicity should play no part in determining which role(s) is appropriate (or not) for that singer.

There is a 5-minute pause between Act I and Act II, during which the houselights come half-way up. There is a formal Intermission between Act II and Act III. This information should be included in the printed program. As well, patrons should be warned of the gun shots which occur in Act I, Scene 3, and Act III, Scene 2.

running time is c. 2 hours

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Cast

Catherine Soffel (Kate) - the prison warden's wife, late 20s - early 30s, soprano

Peter Soffel - the prison warden, early 40s, baritone

Margaret Dietrich - Catherine Soffel's mother, late 40s-50s, mezzo-soprano

Edward Biddle (Ed) - an accused criminal, mid-20s (good-looking), high baritone

John Biddle - an accused criminal, Edward's brother, mid-20s, tenor

Jenny Sebers - The Biddle Boys' accomplice, early 20s, soprano

Detective McGovern - 30s-50s, bass-baritone

Grocer - 40s-50s, bass

Grocer's Wife - 30s-50s, soprano

Mrs. Puffington - 40s-60s, mezzo-soprano

Two deputies - any age, tenor and baritone

Three prison guards - any age, baritones

Judge - 40s-50s, bass

Journalist in Act III - any age, baritone

Prosecutor - any age, tenor

Three children (non-singing roles) - c. 6, 8 and 10 years of age (Nicholas, Elizabeth, Harriet)

Women's chorus (SSA) - Townswomen; friends of Mrs. Puffington

Men's chorus (TB) - Townsmen; newspapermen; jury members; prisoners & courthouse personnel;
members of McGovern's posse

Instrumentation

Piano

Violin solo

nb: orchestral version in-progress

ACT I

(There is a Musical Prelude, which continues into the opening of Scene 1).

Scene 1

(Music continues under throughout. Lights fade up on a Pittsburgh street [this split scene is to be played in front of the stage curtain]. It is night. JENNY SEBERS stands in the shadows, seeking to attract the attention of any passing gentleman who appears to be alone. Her job is to assist the BIDDLE BOYS in their robberies, by luring an unsuspecting man into the shadows, where the BOYS may mug him. One MAN passes, who is clearly not interested in her flirtations. Lights fade up on an interior scene; the two scenes are to be played simultaneously [split stage]. DETECTIVE MCGOVERN is standing at a table with two DEPUTIES, pointing at maps, and going over the current spate of robberies in Pittsburgh).

DEPUTY #1

You're sure it's them?

DEPUTY #2

Of course it is -

MCGOVERN

I know it's them.
They always follow
The same pattern.

They work with a girl.
She's standing in the shadows.
Acting all nice and sweet.
Maybe she smiles, maybe she asks for help.

(Another MAN walks by JENNY; he stops, and seems to be briefly interested, but then his two FRIENDS catch up with him, causing JENNY to back off - these three MEN then continue along their way, exiting).

But once she lures some innocent gentleman,
Getting him to stop,

(spoken)

Those Boys quickly go to work!

I know it's the Biddle Boys!
But they're more lucky than smart.
They always follow
The same pattern, the same method.
Not very smart.

DEPUTY #1

Smart enough not to get caught -

(Deputy #2 nudges him to be quiet)

MCGOVERN

(angry)

Smart? Smart?
Those crooks, those bums?
They're damn lucky -
But their luck is gonna run out!

I'm gonna get those Boys today!
We're gonna make 'em pay!
Their time is over
And I'm
Gonna put 'em both away!

(JENNY finally attracts the attention and interest of one MAN, who follows her...the scene with MCGOVERN continues, as ED and JOHN BIDDLE sneak out from the shadows behind JENNY and her mark - JOHN swings a blackjack, and knocks the MAN unconscious - ED and JOHN rifle through his pockets, pulling out a wallet, cash and some papers, while JENNY acts as a lookout - this should be timed to end as MCGOVERN finishes his scene with the DEPUTIES - just before the DEPUTIES exit, the BIDDLE BOYS and JENNY run off, triumphant.)

DEPUTY #1

So what's the plan?

DEPUTY #2

Yes, what's the plan?

MCGOVERN

We know their method.
They always follow
The same pattern...
We start with the girl.
Find her standing in the shadows.
She will be the key.
We get her to turn them in.
Convince her to save herself.
Get her to set up the Biddle Boys.

DEPUTY #1

How do we find her?

(Deputy #2 nudges him to be quiet)

MCGOVERN

(angry)

Get out on the street!

Check every alley!
Shine a light into every doorway!

DEPUTY #2

Let's go.

DEPUTY #1

Let's get those bums!

MCGOVERN

They're damn lucky -

DEPUTY #2

But their luck is gonna run out!

MCGOVERN and the DEPUTIES

We're gonna get those Boys today!
We're gonna make 'em pay!
Their time (their crime) is over
And I'm (we're)
Gonna put 'em both away!

MCGOVERN

(to the DEPUTIES as they leave)

Find the girl!

(MCGOVERN exits, as the curtain opens to reveal...)

Scene 2

(KATE SOFFEL is on stage alone, at home. Her mood is somber; she has just returned from the prison, where she reads the Bible to prisoners).

KATE

Dear Lord,
Another day in that prison.
Sharing Your hope and love.
Do they hear me?
Locked away - those men - do they care?

I know, I shouldn't have doubts.
I am Your humble servant.

Dear Lord,
I know You hear me.
Every day,
I pray to bring them Your comfort
And salvation.

(Kate's children run in to greet her)

Look at my darlings!

(she kisses and hugs them)

MARGARET

(Kate's mother begins singing offstage, then enters, just behind the children)

Kate! Kate!
We thought it was you!
Coming home, at last.

KATE

(kissing her on the cheek)

Sweet mother - how have my angels been?

MARGARET

(lovingly)

Little devils, I'd say!
During our Bible study,
Nicholas wouldn't sit still.
And Elizabeth - well, she wasn't much better!
Tickling her brother
During Deuteronomy!

KATE (*smiling*)

Terrible! Terrible!

(we hear the sound of a door slam offstage)

MARGARET

There is your husband.

CHILDREN

(exclaiming)

Poppa! *(they run off after him)*

MARGARET

Did you hear about Mrs. Puffington?

KATE

Puffington?

MARGARET

You know, you know!
The lady whose husband falls asleep in church -

KATE

Mother, it isn't polite to gossip!

MARGARET

Who's gossiping? I'm just telling you a story...
So did you hear about Mrs. Puffington?

KATE

No -

MARGARET

She's the lady whose husband -

KATE

She's the lady whose husband -

MARGARET and KATE

- falls asleep in church.

MARGARET

Yes.

KATE

So?

MARGARET

And don't forget the snoring.

KATE

Snoring?

MARGARET

In church.

KATE

Who? Do you mean Mrs. Puffington?

MARGARET

No! Her husband!

KATE

I thought you were telling me about Mrs. Puffington!

MARGARET

Now you've got me all mixed up!

(pause)

Oh, yes.

(pause)

Mrs. Puffington bought another hat...

(PETER SOFFEL, KATE's husband, walks in. The CHILDREN are hanging onto him, the youngest riding on his leg. During the following, PETER good-naturedly tussles with the children - eventually, he takes a large ring of keys out from his vest or coat pocket, and places them on a sideboard or some sort of utility table or lampstand that has a drawer).

PETER

...Mrs. who bought another hat?

KATE

Mrs. Puffington!

(they kiss each other on the cheek 'hello')

PETER

Who is Mrs. Puffington?

MARGARET and KATE

You know, you know!
The lady whose husband falls asleep in church -

PETER

It isn't polite to gossip!

KATE

Who's gossiping? Mother's telling us a story...

PETER

About Mrs. Huffington.

