

TABLET SEVEN

[The middle of the night. Same scene as Tablet Six except that the royal seats are replaced by a kettledrum. Its drumstick leans against the wall.]

Gilgamesh enters, carrying his mounted axe in one hand and the Rector's crosier in the other. [Goes directly up to the double doors and addresses them.]

Gilgamesh: *[Knocks politely with the head of the crosier.]*

Gods, this is Gilgamesh whose name must be pronounced before you engrave the contingent fates of others. I'd like to speak to you, please.

[Silence. Knocks again.]

Admit me to your man-made chamber. I wish to make a suggestion. Listen to me. Take a recess, while Enlil absents himself to consummate the city's marriage. Spare yourselves the trouble of casting lots on our behalf. Dice were made for pure amusement. Wasn't it the very purpose of creating mortals to provide yourselves with leisure?

[To Audience.] (When the world was young they had to till their own fields and build their own houses. They had no art. The seven cities of Sumer were founded as slave quarters. The walls were made of mud. They should be grateful that I've improved their plantation.)

[To doors.] Can you hear me?

[Silence. He knocks again, vehemently.]

The Tablets of Fate are much too long. You could briefly decree our destiny in gross. Why bother with the warps and woofs? No need to endure a tedious night wrangling out the details. Reduce your New Year prescriptions to a few terse gnomes. If other people did as I have done, they'd tell their own story as they went along, day by day, and write the verses for you.

[Silence again. He knocks less vigorously.]

[He examines the doors minutely, feeling with his fingers, vainly seeking entrance.]

Listen, you all: my predecessors here were no more than priests or judges, but I have organized the kind of army you never dreamed of, in your imperial service. Where else has your lugal built a port to heaven? I'm entitled to the courtesy of a little conversation. Even if the riddle means I'm neither god nor man, but stand alone between, I should be consulted at your caucus as the engineer of your own public works.

[Silence. He sounds the drum with his palm.]

Doors, why do you keep me from the parliament? Open, or I'll break in upon my relatives!

[To audience.]

(I should be welcome. They'll never find themselves another such producer. But now, on seven thrones carved from stone and carried here by human beings, the gods deny me audience! I have overestimated their gratitude to the species they like to make love to. Yet there's more imagination in the wits of any weaver's apprentice or halfbaked potter than in all these sagacious mollycoddled majesties. They have the privilege of inscribing those Tablets merely because they happened to come first and live forever. By no other virtue do they ordain the world's history, which we should wrest from destiny when their fingers are loosened at this hiatus of time. It's solely owing to the damned eternity of gods that herds and populations must wait for them to propound the next twelve months. But they should know that for me it's worse than living by chance alone to have chance's part predestined. See how anxiously they bar their ozoned hall when exact-time opens a crack in their firmament!)

[To doors.]

I concede weather and conception for you to fix at random, but we the people should determine what and when to do.

[He strikes the drum with the crosier. Silence.]

[Dropping the crosier, he drives his axe through the drum skin. He then throws the axe at the doors, where it sticks by the blade. He retrieves the axe and unsuccessfully pries with its blade at the cracks of the doorway.]

Just imagine you hadn't called this meeting: Would the seasons have run amok or merged, or men and women felt alike? Would there have been an end to daylight? No insemmination of the dates or sprouting of the barley? I think not. You've concealed from your servants their freehold! It's sorry bosses who fear the competence of workers! You've ruled your drones by infixing self-fulfilled prophecies. —I've been a hypocrite to mute my contempt for your control of every hour of the year. What is fate in fact but history abstracted—the gods' intention *ex post facto*! Anyone who survives me can claim to have prescribed whatever it turns out I will have done. But if Enlil finds it necessary to disintegrate me for sacrilege, then he must confess that last year's Fate has failed!

[To audience.]

(Still, if it's nevertheless somehow true they spin and snip all my years, the hour to act is NOW!)

