
Introducing **Gilgamesh**

Historical Background

The epic of *Gilgamesh* was written down on clay tablets in cuneiform (wedge-shaped) script at least 1300 years before Homer wrote *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. However, the first of these tablets was not discovered until excavations at Nineveh, begun in 1845, uncovered the library of Ashurbanipal, the last great king of Assyria (668–627 B.C.). Among the 25,000 tablets was the Assyrian version of *Gilgamesh*.

The epic gained international importance in 1862, when an expert in cuneiform published an outline of *Gilgamesh* along with his translation of part of the Assyrian version of the

flood. The similarity between the flood story in the *Gilgamesh* epic and the description of the flood in the Bible led archaeologists to intensify their search for more cuneiform tablets.

Today scholars have available tablets containing portions of the *Gilgamesh* epic from many of the ancient countries in the Middle East, dating from 2100 to 627 B.C.—including some recently found in the library of Ebla, the latest ancient kingdom to be discovered. Scholars believe that stories of the adventures of Gilgamesh that existed in the oral tradition of Sumer were first written down in approximately 2100 B.C.

Between 1600 and 1000 B.C., the epic had been inscribed in Akkadian (Babylonian), Hittite, and Hurrian translations, some following the Sumerian versions and some branching off into wider variations, but all keeping the Sumerian names of characters and gods. A priest by the name of Sin-leqi-unninni, who probably lived during this time, is given credit for creating the late Akkadian version of the epic. Scholars think that he took the available Sumerian tales and imposed a uniform focus upon them, so that a series of separate adventures became the dramatic story of Gilgamesh's search for immortality. Sin-leqi-unninni integrated the Sumerian flood story into the epic and also created the friendship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu.

Gilgamesh apparently was a real king of Uruk, in southern Mesopotamia, sometime between 2700 and 2500 B.C. At that period Sumer had city-states, irrigation, laws, and various forms of literature. The writings of the time reveal that the people valued justice, freedom, and compassion. The strong walls of Uruk are attributed to Gilgamesh, and he may well have ventured into the wilderness in order to bring timber to his region, for wood was a valuable building material that this region lacked.

The Sumerian view of the gods as unpredictable and therefore frightening reflects the unpredictable and disturbing nature of the world in which they lived. For example, the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers often radically changed their paths from season to season, a phenomenon that must have wreaked havoc on the farms and cities in the area. The flood in *Gilgamesh* is probably the specific, catastrophic flood that scholars think occurred in

southern Mesopotamia in approximately 2900 B.C. It became a popular subject in the literature of the time.

Traces of an earlier, matriarchal religion remain in *Gilgamesh* as well as in the *Enuma elish*, the Babylonian creation epic. For example, the Temple of Anu and Ishtar belongs to Ishtar alone. The priestess from the temple who is chosen to civilize Enkidu is highly esteemed in her society. Her role in the temple closely connects her with the Great Goddess or Mother Goddess and sanctifies her sexual relationships.

In addition, *Gilgamesh* depicts Ishtar as a Great Goddess. When she wants Gilgamesh to marry her, he refuses because he knows that marriage to the Great Goddess will bring him certain death. He further insults Ishtar by listing the ways she has killed many of her previous mates. Ishtar becomes furious with Gilgamesh and retaliates by contriving to cause his death. However, his friend Enkidu dies instead, unwittingly serving as a substitute sacred king.

The Earliest Hero

Gilgamesh is an unusual hero in that his major quest has an intellectual purpose: the acquisition of knowledge. In addition to possessing courage, he must have great determination, patience, and fortitude in order to reach his destination. After enduring physical hazards, he must wage a battle against despair when he learns that he cannot become immortal. He must find experiences that make life worthwhile, and he must find ways of perpetuating his name. Later heroes start by accepting what Gilgamesh questions; they are born into societies that have already determined the acceptable

ways in which a person can achieve fame and an immortal name.

Appeal and Value

Gilgamesh is the earliest major recorded work of literature, and Gilgamesh is the first human hero in literature. The epic has universal appeal among Western cultures because it reaffirms the similarities in human nature and human values across time and space. The epic reveals the importance of friendship and love, pride and honor, adventure and accomplishment, and also the fear of death and the wish for immortality. It speaks as clearly to us as it spoke to those who lived when it was written, almost 4,000 years ago.

Gilgamesh learns that the only type of immortality that he or any other mortal can achieve is lasting fame through performing great deeds and constructing lasting monuments. He also learns that life is precious and should be enjoyed to the fullest. What Gilgamesh discovers during his long and arduous journey, we too must learn in the course of our own lives.

Like Gilgamesh, we must fight the despair of failure and death. Like Gilgamesh, we must choose what we will value in life and have the freedom to make those choices.