MARGARET

No - Mrs. Puffington.

PETER

Who?

MARGARET and KATE

She's the lady whose husband -

PETER

She's the lady whose husband -

MARGARET, KATE and PETER

- falls asleep in church.

MARGARET

Yes.

PETER

Oh.

KATE

And don't forget the snoring.

PETER

Snoring?

MARGARET and KATE

In church.

PETER

Who? Do you mean Mrs. Puffington?

MARGARET and KATE

No! Her husband!

PETER

I thought you were telling me about Mrs. Puffington!

MARGARET

Now you've both got me all mixed up!

(By now PETER has placed his keys on the sideboard or table, and Nicholas has taken them, jingling them playfully).

PETER

(grabbing the keys - scolding)

These are not toys, Nicholas.

KATE

Those are your Father's keys - and a prison warden's keys are very valuable.
Not to be played with.
Understand?

(Nicholas nods, and PETER puts the keys in the drawer of the sideboard or table).

(spoken) Go and wash up now - supper will be soon.

(MARGARET takes the CHILDREN out)

How was your day at the prison?

PETER

Same as always.

A new one came in today.
Picked up for thieving.
I believe it was his first offense -
Kate, he was just a boy...

Fear was in his face.
In five years, he'll be hardened.
Nothing left of the child,
Just a criminal in his place.

KATE

But he did steal.

PETER

Yes, he did steal.
And justice must be done.
Lessons must be taught,
But what are we teaching?

KATE

Right from wrong.

PETER

Yes.

KATE

God loves you, Peter.
You're a good man.
(spoken) Let's have supper.

(Lights fade down on KATE and PETER as they exit, while lights crossfade up on ED, JOHN and JENNY, walking the backstreets of Pittsburgh. JOHN and JENNY are joking.)

JENNY

Let's have supper.
I'm hungry.

(JENNY notices ED is quiet. She throws her arms around him.)

What's the matter, Ed?

ED

Oh, Jenny.

It's the same thing we've talked about before.

JOHN

Ev'rything is great!
You worry too much!

ED

I know, I know.

JENNY

Thinking too much! *(kisses his cheek seductively)*

ED

Yes, yes.
Probably you're right.
We do what we want.
We have lots of money.

But I'm tired of running.
Tired of hiding.
Tired of worrying every day.

JOHN

What now?

ED

Us getting caught.
You getting hurt.
Somebody getting shot.

JENNY

Worry, worry, worry!

ED

Somebody dying.

JOHN

Ed, really,
Nobody's gonna catch us -
And nobody's gonna die.
The only guy who's gonna get shot
Is the guy who tries to stop me
From doing whatever the hell I want!

(JENNY laughs, kisses ED)

JENNY (*suggestively*)

You just need a good night's rest with me...

ED

Listen.

Let's go out West.

JOHN

Why?

ED

Get outta Pittsburgh!

There's money out West!

More room out West

Away from the rest of these people we've known all our lives!

Let's get outta here, and start over -

I just want to try something new.

JOHN

But you don't know what on Earth we'd do -

JENNY

Ed, what would we do?

ED

True, I don't know what we will find.

JENNY

You're being silly, Ed - silly...

ED

No, I'm serious.

JOHN

You really wanna go out West?

ED

Yes.

JOHN

Ya wanna get out of Pittsburgh.

ED

That's right.
We're not kids anymore.
I'm tired of looking over my shoulder.
Watching out for ev'ry guy in the dark.
I wanna be free...
Let's get outta here, and start over...

What must it be like to be free?
To live without fear of what could be?

JOHN and JENNY

I don't understand you.

ED

We could leave this all far behind.

JOHN (*fondly*)

That's my big brother -

JOHN and JENNY

Always a dreamer...

ED

I mean it.

(They continue on their way - lights crossfade again, down on ED, JOHN and JENNY as they exit, and up on KATE and MARGARET, who are still at home. It is now after supper.)

MARGARET

What's the matter, child?

KATE

Oh, Mother.
It's the same thing we've talked about before.

MARGARET

You have a good home.
You have lovely children.

KATE

I know, I know.

MARGARET

Your husband loves you.

KATE

Yes, yes.
Peter's a good man.
He provides a good home,
We have no material wants.

KATE and MARGARET

And my (your) children are angels,
Blessings from God!

KATE

I thank the Lord, every day.
But something is missing.
Something's not right.
I can't put it into words.

MARGARET

You're tired, that's all.
Attending to the spiritual needs of thankless criminals
Would even wear out a minister.
You're a woman - you're tired, that's all.
Of course it would depress you.
Catherine, I've told you this before,
You should stay home with the children.
Those prisoners don't need you to bring them God's Word.

KATE

But, Mother...
Those poor men.
Alone, misguided.
Some of them only boys.
Is it their fault
They were raised in poverty?
Yes, I know -
There are poor people
Who never resort to crime.
So how do we help those who do?

We demand an eye for an eye,
But ev'ry soul can be saved, if we try.

MARGARET

You're needed at home.

KATE

I believe in justice, but with God's Holy love.

(ED, JOHN and JENNY return onstage, still on the streets of Pittsburgh. Lights remain up on KATE and MARGARET, who tidy up the house. Both scenes will play simultaneously.)

JOHN

How about one more job?

ED

What job?

JOHN

I think you're crazy, but I'll make you a deal.

ED

What kind of deal?

JOHN

I'll go with you out West.
Cut outta Pittsburgh.
If we get a little more spending money first.

ED

Just one job?

JOHN

Just the one.

ED

And you'll go?

JOHN and JENNY

We'll go!
So?

KATE

Imagine what it's like locked away -

Living in a cage ev'ry day.

MARGARET

It's their own fault, -

KATE

They need the prayers that I bring.

MARGARET

- whatever they did.

KATE

Don't you ever wonder
What it must be like for them?

MARGARET

Think of your family.

Think of your children.

KATE

But it weighs on my heart.

MARGARET

They're criminals.

KATE

Still deserving of our care.
Still loved by God.

MARGARET

Kate, you get yourself too worked up!

JOHN

Whaddya say, Ed?

JENNY

Just one more.

JOHN and JENNY

OK, Ed?

JENNY

We need you.

I need you.

ED *(to himself)*

What must it be like to be free?
To live without fear of what could be?

We -

JOHN

Come on, Ed.

ED

- could leave this all far behind.

JOHN

We'll be all right.

JENNY

One more job,
Then we can go -

JOHN

Then we can go out West.

KATE

Will there come a time
When all I feel is peace?

MARGARET

You'll have peace
Here at home -

MARGARET

- where you belong!

KATE

God, grant me peace!

KATE and MARGARET

God, grant me (her) peace!

Blackout

ED

Will there come a time
When all I feel is peace?

JENNY

You'll have peace -
- with me!

JOHN

Are you in on the score?

ED

You promise? You'll leave with me?

JOHN and JENNY

Yes!

ED

Just one more!

ED, JOHN and JENNY

One more!

Scene 3

(The scene begins in darkness. There is an offstage chorus, which will be part of the aural background for the entire scene. The chorus begins singing - almost imperceptibly - a wordless, sustained chord. The chord begins to pulse a little and grow, but it remains very much in the background, and quite soft. The solo violin then plays an aggressive statement over the choral music. When the violin begins to play, the lights fade up, just slightly. It is past midnight, and we are in an alley behind a grocery store. JENNY is acting as a lookout, while JOHN and ED proceed to break into the store. They make their way in, without making too much unnecessary noise. Once they are inside, they begin looking for the store's strongbox.)

JOHN

OK!
Let's find the strongbox!

ED

This'll be the last time, John.

JOHN

Sure, sure - the last time.
Now, if I was a grocer,
Where would I hide the -

ED

Sh! Did you hear that?