[To doors, which make no sound as he pounds on them with his bare fist. He then chops at them with his axe, in increasing fury, but to no effect.]

Doors of cedar, I know well enough why you stop me! If I interrupt the assembly before new fates are fixed, we'll have our liberty by default! Skittish gods, twitch your ears in consternation! Oh pusillanimous absolutes, eagles cowering in your covert like rabbits! Affect languid indifference if you like, but let me in to kiss your feet! . . . Unless you've simply levanted, and left me besieging an empty garrison!

Throwing down the
axe, he snatches up the
crosier and, using both
hands, beats on the
dull doors with the flat
of its crook. The
crosier breaks in two.
He flings away the
pieces and starts for
the stairs.]

Engidu enters, decked in the purple mantle and wearing
the IRTH, but tired and discouraged, carrying the Rod and
Ring negligently in one hand, his bannerstone
(an axe-like weapon) in the other. [He sniffs the air, sneezes,
and only then sees Gilgamesh. Dropping everything, he leaps
for the shoulders just as Gilgamesh hears him
and whirls around to
face him. Engidu
misses his grasp and
ends up on the stairs
above Gilgamesh,
looking down upon
him.]

—Oh my god, has Enlil left already? —Then I'll race him to the bride! The ladder down
from heaven is there for me to climb! On the feast of feasts I'll break my fast, and live
like Engidu by nature! Ah, that deep sweet slippage of the touch, rooting for the flower
underground! I'll butter his bun!—unless he beats me to it. Or join the dance, if it's
already begun. But what if I find him mounted, undulating naked as a wing-ed snake?
He'd better take cover in the upper air—or spend a thunderbolt on me!

—The circumcised wild man! I forgot about your fate! We meet again too soon.

Engidu:
[He notices the broken
crosier and comes
down past Gilgamesh
to pick up the two
pieces.]

Smell feathers before see you! Not go up there. No man do that! You know?

Gilgamesh:

Is Ishtar's lion here to defend her lamb? You're a pretty crafty son of a bitch to sneak up
on me like that.

Engidu:

Stick from temple magic-man. You kill my friend, brother from Lady-Amin!

Gilgamesh:

Great friend: bring poor hagridden stripling to die in woman-cage! You ate acorns and
ran with gazelles. A friend would not have brought you to a city's mockery.

Engidu:
[He menaces
Gilgamesh in the
attitude of a rampant
lion, who only turns

People need me kill you later. But you go on tower, I kill you now! New king guard
queen from bad bull.

Gilgamesh:
away and goes down front. Engidu mistakes the move for a retreat and follows aggressively; yet when Gilgamesh suddenly turns to face him, as if to take his arm, he momentarily shrinks from contact.]

Engidu: No! All people love me, hate you.

Gilgamesh: It's galling to be disputed by a foundling creature, misguided into vice, swaggering at a woman's apron string, strutting in front of lily-livered caterers. Go back to the steppes, where strife and love are artless, brother ape.

[Roused by what he takes to be an insult,

Engidu:
Engidu casts off his mantle and springs to attack. Gilgamesh readily joins the fight, which is like a dance punctuated by the lightning movements of real combat.

Two times called me monkey, kinfolk I like not. Ugh! Other day I killed king of animals. Now kill you!

[They both laugh.]

I grab air!

Gilgamesh is the boxer, avoiding Engidu's grasping blows with a sophisticated guard and precise footwork while annoying him with light jabs. At first Engidu fights like a baffled wrestler, as if the frustration is about to enrage him to his own peril; but gradually and intelligently he begins to imitate Gilgamesh, though occasionally still throwing great straightarm haymakers that are deftly parried or ducked. The fight is by no means ridiculously one-sided, but Gilgamesh makes no attempt to land heavy punches. With growing admiration, cooled off, Engidu studies Gilgamesh's style more and more carefully, but the result is a mirror-imitation in which he leads with his right to oppose a left, etc. . . .]

