

## TABLET TWO

[**Gilgamesh** alone in his laboratory late at night. On the back wall hangs a multiple roller of charts (as for schoolroom maps), from which a geometrical diagram of the IsoRectoTetraHedron (IRTH) is drawn down and exposed. At first he is working at a table, occupied with the ceramic IRTH itself, drilling a hole through it, and stringing it around his neck. Off to one side is a small open-hearth furnace, anvil, buckets, and a few tools.]

**Gilgamesh:**  
[Working distractedly, with frequent pauses to peer intently at the IRTH, both before and after suspending it from his neck, or to finger it as he stares into space.]

**Enter Lil-Amin,** disheveled from sleep, standing hesitantly in a doorway.[After staring around at various objects she points somnambulistically to identify the drawings with the IRTH hanging on his chest.]

[He does the **Dance of the IRTH**, gesturing with the handle of his headless axe.]

[Seeing no response, he stops dancing.]

**Lil-Amin:**  
[Shaking off her trance and advancing uncertainly.]

Until now every night has been a gem well spent—but this time I can't think my way. I've come up against an essence. In a rockless unwooded land I can forge these stones in a furnace—but who can make firewood? If a whole city's cooking must be done on dung and dried reeds, how can I find the fuel to bake a million bricks? I can't squeeze flame from sod! What's left to burn? There isn't heat enough in all our straw to glaze a single square-foot slab of clay.

—Lil-Amin! Without a mask! Is it you?

[Pause.]

At first I thought you were only a goddess. All night long divinities and I follow each other around corners as they inspect the day's damage to tradition. But you seem mortal, and here where all women are lovely there can be no doubt which one is their queen!

—Ah, my Iso-Recto-Tetra-Hedron? You weavers abhor such a lopsided signet, with too many planes but without a single facet that adds up to more or less that half a circle—especially when three out of four are only two-thirds regular.

[Pause.]

Or perhaps it's the sharp straight lines? This tense jackstone is one corner of a cubic brick. I can hew its fundamentals with six strokes of my binary axe! With four faces of three sides each, it's the trivium and quadrivium of all faculties! It breeds all the numbers we'll ever need to count the stars or measure earth by season and degree. Even music has twelve sounds, and all words are made from twice as many.

[Pause.]

But you'd rather memorize yourself to sleep with the lore you're taught than reckon by a system on your own.

Long ago I learned to manage sleep. But tonight fear has cut it short.

**Gilgamesh:** You are always safe while I am sleepless.

**Lil-Amin:** Fear for Giszax himself. —I must be quick. —He has invited men to dream for him, a many-thoughted king.

**Gilgamesh:** But no one's done so—or dares to tell—though my cry's been out a month.

**Lil-Amin:** You can force your slaves to scrape up a mountain on the river, but you can't make them dream your dreams. Since you still refuse to sleep yourself, perhaps the unbidden agency of a woman will serve your purpose.

**Gilgamesh:** Seeing that she's my peer, and occupies those many thoughts.

**Lil-Amin:** Then listen to your dream while it's still naive, before I come to my senses and it takes the guarded lines I'll give it later.

**Gilgamesh:** You are right to come to me for this. Pray tell at once! Don't let your bewildered face grow thoughtful. Don't interpret, don't predict! Let me do the thinking.

**Lil-Amin:** Well—translated into men's language? I dreamt that I, as you, took protection of the night to learn the mystery hidden from men and unknown to foreign women. In the narthex of the Temple, I, Lil-Amin, lay uncovered in sleep as I—you, Gilgamesh—stole past without a pause. At the adytum door unvoiced words were in my ear: "No mortal man may address the hag in women's tongue." I said: "It's I, the king of Erech—only one part man, but two thirds god!"

[She dances.]

**Gilgamesh:** The last time I slept, before I saw Erech, it came to me in dream that strangers somewhere were saying just those last seven words!

**Lil-Amin:** The proof my dream is yours. But hear it out. I crept inside, toward a fissure in the earth. A crone squatted with her back to me, clawing up handfuls of wet clay to make an infant's figure, starting with the head, which hardened under her breath and had become what I took to be the featureless branch of a man that's molded for a woman's pyx. But when she smeared it with foul black tar, a flame ignited and it split along its length. Quicker than blinking, a golden serpent flashed from the shards and vanished between the lips of the cracked hollow. "Look what you've done!" she shrieked at me. "Next year there'll be no moon!" But when I bent to see her face, she smiled: and it was Inanna—Ishtar—that I saw!

[Stops dancing.]

**Gilgamesh:** You must not annotate the dream.

**Lil-Amin:** Then, as you, I found myself standing high as a bird in the sky-lighted night, naked with a man's extremity, while people far below pointed arrows up at me to shoot. —Is it true that with moonlight Inanna can make a man extend himself against his will?

