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## **At Death's Door**

Katie Downing

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**At Death's Door**

Katie Downing

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Cast of Characters:

- Persephone (female, adult, any age)
- Hades (male, adult, any age)
- Alcestis: (female, adult, any age)

Setting:

- The Underworld of Greek mythology in an unknown time

*(Lights up. Bedroom set. Everything is grayscale. Typical bedroom furniture fills out the set -- a bed, dresser, places to sit, etc. A table with chairs can be found further downstage. On the table is a dead potted plant. Enter Persephone stage left holding a watering can. She is wearing pastels or bright colors. She should stand out in this gray setting, looking almost out of place. She goes to the potted plant, sees it's dead.)*

Persephone: Son of a bitch! Hades!

*(Enter Hades stage left. He is wearing all black.)*

Hades: What now?

Persephone: *(Holding up dead plant.)* Why?

Hades: Oh, so you're doing this again.

Persephone: I just want one to live!

Hades: *(mocking)* Persephone, sweetie. It may have escaped your notice, but we're in the Underworld. That's where dead things go. Life is not really our deal.

Persephone: *(annoyed)* Don't sass me! And life might not be *your* deal, but I happen to think that I am a fantastic gardener.

Hades: *(Gestures to plant.)* Clearly.

*(Persephone glares.)*

Hades: Okay, okay. I'm sorry your plants keep dying. But there's nothing I can do about that. Death just comes with the territory.

Persephone: I just miss being outside!

Hades: I know, and not that it will make things better for—

Persephone: Sproutacus.

Hades: Sproutacus. Wow—

Persephone: Come on, that's a cute name!

Hades: Uh huh. But as I was saying. It might not help—

Persephone: Sproutacus.

Hades: --Sproutacus, but spring will be here soon. You'll go back up there and garden to your heart's delight. Never giving a second thought to your lonely husband down here by himself. All alone.

Persephone: Don't try to guilt trip me. You love having a break from my melodrama.

Hades: I would never say that.

Persephone: So you think it?

Hades: But I would never say it.

Persephone: Hades.

Hades: I don't know what you want me to do. If you can't keep those plants alive down here, I certainly can't.

Persephone: I know. I just wanted to brighten up the place. Everything is just so...gray. And drab. And lifeless.

Hades: It's not all that bad.

Persephone: (*sarcastically*) Okay.

Hades: (*playful*) I mean, you're right.

Persephone: That's better.

Hades: And I love you.

Persephone: Much better.

Hades: And you love me?

Persephone: (*Hugging him. Teasing*) Oh, I suppose so. If I must. (*Beat.*) I'm sorry I'm being so ridiculous. It isn't all as terrible as I make it sound.

Hades: Oh, you're not ridiculous. A bit delusional... (*Persephone playfully hits him. He chuckles.*) Okay, okay! But we do need to get to work.

Persephone: You're right. Lots of death today?

Hades: Not sure. I haven't checked the book yet. Speaking of, where is it?

(*Hades looks at the table for the book but does not find it.*)

Persephone: Didn't you have it last?

Hades: You said you would take care of it last night.

Persephone: That's right. I put it on the um...you know...by the...um...with the...the...thing...

Hades: That's helpful.

Persephone: I know. I'm sorry. I probably just left it in the Judgement Hall.

Hades: Great. That's where we're heading anyway. Let's go.

Persephone: Actually, why don't you go on ahead and I'll catch up in a few minutes. I just need to say goodbye to this little guy. (*Gestures to the plant.*)

Hades: *(Clearly doesn't understand the need to mourn a plant.)* Um, sure...? Take all the time you need...?

*(Persephone nods. Hades exits stage left.)*

Persephone: *(Holds up plant and speaks to it, overdramatic. Starts tearing up throughout.)* Well, we've had a good run, Sproutacus. Know that you brought so much joy to so many...well to some...to me mostly...actually, yeah, just me. It's always so tragic to lose one so young. You had so much to live for! If I could grant you back your life I would, Sproutacus! You were beautiful! You had so much to live for! So much air is left uncleansed in the wake of this untimely demise! Oh, Sproutacus, if only I could--

*(Enter Alcestis stage right during the speech. She is wearing nondescript clothing. Persephone has her back to Alcestis and does not notice her at first. When she does notice Alcestis, Persephone is startled. Persephone turns, holding up potted plant, ready to throw it at the intruder.)*

Alcestis: No, please! Don't!

*(Beat.)*

Persephone: *(Seeing Alcestis is not a threat, lowers the plant. She tries to laugh it off.)* You probably thought I was going to throw this at you. *(Laughing unconvincingly, puts plant down on table.)* That's crazy. Of course, I wouldn't do that. That would be...not good. No, I was just...um...stretching my arm... *(“Stretches” arm in throwing position.)* You know, a totally normal thing to do.

*(Long pause.)*

Persephone: So...Who are you? And how did you get in here?

