Androcles, If You Please

By Lee Ann Hotovy

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Synopsis: Set in Ancient Greece, the famous fables of Aesop are brought to life with children performing as creatures. Androcles, a boy slave who longs for freedom, is imprisoned by four terrible masters (vices) and must do their will in order to survive. He meets Hercules, the hero, and is given advice to look for an opportunity to behave heroically, and break free of the masters. After a close shave with a lion, he finds the moment and responds to it in a most unusual way. By this simple act of love, his freedom is eventually gained. The play is representative of our own search for God, running the race, and coming to know the freedom of serving the one true Master through love.

Cast:

Androcles, a boy slave

Master 1, Avaricius

Master 2, Vainellopi

Master 3, Gluttonopolis

Master 4 Prydemus

Tortuus the Tortoise

HazelNUT the Hare

Gregarious the Grasshopper

Colonel Antsworth Ant

Sargeant Antaford Ant

Private Antgus Ant

Private Antagonistica Ant

Private Antissipatty Ant

Maxwell Mouse

Manwich Mouse

Crow-nillius the crow

PITCHER the hornbill (pitcher)

Lester the Lion

Hercules

Staging: In the round/four side stages around one large center stage. Audience sits in corners. Greek backdrops of columns, trees, vines, etc./or traditional stage with multiple levels to represent different

Each of the Masters “homes”. Androcles moves from level to level with center stage open for animal characters.

### Scene 1

*Greek Chant Music/Four Masters appear on separate stages, marked out in glow outlines like statues holding props/black lighting to show outline similar to greek constellations.*

*Lights up on Prydemus and Androcles.*

Prydemus: Androcles, my dear slave…I am sensing a change in you these days. You seem to doubt your “self”, which in other words is *me*, your Master Prydemus. Did I not catch your mind thinking about *love* for someone else just the other day?

Was I mistaken, or did you allow one of the other slaves to rest, while you swept the entire Parthenon with a toothbrush…just to be nice?

Androcles, Androcles…this will not do. You must realize that you are *far more* important than anyone else…you must always remember this …the self must come first. I, along with your other masters, must come first!

Androcles: But if I serve only you, how will I ever be free?

Prydemus: Freedom will leave you empty. You will become nothing with it. No, no, my dear slave…remain in “self”… and you will always be full. You will be number one, without ever having to leave the starting block or cross a finish line. Believe me when I say, this is a good thing! Besides, if you ever run away from us *(other masters move into scene)*…we will be forced to feed you to the *lion*…and I don’t think you want that, now do you? So serve your vices…err…your masters well, and you will be happy!

*Musical piece (Androcles the Mease-ly) sung by four adults/teens representing Masters. Song works around desires (food and drink, vanity, greed, and pride)…call out to Androcles who appears on center stage flustered. Masters demand things from him in song/slave boy…he responds, (Androcles, if you please/ why can’t I be free). Boy interacts with each Master for a brief moment worked into song/dialogue…then returns to song.*

Gluttinopolis dumps noodles on Androcles’ head.

***Black out*** *on side stages. Androcles stands center stage with noodles on head. BSC Large stick is placed on stage*

**Scene 2**

#### Lights on CS down/black light on tortoise/Tortoise begins entrance from SR slowly moving down stage to Androcles/lights up

ANDROCLES: Hello…I’m Androcles, you’re probably wondering why there’s a bowl of noodles on my head…I displeased one of my masters, Gluttonopolis. He wanted lasagna, but I brought him pesto. So he said I could wear it. I’m a slave to him if you haven’t already guessed…in fact, I’m a slave to several masters. There’s Vainellopi…I have to hold up mirrors for her to stare into all day, and tell her how beautiful she is; then there’s Avaricius who only cares about her gold. She’s constantly counting it and asking me to bring her pitchers to fill…and finally there is Prydemus. He is the most controlling master of them all. The slightest failing on my part to honor his every wish, sends him into a rage in which I must duck and dodge, lest I lose my head to a statue of Zeus being thrown my way!

It isn’t easy being a slave to anything…yet here I am. How did I become a slave you ask?

By not paying attention mostly! If I had been on the lookout, guarding my very soul, I might have seen them coming or at least sensed their intrusion…but as it was, I did none of that. The four of them simply snuck up on me, and like a shadow of the night, overtook me. I did not struggle much, for they did not seem so bad in the beginning, but has time has gone on…they are now so overbearing…I am thinking of running away to be free of them…

*Tortoise arrives cs just behind Androcles. Pulls legs in.*

TORTOISE: Then why don’t you?