JOHN

I don't hear nothin'.

(Now we hear the sound of someone coming down the stairs - JOHN manages to duck off to the side before the grocer enters, pistol drawn and aimed at ED.)

GROCER

Stop!
Don't cha move, young fella!
Put up ya hands -
I'm takin' you down to the station house!
Try ta rob me, would ya?

ED

Wait! It's all a mistake - really!
I had too much to drink -

Your back door's wide open -
I wandered in by mistake, that's all!

GROCER

Not likely!
I lock my doors every night,
And always check twice!

ED

I don't know about that, Sir,
But I swear
I didn't come in here to rob you...

(During the above, JOHN has been slowly trying to inch his way behind the GROCER, but the GROCER hears a noise, spins around and fires at JOHN. JOHN had seen the GROCER begin to turn around, and had quickly moved, so the GROCER's shot misses him, but as the GROCER fires at JOHN, ED pulls out his pistol, and shoots the GROCER, who falls down. JENNY freezes at the sound of the first shot - JOHN kneels, checking the GROCER.)

JOHN

Ed!
You killed him!

JENNY

(running in)

What the hell's going on?

ED

Stupid bastard!
Why'd he have to come in here?

(We then hear the GROCER's WIFE offstage, screaming out her bedroom window to the street).

GROCER'S WIFE

(offstage)

Help! Help!
There's shots been fired downstairs!
Call the police!
Call the police!

ED

Are you sure he's dead?

JOHN

He's bleeding like a pig -

JENNY

Let's get outta here!

ED

Stupid bastard!

(JENNY, ED and JOHN run off. We hear a police whistle offstage, being blown out on the street. The GROCER'S WIFE cautiously comes down the stairs, entering the store.)

GROCER'S WIFE

Jimmy? Jimmy?

(she spies his body in the dimly-lit store, and runs over to him)

No. No. No! No!

They've killed you, Jimmy!

Murder!

Murder!

(Curtain and blackout)

(There is a 5-minute pause, with house lights dimming up about half-way)

ACT II

Scene 1

(As the house lights fade back down, we hear a CROWD of people arguing and fussing onstage behind the curtain. From this unintelligible rumble, we soon hear the voices of a group of WOMEN emerge, clearly chanting "The Biddle Boys are innocent! The Biddle Boys are innocent!". With the beginning of the music, the curtain then opens to reveal a courtroom. The crowd of people are spectators, and include newspapermen, curious onlookers, and women of all ages who find the Boys attractive. The GROCER's WIFE is also in the crowd - she is weeping, while being comforted by a friend. During the following, people come and go - as if the courtroom were a marketplace. The WOMEN's chanting becomes singing. "Others" can designate different groups of people, or varying groups of people - men and women).

GROUP OF WOMEN

The Biddle Boys are innocent!
It's like they said at the trial -
They didn't do it!

OTHERS

They're guilty!
Hang 'em!

(The BIDDLE BOYS are brought into the courtroom by the two DEPUTIES, followed by MCGOVERN. They stop before the JUDGE's bench and stand, waiting. The BOYS' wrists are shackled behind their backs).

GROUP OF WOMEN

The Biddle Boys are innocent!
Look at how handsome they are!
Let 'em go free!

OTHERS

Don't be fools!
They shot Jimmy Greene in cold blood!
His life meant nothin' to them!
Didn't care about his wife -
Only his money!
They're guilty!
Hang 'em!
Hang 'em!
Hang 'em!

GROUP OF WOMEN
No!
No!
No!

NEWSPAPERMEN

What a great story!

GROUP OF WOMEN

The Biddle Boys are innocent!
The Biddle Boys are innocent!
Nobody saw them at Jimmy Greene's store -
No witnesses!

(JENNY enters, joining the GROUP OF WOMEN).

OTHERS

Ed and John were caught down the street
Hiding in an alley -

GROUP OF WOMEN (plus JENNY)

The Biddle Boys are innocent!
The Biddle Boys are innocent!

OTHERS

The police say -

NEWSPAPERMEN

Hell of a story!

OTHERS

One other got away -

(The JUDGE enters.)

GROUP OF WOMEN

Just look how handsome they are!

JENNY

Look at how handsome Ed is!

GROUP OF WOMEN

You can't hang a face like that!

OTHERS

They're guilty!
Hang 'em!
Hang 'em!
Hang 'em!

GROUP OF WOMEN and JENNY
No!
No!
No!

Hang 'em! Hang 'em!
Hang 'em both!

(The JUDGE has taken his place)

JUDGE

Order! Order!

(The CROWD continues talking and arguing - the JUDGE bangs his gavel, and everyone gets quiet).

Edward and John Biddle -
You have been found guilty
Of the crime of murder.

You both have a history
Of trouble with the law.
Many times in jail
And still no lessons learned.

Both young and strong -
Such a waste of life.
Do you feel no regret or any remorse?

(The BOYS remain silent. Lights fade up slightly on a split scene: we see KATE in the prison, silently reading the Bible to two PRISONERS. Prison GUARD #1 stands next to her.)

I see nothing in your faces.
And, of course, it is too late.
Crimes have been committed
Against people and the state.

Our citizens must be protected -
Feel safe within their homes.
Therefore, I sentence you both to be hanged.

JENNY

No!

Anything to say?

Ed...

(The BOYS remain silent)

Take them away...

(The BOYS are slowly led out of the courtroom - the JUDGE bangs his gavel once, then exits in the opposite direction, the way he came in. The CROWD begins to jabber again - some are happy, some are upset. It is a circus.)

GROUP OF WOMEN and JENNY

The Biddle Boys are innocent!
It's like they said at the trial -
They didn't do it!

OTHERS

They deserve to die!
Hang 'em!
Hang 'em!
Hang 'em!

GROUP OF WOMEN and JENNY
No!
No!
No!

NEWSPAPERMEN

What a great story!

NEWSPAPERMEN plus some of the OTHERS (men and women)

Ev'rybody loves a hangin'!

GROUP OF WOMEN and JENNY
No!

Can't wait for the hangin'!
String up the Biddle Boys -
Let's watch 'em die!

OTHERS (men and women)
Can't wait for the hangin'!
Let's watch 'em die!

GROUP OF WOMEN and JENNY

They're innocent!

(The CROWD exits - lights fade on the courtroom area as they come up full on KATE in the prison. She closes her Bible - the reading is over).

KATE

May the Lord
Give you comfort.
Welcome His hope and love.

(GUARD #1 leads the PRISONERS away, and they exit)

Do they hear me?
Locked away - those men - do they care?

I know, I shouldn't have doubts.
I am Your humble servant.

Dear Lord,
I know You hear me.

(KATE bows her head, hands clasped in prayer. ED and JOHN are brought into the prison by two other GUARDS - KATE doesn't notice them, and she is startled when JOHN addresses her).

JOHN *(sarcastic)*

Hey, sister -
Say a little prayer for us, would ya?

GUARD #2

Cut it out!

JOHN

We're the Biddle Boys!
We hang in a week for murder!

GUARD #3

Shut up, mister!

(Lights change - JOHN and the two GUARDS freeze)

KATE

Did you kill that man?

ED

No, miss - *(sees her wedding ring)*
Mrs. ? *(she doesn't answer)*
I swear -
I wasn't there,
Neither of us.

KATE

You were found guilty.
There was evidence -

ED

All a lie!
My brother and I didn't do anything.
Didn't hurt anyone.
We don't deserve to die!

KATE

Why would the police lie?

ED

Don't be naive!
Now I'm not saying we're angelic little boys -
We've been arrested before.
But only for thieving -

KATE

Only...

ED

- nothing more.

KATE

What about robbing people on the street?