Alcestis: I'm Alcestis.

Persephone: Alcestis. Hi, I'm Persephone.

Alcestis: Persephone? You mean you're--

Persephone: That's right. *(With a flourish.)* Goddess of spring and Queen of the Underworld at your service. Well, not really. I'm the queen so everyone else is at my service...but you get it.

Alcestis: So this is--?

Persephone: The Underworld. Yes.

Alcestis: And I'm--? I'm dead?

Persephone: *(Going to Alcestis.)* Most likely, but let's take a look. *(Looking her over, circling her.)* No visible wounds or injuries. Too young to be from age. No apparent illnesses. Say “aaah” *(Sticking out her tongue.)*

Alcestis: *(Sticking her tongue out.)* Aaah?

Persephone: (*Inspects like a doctor.*) Yup. Poison. Though so.

Alcestis: (*distressed*) So I am...

Persephone: Yes. I'm so sorry. You're dead. (*Pause.*) And you seem to be a bit out of place. You're not supposed to be here.

Alcestis: I'm not supposed to be dead?

Persephone: No. I mean, this is my room. (*Gestures to bed and other bedroom items.*) You're not supposed to be *here*. In this room. You're supposed to be awaiting judgement so you can go to whatever afterlife you're supposed to go to. You must have gotten a little turned around. You're a kind of lost soul, if you will.

Alcestis: (*overwhelmed.*) ...

Persephone: No worries, though. We'll look you up and figure out where you're supposed to be. And then you will be on your way, I promise.

(*Alcestis looks distressed and distracted by this news and is unresponsive to Persephone. She appears to be trying to figure out or to remember what happened to her.*)

Persephone: Okay, this is a lot to take in. Why don't you sit down for a minute. Then we'll figure all this out.

(*Persephone guides Alcestis to sit in a chair by the table. Alcestis sits, still not responding to Persephone. She is upset, on the verge of tears.*)

(*Long pause.*)

Persephone: Alcestis, do you want to talk about it?

Alcestis: What's there to talk about? I was alive. Now I'm dead. That's it. It all sounds so simple doesn't it?

Persephone: When you put it like that, yes it does. But it's not simple at all, is it?

(*Alcestis shakes her head.*)

Persephone: I know it's not a pleasant topic but getting the dead to the right afterlife is pretty much my job. Understanding how and why people die can help me do that. So, I have to ask: Do you know who poisoned you? Or why they wanted you dead?

Alcestis: I did it.

Persephone: You poisoned yourself?

Alcestis: Yes.

Persephone: That seems drastic. Why would you kill yourself?

Alcestis: I didn't want to.

Persephone: So then was it by mistake?

Alcestis: You could call it a mistake.

Persephone: Oh, I see. You drank something poisonous by accident.

Alcestis: No, I took the poison voluntarily. And I knew it would kill me.

Persephone: But it was a mistake?

Alcestis: Yes, but not my mistake. Not exactly.

Persephone: But you wanted to die?

Alcestis. Of course not.

Persephone: So you didn't want to die?

Alcestis: That's right.

Persephone: So you didn't mean for the poison to kill you?

Alcestis: No, it was intended to kill me.

Persephone: So you didn't want to die, but you had the full intention of dying?

Alcestis: Yes.

Persephone: Which lead you to poison yourself?

Alcestis: Yes.

Persephone: Okay. Let me make sure I've got this. You didn't want to die, so you chose to drink deadly poison knowing you would die even though you didn't want to die.

Alcestis: Yes.

Persephone: Do you see why I'm confused, or...?

Alcestis: I know. It's a long story. It's really complicated.

Persephone: We've got time. An eternity, if you will.

Alcestis: ...

Persephone: Sorry. Too soon.

Hades: *(from offstage)* Persephone!

Persephone: Shit! You need to hide.

Alcestis: Hide? Why do I need to hide? Who was that?

Persephone: That's my husband. If he sees you in here, he'll want you to join the other souls waiting for judgement. He's not big on breaches of protocol.



Alcestis: Why does that matter? Isn't that where you were going to send me anyway?

Persephone: Yes, but not before you explain what happened. You are way too intriguing to leave on a cliffhanger. I'm confused and invested and need to hear your story. Now hide!

*(Alcestis ducks behind her chair, just as Hades enters stage left. He does not see her, but she is still in full view of the audience.)*

Hades: *(entering)* Persephone?

Persephone: Yes, my love?

Hades: Are you okay? You've been in here a while.

Persephone: Hmm? Oh! Yeah! You know, it's just hard. To lose a plant like Sproutacus.

Hades: Alright, well not to interrupt your...mourning...but the book wasn't in the Judgement Hall.

Persephone: Oh.

Hades: Is there anywhere else it might have ended up?

Persephone: Um, probably.

*(A pause while Hades waits for Persephone to tell him where.)*

Hades: Where?

