

## SYNOPSIS

Marceline, daughter of Roc the jailer and the laundress for the prisoners, joyously anticipates the possibility of marrying Fidélio, the young man who now works for her father. Marceline's longtime suitor, Jacquino, arrives and tries again to woo her, but to his annoyance and Marceline's relief, he is interrupted several times by knocking at the door. Marceline's father Roc, enters, rebuffs Jacquino, and asks about Fidélio. Fidélio arrives, having secured a very good bargain for work Roc has asked him to arrange. Roc is especially pleased, and speaks approvingly of Fidélio becoming part of the family, indicating that it takes both love and money to make a good marriage.

Fidélio declares marriage the highest good, but also that he is disappointed Roc has not shown enough confidence in him to allow him to help the jailer with his most difficult tasks in the bottom dungeons of the prison. Roc says he is under strict orders not to let anyone see the prisoners of the state who are put there, but should the Governor of the prison, Pizare, allow Fidélio to help Roc in the dungeons, there is still one prisoner he surely will not be allowed to see, one who has been there for two years and whom Pizare has ordered Roc to slowly starve.

Pizare enters and receives a letter from an informant which says that the Minister of the region suspects there may be victims of arbitrary power held in the prison and will arrive soon for a surprise inspection. Pizare orders a trumpeter to the tower to announce the Minister's arrival as soon as he is seen on the road, fearing the Minister may discover that Pizare has imprisoned his own personal and political enemy, Florestan. He resolves to kill Florestan before the Minister arrives.

Roc re-enters with Marceline and Fidélio, but Pizare tells Roc to follow him. Marceline speaks of marriage to Fidélio, but notices Fidélio is uncomfortable and preoccupied. Marceline leaves to do her work. Fidélio (Léonore) is left alone, pondering her choice to disguise herself as a young man in the hope that she may be able to find her husband alive in the prison. Roc re-enters again to tell Fidélio that the Governor has allowed him to take the young man to the lower dungeons so that they may quickly dig out a cistern to be used as a grave for the prisoner, whom a masked man will soon finish off.

Meanwhile, the prisoners are brought into the courtyard for their daily hour of fresh air.

Florestan, alone in the darkest and most remote dungeon, bemoans his fate, thinks of his wife Léonore, and falls unconscious. Roc and Fidélio enter the dungeon and begin to dig out the cistern. Fidélio struggles to better see or hear the prisoner. When Fidélio (Léonore) recognizes that it is her husband, she keeps her identity hidden, but persuades Roc to allow her to give the prisoner a piece of bread. Pizare arrives,

but masked, and orders Roc and Fidélio to leave. Before they are gone, he begins to strike Florestan, but Fidélio throws herself in front of Florestan to protect him, and reveals herself to all as Léonore, his wife. Pizare unmasks himself and orders Roc to separate Léonore from Florestan. Léonore draws a pistol, but just then the trumpet call is heard. Pizare rushes out to prepare to meet the Minister, vowing to finish off Florestan later. Roc follows, first taking Léonore's pistol from her. Léonore faints.

Florestan calls to Léonore and she awakens. They then hear a chorus in the distance calling for vengeance, and, fearing again for their lives, prepare to die. They are joyfully surprised when it is the Minister, Dom Fernand, who arrives to set them free. Dom Fernand orders Pizare punished, and the innocent prisoners join everyone in blessing the day and celebrating the love and courage of Léonore.