ED

Not true!

KATE

I've heard you did that, too.

ED

Not true!
That wasn't us -
We would never hurt a soul!

KATE

I don't believe you - *(she starts to leave)*

ED

Do you think we deserve to die?

(KATE stops, turns back)

Do you?

KATE

No one deserves to die...

ED

Even if I killed a man?

KATE

Did you?

ED

No - but if I had?

KATE

Only God can answer that...

ED

What were you prayin' for, when they brought us in?

KATE (*pause*)

I had been reading the Bible to some prisoners,
And I was praying for them to find peace...

ED

Will you pray for me, Ma'am?
Will you help me find some peace?

(Lights change back, as KATE continues her exit - the GUARDS are taking the BOYS off in the opposite direction)

What is your name, Ma'am?
Please, what is your name?

(KATE looks back at him, but doesn't answer - ED asks the GUARDS)

Who is that woman?
What is her name?

(They ignore him, until he stops and struggles with them)

Tell me!

GUARD #2

(grabbing ED)

Settle down!
That's Catherine Soffel,
The prison warden's wife!

(KATE has almost left the stage)

ED

Catherine Soffel!

(KATE stops, and looks back again)

Please come back soon,
And help me find peace...

(KATE exits, confused. Lights fade to black as GUARDS take JOHN and ED off).

Scene 2

(Later that night, at the Soffels' house. Lights fade up on KATE, by herself, trying to read her Bible - she is distracted by thoughts of her encounter with Ed).

KATE

"Help me find peace."
That's what he said.
Peace...

(PETER enters the room).

PETER

Still awake?
I thought you had gone to bed.

KATE

Soon, soon.
Let me read a little first...

PETER

Are you feeling all right?

KATE

Just fine...
(PETER look skeptical)
Don't worry -
I'll be up in a minute...

(PETER kisses her forehead, and then exits. After PETER goes, KATE prays earnestly, often looking up, as if she is silently pleading with God).

KATE

How can I heed Your call?
I'm needed here at home.

Is Mother right?
Should I stay and be with the children?
Helping them through the day and night?
They need me more than those men locked away, don't they?
Tell me, God - what's right, what's wrong?

Help me be strong.
Guide me with the light of faith.
Cast these doubts away with its glow.

Mother says fam'ly comes first, but - dear God - please forgive me,
I don't think that's true!
First, I serve You!
Your love is why we're here, after all.
I think my way is clear - I will go.
"Help me find peace," he said.
Since that's Your plan for me,
Yes, God, I'll help him find peace!

(KATE exits - as the lights fade with her, they crossfade up on the interior of the prison. Prison GUARD #1 is on duty near the BIDDLE BOYS. He has fallen asleep. GUARD #2 comes to relieve him - he is amused to find him asleep. He tries poking him a couple of times, but GUARD #1 won't budge. GUARD #2 finally pushes him, kidding).

GUARD #2

Falling asleep again!
I'm gonna tell the warden!

GUARD #1 *(startled)*

I wasn't sleeping!

GUARD #2

Gonna dock your pay!

GUARD #1

What pay?
You've come in late again!
I'm gonna tell the warden!

GUARD #2

I'm not late!

GUARD #1

Gonna dock your pay!

GUARD #2

What pay?

BOTH GUARDS

Say what you will about us!
Sleeping on duty,
Coming late to work -
But if the lousy warden don't like the way we do our job -
He can do it himself!

GUARD #2

(takes a bottle out from inside his coat, opens it)

This'll take the chill off.

(During the following, they pass the bottle back and forth between them, taking turns drinking)

GUARD #2 *(joking)*

Not standing straight enough!
I'm gonna tell the warden!

GUARD #1 *(stands at attention, then sways)*

I'm standing straight!

GUARD #2

Gonna dock your pay!

GUARD #1

No way!
Not drinking fast enough!
I'm gonna tell the warden!

GUARD #2 *(guzzles)*

How was that?

GUARD #1

Gonna dock your pay!

GUARD #2

You say!

BOTH GUARDS

We'll do as we like!
Drinking on duty,
Never standing straight -
And if the lousy warden don't like the way we do our job -
He can do it all by himself!

GUARD #1 *(leaving)*

Good night.

(GUARD #2 grunts an acknowledgment, then sits down, drinking. He falls asleep cradling the bottle.)

JOHN (*tossing and turning*)

Psst. Ed.
Are you asleep?

ED

I was.

JOHN

I hate these prison cots...
There's no way to get comfort'ble.

ED

It'll only be a few more days...

JOHN

Thanks for remindin' me.

(*still trying to get comfortable*)

Say, what was that all about today,
With the prison warden's wife?

ED (*chuckling*)

You saw her there.
Sitting with a Bible,
Fervently in prayer.
I could read her like a book.
Sure as the moon, she's gonna help us, John.

JOHN

Yeah, by savin' our souls.

ED

Better yet - she'll save our lives.

JOHN

How do you mean?

ED

Did ya see her face?
Did ya see the way she was lookin' at me?
Never fails, never fails.
She may say she's talkin' to God,
But her heart is flirting with the devil...
She's gonna get us outta this place -

Trust me.

JOHN

Yeah, right.

ED

Gotta have faith, John.
Only a few more days...you'll see...

(They lie back down, trying to go back to sleep. We see KATE, lighting her way with a candle, quietly making her way into the prison).

KATE *(almost whispering)*

Edward Biddle -
Edward and John Biddle - where are you?

JOHN

Did ya hear that?

ED

It's her, John. *(so KATE can hear)*
Who's that looking for us?

KATE

It's me - Mrs. Soffel.

JOHN

What do you want?

KATE

I've come to help you.

ED

I'm glad to see you here.

KATE

The good Lord has counseled me to bring you both His Word.
To help you find peace...

ED

I knew you would come, Mrs. Soffel.
It's Fate, Mrs. Soffel.

You were sent to deliver me, I know.
To save us.

KATE

Yes, to save you.
In order to enter His Kingdom,
You both must repent -
Ask for His forgiveness,
Welcome His love into your lives -

JOHN (*sarcastically to ED - he then flips back onto his cot*)

Repent!

ED

We do repent, Mrs. Soffel.
We want to change the way we live our lives.
Show God we can change.
You believe that's possible, don't you?

KATE

All things are possible with God's love and forgiveness.

ED

With you to help us, Mrs. Soffel,
I know we can change the way we live our lives.

KATE

I'm only doing God's work -

ED

Don't be modest -
There aren't many people in the world
Who would give of themselves ev'ry day
Without recognition,
Without pay.

KATE

Please stop, Mr. Biddle.
No more flattering words.
Let's pray together.

(She sits, and he kneels with her. KATE has her eyes closed in silent prayer, but ED watches her. She soon grows aware of his watching).

Mr. Biddle, you're not praying...

ED

I am, Mrs. Soffel,
And my prayer was answered...

KATE (*standing*)

It's late.
I need to go -

ED

I know...
Will you visit again tomorrow?
Please, Catherine?
May I call you "Catherine"?

KATE

Try to sleep -

(KATE leaves - the GUARD stirs, but doesn't wake up as she goes. JOHN laughs, slapping ED on the back, before turning over to go to sleep. ED lies down as well).

ED

Sure as the moon...

(Lights fade down on the prison, as they fade back up just slightly on the interior of the Soffels' house. KATE enters, trying to be as quiet as possible. She doesn't see that MARGARET is waiting for her, sitting in the dark).

MARGARET

Where have you been, Catherine?

KATE

Mother - you startled me!
It's late -
What are you doing there in the dark?

MARGARET

I would ask the same of you.

KATE (*pause*)

I couldn't sleep.
Felt restless.

