

SETTING: *Various locations in ancient Greece including the home of Xanthus, a wealthy landowner, the fields and forest surrounding his home and the arena in which the local games are held. The year is 580 B.C.*

AT RISE: *The forest. A few large boulders among the trees. Music under as the stage goes to black then silence. The sound of heavy breathing. Spot on AESOP standing center. He is out of breath from having been chased. He looks around. From the darkness come voices. CHORUS #1, CHORUS #2, CHORUS #3 and CHORUS #4 enter. They wear hooded robes.*

### **#1 Run, Aesop, Run**

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CHORUS #1

AESOP... AESOP...

CHORUS #1/CHORUS #2

AESOP... AESOP...

CHORUS #1/CHORUS#2/CHORUS#3

AESOP... AESOP... AESOP... AESOP...

AESOP... AESOP... AESOP... AESOP...

CHORUS #4

OH-OH-OH-OH...

OH-OH-OH-OH...

OHHHH....

CHORUS #3

RUN, AESOP, RUN...

CHORUS #3/CHORUS #2

RUN, AESOP, RUN...

CHORUS #3/CHORUS #2/CHORUS #1

RUN, AESOP, RUN...

CHORUS #3/CHORUS #2/CHORUS #1/CHORUS #4

RUN, AESOP, RUN...

*(GUARD #1 enters, sees AESOP and points to him.)*

## GUARD #1

There he is!

*(AESOP begins to run. GUARD #1 gives chase. CHORUS #4 exits. The rest of the Chorus swirls around like spirits on the wind.)*

CHORUS #1/CHORUS #2

CHORUS #3

AESOP!

AESOP!

AE...

DO NOT STOP!

DO NOT STOP!

...SOP!

AESOP!

AESOP!

AE...

NO TIME FOR REST

...SOP!

THEY'RE GAINING GROUND...

KEEP RUNNING, AESOP

ELSE BE FOUND

*(GUARD #2 enters opposite.)*

## GUARD #2

Get him!

CHORUS #1/CHORUS #2/CHORUS #3

AESOP!

CHORUS #3

RUN, AESOP, RUN...

CHORUS #3/CHORUS #2

RUN, AESOP, RUN...

CHORUS #3/CHORUS #2/CHORUS #1

RUN, AESOP, RUN...

RUN, AESOP, RUN...

*(AESOP does his best to elude The Guard but is finally apprehended. The Chorus fades to the background. Music out. AESOP struggles but he is no match for The Guards.)*

AESOP

Unhand me, you brutes! Set me free at once or I shall be forced to take action.

GUARD #1

Take action, will you? What could the likes of you do to the likes of us?

GUARD #2

You're an ignorant slave run away from his master. A slave what's been caught.

GUARD #1

And when we return you to Xanthus, he will punish you.

GUARD #2

That's right – Xanthus, your master, will punish you. And I can't wait to see it.

GUARD #1

Let's go.

*(They start to drag AESOP off. AESOP struggles.)*

AESOP

Wait! Stop! Release me or I shall call forth the Lion!

*(The Guards stop short.)*

GUARD #2

Lion...? What lion?

GUARD #1

There's no lion. He's making it up.

AESOP

I speak true! When first I escaped from the House of Xanthus and found myself in this forest, I heard a strange sound, the cry of an animal in pain.

*(We hear the cry of an animal in pain. GUARD #2 looks around.)*

GUARD #2

What was that?

*(Again, we hear the cry of an animal in pain. GUARD #2 gasps and releases AESOP, clinging fearfully to GUARD #1.)*

AESOP

I came upon a clearing and found there a lion...

## ***#2 Lion's Theme***

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*(AESOP points off. Lights shift and music under as the story begins and CHORUS #1 becomes the LION and enters the story. GUARD #1 releases AESOP and clings to GUARD #2. AESOP enters the story.)*

A giant beast with a mane as black as night. When the Lion saw me he roared a mighty roar...

*(LION roars. The GUARDS gasp.)*

I turned to flee...

*(AESOP runs a few steps then stops and turns back.)*

But the Lion gave no chase. Instead, he held up his paw, swollen and bleeding...

*(LION holds up his paw. AESOP approaches the LION. LION roars.)*

GUARD #2

No, don't! He'll eat you!

GUARD #1

Shh!

AESOP

Upon closer inspection, I found that a huge thorn had lodged itself in the Lion's paw.

## ***#3 Help Me***

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LION

HELP ME  
PLEASE... CAN YOU HELP ME?  
THE PAIN CUTS THROUGH AND THROUGH  
HELP ME  
PLEASE... CAN YOU HELP ME?  
I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO

*(As music builds under, AESOP cautiously approaches LION then pulls the thorn from his paw. LION roars in pain. For a moment we think he's going to eat AESOP. Then looks at his paw in surprise.)*

LION  
THANK YOU

AESOP  
LET ME WRAP IT UP...