Gilgamesh:
Suddenly, almost treacherously with a weird but truncated battle-cry, **Gilgamesh knocks Engidu flat** with a right hook and **bounds up the stairs out of sight.**

When you're disappointed I can see why they love you. May your tender eyes cease to show the suffering of life's love while life is still alive! —As for me, I'm already so accursed that I'd be drowned if I took notice of maledictions. So if I am day and she is night, why not fly as a white raven before I'm dead?

Engidu: *[Silence.]*

[For half a minute he lies without movement staring up at the sky; then speaks with a new voice, though still with a slight accent. He suddenly sits up, straight from the waist, and begins to finger the IRTH on his chest. With his head high, still looking straight ahead, he rises to his knees; but then his eye wanders to Gilgamesh's axe, which he there upon picks up to examine as he goes to sit in the lotus position at the bottom of the stairs.]

Now I see how people are! They laughed at my ignorance when they made me think he lived in fear of wilderness. They'll cheer him when he finally lays me low. Too late I'm smitten with the city's bravest scent. Compared to him, except for her who should have been his mate, the city is seven thousand stinks. Before his nostrils flared the fight was over, and only once did the hand that felled me move; but I felt the power of something in his head not to be learned from priest or woman.

Eber enters hurriedly.

Eber:
[Preoccupied with worry, his surprise drops into weary irony.]

Oh, the little child that's come to lead us. Homesick? The fleshmonger's still got pots galore for you to dip. The duties of a human stud don't end so soon. —Ah, I see: it's guarding the tower from drunks. Is it jealous already? Or is this the way a thing-king prays?

Engidu:
[With a wan smile.]

Yes, oh priest-of-treasury, I am thin-king about how to tell my second birth. In the Dreamtime, invented sounds were my only words: names I sang for all things but myself: no more than that. Then Lil-Amin tutored me the pith of speech. But not enough to grasp deceit. Now I have begun to see that people can say untruth with the other meaning in each word to make the sound unmean itself.

Eber:
[Kindly, taking interest.]

Sometimes in Sumer there are meanings more than two, and no one can guess by the opposite of what is said. I can see you're not just a dumb gorilla avaricious for celebrity.

Engidu:
[In reverie.]

I did not name the creature you say I'm not: which means I am! Before she dressed me, I was like the bandar-log, showing all my wants and itches.

Eber:
[With divided attention, his eyes searching everywhere.]

Now that you know your shame, the likeness disappears. Well clothed unbelievers are more like apes than you are: not God's own creatures but golems formed by sarcastic words, civil for ambition only.

Engidu: You too are different. Tell me that God's name.

Eber:
[With a marveling glance at Engidu.]

Are you a second Adam, that you name the beasts and seek the name of God?

Engidu:
[Musing.]

Gilgamesh is like a god. By whatever light remains to me I'll be walking in his shadow. For him will I eat meat and drink beer, or go hungry.

Eber: What's this new note in you already? He'll kill you, unless you kill him—if you don't run away. Yes, that's it: go right now! —Oi, oi weh! You've killed the priest!
[Puzzled, until he notices the broken crosier.]

Engidu: No. He did. Then spared me.

Eber: O my God, this is the end of us all! The people will riot. —Quick, which way did he go? —But first we've got to find my sons! My sons are the future, not Gilgamesh. History goes with my nation. Do you understand that this city is not the whole world? Shaddai calls upon you!
[Violently distraught, he tries to raise Engidu to his feet.]

Engidu: I do not know your sons. Gilgamesh went up there. If Enlil rivets them both with a shaft of lightning, I'll be left to play the fool alone. To think ahead hurts more than a leg torn off. Is the debt for meat and beer this fear of what is not yet but still may come?
[Calmly.]

Eber: Gilgamesh is dead! I am dead! My sons are dead! —But where's the captain? Maybe he can get us out alive!
[Tearing his hair, Eber runs off.]