MARGARET

Why can't you sleep, Catherine?
What are you doing?
Where did you go?

KATE

I just went for a walk -

MARGARET

Catherine!
For three hours?
In this cold?
Where did you go?
I'm worried, Catherine -

KATE

Mother, it's nothing -
I just couldn't sleep,
So I went for a walk -
Don't worry, Mother.

MARGARET

You must be ill -
I'm getting Peter -
(she starts to go, KATE stops her)

KATE

No!
Please don't worry him.
I'm really all right.

MARGARET

You went back to the prison, didn't you?
(KATE doesn't answer)
Didn't you?
(KATE still doesn't answer)

I see that you did -
Catherine, Catherine -
I don't know what's come over you.

KATE

I'm doing God's work.

MARGARET

If this is God's work,
Then why sneak out in the middle of the night?
Why go there without a word to anyone?
Why sneak back over three hours later?
Why deny that you went in the first place?
What is going on?
I need to tell your husband -
(she starts to go, KATE stops her)

KATE

Don't, Mother.
Please -
I know -
Don't be upset with me -

MARGARET

But this is too much, Catherine!
Running off into the night!

KATE

You're right, you're right.
I shouldn't have gone.
I promise you I won't do this again.

MARGARET

And Peter?

KATE

Please don't tell Peter -

MARGARET

Why not?

KATE

He'll get concerned over nothing.

MARGARET

This isn't nothing!

KATE

Please!

MARGARET

Promise you won't go back to the prison.

KATE

I promise!
Promise you won't tell Peter -

MARGARET

Catherine...

KATE

Promise!

MARGARET

It's against my better judgment...

KATE

Promise!
Promise me!

MARGARET (*reluctantly*)

I promise.

(Lights fade quickly and curtains close as the two women exit).

Intermission

ACT III

Scene 1

(It is morning a few days later, on a crowded street in Pittsburgh. People are hurrying back and forth, going about their daily lives. We see MARGARET walk on in the crowd - the Soffels' CHILDREN are with her. They stop to buy some hot chestnuts being sold by a street vendor. She doesn't notice a group of three well-dressed women approach her. One of these three, MRS. PUFFINGTON, wears a fancy - and overly ostentatious - feathered winter hat).

MRS. PUFFINGTON

Hello, Mrs. Dietrich!

MARGARET

(aside) Oh, no -
(smiling) How are you, Mrs. Puffington?

MRS. PUFFINGTON

Invigorated by the cold!
Nothing like a robust walk in the winter!
Wouldn't you agree?

MARGARET

Yes, one of the joys of Pittsburgh...

MRS. PUFFINGTON

We haven't seen you lately at tea, Mrs. Dietrich -
Too busy for us?

MARGARET

As you can see, I'm keeping busy with the children.

MRS. PUFFINGTON

Yes, such rosy little blooms -
(she pinches Nicholas's cheek, who makes a face at her)

FRIEND #1

And not too overweight...

MRS. PUFFINGTON

So where is Catherine?

FRIEND #2

Isn't she feeling well?

MARGARET

She is feeling just fine.

(Lights fade up on a split, simultaneous scene of KATE at home, deep in thought).

MRS. PUFFINGTON

No doubt she's simply resting -

FRIENDS #1 & 2

All those visits to the prison -

MRS. PUFFINGTON and FRIENDS #1, #2

How can she abide
Consorting with criminals like that?

MARGARET

She isn't "consorting" -
She comforts them with the Word of God.

MRS. PUFFINGTON

Of course -
I'm sure she does...

MARGARET *(pause)*

That is a remarkable hat, Mrs. Puffington.

MRS. PUFFINGTON

Thank you!

MARGARET

Is it new?

MRS. PUFFINGTON

The latest from Paris!
A design by Monsieur Gauche!
Do you like it?

MARGARET

It clearly suits you.

FRIENDS #1 and #2

We love it!

MRS. PUFFINGTON

Merci beaucoup!

Well, adieu - *(starts to go, then turns back)*
- and "dieu" come to tea!

(The three women all laugh at the bad pun as they exit)

MARGARET *(to the children)*

It looks like a bird is nesting on her head!

(They all laugh as they exit. The street scene continues in silence, and we see JENNY enter, making her way to the prison. Simultaneously, another split scene fades up on ED and JOHN in their cell [this should be on the opposite side of the stage from KATE's space]. JOHN is asleep. ED sings directly to KATE, who reacts to his singing and his words, as if these were active thoughts in her head - KATE does not sing directly to ED in this part of the sequence).

ED

I knew you would come, Mrs. Soffel.
It's Fate, Mrs. Soffel.
You were sent to deliver me, I know.
To save us.

KATE

Yes, to save you.
In order to enter the Kingdom,
They both must repent -

ED

We do repent, Mrs. Soffel.
You believe we're innocent, don't you?

KATE

They're innocent, aren't they?

(By this point, JENNY has arrived at the prison, and one of the GUARDS leads her over to ED and JOHN's cell - the GUARD remains there, but stands away from them).

JENNY

Ed!

JOHN

It's Jenny!

JENNY

I hate to see you in here...

ED

We're doin' all right -

JENNY

All right? All right?
They're gonna hang ya in just a few days -
I can't sleep...I miss you...

JOHN

Jenny, Jenny - nothin' to worry about -

JENNY

Whaddya mean?

JOHN

- 'cause we're gettin' out!

ED

John!

(The GUARD glances over at them, and they hush to keep their voices down. About this time, as the scene continues, we see MARGARET cross back through the street scene, without the CHILDREN now. She looks worried, and is distracted when an acquaintance stops her for a brief chat. She soon continues on her way, exiting).

JENNY

Gettin' out?
Whatcha got goin', Ed?
I'm so excited!
You're so smart -
I knew they couldn't keep you in here!
When ya get out,
You'll come and get me, won't you?

JOHN

Sure we will!

JENNY

Let's get outta here and start over.
Now we'll go out West like you said!
With you, I don't care what lies ahead.

JOHN

We're goin' out West!

JENNY

Ed, tell me when will it be?

ED

Soon, soon...

GUARD *(calls over)*

Time's up, Miss -

JENNY

(she kisses Ed)

That's for not turnin' me in.

(she kisses him again)

I love you.

(JENNY exits with the GUARD. During the following exchange between ED and KATE, the street scene should gradually dissipate, with everyone exiting. Just as the last few people are leaving, PETER emerges into the center space, studying a file and making some notations in it - he is in his office at the prison).

ED

Catherine, Catherine,
We need you.
It's God's will, Catherine.
You were sent to deliver us -

(KATE now responds and sings directly to ED, from across the stage. They will stay in their own spaces throughout this scene, for now).

KATE

Leave me alone, Mr. Biddle!
I'll pray for you, that's all.
There's nothing more I can do for you now.

ED

Yes, there is -
You can show me your face,
Let me hear your voice -
Soothe my unworthy soul
With cool and calm words...

KATE

I can't, Mr. Biddle, I can't...

ED

And I want you to call me "Ed"...

(Lights fade down slightly on ED and KATE, as they crossfade up on PETER. MARGARET enters; she has come to the prison, and enters PETER's office)

PETER

Margaret?
What brings you here?
Is everything all right at home?

MARGARET

Oh, Peter - I'm not sure.

PETER

You're not sure?

MARGARET

I'm worried about Catherine -
I don't think she's well...

PETER

Is she sick?
Do we need a doctor?

MARGARET

No, no -
It isn't like that.
She just - needs to rest.
All of her work at the prison - well -
Attending to the spiritual needs of thankless criminals
Would even wear out a minister.
She's a woman -
She should stay home with the children.
Those prisoners don't need her to bring them God's Word.

PETER

But it's good for her spirit.
And sets a fine example for the children.
Her work is good for the fam'ly.