*(He tears off part of his toga.)*

LION  
I MEAN IT – THANK YOU

*(AESOP takes Lion's paw and begins binding it.)*

AESOP  
JUST LET ME STRAP IT UP...

LION  
IF YOU'D NOT COME ALONG  
THE PAIN WOULD STILL BE STRONG  
HOW CAN I THANK YOU?

*(AESOP finishes bandaging Lion's paw.)*

AESOP  
THAT SHOULD DO THE TRICK...

*(LION takes his bandaged paw and holds it palm up. AESOP slowly places his own palm against it.)*

LION  
THANK YOU

*(LION kneels at Aesop's feet and presses his face into Aesop's hand. LION stands up.)*

If I can ever be of service...

*(LION takes a step, keeping his gaze on AESOP. He fades to the background and becomes CHORUS #1. Music out. The lights shift back to the Present.)*

GUARD #1  
A lion – kneeling before a slave?

AESOP

It is the truth.

GUARD #1

Then where is he now? Why hasn't the grateful beast come to your rescue?

AESOP

Because I have not yet called him forth.

GUARD #1

Then do it.

GUARD #2

What?!

GUARD #1

Let's see this lion of yours. Go on. Call him.

*(Beat. AESOP steps forward and calls off.)*

AESOP

Lion!

*(Nothing. Beat. AESOP moves a little further away and calls off.)*

Lion!

*(Still nothing. Again, AESOP moves a little further away and calls off.)*

*LION!*

*(Nothing. Beat. AESOP suddenly runs off.)*

#### **#4 Run, Aesop, Run**

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GUARD #1

After him!

GUARD #2

*(Hanging back)*  
But the lion...

GUARD #1

There is no lion! After him!

*(They run off after him.)*

CHORUS #3

RUN, AESOP, RUN...

CHORUS #3/CHORUS #2

RUN, AESOP, RUN...

CHORUS #3/CHORUS #2/CHORUS #1

RUN, AESOP, RUN...

RUN, AESOP, RUN...

*(AESOP suddenly appears opposite. He has eluded his captors. He looks around to make sure the coast is clear and is about to run off when CHORUS #3 steps forward.)*

### ***#5 Calliope's Theme***

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CHORUS #3

LA-LA-LA LA LAAA...

LA-LA-LA LA LAAA...

*(AESOP stops and faces forward. CHORUS #3 pulls back her hood to become CALLIOPE. Light shift and music under as we enter the world of Aesop's memory.)*

AESOP

Calliope...

CALLIOPE

You can't run away, Aesop. You must go back.

AESOP

No...

CALLIOPE

Go back and help my husband. He needs you.

AESOP

How could I help him?

CALLIOPE

You must find a way. Go back. Help him.

AESOP

No!

CALLIOPE

As you love me, Aesop – promise me.

CHORUS #1/CHORUS #2

Promise me... Promise me...

CALLIOPE

LA-LA-LA LA LAAA...

Promise me... Promise me...

GUARD #2 (O.S.)

There he is, up ahead!

*(CHORUS #1 and CHORUS #2 exit. CALLIOPE puts her hood back up, becoming CHORUS #3.)*

CHORUS #3

Promise me...

AESOP

I promise.

*(He kneels back down. The Guards enter at a run. They cross to AESOP and drag him to his feet.)*

GUARD #1

Right now, hold him tight. There'll be no more escaping this time.

### ***#6 Run, Aesop, Run (Reprise)***

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Let's go!

*(The TWO GUARDS drag AESOP around the stage. The scene shifts to the House of Xanthus.)*

CHORUS #1/CHORUS #3/GUARD #1/GUARD #2

AESOP!

AESOP!



GUARD #1  
Shh!

XANTHUS  
What was that?

GUARD #1  
Nothing, Master.

*(Indicating GUARD #2)*  
He's a bit simple-minded, you know. Prone to believing anything he hears.

GUARD #2  
You believed it just as much as me!

*(To XANTHUS)*  
Aesop told us a story about a lion – a huge beast with a mane as black as night...

GUARD #1  
Be quiet!

GUARD #2  
This lion had a thorn in his paw, right here...

*(He holds up his hand.)*  
And Aesop pulled it out for him and the Lion knelt before Aesop in thanks...

GUARD #1  
I said be quiet!  
*(He shoves GUARD #2. Angry, GUARD #2 points at GUARD #1.)*

GUARD #2  
And he believed it as much as me!  
*(XANTHUS grabs GUARD #1 by the front of his tunic.)*

XANTHUS  
I send you out to find my runaway slave and you waste time listening to fairy tales?