Principal Characters*

GILGAMESH: king of Uruk who searches for immortality

LUGALBANDA: heroic father of Gilgamesh; earlier king of Uruk

NINSUN: goddess mother of Gilgamesh; priestess of Shamash

ENKIDU: best friend of Gilgamesh

HUMBABA: giant who guards the Cedar Forest of Lebanon

SIDURI: fishwife whom Gilgamesh meets on his journey

UTANAPISHTIM: king of Shurippak; survivor of the Sumerian flood

URSHANABI: Utanapishtim's boatman

*For a list of the Sumerian gods, see pages 152-53.

Gilgamesh

Chapter 1

Gilgamesh angers his people with his arrogance and selfishness. The gods create Enkidu to teach him humility.

Notice the strong walls of our city of Uruk! These walls were built by Gilgamesh on a foundation created in ancient times by the seven wise men, who brought great knowledge to our land. The top of our outer wall shines with the brightness of copper, but it is made of burnt brick. Now study the inner walls of

our city. Examine the fine brickwork. These walls, too, surpass all others! No human being, not even a king, will ever be able to construct more impressive walls than Gilgamesh built around our city of Uruk! Now approach the majestic Temple of Anu and Ishtar. No mortal, not even a king, will ever be able to build a structure as beautiful as the one Gilgamesh created! Climb up and walk upon the walls of Uruk. Examine the fine brickwork. Admire the majestic Temple of Anu and Ishtar. Gaze upon one man's supreme achievement!

Who was the Gilgamesh who built these walls of lasting fame? Who was the Gilgamesh who built this most majestic temple? Gilgamesh was the renowned king of the city of Uruk. To his people, Gilgamesh was a tyrant who became a great hero.

Gilgamesh left his city to learn how to avoid death, and he returned having learned how to live. In the course of his travels, he saw everything throughout the land. Because he thought about what he had seen, he came to know everything that makes a person wise.

When Gilgamesh returned, he inscribed his travels and his thoughts upon stone tablets and placed these tablets on the strong walls of Uruk. He described the time before and during the great flood. He described his long, tiring journey in search of everlasting life. And he revealed the hidden mysteries of life and death that he had discovered. He wanted his knowledge to help his people improve their lives.

Read what Gilgamesh inscribed in stone upon the strong walls of the city of Uruk so that you, too, may gain wisdom.

Gilgamesh was two-thirds god and one-third man. His mother was the wise goddess Ninsun. His father was the noble Lugalbanda, a mortal who had also been king of Uruk.

Gilgamesh was such a godlike person that his people knew the gods had favored him. Nintu, the great Mother Goddess who had fashioned the first human beings out of clay, had also created Gilgamesh. Radiant Shamash, god of the sun, had given him great beauty. Adad, god of storms, had given him great courage. Ea, god of wisdom, had given him the capacity to learn from his experiences and to become the wisest of men. Yet, despite his goddess mother and all of his divine gifts, Gilgamesh was not a god, but a man. Therefore, he was doomed to share the common fate of all human beings, which is death.

When Gilgamesh was a young king, he was as willful and fearsome as a wild bull. He was the supreme wrestler and warrior. He knew no fear. He had no respect for tradition. He used the sacred drum as he wished. He did whatever he wished even when it hurt others. The fact that his behavior disturbed his companions did not restrain him.

Finally the nobles in Uruk became very distressed by Gilgamesh's behavior. They complained to one another, "Gilgamesh is incredibly arrogant, both day and night. Is this the way our king should act? It is true that the shepherd of our strong-walled city should be bold, but a king should also be majestic and wise! Gilgamesh interferes in the lives of his subjects beyond his right as king. Even in the households of his nobles and warriors, he intrudes between husband and wife, between mother and daughter, and between father and son."

The heavenly gods heard the complaints of the nobles of Uruk and met in assembly to discuss Gilgamesh's behavior. Anu, father of the gods, called the Mother Goddess before the assembly and said, "You created the hero Gilgamesh, mighty and wild bull of a man that he is! Now create an equally strong and courageous man, Enkidu, to be just like Gilgamesh. Make the spirit in Enkidu's heart like that of the warrior god, Ninurta, so that it will match the untamed spirit in Gilgamesh's heart.

"Then send Enkidu into Uruk, and let these two giants among men fight with one another. Enkidu will teach Gilgamesh his proper place in the world. Gilgamesh must be forced to recognize that, godlike though he is, he is not a god. Once he learns that he has limitations like all human beings, then the people in the strong-walled city of Uruk will be able to live in peace."

When she heard these words, Nintu conceived in her mind the image of a second heroic man, whom she created in the form of the god Anu. She washed her hands and pinched off a hunk of clay. Very carefully she drew the design she had envisioned upon it and threw the clay upon the broad, grassy plain a three-day journey from Uruk. Thus she created the hero Enkidu.

Enkidu came to life as a fully grown man. In some ways he looked as much like an animal as like a man, for his entire body was covered with shaggy hair. Long hair sprouted abundantly upon his head like rich fields of wheat. Like the god of cattle, he clothed himself in animal skins. Enkidu lived like a wild creature, away from the company of human beings and among the animals of the plain. He was aware of neither people nor land. Like his companions, the gazelles, he fed upon the grass of the plain. Along with the wild beasts at the watering place, he pushed for his turn to drink.