MARGARET

Peter, Peter -
If I thought that was true,
I wouldn't be here...

(Lights fade back up on KATE at home and ED in his cell - the scenes now play simultaneously)

ED

PETER

Kate's a strong woman,
You raised her well -

It's God's will, Catherine.

Can you let them kill us?

MARGARET

I hope so.

Let them kill two innocent men?

(The GUARD drinks from the bottle underneath his coat throughout this, and gradually falls asleep).

PETER

And I know my wife.

KATE

What do you want of me?
If I could save you, I would!

MARGARET

I hope so.

(With the next line, ED moves out of the prison space, and - throughout the following exchange - slowly crosses over to KATE's space, accompanied by a follow-spot. He will cross through PETER and MARGARET's space, but they will not see or hear him. KATE and ED will now interact, and sing to each other, even as others will later enter KATE's space; no one sees or hears ED besides KATE. As well, ED's crossing over should be timed so that he actually reaches her side at the indicated line below).

ED

Then you believe me, Catherine -

KATE

PETER

Ev'rything's all right.

Yes, I believe you!

MARGARET

I'm not so sure -

PETER

Go home.

Don't worry...

ED

You can get us out!

KATE

What are you saying?

ED

You can get the keys -

KATE

Ed, no...

ED

Your husband's keys can unlock this cell -
Save us -

KATE

I could never do that!
I can only help to save your soul...

(MARGARET exits, not convinced. Lights fade down on PETER, who has not convinced himself, either. He exits).

ED

Save my life, Catherine!
We didn't kill anyone!
You've said you know that's true!
Look in your heart!
This is His will...

(ED has now reached KATE's side, and he takes one of her hands in both of his)

You and me, brought together by God.
Don't you believe that?

KATE

Yes, I believe that...

ED

Then get the keys!
Please save us!

(ED kisses KATE's hand, and begins to move backwards, away from her, back to the prison area. KATE begins to sing her aria, and MARGARET enters, ushering in the CHILDREN to say goodnight to KATE before they go to bed. They are in nightclothes. As KATE fluffs their hair, and kisses them each goodnight, the sequence continues, with KATE singing her private thoughts to God - none of this is heard by anyone around her. ED gradually makes his way back to the prison space - all the time he is calling out to KATE, who tries to ignore his pleas. Once the goodnights are finished, MARGARET leads the CHILDREN offstage).

KATE *(to God)*

God, what should I do?
Free these men and break the law?
Yours is a Higher law, I know -

ED

Why must I be the one?
Hurt my innocent children and my husband?
They don't deserve the pain this will bring.
But Ed and John Biddle stand wrongly accused -
There's no justice if they will die!

I need you -
Please help us.
You know it's God's will!

There's no justice if we will die!

(PETER has now come home from work. He greets KATE warmly, but looks a little worried. He kisses her goodnight, puts his keys in the drawer, and then goes off to bed).

Thy will be done!
Maybe my calling is not as a wife.

Get the keys!

JOHN

She isn't coming.

I will trust in You; give You my life.

ED

She'll be here -

Take care of my fam'ly, God,
Help them forgive me
For everything now I must do!

Gotta have faith, John -

(KATE takes the keys from the drawer and puts on her coat. Lights fade down on the interior of the Soffels' house as she crosses directly over to the prison space, quietly. The GUARD and the BIDDLE BOYS are asleep. She comes over to ED and JOHN's cell).

Ed...

ED *(waking suddenly - JOHN wakes when he hears ED)*

Catherine - you've got 'em!

KATE

But you have to take me with you -

JOHN

(to KATE)

What are you talking about?

(to ED)

What is she talking about?

ED

You can't go, Catherine!
They'll hunt us down like dogs -

KATE

When I set you free, I set us all free!

ED

Your husband, your children -

KATE

Not mine anymore!
This is the path that God has given me.
Helping you be free.
And I want to be with you, Ed...
I know in my heart you have a good soul -
Maybe you haven't always done what's right,
But the world has been a cruel place for you
The things that you've done,
Whatever you've done,
I forgive you -

Let's leave this place and start over!
Imagine how it feels to be free!
Like being blind, then given a chance to see!

JOHN *(aside to ED)*

What about Jenny?

ED *(aside to JOHN)*

Can't worry 'bout Jenny!

We will leave this all far behind...

ED

You can't mean it!

KATE

I mean it!

(she holds the keys up in front of him)

I won't give you these
"Til you say "yes" -

ED

You don't know what you're getting into...

JOHN

This is crazy!

KATE

I've got the keys -
Say "yes" -

JOHN

She's gonna slow us down!

(ED is deliberating)

KATE

I won't, I won't -

ED

Yes -

KATE

You mean it?

JOHN

Ed!

ED

Yes, yes!
Let's get out of here,
And start over!

(During the following, KATE unlocks the cell door. The GUARD is passed out; JOHN takes the GUARD's pistol and knocks him unconscious with it.)

KATE

Imagine what it's like to be free!

KATE and ED

Blinded eyes, given a chance to see!

KATE, ED and JOHN

We will leave this all far behind...

(KATE, JOHN and ED run off. A police whistle blows offstage. The street scene once again gets active, and lights brighten up. It is the next morning, and people are gossiping among themselves).

CROWD

The Biddle Boys have escaped!

Got away!

Did you hear that?

Did you hear that?

(There has been a loud knocking on the Soffels' door - PETER answers it offstage. Lights come up as PETER strides into the Soffels' interior, still in his bedclothes, followed by MCGOVERN)

PETER

When did this happen?

MCGOVERN

Sometime early this morning -

They knocked out a guard...

(PETER shakes his head in disbelief - he tries to think of what to do)

CROWD

How could they escape from the county prison?

PERSON IN THE CROWD

I heard that someone let them out!

CROWD

What? How? Who?

PERSON

That's all I know...

CROWD

Oh...

MCGOVERN

I've got my men on top of it,
But they've had a good start -

MARGARET (*rushing in*)

What's going on?

MCGOVERN

I'll see you at the prison - (*exits*)

PETER

Early this morning the Biddle Boys escaped.

MARGARET

Oh, no!

PETER

I have to go right away -

(*PETER goes to the drawer to get his keys*)

Where is Kate?

(*He finds the drawer empty*)

Where are my keys?

(*pause*)

Where is Catherine?

MARGARET

I don't know...

(*PETER rushes off - MCGOVERN appears with his two DEPUTIES as part of the street scene.*)

MARGARET

Catherine, where did you go?

DEPUTY #1

How do we find them?

(*Deputy #2 nudges him to be quiet*)

MCGOVERN

(angry)

Don't be such a fool!
Check every alley!
Shine a light into every doorway!

MARGARET

Catherine, what have you done?

DEPUTY #2

Let's go.

DEPUTY #1

Let's get those bums!

MCGOVERN

They're too lucky -

DEPUTY #2

But their luck is gonna run out!

MCGOVERN and the DEPUTIES

We're gonna get those Boys today!
We're gonna make 'em pay!
Their time (their crime) is over
And I'm (we're)
Gonna hunt 'em down today!

(JENNY has joined the CROWD, and a WOMAN, an acquaintance, approaches her. Meanwhile, MCGOVERN and the DEPUTIES exit after they finish).

WOMAN

The Biddle Boys have escaped!
Did you hear that?

JENNY

What?
No!

CROWD

How could they escape?

WOMAN

I heard that someone let them out!

Who?

CROWD

Catherine Soffel!
The prison warden's wife!

WOMAN

They say she run off with 'em, too!

MARGARET (*at home*) and JENNY (*still in the crowd*)

No!
How could she (he) do this?
Run off and leave her husband (me)?