**Gilgamesh:** Expunge that dream—and all your puzzlement! I command you to wipe it clean, and forbid you to tell it to any god or person, or to remember it at all.

**Lil-Amin:** I am guilty of the enigma, and doubly so to tell you.

- Gilgamesh:** But it's mine alone to bear. I'll take on the dread. It's not for you to ponder. I will not have its import or its expiation on any other mind.
- Lil-Amin:** You have no cause to worry about my discretion—except in being here right now. They'd bury me alive. I've handed you a perfect hostage. All you have to do is tell.
- Gilgamesh:** Then let's study our collusion. Since you stand first in this city of arts, as artist and as living art, it's generally supposed by all that's holy we should share a bed. Yet the Widows have been heard to say you've such genius at beatitude that you have no need for atonement with a man.
- Lil-Amin:** They admire mysticism, and you mistake the mockery of my solitude in that canard. It falsifies the serenity of an unanointed queen. My proper office lies vacant that was handed down from heaven. I'm sadly called the Maid of Uruk: the only one denied our priest by law—yet refused a woman's dignity by the sole pretender.
- Gilgamesh:** Pretender! I was scanning the world for a place to choose when your Optimates sought me out to implore my archers and my thin-lipped axe. So I delivered Ishtar's city from level carnage. But I won't propitiate her with my foreskin. I will not wear her livery just to glorify her cult!
- Lil-Amin:** Now I understand a little: demigods don't sacrifice to gods!  
[With a fleeting smile.] —But who are you to scorn her mark? In return for sovereignty you swore with hands between your legs to safeguard our customs and perpetuate our rites!
- Gilgamesh:** They ceded me control of all destinies within the range of my bow. Do I pretend too much when I include my own? Erech's people swore to exalt whatever I exalted. Do I pretend too much when I count you among its citizens?
- Lil-Amin:** Oaths of office are pronounced in ancient form and understood reasonably. Any pledge is subject to pious decency. Who would have thought ours could be taken as a mandate for your unholy pride? Instead of honoring the people's rights you edify them with bricks! Your hours of audience are filled with time-and-motion analysis. At night you try to petrify our clay by improving upon the fire of the sun; or dream up levees and ditches to reform our god-given waters! Without a plan from any god you displace a thousand households to make room for a twisted tower—and then regulate our works and days by its evil shadow! Is it fane or barrow? Tell me whether it's god's or yours!
- Gilgamesh:** For myself, neither castle nor hanging garden, but an apex: to lengthen my bowshot; to look down upon the temptations of power; to give me sooner sight of your attackers; to widen my span of stars, while shortening the hours between sunset and sunrise; to give my men a glimpse of peaks beyond the dust of your horizon; and to combine plan with profile in the perspective of my public works. For the gods, yes: a beacon for them in our middle world of seven cities. But not least for you, as sky-house for the tryst! Your canon law stipulates the highest place.  
[Laughing.]
- Lil-Amin:** Am I your bait to challenge heaven? Isn't the sacrilege enough—Uruk offering the Lord God Enlil a mortal bride so unperfected—without presuming to elevate her to the floor of heaven?

**Gilgamesh:** I do not admit that you have been wronged by me, and I mean no insult to your god. Engineering's my only art. It keeps my mind off feeling. I never felt anything before I first saw you. You are shaped to cradle me, and my thoughts yours.

**Lil-Amin:** Then make your liking good. Don't remain an odious clan of one! Join the priesthood of men! Ordained, you can confirm the queen a woman, and she then consecrate you king by law. Rule no longer by default! By unnullifying me you can reduce the people's other grievances to reactionary gripes. In the end they'd praise your works forever. Isn't that the fame you want? Circumcision is no great price to pay. It won't mutilate your faculties. Is Eber maimed? Is the Rector failing? The knife is small, and the pain is briefer than a bride's.

[She laughs.]

[He smiles.]

**Gilgamesh:** For you I'd suffer vultures. But no enemy's knife is small, nor the Rector's enmity so brief. But the worst of it would be to have that insolent priest heave his trophy up to Ishtar, so she could pin it to her shoulder like a bloody sleeve!

**Lil-Amin:** Your pride is cowardly. If women didn't have the guts for humiliation, there'd be no one born on earth to serve the gods or you.

**Gilgamesh:** Still, the de-coronation is a custom I might submit to—if you'd condescend to mine. Where I come from, a king's wife doesn't play the bitch to dogs.