One day a hunter, who lived by trapping the wild animals, discovered Enkidu drinking at the watering place with the wild beasts. Amazed by the sight of such a strange human being, the hunter returned to the watering place on each of the following three days. Each time, he stared in fascination when he saw Enkidu among the wild animals. Each time, the sight of the mighty savage so frightened the hunter that he took his hounds and returned to his home, where he sat in silence, terrified of the wild man.

Finally the hunter said to his father, "For the past three days, I have seen a wild man at the watering place who appears to have come out of the hills. He is so strong that surely he is the mightiest in the land. In fact, the spirit of Anu, father of the heavenly gods, must live within his body! From what I have been able to observe of his habits, he seems to wander over the hills. He feeds with the gazelles on the grass of the plain, and he drinks at the watering place with the wild beasts who gather there.

"I am too afraid to approach him," the hunter confessed, "and yet he is robbing me of my livelihood. He fills in with dirt the pits I dig, and he tears up the traps I set. He releases the beasts and the smaller creatures of the plain whenever my devices catch them, and I can no longer capture any game!"

His father replied, "My son, the heroic King Gilgamesh lives in the strong-walled city of Uruk, which is only three days' journey from here. No one is mightier than he is! Even this wild man of whom you speak cannot possibly equal his strength! Gilgamesh is so strong that the spirit of Anu must live within his body!

"Therefore, you must go to the strong-walled city of Uruk and tell Gilgamesh about this mighty wild man. Bring back a priestess from the temple and let her educate this savage man in the ways of human beings. Let her meet him at the watering place. He will be attracted by her beauty. Once he embraces her, the beasts on the plain will regard him as a stranger and will associate with him no longer. He will be forced to become a human being."

The hunter took his father's advice and followed the road to the strong-walled city of Uruk. As soon as the king heard the hunter's tale, he sent a priestess from the temple to teach the wild man how to act like a human being.

After a journey of three days, the hunter and the priestess reached the home of the hunter. They spent the entire day sitting by the watering place, but Enkidu never appeared among the wild beasts. Early on the second day, the hunter and his companion returned to the watering place. They watched as the wild beasts and the creeping creatures came there to drink. Finally Enkidu, the mighty savage who was accustomed to feeding upon the grass of the plain with the gazelles and drinking at the watering place with the wild beasts, arrived.

"There he is!" the hunter exclaimed. "That is the savage man I have brought you to see! As soon as he sees you, he will approach you. Do not be afraid, for I am certain he will not hurt you. Let him get to know you, and teach him what it is to be a human being."

Enkidu was fascinated by the woman, and he spent six days and seven nights with her. He forgot the grassy plain where he had been born, the hills where he had roamed, and the wild animals that had been his companions. Later, when he was ready to rejoin the wild beasts of the plain, they sensed that Enkidu was now a human being. Even the gazelles drew away from him in fright.

Enkidu was so surprised by their change in behavior that, at first, he stood completely still. When he tried to rejoin them, he found that he could no longer run with the speed of a gazelle. He was no longer the wild man that he had been. However, he had gained something in return for the speed that he had lost, for he now possessed greater understanding and wisdom. He returned to the woman, sat down at her feet, and looked into her face attentively.

Chapter 2

Enkidu and Gilgamesh fight and become friends.

The priestess said, "Enkidu, when I look upon you now, I can see that you have become wise like one of the heavenly gods. Why do you still want to roam over the grassy plains with the wild beasts? Leave this wild country to the shepherds and the hunters, and come with me. Let me take you into the strong-walled city of Uruk, to the marketplace and to the sacred Temple of Anu and Ishtar. In Uruk you will meet the mighty King Gilgamesh. He has performed great heroic deeds, and he rules the people of the city like a wild bull. You will love him as you love yourself."

Enkidu's heart longed for a friend, so he said, "I shall do as you suggest. Take me to Uruk, where the mighty king Gilgamesh rules the people like a wild bull. I shall boldly address him and challenge him to a wrestling match. I am the

strongest one!" I shall shout. "I was born on the grassy plain, and my strength is mighty!"

"Come then, Enkidu," the woman replied. "You must give up your wild ways and prepare to live like a man among other men. You must learn to eat the food other men eat, to wear the kind of clothes other men wear, and to sleep upon a bed instead of on the ground."

Placing her cape upon his shoulders, the woman took Enkidu's hand and, as a mother leads her child, led him into the nearby shepherd's hut. A number of shepherds immediately gathered around and offered him some of their bread and beer. But when Enkidu saw that the shepherds expected him to eat and drink as they did, he could only stare in embarrassment and gag at the unfamiliar refreshments. He could not bring himself to taste such food, for he had lived by sucking the milk from wild animals, and the strange smell and appearance of the bread and beer repelled him.

When Enkidu refused to eat the bread and drink the beer, the priestess said, "You must learn to eat this bread, for it sustains human life, and you must learn to drink the strong drink, for that is the custom in this land."