Persephone: You know...around...

Hades: Persephone. We're way behind schedule and we need that book. Do you know where it is or not?

Persephone: Okay, no. I don't remember where I put it, but we'll find it.

Hades: Fine. Let's start looking.

*(Hades starts to cross closer to where Alcestis is hiding. Persephone blocks his way.)*

Persephone: Where you going?

Hades: To look for the book.

Persephone: *(slightly panicked)* Or, you could just not look over there. On that side of the room. I could look over there. In fact, I could scour this whole room while you do a different room. You know, divide and conquer. We'll find it faster that way.

Hades: Okay...I'll go look somewhere else then.

Persephone: Okay!

Hades: Okay...let me know if you find it.

Persephone: I will. Yeah, I'll do just that.

*(Hades, confused and somewhat suspicious, exits stage left.)*

Persephone: *(making sure he's gone)* Okay, Alcestis, you can come out now.

Alcestis: That was Hades?

Persephone: Yes it was.

Alcestis: He's not as stoic as I imagined.

Persephone: He can be when needs to be, but he is surprisingly sweet. *(beat)* But I didn't tell you that. He's king of dead, we can't have people thinking he's a pushover.

Alcestis: Understood. What was all that about anyway?

Persephone: I might have misplaced something really important.

Alcestis: A really important book?

Persephone: A majorly important book that I need to find right now. *(explaining as she starts looking around.)* We aren't talking about some cheap novel. This is a list of all of the dead souls that pass through here on any given day along with any important information that may help us in our passing of judgement. Hence, majorly important.

Alcestis: And without this book, you can't do that?

Persephone: Precisely. Then no souls can go to their appropriate afterlives. Which would lead to a huge back up of dead people and who even knows what kind of chaos that could cause.

*(Pause while Persephone looks for the book and Alcestis tries to wrap her head around everything.)*

Alcestis: *(breaking the silence)* What's going to happen to me?

*(Persephone stops and turns to face Alcestis. Persephone becomes more serious than she previously had been sits on the foot of the bed.)*

Persephone: Sit?

*(Alcestis sits next to Persephone on the bed.)*

Persephone: *(Comforting, but honest.)* I don't know exactly. I won't lie to you or make promises I may not be able to keep. You may end up with a wonderful afterlife. Or it may be horrible. But I don't know you. I don't know what kind of life you lived or how you ended up here. At least not yet. And don't think you're off the hook about telling me that story, I didn't forget. But most likely, where you end up will be something in between bliss and torment. Not paradise, but comfortable. All I can promise is that Hades and I will judge you fairly.

Alcestis: But what does that mean? You'll judge me?

Persephone: When a person dies, their soul enters the Underworld. Now, this is a big place with lots of final destinations. Our job is to ensure that everyone ends up somewhere fitting, somewhere just. We decide that based on the life they lived. Some people put amazing good out into the world and leave it a better place; for that they are rewarded with a blissful eternity. Other people aren't so altruistic. Those who are cruel and who hurt other people...well they learn what it is to be on the other side of that cruelty.

Alcestis: Just like that? Our whole lives are just summed up to either good or bad? And you call it justice?

Persephone: Of course not. It's not that simple. Those are only the extreme cases. Most people are a balance of good and bad. And their afterlives reflect that. It's not perfect, but it's decent enough.

Alcestis: Comfortable, but not paradise.

Persephone: Exactly.

*(They sit for a moment in silence. This conversation has seemed to put Alcestis more at ease, but she is still somewhat on edge. After a beat, Persephone gets up from the bed, disengaging.)*

Persephone: But none of that can happen until I figure out what I did with that book.

Alcestis: *(standing)* Is there any way I can help?

Persephone: Sure, you can start looking over there. *(Points to one side of the room.)*

*(Alcestis begins looking.)*

Alcestis: What exactly does it look like?

Persephone: Old. Kind of like an old journal. You'll know it when you see it.

Alcestis: How will I know it if I've never seen it before?

Persephone: You'll know because when you see it, it will be followed by me saying "That's it!" *(To herself.)* Now. Okay, think. Where did I have it last? Last night, I took it with me from the Judgement Hall. I walked in here. *(Begins retracing her steps, moving around the room as she previously would have.)* I checked Sproutacus to see if he needed water...I was still holding the book...Then I walked over to the bed and sat down...I must have put it down on here...I don't remember what happened to it after that because that's when Hades—

Hades: *(from offstage)* Hey, Persephone?

*(The women freeze in place. Persephone looks towards Hades' voice, looks to Alcestis standing in the middle of the room, picks up a blanket from the bed.)*

Persephone: Speak of the devil.

*(Enter Hades stage left. As he is entering, Persephone throws the blanket at him so that it covers his head. Because of this, he does not see Alcestis. Hades struggles to get the blanket off himself throughout this exchange but is not successful.)*

Hades: What the--?

