



Quarry Slaves

A Drama by

Lee Byrne

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QUARRY SLAVES

A DRAMA BY LEE BYRNE



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BOSTON, NINETEEN HUNDRED AND FOUR

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BOSTON
MASS.

PERSONS

ANDROGENUS, *a powerful slave, hardly thirty years old in appearance.*

HIS SON, *a frail boy, apparently about fourteen in Scene I.*

GERON, *a decrepit old slave, friendly to Androgenus.*

CYON, *a vigorous old slave, hostile to Androgenus.*

Other Slaves.

Children.

SCENE

A Sicilian underground quarry, some years after the Athenian expedition against Syracuse.

QUARRY SLAVES

FIRST SCENE

[ANDROGENUS is discovered trying to penetrate the rock wall on left. He works some time alone and in silence when enter his son, who seeks to assist him.]

And. Wilt thou too labor, boy?

Son Suffer me, father.

And. This from thy love; yet knewest the goal
I seek,

Then truly wouldst thou crave one shard to move
To strain the fissure but an inch more wide.

Son Dimly I know, for often hast thou told
Of upper air and fields and flowers and stars.

And. Which thou hast never seen, thy radiant
youth

Darkened beneath this roof, within these walls.

[*There is a crumbling of the rock above and both are startled.*]

Son Ah me, the rock. Hence, father, ere it
crush thee.

And. I merely loose it, boy; do thou withdraw.

[*A great fragment falls to the ground.*]

Son Ah! how I fright me. Father, I beg, desist.
Rest and relate me more; plague not the rock
fiends.

And. Here are we slaves to men, yet not to fate.
Then better a heavy death, hope keeping us
human,
Than servile bondage to a shameful lot.

Son True, sire, but tell again of the world
beyond.

And. I fain would please thee; here thou hast
little indeed.

[*He ceases work.*]

Son Thou sayest above the hills are clothed with
green;

The hue I picture vainly.

And. Like thine eyes.

Son But them I see not. Like to thine as well?

And. Nay—to thy mother's, her we covered
here,

Who, dying, cried upon the sun, yet passed

The sunless Styx in darkness.

Son 'Tis this sun

Thou sayest illumines the air of upper realms —

And. Blazing its splendor over all the land.

Son And is it too as the grass?

And. Nay golden as

Thy hair, but with a glory blinding man.

Son And that folk sleep it leaves the land in
gloom—

And. Save for the jewels of the sky —

Son The stars —

And. And eke that pale and silvery sun —

Son Ah me,

And is the day or night more beautiful?

And. One starry night, my son, would make
man rich;

One day excite the envy of the gods.

Son Ah, let us not delay; haste we to freedom.

And. 'Tis a long road; we needs must rest
betimes.

Son I thirst for upper air; sit we not idle.

And. Even so, my son. Strive we again with
the rock.

[*They resume the labor. Enter gradually a*

group of quarry slaves including GERON and CYON.]

1st Slave Still digging, Androgenus?

And. Aye, friends; lend a hand if ye would win liberty.

2d Slave We ache with the toil of the day.

3d Slave One cannot do two days' work in one.

1st Slave Let us help him a bit; he is a good friend.

[They set to work lazily.]

2d Slave How soon expect you the daylight this time?

And. 'Tis with the gods. Man can only toil and wait.

3d Slave Toil and wait for the end — that is our life surely.

And. Toil and wait hopefully for deliverance.

1st Slave Aye, if one try he is doing all he can at least.

[Enter others who scoff at the laborers.]

4th Slave Digging for gold they are; see them lay into it.

Cyon Have ye not enough with one day's work, men?

3d Slave Aye, let us rest.

2d Slave Indeed I am weary.

Cyon Let the madman do his own digging.

4th Slave Come, comrades, have a cheer.

[*All cease work except ANDROGENUS and his son.*]

And. Your bodies are bondmen; be not slaves in soul. Fight the good fight for freedom. If ye win ye gain life for death; if ye fail ye die fighting even as your fathers of old.

4th Slave Our bones ache enough.

3d Slave Aye, and you fight the fight only when fancy takes you.

And. True, alas, I am human; yet is the god not dead within me.