Enkidu accepted her advice, and when he had eaten and drunk he was happy. He then cut his hair, oiled his body, and put on the customary clothing of a man. He became truly human, and he looked like a young noble. "Before we leave for Uruk," he said, "I shall use my weapon to kill the wolves and the lions so the shepherds can rest at night."

Once Enkidu had done what he could to make the life of the shepherds easier, he and the woman began their three-day journey. "You will like the city of Uruk," she said to him. "The people dress in festive clothing as if each day is a holiday. The young men are strong and athletic, and the young women are perfumed and attractive."

"I shall point out Gilgamesh to you," she continued, "although you should recognize him. Like you, he enjoys life. He glows with manhood, and his whole appearance reveals his strength. He is stronger by far than you are, for he leads an active life both day and night. If he ever rests, no one is aware of it!"

"Enkidu, you must curb your arrogance," the priestess warned. "Do not be too bold with Gilgamesh! Shamash, god of the sun, loves him. Anu and Enlil, who rule the heavenly gods, and Ea, god of wisdom, have made him very wise. Even before we arrive from the country, Gilgamesh will be expecting you, for he will have seen you in his dreams."

Meanwhile, Gilgamesh approached his mother, the wise and beloved goddess Ninsun, and told her his dreams so that she could explain them to him. "Mother," he began, "I dreamed last night that I walked among the nobles on a beautiful evening. As the stars in the heavens sparkled above me, one star, in form like Anu himself, fell out of the sky. This star-being landed right at my feet and blocked my path."

"When I tried to lift it," Gilgamesh continued, "it was much too heavy for me. When I tried to push it away, I could not move it. There the star-being stood, unconquerable, right in the middle of our strong-walled city! The people of Uruk rushed from their homes and gathered around it, while my companions, the nobles, kissed its feet. Much to my surprise, I loved this star-being! I placed my

carrying strap upon my forehead, and with the help of my companions, I was able to lift it upon my back and bring it to you. However, when I placed it at your feet, you made it fight with me!"

Ninsun replied, "This star of heaven, in form like Anu himself, which suddenly descended upon you, which you could not lift and could not push away, which you loved, and which you placed at my feet and I made fight with you — this is, in fact, a man just like you, named Enkidu. He was born on the grassy plains, and the wild creatures have raised him. When Enkidu arrives in Uruk, you will meet him and embrace him, and the nobles will kiss his feet. Then you will bring him to me.

"Your heart will be joyful," Gilgamesh's mother continued, "for Enkidu will become your dearest companion. He is the strongest man in the land, with the strength of heavenly Anu. He is the kind of friend who will save his friend in time of need. The fact that you loved him in your dream means that he will always be your dearest friend. This is the meaning of your dream."

Then Gilgamesh said, "Mother, when I lay down again, I had another dream. This time, a strangely shaped axe lay upon the street within our strong-walled city, and all of the people of Uruk stood gathered around it. I loved it as soon as I saw it, so I picked it up and brought it to you. But when I placed it at your feet, you made it fight with me."

His wise mother replied, "Your second dream means the same as your first dream. The axe is the heroic Enkidu, who possesses the strength of heavenly Anu. When he arrives in Uruk, he will become your companion and your dearest friend."

Then Gilgamesh said, "It surely seems that, by Enlil's command, a dear friend and counselor has come to me, and I shall be a dear friend and counselor to him in return."

When Enkidu and the priestess were not far from the city, a strange man approached and looked as if he wished to speak with them.

"Please bring that man to me," Enkidu said to the woman. "I would like to know his name and why he has come."

The stranger said to Enkidu, "Our king, Gilgamesh, lives without any self-restraint. He thinks that he has the right to do whatever he chooses, without considering the rights of others and the traditions of our land. The assembly of the heavenly gods decreed at his birth that, as the king of Uruk, Gilgamesh would have the right to sleep with a bride on the first night of her marriage. Yet Gilgamesh has abused and extended this privilege. Therefore, the people of our city fear and resent him!"

When Enkidu heard this, his face became pale with anger. He said to himself, "When I meet this king who rules the people of Uruk like a wild bull, I shall teach him to know his proper place and to respect the rights and wishes of other people!"

Soon Enkidu entered the strong-walled city of Uruk, with the woman following close behind him. As he stood in the marketplace, the people of Uruk immediately gathered around the heroic-looking stranger and blocked his path.

"Why this man looks just like our king!" they exclaimed. "Look how similar his build is! He is not as tall, but his bones look stronger. The milk of the wild

creatures has given him prodigious strength. Surely he is the mightiest man in our land! Now the clamor of weapons in contests of arms will echo throughout Uruk!"

The nobles rejoiced. "A godlike hero has appeared in our city as a match for our own great king! Godlike Gilgamesh has met his equal!" they proclaimed.

That night, when Gilgamesh was walking toward the Temple of Anu and Ishtar, the two great men met in the marketplace of the land. As the king approached the temple, Enkidu placed himself in the middle of the gateway, gathered his strength, and stuck out his foot to prevent Gilgamesh from passing through the gate. Amazed and angered, Gilgamesh wrestled with the presumptuous stranger. For a long while, the two giants fought one another like two bulls. They shattered the gateposts and made the wall shake.