Persephone: *(whispering to Alcestis.) Hide!*

*(Alcestis moves to hide.)*

Persephone: *(going to Hades)* Oh! Honey! I'm so sorry. Let me help you with that.

*(Persephone tangles the blanket more.)*

Hades: Persephone!

*(Alcestis hides under the table but is still in full view. Persephone motions that that doesn't work.)*

Hades: Persephone! Get this damn thing off me!

Persephone: *(Tangles blanket more.)* I'm trying!

*(Alcestis tries standing behind a lamp. Persephone motions no.)*

Persephone: Don't worry, Hades, I've almost got it!

*(Alcestis dives under the bed.)*

Persephone: Yes!

*(Persephone and Hades finally pull the blanket off.)*

Hades: What the actual hell?

Persephone: Sorry. I was just...you know...looking for the book...

Hades: So you throw a blanket at me?

Persephone: I was...just...making sure the book wasn't under this blanket. So, you know, I threw it out of the way. You just happened to be where it landed.

Hades: What's going on with you today?

Persephone: What?

Hades: You're acting weird. You're throwing things at my head—

Persephone: --A blanket! It's not like it hurt you—

Hades: --you're all shifty, you keep finding reasons to get me out the room. It's like you're hiding something.

Persephone: I don't know what you mean.

Hades: Persephone—

Persephone: Hades.

*(They look at each other for a beat, Persephone silently asks him to let it go and to trust her. Against his better judgement, he does.)*

Persephone: That isn't why you came in here.

Hades: Right. I thought you should know that the newly arrived souls are starting to get overcrowded. There's going to be a huge backup soon.

Persephone: We can't have them flooding out of the place.

Hades: Exactly. We have to do something about it. And fast.

Persephone: I still haven't found the book yet.

Hades: I haven't either.

Persephone: Damn it. Okay. We can't process them with no book. So, in the mean time we should move them somewhere larger to keep them from flooding out and wandering off.

Hades: If we move them, there's a chance some could get lost or escape. If they wander far enough, they may end up in the mortal world. Then, there's no saying what kind of chaos that would cause.

Persephone: We don't have a choice. If we don't move them, they'll all get out and even more could make it topside. There's a whole wing right next to where they are now. We should move them in there.

Hades: That's not equipped to hold them. They could slip out of there even more easily.

Persephone: What's our alternative? Do nothing and leave them until they bust out and cause utter chaos? *(When Hades doesn't respond, she continues.)* Look, they just died; they don't know where they are; they've been through a lot; they're scared. We can't do nothing. If they stay there much longer, they're going to start to panic. If they do, they'll definitely bust out and run for it. We need to keep them calm.

Hades: And moving them all over the place is the way to do that?

Persephone: Well, they'll be more at ease that way than if they're left to overcrowd each other. This is the best option we have. It may not be ideal, but we'll have fewer problems to deal with along the way. Whatever mess we make, we'll clean up as we go. Right now, we have to focus on the problem at hand. Move them.

*(A pause while Hades considers what she has said.)*

Hades: Okay. You're right. I'll do it.

Persephone: Thank you.

*(Hades starts to exit stage left. Persephone stops him.)*

Persephone: Hades!

*(Hades turns back to Persephone.)*

Persephone: It's kinda hard to give the impression of strong, authoritative king when you're holding a security blanket.

*(Hades realizes he is still holding the blanket.)*

Hades: Oh.

*(Hades hands the blanket back to Persephone. Hades exits. Persephone looks at the blanket and she can't help but start to giggle to herself after the day she's been having. Alcestis emerges from under the bed. She is now holding an old looking journal.)*

Persephone: *(laughing)* Never in my life have I seen him look more flustered. And we have been married a long time. Like I mean a *long* time.

*(Alcestis joins her in laughing.)*

Alcestis: I can't believe you actually tangled the king of the Underworld in a blanket!

Persephone: And did you see how hard he was struggling to get out of this thing? And his face! I can't believe that actually worked!

Alcestis: *(jokingly)* If you had known blankets were his weakness you could have escaped here a long time ago.

Persephone: *(laughter starts dying)* Escape? Why would I—

Alcestis: I mean after he kidnapped you and forced you to stay here during the winter.

Persephone: Ah, that old tale again. That's something that my mother likes to tell people because she could never accept that maybe I wanted to make my own choices.

Alcestis: What do you mean?

Persephone: You think I just wandered off by accident while—what? —picking flowers? And out of nowhere Hades grabbed me and refused to set me free?

Alcestis: Well I...

Persephone: I asked him to take me with him. I wanted to come here.

Alcestis: Why?

Persephone: Is it so hard to believe that maybe, just maybe I actually love my husband? That maybe he loves me? Apparently, my mother thought so. Do you know what she did when she found out I had come here?

Alcestis: Demeter was so heartbroken over losing you that the earth started dying.