Engidu: My last sleep. The lion did not sleep in fear before I murdered him.

[Lies down on his side like a child and goes to sleep.]

Norkid enters briskly, fully armed. [Engidu, instantly wakened, rolls over onto his stomach, prepared to spring in any direction.]

Norkid: Too much gallantry, Your Highness? Or were your vital fluids dried up by irony? You're doing your devotions all alone. I thought the divinities here were nothing but venereal. Some might think the people's champion has a rotten gourd; but I'd say you're sulking like a chimpanzee.
[Stopping short.]

Engidu: Why does everyone think of simians when they look at me?
[Leaping to his feet.]

Norkid: Because you're a natural. Your heart is on your face. —But I've got to find my men and rip them from their screwholes. There's trouble in the air. —What's this!?!?
Norkid recoils, drawing his sword; but, seeing Gilgamesh's axe, he picks it up.]

Engidu: His hawk. He did not use it on me.

Norkid: If you've killed Gilgamesh, I'll shed your bones.! If there's no more ground to stand on, I'll pull the whole world down to hell!
[Attacks Engidu in cold rage. Engidu catches his

Engidu: It's the ayatollah. Gilgamesh killed *him*. Then went up those stairs.
wrist and immobilizes his sword-arm.

Engidu displays the broken crosier and releases Norkid.]

Norkid: He's a fucking genius at outrage! What more sacrilegious compound of desecrations could even be conceived by these bottomlanders? We'll be smothered by the mob when this gets out. I fancy you expect to lead the retribution.
[Laughs.]

Engidu: He let me live! Why did he not kill me?

Norkid: He saved you for the proper time. But the people won't spare either of you when they find things gone awry. —Why don't you get out of here? Vamoose! It's your last chance. They pamper monkeys in Egypt. —Where the hell are those amaranthine cocksman of mine? —Shit piss and corruption, where's even Eber and his men? —All right then, if you want to die with us, get off your ass and hold these stairs until I get back with a few necessities. The tower is our citadel.
[Stares at Engidu; then paces up and down thoughtfully as Engidu slowly shakes his head.]

Norkid runs off.

Engidu: Even the soldier tells me to run away. Which way is Egypt? —But no: if Gilgamesh is struck dead by her god, it's for me to inherit his statecraft. I think a black boy is capable of city-lore. For his name's sake I forswear the simplicity of escape.
[Rises. Takes up his bannerstone. Hesitates. Puts the mantle back on. Lies down to sleep.]

Optimates hurry in, ineptly armed and out of breath.
[One drags a large fish net. They are hushed in awe of the gods, and steer clear of the doors.]

Optimate 1: Engidu! The khan has broken loose! Help us catch him!

Optimate 2: [Screams.] The Rector's crosier!
[Optimate 2 notices the broken crosier.]

Rector enters, searching.

Rector: Enkidu! What are you doing here? I'm looking for my staff. —There it is! But broken in two! —You besotted puppet, it's a curse on you to touch it even! —Oh, now I see! Of course it was Giszax that would insult my office, and you were forced to kill him on the spot! But where's his body?
[Finds the pieces of the crosier. Discovers Gilgamesh's axe. Engidu sits up in amazement.]

Engidu: I thought he killed you! *[Pause.]*
—Now you know I'm less than he. No one can take his place.
[To Optimates.] —Do you expect to truss him up like a fish?

Rector: Giszax has tamed this tom cat. —Well, I'll do the job. Which way did he go? —Father Enlil, teach me a dance I was not born to learn. I'll chop down that architect!

[Engidu points falsely.] **Rector runs off**, carrying the axe.

Optimate 1: This is what comes of tampering with liturgy.

Optimate 2: The Rector's magic isn't strong enough. Even our godsend can't stand up against the sleepless mountain bull!
 Dropping all equipment, **Optimates run off** in opposite direction.