AND: Who said that?

TORTOISE: I did.

AND: You sound funny…where are you?

TORTOISE: Home.

AND: Home? Where’s home?

*Androcles stumbles over large tortoise shell*

TORTOISE *slowly emerges from shell*: It is much nicer if one knocks on the shell…a great thumping of feet sounds like a thunderstorm has descended upon my roof.

AND: Oh, I’m sorry…I didn’t see you there.

TORTOISE: That is why a wise man sees with more than his eyes.

AND: Huh?

TORTOISE: I am Tortuus the Tortoise…and you are?

AND: Androcles, if you please.

TORTOISE: That has a nice ring to it. Now my Androcles, if you please…just whom are you running from?

AND: I wasn’t running, I merely tripped over you.

TORTOISE: Very well…whom were you tripping from?

AND: Well…I’m a slave, and being such, I am not very happy.

TORTOISE: No, to be a slave to anything, is to lack freedom, which of course causes unhappiness…for a soul naturally wishes to be free. Who is your master?

AND: Well there are four to be exact.

TORTOISE: That is a lot. Have you considered detaching from any of them?

AND: Are you kidding? Do you know what happens to slaves who run away? They’re fed to the lions!

TORTOISE: Oh yes…the coliseum. Great sport so they say…

AND: No! It’s not!

TORTOISE: Calm down, my boy…I would never wish that on anyone.

## Hare suddenly enters and runs through/racing car and screech sound effects/light change/black light

HARE: Ha, ha, ha! Look who’s barely crawling? My clothes will go out of style and be back in, before you cross the finish line, Shell boy! Ha! Ha!

## Hare exits running off stage/light change

AND: Who was that?

TORTOISE: HazelNUT the Hare.

AND: Well…what was she talking about…is she racing you?

TORTOISE: Yes.

AND: To where?

TORTOISE: The finish line.

AND: You don’t seem very worried about it. I mean it looks like she’s going to leave you in the dust!

TORTOISE: Slow and steady wins the race.

AND: What race? Where are the spectators? Where’s your lane?

TORTOISE: They are unnecessary for this race…because it takes years.

 AND: Years? Are you kidding me? What’s it called the Decade-a-thon?

TORTOISE: Could be, but that may not be long enough for some runners.

AND: Wow! Is it for everyone, or just tortoises and hares?

TORTOISE: Everyone. *They that run in the race, all run indeed, but only one receiveth the prize? So run that you may win.*

AND: Wow! I think I want to be in that race. How do I enter?

TORTOISE: You already are entered. Everyone is. Now that you know, it is matter of planning your strategy on how to win. (song/Slow and Steady Wins the Race) Tortoise goes into shell at end of song

## Light change, black light/Suddenly four ants pop up on stage. Marching in a line singing “Ants Come Marching In”/bump into Androcles

ANTSWORTH: Halt! Hold it right there!

*Ants point antennae at Androcles like guns*

AND: Whoah! What the…army ants?

ANTSWORTH: Spartan Army ants…and if you know what is good for you, you won’t move a muscle. We are the strongest ants in the world!

ANTS: The world!!!

ANTAFORD giggles

ANTSWORTH: Don’t giggle Private…you’re in the army now. Listen human, hand over any food morsels and we may consider setting you free.

AND: But you don’t own me…you’re ants! You’re small, small, itty, bitty ants that I could crush with my bare foot!

ANTSWORTH: Hmmm…a humungus ignoramus! Sargeant…take care of this.

ANTGUS: Yes sir! (to Androcles)Have you ever heard of the mighty Sequoia trees…the largest trees in the world?

AND: Sure…but what does that have…

*Antgus grabs Androcles with his tentacle in threatening manner/other ants grab his legs etc.*

AND: Ow! Hey…

ANTGUS: Do you know the greatest threat to the sequoia tree?

AND: Ow…Uh…lumberjacks?

ANTGUS: Ha! No! The greatest threat to the mighty Sequoia is an army of Carpenter Ants. They can consume the inner rings of a tree in a few days time, and turn it to sawdust before the sun sets on the fourth. So remember, strength lies within numbers, not size, Tall Boy!

## Antaford giggles

AND: Okay, okay…but I don’t have any food with me.