Come, I exhort you; rise above the life of beasts.

Cyon Not beasts, stripling; men, submissive to destiny.

And. Ah, blush, thou gray-beard who would make men unmanly.

Cyon I fought in arms, O mad one, when thou didst follow camp. Teach not me the manly and the unmanly. And who art thou to disturb men's peace of heart and inflame the minds of children with what the gods have denied?

4th Slave Aye, he teaches the quarry-born youth of the upper life.

And. Would ye have them servile-minded even as ye are servile-minded?

Cyon We would have them left in peace. Fill not their minds with the hell of discontent, nay, nor ours, if we will to forget. Is our lot unendurable? Have we not strength sufficient for it? Have we not food in plenty, rest, and sweet sleep? Who knows that beyond Styx we shall not yearn for these stony caverns? Wake not the memory of man when it slumbereth, lest it rage and do him hurt. Thou and thy hewing — reckon thyself favored indeed if we suffer thee to exploit thy follies. What of detection? What of crumbling roofs? What of inpouring ocean? Have thy whims, O stripling, but leave us security while it is ours; leave us peace *if* we can attain it.

[*Exeunt Cyon and slowly the other slaves. ANDROGENUS, somewhat dazed, continues his work in silence, assisted by his son, old GERON alone looking on. At length the son grows weary and falls asleep. ANDROGENUS himself desists and sits watching the boy. GERON approaches.*]

Geron Thou sayest the god within thee is not
dead.

Well said, O youth ; keep thou thy spirit nourished.
Though man help not, thine is a strength luxuriant.
Pursue thy course and may the Heavens aid thee.

And. I thank thee for thy word.

Geron Mine own arm fails ;
I may not give the help I would. Take heart.
Do not despond at Cyon's bitter counsel.

Up, youth ; on with thy task with favoring gods.

And. Nay, when the fit is on me ; now I cling
Within a melancholy maze of doubt.

[*Exit GERON anxious.*]

SECOND SCENE

A Year Later

[ANDROGENUS is discovered hewing again, but this time on the other side. Some slaves pass, jesting at his work. Then enter a group of children who stand admiring him. GERON has also entered.]

Geron Disturb ye not the toiler.

1st Child He must teach us.

Geron A greater task detains him now.

1st Child Always

He gladly leaves aught else that we may learn.

And. Ah, precious spirits darkly nursed, again
Search ye for wisdom?

Children Aye, Androgenus.

Geron Youth, let them learn from these old
lips. Alas,

I cannot hew, nor carry yet, nor carve
 A way to freedom, as with god's help thou shalt,
 Despite thy fellows lingering base behind.
 Then let me learned in lore more old than thine
 Illumine their dark minds. Take thou thine eyes
 No moment from thy heaven-given goal.

And. Shall then good Geron teach you?

Children Nay, thyself.

And. So be it. The spark must live. And
 what today?

1st Child The Persians.

Children Aye, the Persians.

And. Then the Persians.

[ANDROGENUS *sits on a stone with the children
 around him.*]

And. There came the messengers of mighty
 Xerxes

Commanding earth and water from the Greeks
 In token of obedience. And the Greeks
 Gave them their earth and water.

Children No, no, no.

And. Why think ye not?

1st Child Not so our ancestors.

And. Aye, throwing Xerxes' heralds in a well

They bid them seek their tribute. And the King
 Collected his vast army, such the earth
 Hath never seen. Crossing the Hellespont
 They poured upon us hordes beyond counting.
 Even ocean their vast armaments did cover.
 Then Athens, needs retreating from the land,
 Consigned her to Poseidon, and the King
 Prepared for final triumph on the ocean.

1st Child Yes, yes — the battle.

And. I cannot relate.

1st Child Nay, tell us of the fight.

Children Yes, tell the battle.

And. My tongue were dumb to picture what
 ensued —

But you shall hear the Athenian poet's words : *

“ And when day bright to look on with white
 steeds

O'erspread the earth, then from the Greeks pro-
 ceeds

Loud chant of cry of battle, and the while

Echo gave answer from each rocky isle.

The Hellenes then their solemn pæan sang ;

Throughout the ranks the martial trumpet rang.