Engidu: I could smell danger over the horizon, but when she opened up her robe, I looked. When I sat at her feet, I watched the teeth between her lips. But I did not understand. You are like a lion, she sang to me: strong and swift, a lord for women; let me take you to the house of Inanna, to the cloud-gathering peak of Uruk, where the loveless one, wise and preeminent, keeps his own counsel. Come, she said, if in your belly you crave a wife, if in your heart you long for a friend: if such desires move you. From the beginning she said such words with other meaning than she taught. But it will be bitter to sleep the longest sleep without her. . . .

Engidu goes to sleep as **Gilgamesh slowly comes down the stairs** without seeing him, with Enlil's mask in his hand.

Gilgamesh: Praise be to Enlil for such sweet annealment. She perfected the enclosure. I felt her feeling me. There's a sea-change in my bones. But still no conversion deep enough for sleep. How was I to reach her mind, merely on acquaintance, keeping silence incognito? I still don't know her thoughts, let alone her vision working at the loom.
 —Engidu! I told you to go away! Why die by the calendar?

[He catches sight of Engidu, who awakens and looks at Gilgamesh without moving.]

Engidu: Now I know what words mean. Next time we fight I'll have memory to help me.
Gilgamesh: I've just begun to cultivate the faculty of wordlessness that you renounce. Don't despise the instinct not to think in action. If you remember Lil-Amin's conduct in the dark, tell me what I wonder: Of course she knows that as soon as love is spent its promises renew themselves; but would she expect a beatific repetition before her other senses are restored? Will the skill to deceive be born of self-deception? . . . When Enlil finds he's wearing horns, I'll need your right hand to aid my war with heaven. If she's still breathing, which side will she be with?

[Laughs.]

Engidu: When she and I made jointure, it was you she wished to think it was, deceiving herself on purpose. Eui, eui! But she taught me speech sincerely, speaking of your fame as if you called for my friendship.

Gilgamesh: Yet I am guilty of your meat and beer. If I live, that sin will be expiated. —Go back to sleep. I'd be caught asleep myself right now if I were more than only one-third human.

Engidu: I've had sleep enough for one who isn't less than two-thirds brute.

Gilgamesh: Then join your share of humanity to mine! Let's double the manhood of this kingship! Multiply its liberty by two! The remaining necessity will be divided between law and nature, half-and-half. Let Ishtar have her sway over the things we do like other males; but with the guts of a twofold man we'll alter fate as if we wrote it! Pray share my follies!

[Engidu jumps up and finds the Rod and Ring, handing one to Gilgamesh, keeping the other. They dance.]

—I'll take the Rod. You take the Ring!

Engidu: The lion will serve the eagle, and share his prey. I can run like the wind, and smell water in a sea of sand.

Gilgamesh: I'll abandon my studio for the art of action, and lead the way to labyrinths; but you go first in reducing Amazons to kitties. Like wind we'll roam the world for stories, and leave this kingship to the queen!
[Engidu stops dancing.]

Engidu: But the child! Would you leave the child to that priest?

Gilgamesh: Child? What child?

Engidu: The child that has been started.

Gilgamesh: *[Pause.]* You say I've blurted out an heir? Me, a copyist in sculpture? —Is seed entrapped by honey? Passion made me clean forget! Ishtar has us by the orchids: she makes sure the jewel of games is played for stakes. Did the gods themselves decree this rape to make me ante up. —But wait, maybe there won't be a brat! Isn't it a game of odds?

Engidu: Not on Enlil's wedding night. I think he'll take title.

Gilgamesh: By god, he can't claim my by-blow! I'll tell the world what's mine! No more his than the Rector's! My miscreant won't be circumcised and raised for stud! He was alloyed with the rarest artist. It was I, not Enlil, that melted her casting.

Engidu: But if he saw you, no childbirth after all: no woman will be walking down these stairs! He may have already scorned the city's oblate with his vengeance. Divine wrath, not beatitude, has been her second visitation!