MARGARET

Her family?

(PETER appears in the crowd; MARGARET and JENNY remain in their own spaces)

PETER, MARGARET and JENNY

It can't be true!

PETER and MARGARET

A God-loving woman and mother,
Abandoning her fam'ly,

JENNY

Ed, you said you'd get me!
How could you abandon me?

CROWD

Catherine Soffel helped the Boys escape!

PETER, MARGARET

Abandoning her children...

CROWD

She stole her husband's keys!
Did you hear that?

PETER, MARGARET and JENNY

Catherine, (Oh, Ed)
How could you do this?
Abandon me?

CROWD

She left her family!
Abandoned her children!

(Lights down on PETER, the CROWD and MARGARET, who all freeze. JENNY has crossed over to MCGOVERN and his DEPUTIES, who have re-entered the prison area).

MCGOVERN

Yes? What do you want?

JENNY

I got some information for you -
The Biddle Boys are headed West!

MCGOVERN

How do you know?
Who are you?

JENNY

Just a good citizen,
Who wants to see justice done -

DEPUTY #2

How do you know they're heading out West?

JENNY

Never mind how I know!

(she starts to leave)

But when you catch Ed Biddle - tell him...

(spoken)

Oh, tell him to go to hell!

(she runs off)

MCGOVERN *(smiling to the Deputies)*

That was the girl...

(Lights fade down as they exit. A spotlight finds KATE, ED and JOHN as they re-emerge, into their own space on the stage. They are on the run, but giddy and naively optimistic).

KATE, ED and JOHN

Did you ever think that we'd be free?
Like being blind, then given a chance to see!

(Lights fade up and movement returns to all)

PETER, MARGARET, CROWD

How could she do this?
A God-loving woman?

We can leave this all far behind...

JOHN

Let's head out West!

KATE and ED

*(ED puts his arm around KATE's shoulder -
she lets him)*

No more worries!

KATE

With God to guide us!

ED

You're my angel!

(ED tenderly kisses KATE - she lets him)

KATE, ED and JOHN

We're free!

We're free!

Blackout, curtains close

MCGOVERN

(re-entering, leading the DEPUTIES)

They're headin' West!

Let's track 'em down!

CROWD

The Biddle Boys have escaped!

PETER, MARGARET and JENNY

How could she (he) do this -

- to her children (to me?) -

CROWD

The Biddle Boys have escaped,

PETER and MARGARET

- and to me?

CROWD

with Catherine Soffel!

JENNY

To hell with them all!

CROWD

Did you hear that?

PETER and MARGARET

How could she?

MCGOVERN, DEPUTIES

Let's hunt 'em down!

Scene 2

(Note: The form of this scene is cinematic and rhapsodic in nature. There are three threads which are introduced, two in the present and one in the future. The two in the present will merge, and then be propelled forward into the future, for the close. All of the music is continuous, taking us through the various locales and episodes).

(We hear the offstage chorus singing quietly, and the curtain opens. It is a bright and bitterly cold day - the stage is harshly lit, white. We are in the fields of Butler County - there is snow, ice, a cutting wind. ED and JOHN are wearing winter coats stolen from the prison; JOHN carries the pistol he took off the GUARD, while ED has another one that they stole on their way out of the prison. The three of them are running away on foot, but KATE is having trouble keeping up).

KATE

(stumbling, stopping)

Leave me.

ED

(helping her)

Come on, Catherine!

KATE

Leave me - I'll only slow you down...

ED

Kate -

KATE

I can't go on - it's far too cold.

JOHN

Let her go, Ed!

She's holding us back - we have to keep going!

KATE

Yes, let me go - I don't want them to catch you!

ED

Come on, Kate!

Don't give up - we're going to get away!

Out there - the future, Kate!
Waiting for us...

Come on, Kate!
Don't lose hope -
We're all in this together!

You're my precious angel,
Remember?
The guiding hand of God,
Sent to deliver me from my reckless past!

At last, we are free!
You and John and me!
Don't give up!

Come on, Kate!
(ED starts to pull her up)
Help me, John.

(JOHN pulls her up from her other side, and together they continue, going offstage. MCGOVERN enters close behind them, followed by a posse of the TWO DEPUTIES, other armed MEN, and a JOURNALIST)

JOURNALIST

How do you know they're headed this way?

DEPUTY #1

A witness came forward.
Said they was headed West -

JOURNALIST

But how do you know you could trust the witness?
Perhaps you got sent the wrong way.

MCGOVERN

(stops, angrily grabs the JOURNALIST by the collar)

Wrong way?
I looked in her eyes - she wasn't lying!
We're gonna track 'em down today!
Put 'em back into a cell,
Then send 'em on to hell!

DEPUTIES #1 and #2

They won't escape us -

MCGOVERN

The law will be satisfied!

DEPUTIES #1 and #2

No place where they can hide!

MCGOVERN

(pushing him away)

Got it?

JOURNALIST

(to DEPUTY #1)

Who was the witness?

What did she say?

DEPUTY #1

(stops briefly)

Get the spelling of my name right:

Theodore Smith

That's S-M-I-

MCGOVERN

Smith, let's move!

(They continue, going offstage. ED, JOHN and KATE emerge from the back of the theater. As they approach the stage, the lights fade up on an abandoned house. This house is designed as a cutaway, so that we see an exterior front porch, with windows on either side of the door, as well as the interior, which is cluttered with odds and ends. There is also a window at the back of this interior, towards the other side, through which JOHN will later try to escape).

KATE

So cold...

ED

Come on, Kate!

KATE

Leave me - I simply can't go on...

ED

I won't!

JOHN

(spies the house)

Look at that, Ed!
It's a house!

ED

Come on, Kate!
There's a place - we're going to get you warm!
Told you we'd be all right,
Didn't I?

(JOHN has crept up onto the porch and peers in the windows)

JOHN

It's empty!

ED

Come on, Kate!
We'll be fine -
We're all in this together!

You're my precious angel,
Remember?
The guiding hand of God,
Sent to deliver me from my reckless past!

At last, we are free!
You and John and me!
No reason to give up!

Come on, Kate!

(The three of them go inside, and begin getting warm as lights on them fade. As they do, MCGOVERN and the POSSE continue after them, also emerging from the back of the theater, but in separate groups, coming up different aisles, even in the balcony. They will not spot the house quite yet, and will actually exit the theater again just as the next overlapping scene begins).

MCGOVERN and POSSE

Them Boys never had a hope -
Their names are written on a rope!
They may be prayin',
But God don't hear 'em -
He ain't near 'em today!

(MCGOVERN and the POSSE briefly lose the direction of the trail - they stop to examine the footprints during the following aria).

JOURNALIST

(writing, musing excitedly)

So Ed's lover was jealous!
A woman scorned!
His partner in crime turned him in!
This is too good!
I must write a book, a full description of their lives and crimes!

(imagining the title, pompously)

"The Biddle Boys and Mrs. Soffel!
The Great Pittsburgh Tragedy and Romance!
The Greatest Tragedy and Romance in History!"
I must write this book!
It'll bring me world reknown!
My fame is assured!
Arthur Wood! Arthur Wood!
The people of Pittsburgh will remember my name!

MCGOVERN

The tracks head off this way -

(MCGOVERN begins to lead the POSSE off)

DEPUTY #2

(sarcastically, seeing that the JOURNALIST is trailing behind them in his reveries)

Hey, Arthur Wood - let's go!

(MCGOVERN and the POSSE exit the theater again through various doors around the audience, and not via the stage. Lights come up on the PROSECUTOR before the JUDGE at KATE's trial in the future).

