

## Androcles and the Lion

*The scene takes place in ancient Rome. Androcles, a recently converted Christian, and his wife MEGAERA are running away from persecution. Their route has taken them into the depths of a forest. Androcles is a small, thin, ridiculous little man who might be any age. His wife is rather handsome, pampered, well fed and in the prime of life. She has nothing to carry and has a stout stick to help her along. She does not share his beliefs and did not want to leave the comforts of city life. She is tired and exhausted by their journey and furious with her husband.*

**MEGAERA:** *(Suddenly throwing down her stick)* I won't go another step. I don't believe a word of it. You are always threatening me with wild beasts to make me walk the very soul out of my body when I can hardly drag one foot before another. We haven't seen a single lion yet.

*(Tearing the bundle from his back)* You cruel beast, you don't care how tired I am, or what becomes of me. *(She throws the bundle on the ground)* Always thinking of yourself. Self! self! self! always yourself. *(She sits down on the bundle)* A man ought to think of his wife sometimes.

Aren't you happy with me? You ought to be ashamed of yourself but you're not: you glory in it. You glory in everything. In making me a slave, and making yourself a laughing-stock. It's not fair. You get me the name of being a shrew with your meek ways, always talking as if butter wouldn't melt in your mouth. And just because I look a big strong woman, and because I'm good-hearted and a bit hasty, and because you're always driving me to do things I'm sorry for afterwards, people say "Poor man: what a life his wife leads him!" Oh, if they only knew! And you think I don't know. But I do, I do, *(screaming)* I do. *(Pausing)* Then why don't you treat me properly and be a good husband to me? You can return to your duty, and come back to your home and your friends, and sacrifice to the gods

*Continued ▶*

as all respectable people do, instead of having us hunted out of house and home for being dirty, disreputable, blaspheming atheists. Don't you dare to compare me to common people. My father owned his own public-house; and sorrowful was the day for me when you first came drinking in our bar. I can forgive a man being addicted to drink: it's only natural; and I don't deny I like a drop myself sometimes. What I can't stand is your being addicted to Christianity. And what's worse again, your being addicted to animals. How is any woman to keep her house clean when you bring in every stray cat and lost cur and lame duck in the whole countryside? You took the bread out of my mouth to feed them: you know you did: don't attempt to deny it.

*(Rising)* Oh! I won't bear it another moment. You used to sit and talk to those dumb brute beasts for hours, when you hadn't a word for me. Well, if you're fonder of animals than of your own wife, you can live with them here in the jungle. I've had enough of them and enough of you. I'm going back. I'm going home. Serve you right if you are sent back to Rome and thrown to the lions! I wish them joy of you.

*(Screaming)* Are you going to get out of my way and let me go home? No! Then I'll make my way through the forest; and when I'm eaten by the wild beasts you'll know what a wife you've lost. *(She dashes into the jungle and nearly falls over the sleeping lion)* Oh! Oh! Andy! Andy! *(She totters back and collapses into the arms of Androcles, who, crushed by her weight, falls on his bundle)*

by George Bernard Shaw