Finally, Gilgamesh bent his knee to the ground and turned away from Enkidu. His fury suddenly left him, for he realized that this presumptuous stranger must be the Enkidu of his dreams. His dreams had revealed the truth, for Gilgamesh knew that he had indeed met his match in Enkidu.

When he saw that Gilgamesh had turned away, Enkidu said with the greatest respect, "Hail to you, Gilgamesh, whom Enlil has made king of the people! Your mother, the goddess Ninsun, has given birth to a great son! You tower over those you rule!"

The two men then embraced each other and became the dearest of friends.

Chapter 3

Gilgamesh and Enkidu prepare to travel to the Cedar Forest and to meet the evil giant Humbaba.

One day Enkidu's eyes filled with tears, for his heart was sad. Gilgamesh, hearing his friend sigh bitterly, said to him, "Enkidu, my friend, why do your eyes fill with tears, and why do you sigh with such bitterness?"

Enkidu replied, "I am crying for my lost strength. When I lived among the animals upon the grassy plain, I was swift and strong. Here in the strong-walled city of Uruk, my arms hang useless by my side. Inactivity has turned me into a weakling!"

"I know how to heal the grief in your heart," Gilgamesh replied. "The fierce giant Humbaba lives at the base of the Cedar Mountain, home of the heavenly gods in the Cedar Forest of Lebanon in the land of the living. Come with me to slay him, and then we shall have banished all evil from the land."

"You cannot mean what you are saying," Enkidu replied. "You can speak with great courage because you have never seen Humbaba. Although I have never seen him either, I learned from the wild creatures about the Cedar Forest and the evil giant who guards it."

"The forest extends over an area of 30,000 square miles," Enkidu explained. "Its span is so great that a person can enter it and never find his way out again. And as for Humbaba, the very thought of fighting that monstrous giant fills my heart with horror! Enlil, ruler of the heavenly gods, has appointed him watchman. He preserves the Cedar Forest by terrifying anyone who dares to enter it."

His face is as fearsome as a lion's. His dreadful roar resounds throughout the forest like a river that is swollen with flood. His teeth are those of a dragon, and flames issue forth from his mouth. With each breath he consumes every reed and tree in his path. Nothing that burns can escape being devoured by that monster! Why would you choose to pit yourself against a being who is more powerful than you are?"

"I know that it is my fate to die, sooner or later," Gilgamesh explained. "Before my life comes to an end, I would like to make a name for myself. So I intend to climb the Cedar Mountain! When those in time to come remember the great names of the past, I would like my name to be among them. I will bring the names of the heavenly gods with us, so that they too will be remembered."

"We cannot enter the Cedar Forest," Enkidu repeated. "Humbaba watches over the forest without ever resting. He can hear the wild cows when they are 200 miles away."

Gilgamesh responded, "My friend, who can reach heaven? Only the gods live forever with radiant Shamash. The days of human beings are numbered, and whatever they achieve is like the wind! Why do you fear death when, like all human beings, it is your fate to die? What has become of your heroic strength? Is it not better to do your best to gain fame than to wait patiently and quietly for the day of your death? Fame and glory will give life to your name even after your death."

"If you are still afraid to fight Humbaba," Gilgamesh continued, "then let me walk ahead of you while you encourage me to be brave. Even if I fail, I shall have made a lasting name for myself. People will say of me, 'Gilgamesh died fighting the fierce giant Humbaba!'"

"I shall not walk behind you, my friend," Enkidu replied. "While you are traveling toward the land of the living, I shall remain in the strong-walled city of Uruk. I shall inform your mother of your great glory. Let the wise goddess Ninsun proclaim your fame to all the people! I shall inform your mother of your impending death. Let the wise goddess Ninsun weep bitter tears as she grieves for her lost son!"

"As for me, I do not choose to die," Enkidu continued. "I do not wish to be destroyed by fire. I am not ready to have the three-ply shroud cut. I am not ready to make that journey upon the Euphrates River."

Gilgamesh said, "Your fear fills my heart with sadness. With my own hands I shall kill Humbaba, cut down the cedars, and bring their fragrant wood to strong-walled Uruk. In this way, I shall make a lasting name for myself. I shall order the smith to forge new weapons for us: axes to chop and blades to shape the wood, and mighty swords to use against Humbaba. I wish to see this giant whose name fills our land with terror. I will overcome him in the Cedar Forest! Then all peoples will know how strong the King of Uruk is!"

Enkidu replied, "Oh, Gilgamesh, if your heart is set upon such an adventure and you are determined to enter the land of the living, then I will reluctantly accompany you. However, you must tell radiant Shamash. He is in charge of the Cedar Forest, and surely you will need his help."

So Gilgamesh chose two young goats, one white and one brown, and offered them to Shamash with a prayer. "Oh, heavenly Shamash, I wish to enter the

Cedar Forest of Lebanon in the land of the living, and I wish that you would help me."

