

TABLET NINE

[Downstage right a simple cot inside a low lean-to open toward audience but initially obscured by a drop-curtain. Upstage left a small raised platform, empty at the outset.]

Berosus sitting as before. Enter upstage Gilgamesh (bloodstained), Eber, the Rector, and Norkid.

Eber: This is the wrath of Elohim!

Rector: It's the wrath of Inanna! Her temple was spared. Never before have the gods [Breathless.] shaken our land.

Norkid: Earthquakes are to be expected where I come from. So I suppose you think Mazda was always angry at us.

Gilgamesh: How much further damage? Have you inspected the walls? Any cracks in the tower glaze?

Norkid: No sign of that. Just a few leaks in some of the canal watergates.

Eber: Ten of the herders were killed by the cattle and about twenty of them seem to be dying. Inside the walls so many houses had collapsed that we can't yet count the dead. Most of the public wells are ruined. —But it's not the innocent gentiles that were meant to be punished!

Gilgamesh: This isn't the time to debate theodicy. Leave the dead and let the women worry about other casualties until the city is secure. Are the cattle rounded up?

Norkid: They're docile and harmless now the monster that started their stampede is dead. I must admit that such a huge aurochs was never seen where I come from. I'd like to know how he got into the stockyard before the quake! On the rampage he looked like a mammoth red-eyed lion, but he had neatsfoot hooves sharp as a gazelle's. He seemed much too canny for a wild bull that accidentally starts a domestic panic. The shaking ground may have loosened the gate but he tossed it off its hinges like an educated elephant. His horns were at least eight feet from tip to tip.

Enter Engidu
downstage left, more and more slowly, attended by **Lil-Amin and Widow 1**, (unseen by the other players), limping across to the lean-to. He lies down on the bed.

Gilgamesh: His mane was thicker than the length of my sword. That's why it took so long for Engidu and me to kill him. It was one of those horns that nicked Engidu's foot.

[To Eber.] We are very lucky not to have fared any worse.
—Send a caravan up river to get grain for the survivors' bread. We may have enough beer in your godown to tide us over till the water is cleared. Draw what you need from the treasury.

Eber leaves.
[To Rector.] —Why aren't you ministering to your people? Are you their pastor, or just a master of ceremonies? If they think that bull was sent by Enlil you can tell them that I've turned it into the greatest sacrifice ever offered in propitiation!

Rector: Not sacrifice but sacrilege, out in the streets! Never has there been such profanity!
Rector leaves.

Gilgamesh and Norkid
go off the opposite way
 upstage, conferring.

Engidu: [*Moaning softly.*]

Widow 1: There's no more bleeding but the smell augurs worse. He should have told you about the pain.

Lil-Amin: He imitates Gilgamesh in every bravado. He said the puncture was nothing worse than a manly scrape. But now the polluted blood has reached his head, already too late for any medicine I know. We can do nothing but apply my herbs to keep the fever down. His life will depend upon our oblations to Inanna.

Widow 1: Shall I go tell Gilgamesh?

Lil-Amin: Find him if you can. See if he'll listen to a woman. Say nothing to anyone else except Norkid. If Engidu's sickness gets out too soon the Rector will call up a riot before I can assure everyone that the earthquake was not meant for us. The people are frantic enough with grief and devastation. I must attend to the sacrifice. Those who fear I'm dead in the rubble can come and see me at the altar. But I won't leave him until you bring water and my bag of herbs.

[Widow 1 hurries off.]

Engidu: Why are you still here? Go away! Let your ape-man die in captivity! Better alone than watched by the one who lured him to mankind.

Lil-Amin: I am here to help you. You need silent rest.

Engidu: Help me! All too well I know that woman-words have deceitful meanings! You opened your robe to reveal your snare and made me learn that I was somewhat human! You cut my hair, you dressed me in clothes, you fed me meat and gave me beer to steal my strength. You tamed me for the world that thinks of death. Bitter sorrow comes too late!

Berosus: Engidu drifts into delirium.

Engidu: You were the first I saw of wordy kin! Must you also be the last? Where is Gilgamesh? It's not his fault you led me to him and death. But why doesn't he come see me die in his dungeon? You promised I would be his brother! Why does he leave me trapped like a lion in your woman-net without the strength of a hare and my thoughts too swift to remember?