Gilgamesh: Then I'll rip my tadpole from her womb, as prematurely planted, and raise him to wrest that lethal fire from the lord high god. —Where's my axe? .Ê.Ê. I'll have to use your throwing stone for surgery. —Yet perhaps it's not too late! Enlil may be slow in raising his voltage. Come on! In a god-fight I'd like to have my foster-brother watching!
[Casts about for his axe without success. Takes up Engidu's bannerstone and starts for the stairs.]

Engidu: But now suppose the opposite. It's more likely that he's blind with rut. He'll take her second offering as the first and only. Let the eucharist run its course, without your death, or any other. —Besides, I may be the sire.
[Restrains Gilgamesh.]

Gilgamesh: *[Silence, followed by a burst of laughter.]*
I forgot that too! Everywhere we turn, your intuition outreasons mine. —You want a cub? Very well, you've jumped my claim in advance! We'll make the birthright yours. If he's born circumcised, the priest can't skin him alive.

Engidu: He'll look half baboon!
[Smiles.]

Gilgamesh: Your whelp will be the recognized successor. We'll stay to see him through, and have her rear him as a bard, memorizing all the feats of kingship.

Engidu: There can't be two of us.

Gilgamesh: We've already settled that. You're the father.

Engidu: Two kings, I mean.

Gilgamesh: Why not? Our will is free. Tomorrow's combat will be a double dance of the Isorectotetrahedron. Two points to hew each edge! We can double our talent for autonomy by halving the burden. Waiting for baby, the people will have you to love all the while I'm making them breed Euphrates to the Tigris! Together, back to back, we can face both ways and never be surprised!

[With bannerstone in hand, he repeats the movements of Tablet 2. Engidu responds in kind, tossing and whirling the IRTH.]

Engidu: With me to trust, you can sleep at last!

Gilgamesh: No, sleeping's still your job. You can sleep for two, and store it up like a lazy lion, for us both to draw on whenever we want to prolong our zest. Be my dreamer too. You dreamt a world of peace before Lil-Amin awoke you. But if I were now to sleep, Ishtar would cackle to high heaven that it was proof I'd been kept awake for seven years by lack of love.

Eber enters, in woeful

Eber: exhaustion, wailing, rending his garments, and tearing his hair.

Gilgamesh! —I find you too late already. —I wish it was my sons that's still alive instead of you. The apples of my eye all dead! My tribes all lost at once for good! —I'm too old to make any more baby boys for this history.

Gilgamesh: Who killed them? How do you know they're dead?
[Alarmed.]

Eber: I know nothing else. I can't find the soldiers either. I can't find anyone. This is such a hateful night that not even rumors reach my ear. —Help the Lord avenge my sons!
[More calmly.]

Gilgamesh: Perhaps vengeance is unnecessary, dear man. First Engidu and I will find them, dead or alive.
[Pats Eber on the back.]

Gilgamesh & Engidu: *Questing to and fro,
We'll count the trees
And search the seas
As far as camels go!*

Singing, **Gilgamesh and Engidu go off** arm in arm, with bannerstone and IRTH.