"I know that your strength is great, Gilgamesh," radiant Shamash replied. "You are, indeed, a great warrior. But why are you attempting such an adventure? Why does the land of the living interest you?"

Gilgamesh tearfully answered, "Oh, radiant Shamash, please listen to my words. We human beings are not as blessed as the heavenly gods, for we cannot live forever. Every day in my city of Uruk, people die! When I look over the strong walls of my city, I see the Euphrates River bearing their dead bodies.

"Sooner or later even I, king though I am, shall have to face that fate. Even I shall have to make that last journey. Death makes the human heart heavy with grief. No matter how tall he is, a mortal cannot reach heaven. No matter how wide he is, a mortal cannot stretch over the earth.

"Yet before my life comes to an end," Gilgamesh concluded, "I would like to make a name for myself. I would like to enter the land of the living and climb the Cedar Mountain. When future generations remember the great names of the past, I would like my name to be among them. I will bring the names of the heavenly gods with me, so that your names too will be remembered."

Shamash heard Gilgamesh's words and accepted his tears as a sacred offering. The radiant god felt pity for Gilgamesh's human fate and was merciful to him. "I shall be your ally against Humbaba," he told Gilgamesh. "I shall confine in mountain caves the snake that poisons with its tongue, the dragon that scorches with its fire, the raging flood that destroys the land, and quick flashes of lightning that cannot be conquered. They will not be able to cause trouble for you during the course of your adventure."

When Gilgamesh heard the words of Shamash, his heart filled with joy. He called the elders of Uruk to assembly and informed them of his plan. They were not convinced by his enthusiasm.

"Your youthful spirit fills your heart, Gilgamesh," they said to their king, "but it has blinded your eyes to what you are doing. Listen to our counsel. We hear that the Cedar Forest extends over an area of 30,000 square miles. Who among human beings is brave enough to enter it? We hear that Humbaba is a creature to be feared. Who among human beings can face his weapons? The monster roars like a river swollen with flood, and his fiery breath brings death.

"Why do you want to face such a foe?" they asked. "You could not choose a more unequal contest! However, if we cannot convince you to change your mind, then go with our blessing. May your god, Shamash, protect you and bring you safely back to strong-walled Uruk!"

Gilgamesh knelt before radiant Shamash. Raising his hands in prayer, he said, "Heavenly Shamash, I am on my way. Guard my soul. Protect me and bring me safely back to Uruk. I am taking a road I have never traveled. I want to walk with joy in my heart."

Gilgamesh then set about recruiting some of his countrymen. "He who is responsible for a household, stay home!" he commanded. "He who is responsible for his mother, remain with her! However, if you are a single man and you would like to join me on this greatest of heroic adventures, I invite fifty of you to come

along with me into the land of the living, where Humbaba guards the Cedar Forest. There we shall slay the monster and banish all evil from the land!"

The men of Uruk obeyed Gilgamesh. Those who were the support of their families stayed behind, while fifty youths prepared to accompany Gilgamesh upon the great adventure.

Gilgamesh ordered the metalsmiths to cast the enormous bronze axe that he would call his "might of heroism," along with axes and swords for all his companions. Then he ordered servants to cut wood from the apple, the box, and the willow trees to be fashioned into other weapons and tools. When all of the adventurers had been properly equipped, Gilgamesh's servants brought their king his weapons. They gave him his bow, a quiver full of arrows, and an assortment of cutting and shaping tools, and they placed his axe, the "might of heroism," and his sword upon his belt.

When the group was ready to leave, the people cried, "May you return safely to our city!"

Then the elders gave Gilgamesh their final counsel. "Do not put too much faith in your own strength, Gilgamesh. Permit Enkidu to travel the road in front of you, for he knows the way to the Cedar Forest and he is experienced in battle. Let Enkidu precede you through the forest and over the mountain passes. Let his eyes see clearly that he may protect himself and you, for the person who treads first protects the friends and companions who follow behind him.

"At night," they advised, "before you rest, you must dig a well so that the water in your waterskin will always be fresh. Remember to offer cool water to radiant Shamash, and never forget to honor your father, Lugalbanda. Then, after you kill Humbaba, you must remember to wash your feet as the gods require.

"May your god go with you, Gilgamesh," the elders concluded. "May Shamash heed your prayers. May he open before your feet the obstructed path, the closed road, and the formidable mountain. May the night bring you nothing to fear. May your father stay with you and protect you. May you live to attain your wish."

Then the assembled elders addressed Enkidu, saying, "We, the assembly, entrust our king to you. Protect your friend and companion, and return him to us safely."

Once they had received the blessing of the assembly of elder nobles, Gilgamesh said to Enkidu, "Let us go before my mother, priestess of Shamash. The great queen Ninsun, who possesses broad knowledge and great wisdom, will surely send us forth with her blessing."

