

TABLET FIVE

[Before dawn on the day before New Year's. The temple sacristy to stage left of a dividing wall; stairs of the tower to the right. The sacristy is identified by the five-point star motif on a short screen (which makes an el with the wall) concealing Lil-Amin's bath; a loom is visible upstage. A sacrifice has just been celebrated, and the under-priestesses (Widows) are returning from the temple to the sound of recessional music from within. The ritual style is penitential.]

Lil-Amin enters, masked and in eucharistic vestments, **preceded by Widows**.

[In ceremonial but perfunctory fashion, during the following dialogue, they relieve her of a bloody knife on its sacred plate, and divest her one by one of tiara, chasuble, stole, maniple, cincture, amice, and alb (or mimed suggestions thereof). She herself may touch nothing. It is given to understand that other Widows are meanwhile passing back and forth with jars of water and hot stones. Finally they remove her mask and shift as she steps into her lustral bath out of sight. At first she appears dazed, praying by rote and exchanging formal bows with her acolytes.]

Lil-Amin: Oh nuns of Inanna, blessed is the Queen of Heaven.
Oh ye servants of the Father Enlil, praise him forever.
Oh holy sisters, walk in the ways of Our Lady,
and glorify the prince of gods. Magnify the Lord.

Widows: *Amen.*

Lil-Amin: O Lord Enlil, who has suffered me to minister this day in your holy temple,
[Kneels, facing the temple.] mercifully pardon the faults of my service, and vouchsafe to grant that on the highest altar of my people in the night to come I may receive without blemish the grace of your loins, and make myself acceptable to you as the vicar of Inanna in her own city here on earth, who lives and reigns your heavenly daughter in the world without end.

Widows: *Amen.*

Lil-Amin: All those years as a girl I dreaded my first sacrifice. It's strange how cool I was with
[Rises. The Widows undress her and prepare the bath as she gradually recovers.] the knife. I didn't fall faint with pity when the blood splattered my skin. Instead, I took pleasure in my style, and felt nothing for the throbbing sow as I slit her belly open that might well have lived to farrow many more. The embryos still quivered. I thought how painless breeding is, for boars.

[She steps behind the screen.] —Sisters, help me cleanse this female blood.

Widow 1: The cauls were perfect in the womb!

- Widow 2:** Your blood-voice was clear and strong. Your penitential dance was flawless. Surely it's now forgiven, your journey beyond the scan of Uruk. Heaven knows it was to right seven long years of wrong.
[They bathe her behind the screen.]
- Lil-Amin:** My new worthiness is small. Dawn's air still smells of famine. The moon is dark and the sun is loathe to rise. It goes hard for me so to please heaven's bridegroom that he will stay the Great Gods' Council, to keep the waters from coming to an end. I, the one most weak and terrified in all this city, not yet learned even in the ways of men, must feign the supremacy of sacred desire! I tremble more as victim than I did as hunter.
- Widow 2:** Your trembling brought on beatitude. Enlil's heart will be gladdened by earth's most holy bride. He will trace the shape of your skin, and love's tide will rise in his golden thigh.
- Lil-Amin:** It will be the plowing of a salted field. My liver's shriveled and my heart benumbed. I am dead before I climb those stairs. The god will cinder me with lightning.
- Widow 1:** Yet your spirit lives, like barley-seed in a moistened grave! A withered ear of grain is sevenfold reborn.
- Widow 2:** In tonight's vigil you'll learn your way by prayer, meditating the hopes you uphold of all Uruk:
- Widows:** —that the cow of the field will yet be covered by the bull.
[Widows dance.] —that man will no longer turn from woman.
—no bride ever again sit in grief beside her bed.
- Gilgamesh appears,** —For the fragrance of your sanctity will be giddy musk to the king of gods in his invisible to them, nostril.
coming down the stairs outside the Chamber of the Gods.
sacristy wall. [He carries Engidu's fire-bow, moving without —And Enkidu will wrest from Giszax the Rod and Ring of her own city.
- Lil-Amin:** Now I'm clean. —Go sweep the sanctuary. —You go dress the meat. —Then come purpose until he catches the sound of their voices. Then puts his ear to the wall, as if to the opening of an air-duct, straining to hear.] **Widows go off** into the temple. [Lil-Amin remains behind the screen. Gilgamesh strikes a single note on the bow, which gives her pause; but she continues.