Persephone: You mean she caused a famine. I guess she thought that if she flooded the Underworld with a sudden huge wave of dead people we'd be so overworked that I wouldn't want to stay. *That* was her solution. Did she consider that maybe I liked it here? Did she even bother to come and talk to me? To listen to my side of the story? No. She condemned how many thousands to starve? And *I'm* the victim?

Alcestis: You don't have children, do you?

Persephone: No, I don't.

Alcestis: You would be surprised how far a mother would go to protect her daughter.

Persephone: So you're saying my mother was right to starve people to death?

Alcestis: No, of course not. But it's not so surprising that she would want to keep you close.

Persephone: Never mind what I want? Or what Hades wants?

Alcestis: Well, he did get what he wanted. You ate the pomegranate seeds and spend the winter here.

Persephone: You know that's another thing. How did that all go down in the story you heard?

Alcestis: Hades tricked you into eating the seeds. You didn't know you would have to stay in the Underworld until it was too late.

Persephone: And people believe that! How would he even do that? What, was he all "Here have snack! Oh all that stuff you've heard about eating food from the Underworld? Don't worry about it, it's fine." Seriously? I'm a goddess. Do people really think I wouldn't understand how the Underworld works?

Alcestis: Well then, what did happen?

Persephone: I ate the seeds, but they were my idea.

Alcestis: What?

Persephone: My mother was never going to listen to me. She was never going to stop unless she got me back. I couldn't let her keep killing people because of me. But I couldn't give up all this either.

Alcestis: All this? The Underworld?

Persephone: Up there everyone always saw me as just some girl who could make things grow and who liked pretty flowers. They never understood that I wasn't just gardening. I was creating life. Hades saw that. He knew that I could understand life in a way no else did. Consequently, I could understand death too.

Alcestis: (*understanding*) So, you could understand him.

Persephone: (*nodding.*) Down here I'm a queen. And I'm damn good at my job. But my mother couldn't accept that. So I came up with a compromise.

Alcestis: You ate the pomegranate seeds.

Persephone: Fruit of the Underworld. I would always be tethered here. I could leave, but never permanently.

Alcestis: So, Demeter was appeased and lifted the famine.

Persephone: No, I did that.

Alcestis: You?

Persephone: Yeah, she likes to take credit for lots of things. She still felt that she was cheated and refused to lift the famine unless I would be with her always. She's not exactly the compromising type, as you may have gathered. So, when I returned to the living world, I had to clean up her mess. The earth came back to life I because *I* willed it. *I'm* the one who brought back spring. She may provide bountiful harvests, but the seasons are my domain.

Alcestis: Why have I never heard the story this way before?

Persephone: Dead men tell no tales. And as it happens, I spend a lot time among the dead. My mother's story caught on because I wasn't there enough to tell my side.

Alcestis: Doesn't that bother you?

Persephone: (*Shrugs.*) I figure in the end, everyone answers to me. When they get here, they can see the truth for themselves. I'm not some helpless damsel and Hades isn't some heartless villain. He does tend to brood now and then, I'll give you that, but you would too with a kingdom to run. And it's not exactly sunshine and rainbows down here.

Alcestis: Well, I guess that's fair enough.

(*Pause. Persephone notices the journal that Alcestis is still holding.*)

Persephone: That's it!

Alcestis: What?

Persephone: The book! Alcestis! That's it! Where did you get this?

(*Persephone takes the book from Alcestis.*)

Alcestis: (*having forgotten she was holding it*) Oh! It was under the bed. I found it when I was hiding. I didn't realize this was *the* book. I thought it might just be a diary or a journal or something like that.

Persephone: Under the bed of course! I put it down and it must have gotten knocked off last night when Hades and I were— (*stops herself when she notices Alcestis is still there*)—yeah, you probably don't need the details. Anyway, it must have fallen under the bed and we didn't notice.



Alcestis: So that is a record of every person who will ever pass through here?

Persephone: Pretty much. It's a really good thing you found this.

Alcestis: But it's so small.

Persephone: It's as big as it needs to be. Besides, we can't just look up anyone on a whim and find out exactly when they're going to die. We can only see recent deaths. The people who will pass through here today. Tomorrow, we'll see those who will arrive tomorrow. That's the only information we need.

Alcestis: I guess even gods don't know everything.

Persephone (*laughs*) Yeah, but don't go spreading that around. We'll lose our credibility.

Alcestis: Of course. Not a word. So how does this book work anyway?

Persephone: It's very simple, really. I just look up whoever I need to know about and it tells me how they died, key life events, violent tendencies, charitable acts, criminal history, anything that might be important. For example, if I open this up and look up "Alcestis" it says that you...aren't here...

(*Confused, Persephone frantically flips through the book trying to find Alcestis' name.*)

Alcestis: What?

Persephone: You're not here. You're not listed at all. But you're definitely dead. You have to be in here. How could you not be on the list...?

Alcestis: (*quietly*) Is there an Admetus?