- Eber:** Captain! Where are the troops already? Hurry—my boys, your friends! May God lengthen your years, if you will only help!
- Norkid enters from the opposite side, followed at a distance by the straggling Troopers,** still buckling on their equipment.
- Norkid:** Here's the dawn patrol. They must have ended their lubricities. —Fall in, funnyboneses! Shake a leg! Strawberries and cream are too rich for your blood. Tomorrow cherries will be back in season. Dress it up, old vets! The Traders are missing. Their governor thinks they were ambushed on their way to the tents.
- Troopers:** —Waylaid is the word, wouldn't you say, boys?
 [Chuckling, giggling, and collapsing with laughter.] —They were still going strong when you routed us out. I've got to take my hat off to them. Nothing leaches the starch out of those merrymaking stags.
 —Of course they only drank a thimbleful, compared to us. But, next to those comedians, we're pikers when it comes to song and dance. Laugh? I thought I'd split a gut!
 —The girls did.
- Eber:** Girls! What girls? Where?
 [Shrieking.]
- Trooper 1:** Don't worry, sir. Nothing but a little New Year's symposium. Beer, widows, and woodwinds. We had for guests some nuns.
 [Pointing the way they'd come.]
- Eber:** You lie, goyim. Whoring! My sons?
- Norkid:** It's an unoriginal sin.
- Eber:** Oi, oi, my polluted seed! The serpent has struck at my stem!
Eber runs off to find his sons.
- Troopers:** *We the old boonfellows of the cup and the lance*
 [Breaking rank, they fall into a staggering shuffle and finish up on the ground sprawling with laughter.] *—offered those oddfellows a memorable chance*
—to share as our moonfellows in triangular dance,
—which made us all bedfellows in Messpot romance.!

Gilgamesh and Engidu return.

[Gilgamesh carries the fire-stick and drill, like a small bow and arrow; Engidu again wears the IRTH on his chest and holds the bannerstone.

Norkid: The lost have been found, in flagrante delicto, and the story is an old one. The Widows think our Traders worth their salt.

Norkid intercepts
Gilgamesh at the side
and continues to
explain the situation
sotto voce, both
laughing.]

Widows enter, beating cymbals, **with Traders** playing recorders, in a reeling snakedance, **trailed by Eber**, who is moaning and sprinkling his head with handfuls of ashes from his suspended skirts. As **Rector also enters**, still carrying Gilgamesh's axe, the Troopers miraculously revive and join the dance. **Optimates timidly reappear**, fascinated, but remain at the side. [The Rector abstractedly and vainly thumps for order with the butt of the axe. Then, at the horror of seeing Gilgamesh and Engidu in amity together, he rushes at them with axe upraised. With the bow

Rector: Perfidious traitor! Giszax clinches his grip on the city's liver, and you fawn like a cur. Infidel! You have betrayed the people of your own creator. Salt will blight her fields; wild goats will crop her barley down to the sand. Heaven again will close. May I never speak again if I don't fix reprisal as my highest joy! Blessed shall he be who dashes the brains of your children in our marketplace!

Gilgamesh blocks his
attack and grabs away
the axe, sending him
backwards across the
stage, right

through the dancers, so that he ends up on his knees, near the foot of the stairs, practically out of sight. This violence puts a stop to the dance, and all the dancers draw back to the right in motionless silence facing the double doors, except for the Troopers, who have sat down with exhaustion in the same place, amused at their own weakness, before realizing what goes on. The Widows thus lean against the Traders and rest their hands on the heads or shoulders of the Troopers. Throwing away the bow, Gilgamesh hands Engidu the recaptured axe and keeps the bannerstone. Together they work on the doors and succeed in prying them

Gilgamesh: Let's spring this cage! —Gods, we've come to set you free! Are you staring wildly at each other as I say it? Gilgamesh and Engidu are coming to get the Tablets of Fate! Beware the mortal blacksmiths: Engidu and Gilgamesh are about to strike off chains. Drop the soapstones of destiny!

open, only to reveal a
perfectly blank black
hole. Each with his
weapon in one hand,
with the

Engidu: Gilgadu on the warpath!

other they lob the Rod
and Ring into the
blackness like
grenades.]

Gilgamesh and Engidu disappear into the void. After an extended motionless silence, they reappear like pranksters fleeing with laughter, each carrying a Tablet, which they fling down and smash with their axes in a fast exultant version of the IRTH Dance. [Carried for a moment by the enthusiasm of the revived Troopers (now on their feet), the other dancers surge forward, excited and confused.]

Gilgamesh: Our dance of the twin tomahawk!