PROSECUTOR

This shocking crime has made the front page
Of ev'ry newspaper in this country.
Great things, good things occur ev'ryday in Pittsburgh,
But what gets written, what makes the news
Is this woman's depraved behavior -
Even Charles Dickens couldn't make up
Such a sinful character as she -

(Lights fade back up on the interior of the house. ED and KATE are laughing, enjoying themselves, and eventually kiss. JOHN is worried and distracted, nervously watching out the front windows, checking his pistol, ready to run).

Stealing the keys from her unsuspecting husband
To help two convicted murderers escape,
Then running away with them, a common criminal herself!

A so-called mother, cruelly abandoning her children!
It's obscene!

(turning to where she will be, but still addressing the court)

Haughty and disdainful woman!
Committing adult'ry - she's a vile libertine!

(MCGOVERN and the POSSE re-enter the interior of the theater)

MCGOVERN

(spotting the house)

Look over there!

DEPUTY #2

That's a good hiding place -

MCGOVERN

Ev'rybody, down -
Let's move up easy.
Remember, they got at least two guns -
The one from the guard, and the other from the front desk.
They're convicted killers,
Armed and dangerous.
Take no chances -
Shoot to kill.

POSSE MEMBER

Didn't the judge say bring 'em back in?

MCGOVERN

What the hell's the difference?
They're s'posed to hang this week -
Hang 'em, shoot 'em - it's all the same thing...

A DIFFERENT POSSE MEMBER

What about the warden's wife?

MCGOVERN

This is her mess -
Sure, be careful,
But don't take no chances.
Shoot to kill.

You boys, go 'round back.
Don't do any shooting, unless they try to escape.
You others, come with me.
Easy.

(The POSSE splits into two groups, and each of these moves slowly towards the house. MCGOVERN leads one group around the side of the theater, up on the stage, closing in towards the front of the house. The other group moves around, coming towards the stage and the house from the back side. JOHN doesn't spot them - yet).

JUDGE

Mr. Foreman,
On the charge of aiding and abetting the escape
Of convicted felons Edward and John Biddle,
How do you find the defendant?

JOHN

(seeing something)

What's that?

ED *(getting up)*

Where?

JOHN

(spotting MCGOVERN and the party in front)

We're found!

(KATE jumps up)

ED

No!

KATE

God have mercy!

JOHN

We shoulda kept going!

It's all her fault!

MCGOVERN

I see 'em!

(MCGOVERN and his part of the POSSE begin shooting at the house)

JOHN

I ain't goin ' back, just a get hanged!

(JOHN returns fire through one of the front windows)

KATE

I'm sorry, Ed - oh, so sorry!

ED

Kate, please - it isn't your doing!

(ED returns fire through the other front window. JOHN gets hit in the arm, falls back and drops his pistol).

JOHN

I'm hit!

ED

John!

(KATE picks up JOHN's pistol and fires back - she quickly gets shot through the window, and falls down. ED stops shooting; he kneels down and tries to help her).

Catherine! No, no -

KATE

I've killed us! I've killed you!
I slowed you down - why did you stay with me?
Why didn't you go, when I begged you to go?

JOHN

Damn it, Ed - I told you, I told you...

(During the following, MCGOVERN sees they have stopped shooting. He motions his group to stop shooting, and to approach the house with caution. They move towards the porch).

ED

No one ever did what you did, Kate.
You believed in ev'rything.
Lies and all...
When I see your face,
When I see the way you're looking at me...
I'm the one who is sorry, Kate.
I never did deserve you
Or ev'rything you sacrificed.
I love you...
No matter what happens.

(He kisses her)

JOHN

(grabbing the pistol back from KATE)

I'm gettin' outta here, Ed -
You suit yourself!

(JOHN makes his way to the back of the house, and forces open a back window to get away)

ED

I knew you would come, Mrs. Soffel.
You were sent to save us, I know.

KATE

Yes, to save you...

(As JOHN gets through the window, he is promptly shot and killed in a fusillade from the second group at the back of the house. Almost simultaneously, MCGOVERN kicks in the front door - his group is right behind him).

ED

(hearing the gunfire in back)

John!

(jumping up as MCGOVERN bursts in)

Don't shoot - she's innocent!

(MCGOVERN shoots him almost immediately. KATE screams, as ED falls to the ground, mortally wounded).

KATE

(scrambling to hold ED)

Don't kill him!
Please!
He didn't do anything -
Never hurt a soul!
It's all a lie!

(ED is dying)

Ed, don't die!

ED

Show me your face,
Let me hear your voice -
Soothe my unworthy soul
With cool and calm words...

KATE

I will, Mr. Biddle, I will...

MCGOVERN

What a touching scene -
A killer and his whore!

ED

You're a clown, McGovern!
You and the rest of these fools!

(MCGOVERN kicks ED to one side, out of KATE's hands)

MCGOVERN

The other one said to go to hell!

(Before anyone can say or do anything, MCGOVERN shoots ED point-blank in the chest. ED briefly shudders, then dies).

KATE

No!

JUDGE

The Biddle Boys are dead
And the law is satisfied.

(KATE is shackled by MCGOVERN and his DEPUTIES. They then bring her over to her trial, where she stands before the JUDGE. Meanwhile, the BOYS - both dead - are carried off in the opposite direction by the POSSE. Soon, they are wheeled on stage in open caskets on hand trucks. They are left on display for the passing crowd, then taken off with PETER's entrance).

JUDGE

You, Catherine Soffel, shameful woman.
The court holds pity for the fam'ly you harshly abandoned.
Have you something to say?
Are you sorry for what you have done?

(KATE stays silent)

Were you beguiled by those tricksters, the Biddles?
Did you really believe Edward Biddle loved you?
Could you be such a fool?

KATE

Edward did love me,
As no man has loved me -
What we had together, I never knew before...
My husband is a good man, I love him...
My children, oh, God - forgive me, forgive me...
But it was God who led me to Edward
God knew what would happen...

PETER (*entering, on one side of her*)

How can you blame God, unfaithful wife!
And don't call them your children; they're not anymore!
You talk about "God",
You claim to know what "love" is -
You know nothing about either!

(*he tries not to break down*)

KATE

Peter, I'm sorry, I'm sorry...

MARGARET (*entering on the other side of her*)

How did it come to this?
Is this how I raised you?

KATE

Please, mother -

MARGARET

No - no - don't look to me, child.
God had nothing to do with this.
It's your own tragedy.
You bear the pain of your children...
You must carry that weight alone.

KATE

Mother, no more -

PETER

I will divorce you -

KATE

Please, have mercy...

(*The CROWD of spectators silently enters the courtroom from all sides of the stage*)

PETER

You won't see the children!
How dare you ask for mercy!

PETER and CROWD

Sinner! Sinner!

KATE

Mercy...

PETER and CROWD

No mercy...

MARGARET and OTHERS

God have mercy...

JUDGE

For the felony of assisting state convicts to escape,
I sentence you to five years
In the Allegheny County Prison...
A place you should know quite well...

KATE
I miss Ed -
I need him!

This Temple of Justice demands retribution,
Requires atonement.
Let others be warned, let others take heed -
Catherine Soffel, plead with God for His divine forgiveness
You'll get none from this world.

(bangs his gavel, exits)

PETER, MARGARET and CROWD

This Temple of Justice demands retribution,
Requires atonement.
Let others be warned, let others take heed -
Catherine Soffel, plead with God for His divine forgiveness
You'll get none from this world.

(KATE is slowly led offstage in shackles by MCGOVERN and the DEPUTIES - there is a gradual fading of lights)

You'll get none from this world.
You'll get none from this world.

Catherine Soffel, plead with God.

The Biddle Boys have been killed.
And Mrs. Soffel captured.
Did you hear that?

(Curtains close, as lights continue fading to black)

BOWS

END OF OPERA