(*Persephone gives Alcestis an uneasy look. She slowly turns pages to find Admetus' name. She finds it and looks suspiciously at Alcestis.*)

Persephone: How--? I think it's time you finish telling me that story.

(*Long pause while Alcestis gathers herself. Persephone watches her apprehensively.*)

Alcestis: It wasn't supposed to be me. Admetus, my husband, was supposed to die.

Persephone: Then how is it you're here and he's not?

Alcestis: Admetus knew he was going to die and soon. So he cut a deal. Someone had to die, but it didn't have to be him.

Persephone: I see.

Alcestis: He asked everyone. Friends, acquaintances. He even went to his own parents.

Persephone: What kind of man asks his parents to die?

Alcestis: I guess, he figured they had lived full lives and were close to death anyway.

Persephone: And he told them that?

Alcestis: It didn't go well. They were outraged that he would even ask. They threw him out. But by then everyone else had refused him too.

Persephone: Doesn't seem to be a very popular guy.

Alcestis: No. My husband has always been...difficult to get along with. He was never really...he never inspired affection in others.

Persephone: People who would ask others to die for them but are too cowardly to do the same rarely do.

Alcestis: Admetus grew desperate. Very desperate.

Persephone: He asked you.

Alcestis: Not exactly.

Persephone: What do you mean?

*(Alcestis crosses to the bed and sits on it, remembering.)*

Alcestis: The night before his time was up, I was checking on Perimele, our daughter. She was sleeping so soundly when Admetus came in. He handed me a cup and he drew a knife.

Persephone: *(quietly)* No...

Alcestis: He-he held the knife to Perimele's throat. And he told me it was my choice. Her life or mine.

Persephone: That bastard.

Alcestis: He was determined to live. There was nothing I could do. I couldn't fight him off. If he so much as twitched, it could mean her life. I couldn't-I couldn't...

Persephone: So you drank the poison.

Alcestis: What choice did I have? What choice did he give me? I knew he was scared. I knew he was cruel. But I never thought that he would...

Persephone: He didn't. You stopped him.

Alcestis: *(crying)* Whenever I close my eyes, I see his. Staring at me. Looking at me like he knew he had won. I never thought he was capable of...but once I saw that look in his eyes...I knew he wouldn't hesitate.

Persephone: You meant to die, but you didn't want to. I understand now.

Alcestis: *(nods)* It was my choice.

Persephone: No it wasn't. He didn't give you a choice, only the illusion of one. He murdered you, the same as he would have murdered Perimele.

Alcestis: And now she's there with him and no one knows. No one knows what he did.

Persephone: No, I expect he'll say it was your choice, your idea. He'll say you're a hero.

Alcestis: No one will ever know what kind of monster he truly is. *(beat)* And I left my daughter with *him*.

Persephone: There's nothing more you could have done.

Alcestis: And now there's no saying what he'll do to her.

Persephone: He has no reason to harm her. Your life paid for his. You saved her. She's safe. Her life is safe.

Alcestis: For now. How do I know that he won't just kill her as soon as she becomes inconvenient to him? How do I know that he won't send her away to somewhere awful? She's not safe! Not with him!

*(Alcestis begins pacing angrily around the room.)*

Persephone: Alcestis...

Alcestis: I would burn this whole place to the ground, if it meant getting out of here and keeping her safe. But I can't. Can I?

Persephone: Alcestis—

Alcestis: You said yourself dead souls can find their way back. But you won't let that happen. Too much of a mess.

Persephone: You don't understand. It's not that simple.

Alcestis: No, I understand perfectly. I'm stuck here helpless and he's up there living the life that should have been mine.

Persephone: Alcestis, I—

Alcestis: Don't try to make me feel better. Don't tell me I died heroically and will spend eternity in paradise! There's nothing you can say, Persephone, that will ever make any of this better.

*(Pause.)*

Persephone: You're right. I'm sorry.

Alcestis: You're sorry? You're the queen around here and all you can offer me is "sorry"?

Persephone: I don't know what you want me to say. None of this was meant to happen to you—

*(An alarm sounds.)*

Persephone: Shit!

Hades: *(from offstage)* Persephone!

Alcestis: What is that?

Persephone: Nothing good.

*(Hades enters stage left in a panic. At first, he does not notice Alcestis.)*

Persephone: They broke out.

Hades: Of course they broke out! That wing isn't equipped to hold them.

Persephone: How bad is it?

Hades: Bad. We've never had a breach this big before.

Persephone: Tell me it's not all of them.

Hades: It's not, I was able to secure a good portion of them. But while I was focusing on that, others managed to slip through the cracks.

Persephone: How many?

Hades: Enough to cause major chaos if they make it topside.

Persephone: Shit!

Hades: Yeah and they're—*(notices Alcestis)*—wait. Who--?

Persephone: Never mind that now, we need to—

Hades: So this is what you've been hiding all day.