**Lil-Amin:** Your terms are outrageous. You'd hoard the sacrament!

**Gilgamesh:** No, only you. If you're mine, you're not to be dispensed.

**Lil-Amin:** Never have honorable guests diminished a husband's abounding riches: they magnify his glory. Besides, how could any man copy you, or steal me from you? You're the one that not even my god can dispossess. And the future woman is already yours—before sanction or touch or promise. My hand is yours; my lips, my ears, my eyes. But especially the thoughts I make up.

**Gilgamesh:** Yes, those feed and sleep with mine! It's they that make you the artist of your people, and in them lies my hope for apostasy. But your brain has yet to be deafened by the buzz of honey-bees. With me you'd know your gifts.

**Lil-Amin:** The commonwealth comes first. Can you be prouder than the Lord Enlil? Woman's superabundance is celebrated by the gods themselves. I take on faith the catechism I teach, that even from the husband of heaven there won't be beatitude enough for the vicar of Inanna.

**Gilgamesh:** Mankind was given the jewel of games for you and me alone to play! My only demand is equity.

**Lil-Amin:** I've heard about Northmen's equity! You'd cage me like a widowed dove, or have me follow at your heel—half forgotten when your fickle appetite is slaked.

[Softening.] . . . though perhaps not you. I mustn't forget that you're a scandal to your own race too: a chaste barbarian!

**Gilgamesh:** Since I first saw you dance. Since my last sleep.

- Lil-Amin:** Before your dream I had one for myself. I lay enslaved as with a blunt gleam you overshadowed me. Yet, out of shame, no beatitude would come—until Inanna, one hand resting on your back, stood smiling down at me and said: “No one can withstand him. He is now the state. You must weave his banner.” Such false dreams come to me more often as my childhood lengthens. In sleep they don’t seem heretical.
- Gilgamesh:** To whisper that you might yield to force without offending heaven is a shabby lure! It re-reminds me that to get the peace I crave by merely spending power would be to drown like a bee in the honeyed catacomb. A rueful atonement!  
[Vehemently.]
- Lil-Amin:** I despise your gloss! Didn’t I say the dream was false? Who but Giszax himself has proclaimed by herald that dreams are not presentiments—only suspended speculation, pro or con? —What fatuous presumption, to say I’m provoking violence I affect to fear—in order to rob you of your strength! You’re the clear free star, and I’m the deep black pool that traps you by reflection! I’m the succubus that provokes brutal lust to betray the liberty I envy! What nonsense!  
[Flaring up.]  
[Scornfully.]
- Gilgamesh:** I only meant that we must love each other.  
[Approaching.]
- Lil-Amin:** For the love of god, are you too willful or are you too stupid to understand that my renunciation of custom would only cheapen me to you as well as to my people?
- Gilgamesh:** Lil-Amin! This is closer than we’ve ever been before. I find I can endure the air you breathe!
- Lil-Amin:** You abuse the confidence of a private dream. It’s sad that frankness is a woman’s fault, and sadder yet that a word, once let go, is a bird that can never be recaptured.  
[In a lower voice, turning away.] —It sometimes happens when the moon is dark like this that I bewail my vows, and yearn to comfort as a private wife the only other loveless lover in all of Uruk. But the full will come again, and this lunatic will get back her wits. You can’t corrupt me with your self-importance.
- [He comes closer.] —Don’t touch me! —I tell you, the fraud is yours, to speak of passion! You’d scorch me with a simulation too tepid to keep your feet warm. I often wonder at the fame that preceded you to Uruk. The world had heard enough of your warp-spasm in battle—and the untamed generosity of your loves! But now here, your flaring nostrils only snort the steam of cogitation! Your mighty right hand wields a stylus! Your shield-arm turns a potter’s wheel! . . . For the prima donna of Uruk your liberality is sackcloth and ashes.
- Gilgamesh:** The liberality you want is plethora of consorts!
- Lil-Amin:** Oh Queen of Heaven, who seven times inflamed all eyes in harrowed hell, I’m worth no more than a leer to our famous mountain bull! I unstring his desire with something bitter in my voice. I stink in his nose. There is no hope in me. —Must I disgrace the house of Inanna? No! Let the Rector drag the axe-man to the block! Let my people drown the Doge of Dikes in blood! —Or else myself befuddle me enough to forswear Inanna under the next onslaught of milord’s residual warmth.
- Lil-Amin goes off quickly.**

**Gilgamesh:**  
[Starts to dance, but  
stops abruptly.]

My nights in this rimless valley have been brimming with sleepless dreams of the labyrinth beneath that brilliant heart. But she's partly right: her intelligence divides my iron blood and feeds the smithy in my head. And now her voice has given me the oracle to work on! I can use her dream without her form and substance. Let that desire wait. It won't turn rancid.

Excitedly snatching up  
a bucket, **Gilgamesh**  
**runs off** another way.

—The riddle of my origin was a wraith of mist to distract me from the other idea that might have come to me in sleep!