* *Rhymed from Plumptre's blank verse translation.*

Swift swept the loud oars through the foaming
wave,

And first in order moved the right wing brave.

Next the whole line its forward course began,

And forth along a mighty shouting ran :

‘ O sons of Hellenes, forward, free your homes,

Shrines to your fathers’ gods, and holy tombs

Your ancestors now rest in. Free from thrall

Yourselves, your wives, your children, and your
all.’

Arose in answer murmur of Persian speech.

The time to wait was over. Forward each

Dashed its bronze-pointed beak, and with a din

A Grecian trireme did the strife begin,

Crashing from Persian craft its prow away ;

Then each against his neighbor did essay.

First firmly held the Persian armament,

But when the ships within the strait were pent

Then they with bronzen beaks and mutual shocks

Went crashing each the other as on rocks,

The agile Grecians, fewer, darting fierce

Where’er a Persian oarbank they might pierce.

Capsized, the hulls lay floating, and the sea

Was covered with the wreckage and debris,
 And Asian corpses floated on the wave,
 Or, stranded, lay on rocks, too late to save.
 Hence last in headlong flight the Grecians sent
 All that remained of Persian armament.
 And bitter groans and wailings overspread
 The wide sea wave until night overhead
 Prevailing bade all cease. The Persian ill
 Recounted large a ten-day time would fill.
 Be sure such hordes Poseidon then did hide
 As never yet on single day had died.”
1st Child O glorious victory! But still on land
 The King had numbers vast.

And. And they full soon
 Tasted what fare their brethren on the sea.
 Back to his Persian palaces the King
 Departed and no more tried Grecian valor.

1st Child And died not many Greeks as well as
 Persians?

And. Aye, but their death — again let poet speak.
 Hear ye the epitaph on them that died.
 First on our fathers.

1st Child Speak the epitaph.

And. "If they be blessed whom noble death
enfold,

To us of all men Fortune gave this grace;
For hastening freedom's crown on Greece to place
We lie possessed of praise that grows not old."

1st Child O noble epitaph!

And. And on the others:

"These men to Greece a crown of glory gave;
Then, cloud-enwrapped of death, passed from
high earth;

Yet being dead they died not, for their worth
Lifts them in glory even from the grave."*

[*The children express pleasure.*]

And. Such were our sires who dwelt on upper
earth.

2d Child And must we ever linger in these
shades?

1st Child Nay, for Androgenus doth daily delve,
And one day he will lead us to the light.

And. Aye, ye believe. That will I, gods per-
mitting.

1st Child Come we and help thee delve, O noble
Androgenus.

**Rhymed from Mackail's prose.*

2d Child Aye, come; we too must hew.

And. So be it, children.

[He proceeds with his hewing, they giving him some sort of assistance. But they gradually weary and depart in silence till at last he is left alone. He finally seats himself, head in hands, in silent gloom.]

THIRD SCENE

A Year Later

[*The excavations on the two sides are seen to be abandoned and partly filled in. One now seems to be in progress in the center, but how far the work has gone cannot be seen as the tunnel has a turn, leaving the end out of sight. The sounds of digging are heard within. Two elderly slaves of the better kind are discovered conversing.*]

1st Slave Hark, hear him hew; he digs and
digs and digs

What time the task-men let him. Thus his life
In fruitless toil is spent.

2d Slave What better we?
Do our days bring us profit?

1st Slave Nay, alas,
Nor pleasure save a melancholy one,
To sit and ponder o'er our evil lot.

Yet he might rest.

2d Slave Perchance in this employ
His body's labor brings calm to his mind
Else unattained. But hist, is that his cry?

[ANDROGENUS *is heard exclaiming from the passage. The old men listen. In a moment ANDROGENUS rushes forth, greatly excited.*]

And. Where is he, Cleon? Man, art dead?

Reply.

Where is he, where?

2d Slave Alas, O youth, whom call you?

And. My son, my son — whom else? Where is
the lad?

2d Slave I know not, sir.

And. Go tell him ere my news
Strangle me in its bulk; go tell him, Cleon.

2d Slave But, sir, I know not —

And. Go, good Cleon, go.
After these years events come with a rush.

