

## SYNOPSIS

### Act 1

Background: fifteen years earlier, Farnace usurped the Hellenistic kingdom of Pontus, on the shores of the Black Sea, by assassinating his cousin Mithridates Evergetes with the complicity of his lover Stratonica, Evergetes' wife, whom he then married. The daughter of Mithridates Evergetes and Stratonica, Laodice, fearing that her mother and stepfather also intended to eliminate the legitimate heir, the young Mithridates, sent him to Egypt to King Ptolemy, awaiting the day when he would return to reclaim the throne.

In the countryside near the capital, Sinope, Laodice vents her rage to the winds ("Sì, un adultero è nel soglio"). Her husband Nicomedes announces that Farnace demands his stepdaughter's presence at the celebration of his coronation anniversary. Laodice wishes to refuse ("Tra i perigli, i timori e le morti") but Nicomedes advises caution.

Mithridates arrives with his wife Issicratea and prays fervently to the gods for their aid ("Patrii numi, amici dei"). He explains his plan: they will disguise themselves as Egyptian ambassadors under the names Eupatore (himself) and Antigono (her), making Farnace and Stratonica believe that they have been sent by King Ptolemy to forge an alliance against the Romans, sealed by Mithridates' death—since as the rightful heir of Pontus, he represents a great threat to the usurpers. Eupatore declares his love for his wife ("Se il trono dimando").

At the court of Sinope, Laodice once again reproaches her mother for her crime. Stratonica claims she acted in self-defense, as her husband was about to kill her to marry another woman, but Laodice retorts that her affair with Farnace had long been ongoing. Stratonica reacts angrily ("Quante furie ha il crudo Averno"), and Laodice responds defiantly ("Se il tuo sdegno e la mia sorte"). Farnace mocks his stepdaughter and relishes the upcoming celebration ("L'allegrezza, chi ben l'intende"). In an address to the people, Farnace promises to resolve swiftly the two main threats to the kingdom's stability:

Rome's imperialism and the possible return of Mithridates to reclaim the throne. Nicomedes comments with sarcasm that the king fancies himself a god on earth, but without the people's consent he is nothing ("Bella gloria d'un gran re").

## Act 2

Eupatore and Antigono present themselves to Stratonica as Egyptian ambassadors. They announce that her son Mithridates is on one of their ships anchored offshore. If Stratonica and Farnace wish, they are ready to kill him. Stratonica hesitates and asks about her son, whom she has not seen in fifteen years. Antigono paints a flattering portrait of him ("Aria dolce e fiera ha in volto"). Stratonica, aware that her daughter would incite her brother against her, repeats her version of events to the ambassadors and laments that the powerful are never believed honest by the people ("Il mondo mal sospetta").

The false Egyptian envoys offer Farnace Mithridates' head as a pledge of alliance between the two kingdoms and demand a public oath ceremony. The court counselor Pelopida, knowing of Mithridates' popular support, tries to dissuade Farnace, who nevertheless orders the army to intimidate dissenters ("Ottenga la paura ciò che non può l'amor").

Laodice catches the envoys' attention. Pretending to be a servant of Laodice, she claims to have been sent to offer the royal treasure in exchange for Mithridates' release ("Dolce stimolo al tuo bel cor"). Eupatore agrees and rejoices with Antigono at the success of their plan, which will spark a popular revolt ("Sì, sì, spera, o caro sposo").

## Act 3

Farnace announces to the people the alliance with Egypt and Mithridates' death ("Ciò che al regno è beneficio"). Intimidated, the people cheer ("Sì, dà laude"). Stratonica declares that for the people's good she is willing to sacrifice her son's life ("Esci omai, che più non v'hai loco").

Nicomedes informs Laodice of what happened. Realizing that the Egyptian envoys have no intention of honoring their pact, Laodice orders Nicomedes to gather a militia to capture them. Nicomedes obeys, ready to die for his wife (“Vado, sì, con pronto piè”).

Laodice captures Eupatore and Antigono and wants to kill them, but seeing the couple ready to sacrifice themselves for one another, Nicomedes advises keeping Antigono as a hostage and allowing Eupatore to return to the ship to bring Mithridates alive. Eupatore hesitates to reveal his identity (“Parto, sì; ma nel partir”). Laodice and Nicomedes rejoice, convinced they have saved Mithridates (“Chi ben opra ben confida”).

#### Act 4

Eupatore returns from the ship with an urn he claims contains Mithridates’ severed head, which he intends to deliver to Pelopida for Farnace. But Laodice, who has been spying, reveals herself, embraces the urn, and bursts into a desperate lament for her brother’s death (“Cara tomba del mio diletto”). Eupatore, in turn, reveals his identity, showing her the letters he had received from her over the years. The siblings embrace (“Sì, per sempre ancor t’abbraccio”). Nicomedes arrives with the hostage Antigono, ready to kill both, but Laodice stops him. Eupatore then reveals that Antigono is in fact his wife Issicratea. Nicomedes raises a battle cry (“All’armi, a battaglia”).

Inside the palace, Antigono recounts to Stratonica how Mithridates’ death occurred, while Laodice feigns sorrow and submission before her mother, who exults (“Odiata, disprezzata”).

#### Act 5

In a solitary place, Eupatore prays to the gods (“Stelle, se il vostro lume”). Farnace has summoned him there, alone and unguarded, to receive Mithridates’ head. He hopes to quell the revolt by showing proof of Mithridates’ death. Eupa-

tore seizes the opportunity to kill him and orders his followers to slaughter his men (“Uccidete, distruggete”). Laodice and Antigono rejoice at Farnace’s death and long to kill Stratonica as well, but Eupatore wishes to forgive his mother. Antigono reluctantly agrees to obey (“Tu sei l’anima del mio core”).

Eupatore gives Stratonica the urn supposedly containing Mithridates’ head, but when she opens it she finds, horrified, Farnace’s head. Realizing she is trapped, she attempts suicide, but Eupatore stops her, calling her “madre” and declaring his forgiveness. Stratonica, recognizing her son, rejects his pardon and lunges to kill him. At that moment Antigono intervenes and kills Stratonica without hesitation, while Laodice restrains Eupatore, who wishes to defend his mother. As Eupatore is overcome with grief, Nicomedes and Laodice sing of victory (“Del pien diletto” – “Gioia da prode”).

Before the people, Eupatore—now recognized as Mithridates—is crowned King of Pontus. He forgives his father’s enemies, lamenting only that he could not extend his pardon to his mother, as the people acclaim him (“Prima cura e dolce amore”).