- Lil-Amin:** You know I did not give you this sleeping sickness. Blame Gilgamesh for folly, not me for love! He led you into evil. I gave you dearest love. I brought you to Uruk for my people's sake. They still adore you for diverting Gilgamesh from his most oppressive ambitions. You are their champion. Let them need not grieve for you. You will live if you try to remember the love and friendship among us.
- Engidu:** The promise of that love and friendship was what made me betray the gazelles and lions who ran with me on the steppes! You charmed me into hunting their kind! Then Gilgamesh made me help him taunt the gods by killing Kumbaba and the bull of heaven! –Oh save me from the dust! [*Wailing.*]
- Widow 1 returns,**
running, with water and herbs.
- Widow 1:** My lady, please: I was intercepted by your brother the Rector and sent back to implore your immediate presence at the council. Gilgamesh refuses to consult the Optimates. They say the people cry out to be told what's happened to Engidu. Gilgamesh tells them it's more important right now to stop the looting and fix the gates. I'm so afraid of—
- Lil-Amin:** Then I must go. Engidu can't bear the sight of me! Give him all the water he can swallow.
- Widow 1:** Oh my lady, I'm sorry for you—and for us all!
- Lil-Amin:** Try singing him to sleep.
- Lil-Amin goes off.**
- Widow 1:** [*Wordless lullaby.*]
- [Ministers to Engidu and draws the curtain.]
- Berosus:** Engidu sleeps and dreams.
[Plays flute.] [*Gradually diminished humming.*]
- Widow 1:** Oh Inanna, do not let our savior die!
- [**Engidu reappears** from back of lean-to, perfectly healthy, in refreshed attire, facing upstage and seen only from behind.]
- Gilgamesh appears** stage-left in simple dress.
- Inanna appears** on platform (played by Lil-Amin lightly clothed as the goddess).
- Inanna:** I bear the blame by Father Enlil for allowing you to contaminate my godson, and to use him against Kumbaba the warden of heaven's axis. I have defended you against the wrath of every other god. Because Uruk is my city I have also been accused of overlooking your insubordinate architecture. Yet before the council of gods I pleaded that you were a stranger ignorant of Sumerian customs. I mean to persuade my peers to withhold their righteous retribution. I will bemuse them with excuses for your effronteries and transgressions, promising each of them such favors as lie within the realm of love. For you are like no other man or god. Let us find a bed together. I promise your willing acclamation by the blackhaired people as high king of all Sumer and the Sea-Lands.

- Gilgamesh:** As their beloved builder of walls and canals? As the gods' favorite acolyte? Or as your father's rival?
- Inanna:** Come with me to the tower's top. I will show you the sweep of your command from mountains to the sea. You shall have the means to rule all cities. Yours will be dominion over timber forests, bitumen pits, stone quarries, herds of cattle, flocks of sheep, water wells, steppes for grazing, fields for grain, and the fruit of all blossoming—everywhere between Tigris and Euphrates, and as far as you wish beyond them! You shall harvest the reeds and fishes of the Sea-Lands and build great ships to bring gold from Ophir!
- Gilgamesh:** Everything but liberty of will!
- Inanna:** I will forbid you nothing, not even the continued love of Lil-Amin my servant, nor of her handmaids.
- Gilgamesh:** Is that all that freedom calls for?
[Laughs.]
- Inanna:** What else can you imagine? Do you know who I am? Do you doubt my promises of power?
[Reveals her naked body.]
- Gilgamesh:** Who could doubt the power of your promise, which is not equaled by any wish in dream. I can see that you are the goddess: you cast no shadow, your eyes do not blink, your feet do not touch the ground, and there's no sweat on your brow. I further know that a deity speaks the truth of its own desire when it offers us its body. But in this case I regret that you face numinous disappointment.
- Inanna:** Are you too haughty to sew mortal seed in the queen of heaven?
[Covers herself totally.]
- Gilgamesh:** Right here in Uruk you will find such secretion otherwise available.
- Inanna:** It's not your child I want.
- Gilgamesh:** Then you ought not to be worshiped for fertility. They should praise your cunicular lust. But you envy our happiest women. Even the best of your matings with a mortal cannot convert your lovelessness to bliss. You will never know the beatitude you crave from god or man. Your body is spared women's inconveniences; so it's only compensatory justice that your freer passion should never culminate as theirs often do! As you found even with sweet Dumuzi, noblest of men, best of poets, a champion in the sport. In cruel disillusion you sent him down to dust. And all the others lured by a divinity's desire. I do not intend to end my days in thrall to your uxorious caprice or as the victim of thwarted ecstasy. Content yourself with peers who never sleep, who have never built a building or thought a new thought, whose minds are blank and clothes are always clean, whose garlands never wither, who never feel the reciprocity they miss in raping too swiftly the daughters of men.

