



29. Androcles and the Lion

Long, long ago, there lived a kind, gentle and courteous man called Androcles. But he had a very cruel master. In those days, kings, nobles and other wealthy men used poor people as their slaves. Androcles was a slave. The slaves were forced to work for their masters. They had to do what their masters told them. They had no freedom, no rights. Even when they were unhappy with their master, they could not leave him. They were bound by law to obey their master, however wicked he might be.

Androcles did not like his wicked master. His master starved his slaves and often whipped them. Androcles felt that even death was better than serving such a master. He kept looking out for a good opportunity. At the first chance he got, he escaped from the clutches of his cruel master.

Now, although Androcles had thus run away, he was not a coward. He took shelter in a forest. He was not afraid of the wild beasts that roamed the forest. He did not mind that he had no roof over his head. He was happy that he was free as a bird to go wherever he wished.

One day, as he was wandering in the forest, he suddenly came face to face with a lion. His first reaction was to turn and flee. But then he saw that the lion had not moved on seeing him. It neither growled, nor roared. In fact, it looked at him piteously as if it was in great pain.

Androcles paused. Then he moved very cautiously towards the lion, step by step. The lion moaned and whimpered. "Please help me," its eyes seemed to say.

When Androcles drew near, the lion lowered its head and began to lick its paw. Then Androcles saw that the lion's paw was wounded, sore and swollen.

On a closer look, Androcles noticed that a big thorn had pierced one of the lion's toes. 'So this is the cause of the lion's distress,' thought Androcles.



Summoning up all his courage, Androcles stretched his hand slowly towards the injured paw. He was afraid that the lion would attack him if he touched its swollen paw. But the lion seemed to understand his good intention.

Androcles took the paw in his left hand. Deftly, he pulled out the thorn. Then, tearing a piece of his own clothing, the kind man bound up the lion's injured paw. To his surprise and wonder, the lion then licked his arm, as if to show gratitude.

Androcles remained with the lion till it could walk again. He would hunt in the forest and share his food with the helpless beast. Every day, he would clean and dress the lion's wound. Soon, the lion was able to move about. Many times, it followed Androcles wherever he went.

In the meanwhile, Androcles' master had complained to the authorities that his slave Androcles had run away. Soldiers were sent in all directions to capture Androcles. They searched for him high and low but couldn't find him. At last, they came to the forest where Androcles lived.

It so happened that Androcles had gone out alone that day while the lion rested near the cave. Both of them fell into the hands of the soldiers. The soldiers took them back to the city. They put Androcles in chains in a prison. The lion was caged.

In those days, people who were found to be guilty of a serious crime were fed to wild beasts as punishment. Running away from one's master was a very serious crime at that time. Therefore, Androcles, too, was to be thrown to the wild beasts.

On the appointed day, the emperor arrived at the circus and took his place. The crowds cheered loudly. The trumpeters blew the trumpet and Androcles was brought into the arena. His chains were unbound. He felt weak and dismayed. He was certain that this was the last day of his life.

At the opposite end, a gate was raised and a ferocious lion was released into the arena. It had been kept hungry to make it more ferocious. Androcles was filled with fear, but he put up a brave front.

The lion saw Androcles and rushed towards him, bounding and roaring. But suddenly it stopped in its tracks. Then it moved slowly forward. All its rage seemed to have melted. Androcles saw this too. Each friend recognized the other.

To everyone's amazement, the lion bounded towards Androcles again, but when it reached him, it began to purr and rub its nose against him. Androcles hugged the lion. He wept with relief and joy.



The audience, including the emperor, watched this tender sight in great wonder. People began to cheer Androcles and asked for his release. The emperor asked Androcles to explain the lion's strange behaviour. When he heard the whole story, the emperor was also moved by the gratitude and friendship between man and beast. He ordered that Androcles should be set free. He would no longer be a slave.

When the emperor asked Androcles what other reward he would like, Androcles replied that he did not want anything for himself. But he wanted the lion to be set free too.

The two friends went back to the forest to live a free life.

- **piteously** : in such a way as to cause pity; making (Androcles) feel sorry for it.
- **cautiously** : very carefully. • **whimpered** : made unhappy, frightened sounds.
- **distress** : sorrow, suffering, pain. • **summoning up his courage** : making a great effort to be brave. • **deftly** : skilfully and quickly. • **arena** : a place where sports, entertainments and other public events take place. • **ferocious** : fierce.

Things to do :

1. Answer the following questions :
 - (a) Describe the life of slaves in your own words.
 - (b) What did Androcles feel about his master ?
 - (c) What tells us that Androcles was not a coward ?
 - (d) How did Androcles help the lion ?
 - (e) Did the lion recognize Androcles in the arena ? What did it do ?
 - (f) What did Androcles ask for ?
2. Guess the meaning of the following phrases and use them in your own sentences :
 - * face to face * high and low
 - * draw near * to everyone's amazement
3. Find out at least five pairs of opposites from the story.
4. Narrate the story in short in your own words.