....
 He then plucks two notes. Another pause and continuation.

 Finally he sounds three notes.]

Gilgamesh: It's harder for me to walk up those steps and open my robe to the divine guardian of our race than it was for you to harrow all hell naked! I'll have no strength in me when I reach the top. Keep me at least from screaming. Let me faint on the Lord's bed, and avert my face, before the bolt of glory shatters this lump of half-baked clay. Does it pierce like flame, or spear? —What's that? . . . Who's there? . . . You must not come into the sacristy!

Gilgamesh: It's me.

Lil-Amin: Enkidu? Not here! Not now! Go back, go back!

Gilgamesh: I, Gilgamesh, with the string of Engidu.
 [Hesitating.]

Lil-Amin: Oh no! No, no, no! They'll annihilate you here!

Gilgamesh: Deep calls to deep! Thought to thought! Eye to eye! Ear to ear! Tongue to tongue! Pelt to pelt!
 [Gaily.]

Lil-Amin: *[Pause.]*
 You mean stone to wool. Furnace to loom. Tar to holy water. Sleepless prowling to the sleep of love.

Gilgamesh: Then tree to root! Or sun to moon!

Lil-Amin: Twain that meet in eclipse.
 [With a short laugh.]

Gilgamesh: Are you naked?

Lil-Amin: I wear no jewels.

Gilgamesh: You gave away mine.

Lil-Amin: To buy that music-stick for you who had sent me!

Gilgamesh: To me you never reported your success.

Lil-Amin: Was is likely that I'd fail?

Widows enter,
 preceded by horizontally carried flabellums, which they solemnly wave at her. Then dropping the fans, they go out again.

—Shisss! Someone's coming.
 —Be careful! Don't touch me! —Now go sprinkle the Veil of Inanna with seawater from the Apsu well. But first take care to inspect it thread by thread. Give it a blessing when you take it out of the tabernacle, and again at the door, with balsam. Try to walk with dignity.

[Lil-Amin resumes in a whisper.]

—Go away, Giszax! You have enemies enough, without calling down the wrath of our Father in Heaven.

[Silence.]

Are you still there?

[Silence.]

[In sudden fear she reaches out from behind the screen and snatches up one of the fans by its head. The long handle is seen probing vaguely in self-defense.]

Can you hear me? —There's no way of getting in here without being seen by the Widows. Dear God, I pray he hasn't killed them!

Gilgamesh: I haven't changed. I'm still no beast of prey. I still don't sack my cities.

Lil-Amin: It's I who have changed.

Gilgamesh: You cannot be less fine.

Lil-Amin: From the worm you saw I've become a butterfly. As an old maid at the loom my knowledge was imagined, my speech too idle. But I no longer waste.

Gilgamesh: You were Ishtar's artist. And day by day you still increase in worth. I look forward to your wrinkles.

Lil-Amin: You've waited too long in the looking. I do what is decreed above our heads. Your fate too will be inscribed tomorrow.

Gilgamesh: [Laughs.] Perhaps I shall be obliged to alter one of those decisions. Or change your office. But you are a tree of innumerable harvests, which blossoms at fruition. My wedding present bears neither fruit nor flowers, but I have topped it off with Zagros evergreen. I molded the last brick, fired the last tile, pointed the last course with my own bitumen. The whole Sea-Land and all its seven cities look to the mountain I have made for your featherbed of bliss.

Lil-Amin: As the destined platform for our Lord High God's descent to earth, it's an afterthought of your willed obsession.

