

ALCESTIS

Euripides, translated by Gilbert Murray

MAID: When she felt that the appointed day had come, with flowing water she washed her fine skin and taking from the cedar closet clothing and accessories she dressed herself becomingly. Then standing before the altar of Hestia(28) she prayed: "Mistress, since I am going down below the earth this is the last time I will fall on my knees before you; take care of my orphaned children: wed to my boy a dear wife and to my girl a noble husband. Do not let them, like their mother, die before their time, but let my children be happy in their father's land and complete a happy span." She went to all the altars that there are in Admetus' house and she crowned them all with garlands and prayed at them, pulling leaves from myrtle branches, without tears, without complaint; even her complexion was unblemished by the advancing evil. And then flinging herself into her bedroom and onto her bed, there at last she let the tears fall and said, "My bed, where I gave up my virginity to this man for whom now I am giving up my life, goodbye. I do not hate you, though you have destroyed only me. But I was reluctant to betray you and my husband and so I am dying. Another woman will get you, no more virtuous than I, but maybe luckier." Throwing herself upon the bed, she planted kisses on it and all the bedclothes were wet with her floods of tears. But when she was finished crying, tearing herself from the bed, she started to go out, her head bent down, but again and again, she turned back and threw herself back on the bed. The children were crying, clinging to their mother's dress and she took them in her arms and one after the other she kissed them goodbye, because she was dying. All the servants were crying everywhere in the house, feeling sorry for their mistress. But she held out her right hand to each, and no one was so low that she did not speak to him and hear what he had to say. Such is the tragedy of Admetus' house. If he had died he would be done with it, but by escaping he has so much grief that he will never forget it.