Delay then not the precious tidings; go.

2d Slave I gladly go, yet, sir, my message know
not.

And. Its impact makes me weak. Go fetch the
boy.

'Tis freedom, light, Elysium, air, the sun.
Go fetch the boy. My tongue alone can tell him.

2d Slave I go, good sir, yet fear this strong
excitement.

[*Exit 2d Slave.* ANDROGENUS *sinks to a seat.*]

1st Slave Relate, I pray thee, that which gives
thee joy.

Thou hast not reached the air of upper earth?

And. Not yet the air, my friend, but as I dug,
Parting the rocky fragments as they fell,
Varying the noise of smiting with a song,
I hushed — methought a murmur reached mine
ear,

And straining with the stillness of the dead
I listened, yearning, calling on the gods,
And then I heard distinct —

1st Slave Haste, haste, good youth —

And. The beat of ocean on a wall of rock.

1st Slave Cease thy infernal work. The waters
o'er us

Will burst into our world and all will perish.

And. Nay — to mine ear the sound came from
below,

3d Slave Until he's tired, poor fellow — ha, ha,
ha.

We gain that end with toil our taskmen give us,
And need no farther training.

1st Slave Let me speak.

This is no stuff for jest; he now hath reached
A point whence he can hear the ocean's roar.

4th Slave Nay, then, we are free — Androgenus
our saviour!

1st Slave But if the water be above —

5th Slave O horror!

1st Slave How may it chance that it be not above?

Others Aye, it must be, alas!

1st Slave Desist from labor,
Unhappy youth, ere we be overwhelmed.

Others Desist, ah cease.

1st Slave Wilt thou, Androgenus?

And. Most truly slaves!

1st Slave Give us thine answer, youth.

And. What fear ye?

Slaves Death.

And. Ye soul-dead slaves!

The Fates bestow Elysian life upon you,
Air and the sun, and bliss of upper regions,

And ye who once were Greeks, O gods! refuse
 them,

Choosing the quarry, thrice deserving slaves.

1st Slave If we but knew —

And. Then be it death in the waters.

Give we our challenge even to Poseidon,

And if we die 'twill be in gaining glory,

Even as our fathers fought with armed seas

What time the Persian myriads poured upon them.

Or shall we linger here in a Hell too early,

And rear our children throughout generations

That eyeless, soulless, they spend their dark days

Untouched by any thought that honors manhood?

Nay, rather, challenge we this worthy death,

Which, slaying our body, to our soul gives life.

Do we one deed before our doom o'ertake us,

And die, defeated haply, yet die men.

5th Slave And so say I — death rather than this
 bondage.

6th Slave And I.

7th Slave And I.

1st Slave But softly, softly, friends,

Be we not rash. Full many have voice in this.

Not in our hands the fate of all our comrades.

Await the time that all may have their word.
 Meantime, Androgenus, give us thy promise
 Thou wilt desist till numbers give thee warrant.

And. I have no servile promise.

Geron (who is among slaves) Hush, my son.

Enrage them not lest they prevent thy toil.

Aye, friends, Androgenus hears. Await we counsel.

This work's too weighty for our single minds.

Depart we all to rest, the morrow assemble.

5th Slave Aye, dream we on it. Farewell, Androgenus.

Slaves Farewell. Farewell. Farewell.

[*Exeunt slaves. GERON returns.*]

Geron My son, my son!

Either we die exalted, or we live

And end this most inglorious life in death.

But let me too discover thy dear secret.

And. Aye, Geron, list thou too what thou mayest hear.

[*GERON passes into the excavation. There is a long pause.*]

Is it above or under thee, good Geron?

Geron Hark, I hear naught as yet.

And. Must listen intently.

[*There is another pause.*]

How now, good Geron?

Geron Hark, I hear not yet.

[*There is a longer pause.*]

And. Where, then, the sound?

Geron Nay, but I hear not yet.

[*After a very long pause.*]

And. Whence comes the sound? Pray speak, O aged friend.

[*GERON comes out slowly.*]

Geron Alas! Alas!

And. It is above — ah then
Our deed will be the nobler.