Gilgamesh: It was my will to reconsider everything for you. I'm steersman, not a rudder. The afterthought is heaven's. Let my tower serve for all your marriages.

Lil-Amin: Why do you come to taunt me, Giszax? It was not by my choice that I seemed fair to an impetuous champion. He had never seen a hairless face.

- Gilgamesh:** Or thigh. What was it made you dance against your will? I'm told he didn't have to lift your skirt. Did he lick your salty palm?
- Lil-Amin:** It was the will of Inanna that spirit stood aside for body.
- Gilgamesh:** It's said your spirit was radiant.
- Lil-Amin:** Are you here to spite my radiance?
- Gilgamesh:** I am here by chance. Is it true that by taking Engidu you left the peaceable kingdom in a snarl?
- Lil-Amin:** The orders came from you, the duty from Inanna. I did not go with joy. But desire roused cannot be flouted.
- Gilgamesh:** Unless it's mine, apparently.
- Lil-Amin:** You vaunt your sovereignty of mind! Ha! —I tell you, for myself and him it was Inanna who enkindled motive.
- Gilgamesh:** Then disobey the gods that use you! Stop Ishtar's game!
- Lil-Amin:** The game of Inanna is the work of life.
- Gilgamesh:** So it was the means of work that made you love him?
- Lil-Amin:** The means were ends. His chest pressed against mine. I did the work of a woman. It wasn't love. No, it was not love—at first.
- Gilgamesh:** At first! Then when did it begin? Were you in love a minute later?
- Lil-Amin:** For pity's sake, it's like asking life itself when life began to ask me what I felt or when! At times he and I were halves of a single dancer—one breathing out, the other breathing in. Is that what you call love?
- Gilgamesh:** One tidbit of a mouse and you purr like a lion's mate.
- Lil-Amin:** Oh he was gentle, but never mousy!
- Gilgamesh:** Mouse or lion, he'll die before he has the chance to roar!
- Widows enter,**
singing.
- Widows:** *Softly run Euphrates
Until we end this song.
The veil of Inanna
For Enlil's night on earth.*
- [They carry a blue veil behind the screen, where they dress Lil-Amin,

Lil-Amin: My mother once wore this. —Mind you don't touch me! —There. Now carry up linen from the cedar chest, and make up the bed exactly as the Rector showed you. Our Lord's mask goes up late in the afternoon, with the flowers. Don't forget the bridesmaid's prayer when you finish.

who then appears from behind the screen in a blue diaphanous gown, her own mask in hand.

Widows: *Softly run Euphrates*
Until we end this song.

One of the Widows sprinkles her with an aspergillum.]

Widows go off, crossing downstage to the opposite side.
 [They carry various objects up the stairs. Shielding their eyes against the bright daylight outside the wall, they barely miss Gilgamesh, who manages to shrink back unseen.
 Lil-Amin listens, at first with a frown.]

Lil-Amin: Giszax?

Gilgamesh: Here am I. How tractable you are—with cats and gods: anyone but me!
 [Lil-Amin smiles to herself.]

Lil-Amin: You sent me to the cat. You raised my bed to God. You and my brother agreed to it all.

Gilgamesh: I allow for your religion. When both the circumcised transients are gone, the question between us will remain.

Lil-Amin: Enlil's bride can never be a private wife!

Gilgamesh: I don't agree to that.
 [He starts forward

Lil-Amin: It's a pity you won't be consulted. Tomorrow before dawn, behind the double doors, around the projecting el, slowly groping his way through a dark and unknown passage. the Council of Gods will cast the New Year's lots: every person's, mine, and yours. Your two-thirds of a vote won't be solicited.

Gilgamesh: As plenipotentiary for myself, I act without instructions. So can you. For us, you and I decide!
 He speaks progressively louder as he moves away from the mouth of the ventilation duct (so that she may not suspect his change of position); her voice sounds commensurately fainter. As he rounds the el and approaches her, he lowers his voice, and hers sounds louder, until they are again in equilibrium.]