- Inanna:** Revolting man! You hazard sacrilegious conceits like a pretentious shaman! As if you could possibly know anything about such mysteries when you're not a female of any species!
- Gilgamesh:** One night nine months before I was born in the mountains my mother was visited by two gods imitating men. That truth she told me later. So I know by blood a little what it's like to be a god. My feet touch the ground but I don't sleep much. But I might claim to be nearly half human in femininity! Lil-Amin too speaks of the experience as something opposite mine when I lose my wits in battle-rage. You should become more intimate with the priestesses that serve your temple.
- Inanna:** May Enlil blast your impiety! I will not beseech an ephemeral worm! You have seized my city scoffed at its laws! May you die in rubble, childless and alone, cursed by every god for insulting my generosity, for despising my accidental notice of your shape. You can't guess the devices I have to rob you of the fame you crave! If I were an earthling I'd give my life to be your assassin. But I will find a more painfully public drawn-out way to cut down your towering presumption!
- Gilgamesh:** Does Madam Fertility Muse threaten drought famine and pandemonium for her people? —Wait! Before you go, let Engidu pay a changeling's tribute to his godmother! You can have our trophy of your mammoth Bull of Heaven!
[Laughing rudely.]
[To Engidu.]
[Engidu throws a knot of heavy rope at her.]
—Flog her with the cod and pizzle! Go on, throw it in her lap! Even her father knows she's shameless!
- Inanna, Gilgamesh, and Engidu disappear.**
[Berosus plays flute.]
- Widow 1:** [Croons tenderly.]
Gilgamesh in former dress **comes on running.**
- Gilgamesh:** Where is Engidu? Is he really hurt? Where is he, woman!
[Widow 1 opens curtain to show Engidu tossing in delirium.]
Get out of my way.
- Engidu:** [Moaning.]
- Gilgamesh:** Engidu! Why didn't anyone tell me sooner?
[To Widow 1.]
[Gilgamesh kneels beside the bed.]
Leave those things. I'll watch tonight.
- Engidu:** No! Don't come near me! Now I know your heart! Always false brotherhood with nice words! ...When you said I was your friend Eber smiled like a father and called me Nimrod the mighty hunter. Norkid made me welcome to the soldiers. ...You kept me so much at your side that because of our likeness people called me the Good Gilgamesh. Passing in the street they began to say "We are not blind. That's the real Gilgamesh, disguised by Inanna as barbaric Engidu!"...

Berosus: So began in Engidu's delirium the legend's amalgamation of two figures. This hierodule watched and listened but she was an imaginative witness. Afterwards she told migrant traders disparate stories about the same personage.
[Widow 1 goes out.]

Gilgamesh: My dearest friend, I was pleased with the confusion. We have not ended our feats, for yet more fame in greater deeds than killing. You must get well soon, so that together we can astonish the gods with acts of peace.

Engidu: ...Your smiles grew false with jealousy of the people's love. Yet still you used me!
[Not listening.] Without me you could do nothing great enough to keep Uruk in docile subjugation. ...You were clever; I was just an uncouth brute, easy to deceive...

Gilgamesh: Engidu, are you saying what you really mean? How did I deceive you? How could I? Why on earth should I of all men have need to play you false as twin to my own heart? I wanted the people to love you! I saved your life and you saved mine! You were afraid when I was not; I was afraid when you were not! We loved the same woman! If you had cared about kingship I would have gladly shared the Rod and Ring!

Engidu: You have turned me against lions and aurochs, and even against the gods. Yet you never let me be my own man! What have I become but a savage in captivity, dying alone in this cage within the walls of a city I hate! ...You lured me with words that never meant what people told me they said.
[Gilgamesh raises his head to give him water but then meets agitated resistance as he gently presses him down again.]

Gilgamesh: You wrong me, Engidu—after all our time as loving equals! I who understand more than other men cannot guess what mistaken thought has turned you against me!
[Lays his head against Engidu's chest.]

Lil-Amin enters quickly

but pauses to watch from a short distance.

When Engidu notices her she comes to stand beside Gilgamesh.

Lil-Amin: The gods have taken his reason. We can only pray for him to sleep.

Gilgamesh: You pray. I cannot pray. Where is your magic now? The gods rule by doing nothing. The people prayed for him but their love cannot keep him alive! They are always answered by what they're told's the will of heaven.
[Impulsively he rises and rips from her neck the Isorectotrahedron, slinging it by the lanyard into the audience.] —This jewel I gave you is only my mnemonic symbol, not an amulet! A real rectotetrahedron changes shape in reason's nightmare! Life's edges and facets are never so neatly fixed. Our world is not a constellation in the sky! It slips away from us like an altering dream, less to be trusted than a river of moons. Let Euphrates drown every gem like this!

Lil-Amin: You can't throttle grief by recanting your own reason! If you can't pray to gods, proud Gilgamesh, pray to yourself. Even you may be capable of that! Pray to realize the fact that Engidu is dead.

Engidu: I go! You stay.
[Engidu dies.]

Gilgamesh: His eyes are clay. Inanna has killed him!

Lil-Amin: Your tears become you now, the only offering to gods I've ever seen you make.

