

The libretto in brief

Prologue

In Genoa, around the middle of the 14th century. A square: on the right the Fieschi palace, with a large balcony and an image of the Virgin with a lamp burning in front of it. It is nighttime.

The aristocracy and plebeians are at loggerheads over the election of the new Doge. An ambitious plebeian, the goldsmith Paolo Albiani, has proposed a friend of his, Simon Boccanegra, a corsair in the service of the Genoese republic, as a candidate for the title, hoping to be well rewarded for his pains. But Simon, who is averse to honours, is reluctant: the only thing he cares for is the fate of Maria, the woman he loves. Her father Jacopo Fiesco, an arrogant patrician, has forbidden them to marry and has locked Maria up in the palace as a means of punishment. Paolo knows all about Simon's agonising secret and, to goad him into standing as candidate, makes it clear that once he is elected Doge, Fiesco will be obliged to allow the overdue marriage. Meanwhile Fiesco comes out of his palace into the deserted square, pitifully calling the name of his daughter, who has just died. Unaware of Maria's death, Simon meets the haughty patrician and begs him to forgive his misconduct and accept him as a son. "Never," answers Fiesco. Only if Simon hands the daughter he has had by Maria over to him he might be willing to forget the outrage his family honour has suffered. Unfortunately Simon cannot fulfil this condition, because the child has mysteriously disappeared from the house of the nurse she had been entrusted to, in a far-off coastal village among hostile folk, and all his attempts to find her have proved fruitless. "Then there can never be peace between us", retorts Fiesco, before sweeping off haughtily. The distracted Simon ventures into

the palace, longing to see his beloved Maria, only to find her dead. He staggers outside, as if in a terrible nightmare, just as the crowd burst on to the square, acclaiming him as the new Doge of Genoa.

Act One

25 years have passed. The Grimaldi garden near Genoa.

Amelia Grimaldi (unaware she is actually Maria and Simon's daughter) has been in a constant state of anxiety since she found out that her lover, Gabriele Adorno, has joined a patrician plot to overthrow the Doge. She endeavours to dissuade him from such a perilous enterprise, and, having found out that the Doge intends to ask her hand for his henchman, Paolo Albiani, urges Gabriele to ask her old guardian, Andrea, for his consent to their marriage. The old man – who is actually is the presumed-dead Jacopo Fiesco – gives his consent, at the same time informing Gabriele that his beloved Amelia does not belong to the noble Grimaldi family, but is an orphan of humble origins taken in by nuns the very day the real Amelia died. She had been given Amelia's convent cell and then was sent to Genoa as a Grimaldi, in order to recover that banished patrician family's fortune, which had been confiscated by the Doge. Later, when Simon Boccanegra comes to announce to her in person the magnanimous pardon he is granting to her banished brothers, Amelia informs him of her obscure origins. Listening to her tale, he thrills with emotion and happiness as he realises she is his lost daughter (whose real name is Maria, after her mother). Learning that she is already betrothed to Gabriele Adorno, he orders his trusted Paolo Albiani to give up any idea of marrying her. Paolo is furious and he and his accomplice, Pietro, plot to abduct

Amelia under cover of night and to carry her off to the house of a certain Lorenzino, a moneylender.

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Council chamber in the palace of the Abati. On one side 12 patrician members of the council, on the other 12 plebeian members. The Doge, supporting a passionate plea from Petrarch for ending fratricidal bloodshed, is trying to prevent war with Venice, which is being urged by the council. A noise of rioting is heard from the square, with alternate shouts of "Death to the Doge" and "Long live the Doge". Rising proudly from his chair, Simon gives orders for the demonstrators to be admitted. The mob rushes in and closes menacingly around Gabriele Adorno, demanding that the young patrician should be put to death for killing Lorenzino, the moneylender. Gabriele admits to the deed, saying that he did it because Lorenzino had abducted Amelia Grimaldi. According to Gabriele, before dying the villain confessed that he had acted on behalf of "a man in a high position". The Doge asks for the culprit's name. "Rest assured", replies Gabriele with bitter irony; "Lorenzino died before he could reveal it." After this explicit accusation against Simon, Gabriele hurls himself at him, yelling that he is a shameless abductor of young girls. Amelia, who had managed to escape from Lorenzino before he was slain, rushes in just in time to throw herself between the two men. Her story, of course, clears Simon from the accusation, and she begs for mercy for Gabriele; then, staring hard and long at Paolo Albiani, she declares that the culprit is standing in the same hall. The Doge understands her meaning; in a terrible voice, he calls Paolo and, reminding him sarcastically that it is his duty to uphold the people's rights and to help discover who raised his hand against Amelia,