Engidu: I smell the feathers of an Iso-recto-tetra-hawk!

Gilgamesh: [He rips the IRTH from Engidu's neck and slings it toward the void, but it goes awry up the stairs.]
Ye gods that blow like the wind, you won't forget that Gilgamesh was here. The world is young again! Let us no longer construe each other's words. —My friends, it's not worthy of a pair of kings to dwell shrewdly domesticated in this delta of marshes. —Engidu, let's go find a cedar grove with a granite quarry, and fetch the young prince a lifetime heap of stone and timber! An axe to cut, an axe to hew!

Engidu: A blade for flesh, a blade for bone!

Engidu and Gilgamesh dance off, followed by the Troopers, Norkid, Traders, and Eber, just as Lil-Amin enters, descending the stairs in time to catch the IRTH. [The Urukians remaining, following the trajectory of the IRTH, turn to face Lil-Amin on the stairs. The Rector is exposed kneeling abjectly in her path, whom she blesses in passing with a vague motion of her left hand. Smiling to herself, she hangs the IRTH around her neck. As her people watch in awed silence, she closes and fastens the doors like

Lil-Amin: Vandals cannot disconcert our gods. Enlil is our father, and Enlil bides his time. The hour of Giszax is not yet come, but his felling is assured. For maiming the body of our motherland he shall be leveled to the dust, for insulting the gods of Sumer in the very house of Inanna, for suborning the consort she sent me.
a serenely abstracted housewife. All the while she is seen to be **growing pregnant.** She turns to the Rector.]
—Lift up your heart: the sacrifice was full, perfect, and sufficient. Enlil finds me blameless, and the anger of heaven will not fall upon you.

Rector: Save for strangers, all offences pardoned. Manifold sin and wickedness is remitted.
[Huskily, in customary form.]

Widows: & Optimates: *Amen.*

Lil-Amin: Like my mothers before me, I have been received into the blessed company of god's faithful brides, and I am absolved of mortal love by the beatitude of divine atonement. —It's still dark down here. Up on high, when I opened my eyes to the Morning Star, I saw dawn arising from far mountains.

Widow 1: We tried to feel your holy mystery: your horrified tremors, the cold breath of Enlil, his unknown weight and shape.

Lil-Amin: Sisters, you may well believe that my wedding night began in the quaking fear you have imagined: clammy snake, searing dragon, clawing griffin; crucified impalement, fatal agony—anything but what we pray for. Yet, as Enlil's claim was not denied, neither was my hope. His pinions rocked the stars above, yet beat as softly as an adoring swan's, and the blessing was impressed that inspired in me a new art—not of the weaver but of what is woven! Finally, in sixth or seventh heaven, festooned with a procession of beatitudes, the galaxy grew vague. . . .

[Finding the fire-bow and drill, with solemn playfulness she takes a shot in the direction Gilgamesh has taken. When the stick falls ludicrously short, she laughs.]

—He found my work was good, for after he drew back he did not leave me emptied of plenitude, but returned to the blessing in fresh tempo. That's how the incubus of private love is exorcised! Not once along the Milky Way did the name of Giszax halt my breath—though I shall live out my life as his spinster.

[Pats her belly.] —The child I carry is his god-daughter. She shall be empress of all the Sea-Lands. When I'm a crone at my tapestry, behind the altar, I'll still be teaching her what I have studied. Her works will put to shame the works of Giszax!

[To the Rector.] —It will take more than two king-bees to deprive this land of honeycombs. Tell the people that this year's sap and seed will flow. Children will come to birth, and there will be strength to bring them forth. Not in vain did I loosen my knees to the bridegroom and arch my throat, and press my eyelids closed, as I lifted up my spine to god. The bride you offered was not glorified in vain!

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

Lil-Amin goes out, followed by Widows and Optimates.

The Rector stands watching until they are out of sight; then **leaves oppositely**, ending the play.