ANTSWORTH: Ha! You humans always have food. We’ve heard it fall from your mouths when you eat and brush it aside!

ANTAFORD: Or…*giggles*…when you sleep on blankets in the sun. You have baskets full of it, and you leave it out for us to take…like a smorgasbord!

ANTS: Smorgasbord!

ANTGUS: You even throw it out into great receptacles, changing its name to garbage…while all along we KNOW what it is!

ANTS: We *know* what it is!…

ANTAGONISTICA: Pizza! Marshmallows!

ANTGUS: So don’t play any games with us, we may not be able to see it, but we can smell it on your breath!

TORTOISE: How do you know that it isn’t *my* breath you smell?

ANTSWORTH: Halt! What do we have here Sargeant?

ANTGUS: It appears to be…(using tentacles he feels tortoise) a digestium antuius!

ANTS: An anteater!!

## ALL ANTS SCREAM and run in circles confused

AND: Why are they screaming?

TORTOISE: They’re afraid I will eat them. They think I’m an *ant eater*. It’s the shell you know. Here place this walking stick in front of them… it will keep them busy for a while.

**Scene 4**

Light change/Suddenly Prydemus enters followed by Avaricius and Gluttonopolis/BSC have net for prop ready/G and A carry it in/Androcles sets mirror down

PRYDEMUS: Androcles! There you are! I have just spoken with Gluttinopolis and Avaricius and they have told me of your betrayal!

AND: Uh oh, Prydemus. (meekly) It was the ants…

PRYDEMUS: Do not try to blame your weakness on something as small as that…it should be your will to serve us. That is all you are called to do. Do you understand?

AND: I do…but it doesn’t make me happy. I would like to be free.

All four masters laugh

 PRYDEMUS: Do not be a fool. You are nothing without us!

*HERCULES appears on side stage as flashback/fog machine: … When opportunity presents itself…do something…respond to the call! Say yes to what’s right, and no to what’s wrong. Sometimes that takes more strength than holding the world on ones’ shoulders.*

AND: Then I think I would like to be “nothing”…at least then I can be free.

PRYDEMUS: Free? Free? You don’t know what you are talking about. If you are free of us you will have no sense of worth!

(song—reprisal of Androcles the Meas-ly)

MASTERS: You’ll be nothing!!!

Masters sing and move in on Androcles/cast net over him.

PRYDEMUS: Send for the lion!

Black out

Scene 2

Androcles appears center stage holding catnip(BSC bring out and take net off Androcles in BO/place cubes for Masters to sit on). Masters sit in background like spectators/Tortoise enters slowly moving downstage

AND: I’m done for now. My masters caught me…I couldn’t fight them all off, and so now

They’ve tossed me to the lion. I’m going to be Lester the Lion’s lunch in a very short while. I brought some catnip to go with me; sort of like parsley with a good steak.

TORTOISE: I wouldn’t throw in the towel just yet, or in this case, the catnip, Androcles. Remember slow and steady wins the race.

AND: But I’m in the coliseum and they are about to release the lion! By the way what are you doing here?

TORTOISE: The race goes through the coliseum for everyone at some point. It seems we have both arrived at the same time. It is the final test to determine a true winner.

AND: Has the hare been through here?

TORTOISE: I believe she is still sleeping.

AND: Aren’t you afraid?

TORTOISE: A little, but I am keeping my eyes on the finish line. Slow and steady wins the race.

AND: Yeah well I was just thinking about keeping my eyes closed…until it’s over.

TORTOISE: And the blind will see…You have made it this far my friend, just stay true to love and you will win in the end, no matter what comes out of those gates.

BL Light change/fog machine/Sound of gates opening/lion enters (Music: Eye of Tiger). Androcles shuts eyes holding catnip out. Lion enters roaring mightily/sound effect. Masters cheering. Lion Sneaks up on Androcles as if he will pounce, then suddenly stops.

LION: Hey, do I know you? You look… and smell… really familiar?

AND: No, this is my first…and last (gulp)… time here.

LION: No really…I know you…I do…but I just can’t put a paw on it…

Lion rests paw on Androcles shoulder just like before when he pulled thorn out.

Both realize at the same moment.

LION: Androcles, if you please!

AND: Lester? Are you going to eat me…I mean people paid good money for the show?

LION: Hey a surprise ending is worth every penny. You are free, if you please…Androcles!

AND: I’m free!

Masters are led off stage by Spartan Army Ants/through gate (ant song)