he forces him to curse the villain in public. "Be he accursed", says Paolo, choking with fear and rage. "Be he accursed", the crowd repeats.

Act Two

The Doge's apartments in the Ducal palace.

Paolo Albiani has been banned from Genoa, but before leaving he is determined to avenge himself on Simon Boccanegra. He pours a slow-acting poison into a goblet on the table by the Doge's chair and, in case this fails, suggests to Andrea, that is, Jacopo Fiesco, Simon's implacable but not ignoble enemy (after bringing him and Gabriele Adorno out of prison, where they have been sent for their part in the patricians' plot) that he should murder the Doge in his sleep. Fiesco refuses indignantly, but Gabriele is inclined to believe Paolo's insinuation that Amelia has become the Doge's mistress, especially as Amelia is found immediately afterwards in the Doge's apartment. Amelia tries hard to persuade Gabriele that her ties with Boccanegra are very different from what he suspects, but her obvious embarrassment and the affectionate conversation with the Doge which Gabriele witnesses unseen soon afterwards seem to confirm Paolo's mean insinuation. Actually, Amelia-Maria has been confessing to her father that she loves Gabriele, and despite the fact that his name appears in the list of conspirators, has once more managed to obtain a pardon for him. Notwithstanding this, Simon, having fallen asleep after drinking from the poisoned cup, again runs the risk of being stabbed to death by Gabriele, who is convinced he is doubly justified in taking revenge, first for the Doge's persecution of the Adorno family, and then because he is his rival in love. Again Amelia manages to save her father, arriving just in time to stop Gabriele's hand, and again the

Doge generously pardons his would-be murderer. Gabriele at last discovers the real identity of Amelia-Maria. He gives his word that he will at once inform the conspirators of Simon Boccanegra's peace offer and that, should he fail to deter them, he will come back and fight at Simon's side.

Act Three

Inside the Ducal Palace: Genoa and the sea in the background.

The conspirators have been defeated. On the Doge's orders, an officer returns Andrea's sword to him. On his way to the scaffold with the other rebels, Paolo informs the old man he has poisoned Simon Boccanegra and was himself responsible for Amelia's abduction. The proud patrician is indignant: this was not the revenge he wanted to take against his ancient and powerful opponent. A captain enters, followed by Simon Boccanegra, and from the balcony calls upon the people to obey the Doge's wishes and not gloat over the brave and vanquished dead. Meanwhile Simon, inexorably condemned by the poison, suffers atrocious pains, and, gasping for air, tries to breathe in the salt breeze, pitifully calling the sea as witness of his glorious enterprises in the past. Andrea comes forward and in a terrible voice announces that Simon is doomed. Overcome with emotion, Simon recognises in him Jacopo Fiesco, whom he thought was dead. "Now is the moment to pardon me", he says, reminding him of the promise he had made long ago, should Simon ever restore his grand-daughter to him. It is the climax of the tragedy: Jacopo learns that Amelia Grimaldi is none other than maria Boccanegra, Simon and his daughter Maria's child, whereas Maria Boccanegra, formerly Amelia Grimaldi and now Maria Adorno (after her marriage

to Gabriele), learns that Andrea is really Jacopo Fiesco, her grandfather. Surrounded by his weeping kinsmen, Simon Boccanegra dies amid general sorrow and consternation, having appointed Gabriele Adorno as his successor.