Persephone: Hades, please, that's not important right now.

Hades: No, I think it is.

Persephone: Please. Let's discuss this later. We have bigger—

Hades: You know what, no. You've been lying to me all day, and I'm supposed to ignore that!? No, Persephone, I knew you were hiding something, and I stayed quiet about it because I trusted that you were doing what you needed to do, but instead—

Persephone: Instead what? What am I doing?

Hades: You're neglecting your responsibilities so that you can play a fun little game where you hide a soul from me, and for what? To make a friend? To have a laugh?

Persephone: That is not what I was doing! You have no idea—

Hades: It doesn't matter what your intentions were, Persephone! The rules we have are in place for a reason. You can't just do whatever you--

Persephone: I had the situation well in hand—

Hades: But I didn't! All the while you were having fun lying to me and hiding whatever you've been up to, a whole lot of shit has been going on that I've been dealing with alone!

Persephone: Hades, I-

Hades: *(notices the book that Persephone is still holding, grabs it)* Oh! And you found the book! When were you going to tell me that? *(throws the book aside)*

Persephone: I-

Hades: No! I have needed you today. And you have continuously left me to scramble on my own--

Persephone: --Do not put that on me! I have tried to help--

Hades: --No, Persephone! Things have been falling apart at the seams and what have you been doing? Hanging out in here, having your own little tea party—!

Persephone: *(yelling over him)* You have no idea what I have been dealing with today!

Hades: *(coldly)* And whose fault is that?

*(Beat.)*

Persephone: We have bigger issues to deal with right now.

*(Persephone brushes past Hades and goes to exit. Pauses before leaving and turns to Alcestis.)*

Persephone: Alcestis, wait here. I promise we'll figure this out when I get back.

*(Persephone exits stage left. Hades and Alcestis watch each other for a beat. Hades exits after Persephone. Alcestis is left alone on stage. After a beat, she stands and goes to look after where Persephone and Hades just exited. When convinced the coast is clear, she turns and sneaks out the way she came in, exiting stage right. The stage is left unoccupied for a long beat. It is quiet at first, then sounds of shuffling and struggling can start to be heard building from offstage. Voices can be heard. It starts with indistinct distant yelling that builds into closer sounding, distinct lines:)*

Hades: *(from offstage)* Go get her!

Persephone: I will. Later.

Hades: Now.

Persephone: Can we fight about this later? We have--Behind you! Catch him!

Hades: Watch out—

Persephone: What the--?

Hades: Persephone, bring the lost soul here with the rest!

Persephone: Hades, I promised her—

Hades: That doesn't matter now!

Persephone: Hades!

Hades: Persephone!

Persephone: Ouch!

Hade: Are you okay!

Persephone: Yeah! Hades!

*(crashing sound from offstage)*

Persephone: Watch out!

Hades: I got it! Now go get her!

Persephone: Under one condition!

Hades: What?

Persephone: When the time comes, her fate is my call!

Hades: Fine!

Persephone: Swear it!

Hades: I swear! Now go! And hurry up!

*(Persephone enters stage left, notices Alcestis is missing.)*

Persephone: Alcestis? *(no response)* No...

*(Persephone looks around the room. Looks out stage right where Alcestis left. There is no sign of her.)*

Persephone: Son of a bitch! Just one thing! Can just one thing go right today?

*(A crashing sound from offstage)*

Hades: *(from offstage)* Persephone! I need you!

Persephone: Apparently not.

*(Persephone runs back offstage left.)*

Hades: Where is she?

Persephone: I'm handling it!

Hades: She's gone, isn't she?

Persephone: I said I'm handling it!

Hades: I swear, Persephone, if she escapes—

Persephone: We don't have time for this!

Hades: If she does—

Persephone: Then I will handle it, Hades!

*(During this exchange, their voices get more distant as if they are walking away. The sounds of distress also fade out and the set is again left unoccupied and silent. A long beat passes. Alcestis enters stage left in a rush. She stops abruptly when she recognizes the room.)*

Alcestis: *(confused)* Wait. How--?

*(Alcestis looks back at where she entered from. Then crosses and looks to where she exited. Is confused. She exits stage right. A long beat passes and she reenters stage left.)*

Alcestis: What?

*(Alcestis exits stage right. Beat. She enters behind the audience and walks down the aisle and onto the stage, confused.)*

Alcestis: How?

Persephone: *(from offstage)* I'm telling you she isn't in there.

Hades: *(from offstage)* Just like she hasn't been in there all day?

Persephone: *(from offstage)* I'm not lying to you. Anymore.

*(Persephone and Hades enter stage left. They see Alcestis.)*

Persephone: *(turning to Hades)* Okay, this looks bad. But I swear she wasn't in here.

Hades: Persephone.

Alcestis: Why the hell can't I break out of here?

Persephone: What?