Geron Nay, not that.
But mine unhappy ears hear not the sound.
It is denied mine age to share thy secret.

[*He looks on ANDROGENUS sadly as though doubting.*]

And. Even to my younger ears it sounded faintly.

[*GERON looks more sadly upon him, believing him to have been deceived.*]

But strange the boy comes not. I willed to tell him

Myself the first. Do thou too seek him, Geron.

Geron I shall, good youth.

And. And I the while shall hew.

I thank the gods the end is not far now.

Geron Not far, O youth, not far. Be we in hope.

[*Exit GERON. ANDROGENUS passes into the excavation, where for a time he is heard hewing intermittently. Enter son and two slaves.*]

Son Where is he now? Where is he, Cleon?
Speak!

My feet have never hastened so. A fear,
A nameless fear hath seized me.

1st Slave. Cheer thee, lad.

He hath good news.

Son What news?

1st Slave An end to labor.

Son Doth he give o'er the task? But where
then —

1st Slave Hark!

[*The hewing is heard again.*]

Son Then still he toils — thou saidst he had
desisted.

[*They enter the excavation. The great rock*

is heard to fall within. The boy rushes out screaming, a third slave who enters restraining him. The first two slaves bear forth the injured ANDROGENUS and lay him down on an improvised pallet. The boy, crushed with grief, does not obtrude himself but weeps silently near by.]

And. I fear — I fear I'm somewhat hurt.

1st Slave Alas!

And. It is — it is unfortunate. Delay —
Delay's annoying now — so near the end.

[The slaves have been examining him.]

2d Slave Despatch at once to Geron. He alone
Can save him.

1st Slave He alone.

2d Slave Aye, make all speed.

[Exit 1st Slave.]

And. I cannot brook to wait. So long I have
toiled,

Patient before, I yearn for the completion.

2d Slave Aye, friend, forthwith again thou shalt
be toiling.

We must have thee made whole; others may rest,
Thy sole work must go on unstopped, unhindered.

And. And hast thou faith? Alack! They are

few that have.

[*Reenter 1st Slave.*]

1st Slave He comes.

2d Slave Thine aged friend.

And. The noble Geron.

[*Enter GERON. Others come in quietly during the scene.*]

Geron. Alas! alas!

2d Slave Thou wilt save him, Geron.

1st Slave Aye.

[*The old man examines ANDROGENUS for some moments, then, rising, he pauses before speaking. All await his words.*]

And. How long — how long, O Geron? What delay?

Say how long wait must hold me from my task?

Geron Alas! and yet again alas!

And. Grieve not, good friend,
But tell the worst.

Geron Alas, Androgenus,
Thy noble strife is finished — thou must die.

And. Nay, say not so; I cannot, cannot die.

Geron The Fates will not be conquered.

And. I must live.

There is that to do must fail not.

Geron Pity, pity.

And. Thou dost surprise me, Geron,—me to die—
And thou that ever didst give me of cheer.

How shall I die ere I have won the light?

Wouldst thou this race to linger blind forever?

Geron Alas! dear youth, the gods deny thy wish.
The shades of other darkness soon will fold thee.

And. Thou liest, Geron, though thy hair be
white.

Once did one friend at least brook to support me.

[*He rises in his excitement.*]

Henceforth if I alone must go, so be it.

I tell thee to thy teeth, with all thy leechery,

I will not die until my work be done.

[*A spasm of pain seizes him.*]

No power shall stay me.

[*He is stricken again.*]

Ah! my heart, my heart:

Geron Poor friend, Fate is too strong.

And. My heart is bursting. (*A pause*).

Alas, to die were sweet—to fail is bitter. (*A
pause.*)

Where is the boy?

[*The son now throws himself kneeling at his father's side. A great calm has come on ANDROGENUS.*]

And. Grieve not. From this hour forth
Thou hast too weighty a charge to think on grief.
I willed to win the light, the Fates will other :
Yet shall we balk them, thou and I, my son.
I leave thee rich, a legacy of labor.
Take thou the strength I leave ; be strong hence-
forward.

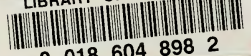
[*His breath is failing him.*]

Complete, O son, my little enterprise.

[*He dies.*]

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