Hand in hand, the two friends entered Ninsun's chamber. Gilgamesh said, "Mother, I have determined to make a great journey that will take me upon a strange road to the Cedar Forest and the home of Humbaba. There I face a battle whose outcome is uncertain, for I shall attempt to kill Humbaba in order to remove all evil from the land. Each day that passes from the day of my departure until the day of my return, pray to Shamash on my behalf, for he too hates evil."

Ninsun put on her ceremonial robe, placed an ornament upon her breast, and put a diadem upon her head. She climbed the stairs to the top of the temple-palace, where she stood upon the roof and offered incense to radiant Shamash.

Raising her arms to the god of the sun, Ninsun cried, "Why have you given me a son like Gilgamesh? Why have you given him such a restless heart? Why would you have him make such a journey upon a strange road? Why must he face Humbaba in the Cedar Forest?"

She prayed, "Oh, Shamash, I ask you to protect my son each day that passes from his departure until his return. And when at the end of each day you go to your rest, commend my son to the watchers of the night! Protect him in the Cedar Forest as he slays the fierce Humbaba, for he will remove all evil from the land, and you also hate evil."

Ninsun then smothered the incense and called to Enkidu, "You are not my own child as Gilgamesh is, mighty Enkidu, but I am now formally adopting you. Go with my blessing, and return safely to Uruk."

Chapter 4

Gilgamesh and Enkidu reach the Cedar Forest and kill Humbaba.

Enkidu then said to Gilgamesh, "Let us be on our way. Follow me, and have no fear in your heart. I know the road that Humbaba travels and the place where he lives."

Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the young men walked a distance that would usually take six weeks in only three days. After sixty miles, they stopped to eat. When they had traveled another ninety miles, they prepared to spend the night. Then, before radiant Shamash they dug a well. They walked 150 miles each day and crossed seven mountains. Finally they arrived at the gateway to the Cedar Forest, which was guarded by Humbaba's watchman, whom they killed.

There Gilgamesh fell into a deep sleep. Enkidu prodded the king's body, but he did not awaken. He spoke to Gilgamesh, but he did not reply. "Oh, Gilgamesh," Enkidu cried, "how long will you lie here asleep? The young men of Uruk who have accompanied us are waiting for you at the base of the Cedar Mountain!"

At last Gilgamesh heard Enkidu's words and rose quickly to his feet. He stood upon the earth like a great bull, put his mouth to the ground, and bit the dust. Then he stood erect and clothed himself with words of heroism as if he were putting on his robe. "By the lives of my father, Lugalbanda, and my mother, Ninsun, who gave birth to me," Gilgamesh swore, "I shall not return to the strong-walled city of Uruk until I have entered the Cedar Forest in the land of the living and have fought with Humbaba, whether he is a man or a god! By the lives of my father, Lugalbanda, and my mother, Ninsun, who gave birth to me, may I achieve such glory that all who look upon me will view my deeds with wonder!"

"Let us call the young men and hurry, Enkidu," Gilgamesh continued. "We want to find Humbaba before he travels beyond our reach."

Enkidu replied, "Oh, let us not walk deep into the Cedar Forest! When I opened this gate, my hands became weak. I no longer have the strength to protect either you or myself!"

"Do not be afraid, Enkidu," Gilgamesh assured his friend. "You know how to fight, and you are experienced in battle. If you will just touch my robe, you will not be afraid of death, and your hands and your arms will regain their former strength."

"Now, come!" Gilgamesh commanded. "Let us go forward and face this adventure together. Be of good courage! When we come face to face with Humbaba, if we are afraid, we will conquer our fear. Even if we feel terror, we will conquer our terror. The man who walks in front protects himself and his companion. Even if he dies in the process, he has made a lasting name for himself. The man who is a coward is not at peace with himself and leaves nothing behind to give him a good name."

They found themselves at the green mountain. Without further conversation, they stood still and looked around them. When they looked at the entrance to the Cedar Forest, they noticed the tremendous height of the cedar trees. They saw that the path that Humbaba was accustomed to walking was straight and clear. They looked upon the Cedar Mountain, which was the home of the heavenly gods. The face of the mountain was covered with a luxurious blanket of stately, shade-bearing cedar trees.

That night, Gilgamesh awakened Enkidu at midnight and said, "I had a strange dream, Enkidu. A mountain crumbled and fell upon me. Then a fine-looking man appeared. He pulled me out from under the mountain, gave me water to drink, and then helped me to stand upon my feet."

Enkidu replied, "Your dream is good, Gilgamesh. Humbaba is the mountain that fell upon you. We shall seize him, kill him, and toss his body upon the plain."

The next day, when they had walked sixty miles in the Cedar Forest, they stopped to eat. After another ninety miles, they prepared to spend the night. Then they dug a well before Shamash. Gilgamesh approached the mountain with an offering of a fine meal and said, "Mountain, bring me a dream."

Gilgamesh fell asleep with his head upon his knees. Once again he found himself wide awake in the middle of the night. "Enkidu, my friend," he said, "I have had an awesome dream! It is so disturbing that surely it is not favorable! I dreamed that I seized a wild bull of the plains. When I grabbed it, the bull stirred up so much dirt that the dust made the sky dark. Then the bull seized me and sapped my strength so that I was forced to retreat before it. But once I was at its mercy, the bull gave me food to eat and water from its waterskin to drink!"