Alcestis: Every time I leave this room, I end up right back where I started. It doesn't matter which way I turn, I always end up back here.

Hades: *(to Persephone)* So she did try to escape. I wonder who could have predicted that.

Persephone: Hades, please. I made this mess, let me clean it up. I'll handle it. You go keep everyone else in line. I won't be long.

Hades: Persephone—

Persephone: I know you don't like it, but you were right to trust me the first time. I'll explain everything, I promise. Just give me a minute.

*(A beat while Hades stares at Persephone until he eventually agrees.)*

Hades: Okay.

Persephone: Thank you.

*(Hades crosses to a chair and sits while Persephone takes over.)*

Persephone: You tried to escape. I promised you we would figure this out, but you tried to escape anyway.

Alcestis: Of course, I tried! My daughter needs me. If I could just figure out how to get out of here!

Persephone: What exactly happened? When you broke out?

Alcestis: I try to walk out the way I came, but somehow, I keep ending up back here. I've tried going straight, I've tried turning, but always end up back in this room.

Persephone: You really are a lost soul.

Alcestis: What's happening to me?

Persephone: I've never seen this happen before. Usually if souls wander off, they eventually can make it back to the living world.

Alcestis: But I can't.

Persephone: No, you're stuck here. Why here?

Alcestis: It feels like something is pulling me back to this point, this room.

Persephone: My room. Where I was when you died.

Alcestis: You think it's you?

Persephone: I don't know what else it could be. There must be a reason why you came to me instead of ending up with the other souls like you should have.

Alcestis: But why? I'm dead the same as them. What makes me any different?

Persephone: *(realizing)* You're not in the book. *(Goes to where the book was left. Picks it up.)*

Alcestis: What?

Hades: She's what?

Persephone: You're not in the book. You're not supposed to even be dead. You didn't get here through the normal way, of course you didn't end up in the normal place. But if you're not in book...

Alcestis: What?

Persephone: We can't judge you if you're not in the book. We don't have the necessary information. We can't make an objective judgement. We can't send you to any afterlife. There isn't one for you. It's no wonder you can't get anywhere else. Where could you go?



Alcestis: But what does that mean for me? I just stay here forever?

Persephone: No, of course not. But I'm starting to see why you came to me. I have to figure out something to do with you.

*(Pause. Persephone sees the dead potted plant. She goes to the plant and picks it up.)*

Persephone: *(to herself)* I just want one to live. *(thinking to herself)* You're not in the book, but he still is.

*(Persephone puts the plant back down and turns to Alcestis.)*

Persephone: You wanted my judgement. Well, here it is. I know exactly where you deserve to go. Go back the way you came.

Alcestis: What?

Hades: What?

Persephone: Walk out of here. Go back the way you came.

Hades: Persephone.

Alcestis: I tried that. I keep ending up back here.

Persephone: You'll make it this time. I'll go with you and show you the way.

Hades: You'll what? Persephone.

Alcestis: But isn't that against your rules? Chaos and all that?

Persephone: You can go if I allow it. You won't be a dead spirit busting out. I restore life to the world remember? Just think of this as spring coming early.

Alcestis: So that's it? We just walk out of here and I'm alive again?

Persephone: That's right.

Hades: Persephone.

Persephone: I know. I'm sorry. But I have to do this.

Hades: What about everything down here?

*(Persephone hands Hades the book.)*

Persephone: You can do it. You can handle this. You do it all the time when I'm not here. And I'll be back as soon as I can.

*(Persephone kisses Hades' cheek and he lets her go.)*

Persephone: *(to Alcestis)* Are you ready?

Alcestis: Yes.

Persephone: You have to understand, this doesn't come without a cost. A life must pay for a life. That was the deal after all.

Alcestis: If I'm alive, then that means Admetus didn't uphold his end of the bargain.

Persephone: Exactly.

Alcestis: That's why his name is still listed, but I'm not.

Persephone: That's right. It was always going to end like this. One way or another.

Alcestis: If this works, I don't know how I could ever repay you.

Persephone: There's a little girl who needs her mother. And I've seen what happens when mothers and daughters are forced apart.

Alcestis: Thank you, Persephone.

Persephone: Let's go. I'll only take you as far as the edge of the Underworld. Once you cross over, I'll return here. And don't take this the wrong way, but I better not see you again for a long time.

Alcestis: I'll try my best.

*(Alcestis turns and starts to leave.)*

Persephone: Alcestis! Wait.

*(Persephone picks up the potted plant and hands it to Alcestis.)*

Persephone: There is one thing you can do to repay me. His name is Sproutacus. When you get back home, plant him somewhere nice. See if you can bring some life back to him too. Try to help him grow.

Alcestis: I will.

Persephone: Now, let's get on our way. We have a long journey ahead of us.

*(Alcestis and Persephone exit stage right. Hades is left alone on stage, yet again awaiting Persephone's return. Lights down. End play.)*