- Lil-Amin:** What can we decide? To flee? To live in the marsh weaving nets for fish and making love for brats? You can decide to build a hut with reeds! . . . Did your mother have no gods, that you're immune to retribution? Not Enkidu, but you, should play the King of Fools!
- Gilgamesh:** Do you pray for him to kill me?
- Lil-Amin:** Can you expect the sympathy of Inanna's high priestess?
- Gilgamesh:** But the private person, what does she hope?
- Lil-Amin:** The private person drifts without hope, the orphan of Uruk, beyond the river's mother-reach, like an empty coracle at sea. Let wind and tide decree her course without entreaty. How can a floater be sure of what she wants, alone in the shoreless night without a moon? But I know that if you kill Enkidu, black cancer will eat away the sun, and miasmic naphtha rot away the bindings of our bones. The Optimates would arraign my feebleness, and the Rector would condemn his own sister for the city's failure to lift its curse. If Enkidu dies, I die too!
- Gilgamesh:** Not under my protection!
- Lil-Amin:** They'd have ways to kill me. Unless you did so first.
- Gilgamesh:** Why would I kill my heart's desire?
- Lil-Amin:** For keeping her vows. For remaining un beholden to your weak preference. Her autonomy would enrage you. A tyrant can't endure paradox.
- Gilgamesh:** My exclusive preference is preeminently strong. What's more, being deeper, more contented than loose servitude to mother nature. It's your match too—when I have the only wife for me in all four quarters of the universe.
- Lil-Amin:** Even after Enkidu? And after tonight? I thought you said—
- Gilgamesh:** Even after circumcision! *After* anything perhaps. But not *before* any subsequent dancer! No successor while I live.
- Lil-Amin:** The mighty Nimrod has used me for his decoy, and now he wants jealous title to my carcass!
- Gilgamesh:** If I were master you'd be mistress.
- Lil-Amin:** The symmetry is false. Equality isn't equity for a woman. You'd level our atonement, limiting my beatitude to yours!
- Gilgamesh:** There's no limit to the mind. I speak of Gilgamesh and Lil-Amin, not of man and woman!

- Lil-Amin:** As if keeping the caste at two were as hard on you as me! A dog in the manger that wants a bitch as brood stock. To be reduced to your chattel is for me no honor. But you have never honored the ways of kings, and none that come after will ever honor yours.
- Gilgamesh:** But Engidu wasn't raised by women either. He's been king of kings in the bush. Not
[He is now so close to her, without detection,
- Lil-Amin:** Wrong! He's sensitive to gender, with an inner ear for rhythms, studious of the dual
that he must deflect his voice with one hand to his mouth.
- Gilgamesh:** Before his patience sleeps, your dancing panther will bite the dust of one who takes
She turns to the dividing wall, puzzled no sedatives!
- Lil-Amin:** He's kind to me, and as intelligent as a sister in knowing what will please. But if he
by his altered tones.] ever palter with my sovereignty, I can finish him off with my inexhaustible allures!
[She laughs.]
- Gilgamesh:** You're already thin to the bone from overwork! But I thank him for ravishing the
[He steps up behind her. At the sound of her voice she spins arrested beauty of your pucelage. In your face now is what I'd hoped to see! Though
I suppose you've also been fasting.
- Lil-Amin:** Holy Mother, I thought you sounded much too close! You can't come in here!
- Gilgamesh:** Who's not a cat may look at a queen. This is the place for a fly on the wall! I see that
a woman's mystery battens on her penance.
- Lil-Amin:** There's no mystery about women in a female city. —Don't come near me! I refuse to
[He takes a step toward her.] become your accessory!
- Gilgamesh:** You lured me here with your existence.
[Smiling.]
- Lil-Amin:** Get out of here! I'm not fascinated.
- Gilgamesh:** When I am gone—
- Lil-Amin:** —there'll be no one to praise me for my thoughts. Gilga-mesh is but once. When he
[Turning away.] is gone, it will be as if the cruel sun went out. To rid my office of his begrudging
glare I must lose the light I see by, and deprive the city of blazing invention. —Yet I
promise you I'll put aside the loom and ply the fire-craft you've taught us. I'll use
any art that serves my way to perpetuate your works. I need Enkidu to loosen up the
law, but no consort shall repossess your seat, or occupy your cot. Why should the
[Facing him again.] people of a woman-god have any king at all? *I'll* build the seven walls! *I'll* erect
seven towers for the seven cities of seven gods!

Gilgamesh: If I'd only known you cared for power! I'd've long since handed you the plans and got some sleep.
[Laughing at her.]

Lil-Amin: To become an actress, I've studied all your acts. Before your huge eyes are closed, I mean to take in all their vision. I know how to draw plans and issue specifications; by anatomizing space, to control the use of time; to appraise skills and apportion tasks; to examine small movements and seek innocent causes of untoward effects; to be friendly and aloof; to bend and stiffen. I can imitate your face, and how you walk, and even how you swing your axe. My method will put your moods to use.
[She dreamily mimics his characteristic acts and gestures, as they might seem to a child. At which he laughs happily.]

Gilgamesh: You're a keen student, but you can't inherit your teacher's memory. Design is also made of details; and it takes the particulars of experience to realize plans through gangs of men. It will take somewhat closer acquaintance to acquire all my lore. Therefore let me live another seven years, and help you learn much more!

Lil-Amin: I already know more than you think. I make everyone tell me versions of your criticisms. I've sent reporters north for stories of your past. Taking up mathematics and ceramics, I've analyzed the Iso-recto-tetra-hedron by its syllables. I can dance your theorem of squared triangles. I don't know the proof, of course, but the fourth face is perfect, with long and equal sides, each of which when squared is equal to one third the full cube's surface. —The rest I get by experiment. See: the condensation of your battle-cry, the acorn of your oak!
[Lil-Amin performs her version of the dance of the IRTH.]

Gilgamesh: But you didn't keep the clay-stone I gave you.

Lil-Amin: I only pawned it. I'll have it back as souvenir. But you see, I've memorized your theme. By my resonance you'll live in fame.

Gilgamesh: Then you must resonate my desire now. Project my sleepless hope. Show the craving that scrapes my unglazed clay. Dance the turbulence of this aquifer that undermines my roots. But don't just counterfeit the harmonics of two joined rivers, or of two spines touching, opposite but like, where four legs meet!
[Her dances changes to reflect his words.]

Lil-Amin: I can immortalize your vibrations without your mortal power, but it's not for the sounding board to propagate your seed.

Gilgamesh: You seem too sure that I'm the one will die. Does the Rector intend to daub Engidu's fingernails with venom?
[Thoughtfully.]

Lil-Amin: No necessity for that. Would I be memorializing you if there were any hope? Giszax isn't equal to a lion with human hands and superhuman motion.

Gilgamesh: Better warn him too, if you're an expert in the manly art! You can't blame me for opposing the gods in self-defense.

Lil-Amin: And when, before you know it, you're emptied of your blood, all breath spent, your disconcerted ghost can't blame me I if don't suppress the cheers. The mask of power will staunch my wound and smooth the flux of pain. My widow breasts will harden before the milk begins to well. Tight-lipped I'll beat my chest, subjugate my brother, and set free pigheaded will against all varieties of wisdom—my heart commemorating yours in wanton purity of pride!

Gilgamesh: I didn't suck my strength from milk, and I won't die to favor a necromancing witch!

Lil-Amin: So after all it's fear that keeps you from me! Fear, fear, fear! You're afraid of what I am, and call it mystery! —Oh Blessed Lady Inanna, pardon my consideration of the secondary sex. Giszax can go to hell—body, shade, and name!
Lil-Amin runs off
Carrying her mask,
into the temple.

Gilgamesh, giving pause to his astonishment,
walks off the other way.