Enkidu replied, "The wild bull of your dream, my friend, is really heavenly Shamash. When we need his help, he will hold our hands. It is he who let you drink from his waterskin. He watches over you, and he will bring you honor. In your dream, radiant Shamash is encouraging us to accomplish one thing that will be remembered after we have died. Certainly the deed must be to slay the monstrous giant Humbaba! "

Gilgamesh then said to Enkidu, "When we approach Humbaba, what should we do about his servants?"

Enkidu answered, "My friend, first capture the mother bird, for without their mother, where can the chicks go? Therefore, let us first kill Humbaba. We can find and kill his servants later, for like chicks, they will run frantically around in the grass."

Gilgamesh listened to the counsel of his friend. In order to attract Humbaba's attention, he lifted his axe and cut down one of the cedars.

Although they were more than two miles away from Humbaba's cedar house, the giant heard the noise and became furious. He left his house and fastened his eye, the eye of death, upon the two friends. He shook his head warningly and roared, "Who has come here? Who is damaging the precious trees that grow upon my mountains? Who has cut down one of my cedars?"

At the sound of Humbaba's roar, Gilgamesh suddenly trembled with fear. Enkidu saw the terror in his heart and said, "My friend, remember the words you spoke to the people of Uruk! Remember why we have made this journey! Now let courage enter your heart, and prepare to kill this monstrous giant!"

Gilgamesh gathered his courage and called out to Humbaba, "I, Gilgamesh, king of Uruk, have felled your cedar! By the lives of my father, Lugalbanda, and my mother, Ninsun, who gave birth to me, I have come to the Cedar Forest in the land of the living in order to fight you to the death and banish all evil from the land!"

Then Shamash from high in heaven spoke to Gilgamesh and Enkidu. "Approach Humbaba, and have no fear. Just do not let him enter his house." Shamash then hurled mighty winds upon Humbaba. Eight winds—the great wind, the north wind, the south wind, the whirlwind, the storm wind, the chill wind, the tempestuous wind, and the hot wind—arose against the fierce giant and beat against him from all sides so that he was unable to move in any direction.

Meanwhile, Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the young men began to fell the cedars, trim their crowns, bundle them, and lay them at the foot of the mountain. When Gilgamesh had felled the seventh cedar, he found himself face to face with Humbaba.

Gilgamesh pushed the monstrous giant against the wall of his house and gently slapped his face as if he were pressing a kiss on him.

Humbaba's teeth shook with fear as he pleaded, "Heavenly Shamash, help me! I know neither my mother, who gave birth to me, nor my father, who reared me. In this land of the living, it is you who have been my mother and my father!"

"Gilgamesh!" Humbaba then entreated. "I swear by the life in heaven, the life upon the earth, and the dead in the nether world that I shall subject myself to you and become your servant. I shall let you cut down my trees and even build houses with them."

As he listened to Humbaba's pleas, Gilgamesh felt pity for the giant. To Enkidu, the king said, "Should I not let the trapped bird flee the cage? Should I not let the captured man return to his mother?"

Enkidu said to Gilgamesh, "Do not listen to Humbaba's pleas! Do not let him talk you into freeing him, for he is a clever and dangerous enemy. He must not remain alive! The evil demon Death will devour even the greatest of human beings if he does not use good judgment. I assure you that if you let the trapped bird flee the cage, if you let the captured man return to his mother, then you most certainly will not return to Uruk and the mother who gave birth to you!"

"Enkidu," complained Humbaba, "you are only a servant and yet you have spoken evil words about me!"

However, Gilgamesh listened to Enkidu's wise counsel. He took his axe, the "might of heroism," and his sword from his belt. Then he struck Humbaba upon the neck. Enkidu also struck the monstrous giant upon the neck. With the third blow Humbaba fell to the ground, and Enkidu sliced off his head. For six miles round about, the cedars echoed the sound of Humbaba's body hitting the earth. Gilgamesh and Enkidu stood amazed that they had actually killed the watchman of the Cedar Forest of Lebanon.

Gilgamesh then continued into the forest, where he cut down Humbaba's cedar trees. The young men of strong-walled Uruk cut and tied them in preparation for their return to the city.

Chapter 5

Gilgamesh refuses to marry Ishtar, the goddess of love and fertility. She retaliates by sending the ferocious Bull of Heaven into Uruk. Gilgamesh and Enkidu kill the bull. Enkidu insults Ishtar and then becomes ill and dies.

When Gilgamesh returned to strong-walled Uruk, he cleaned and polished his weapons. He unbraided his dirty hair, washed it, and threw it back loosely over his shoulders. He then changed into clean clothes. Finally, he wrapped his royal, fringed cape about his shoulders, fastened it with a sash at his waist, and placed his crown upon his head.

When the goddess Ishtar saw Gilgamesh dressed in his royal clothing, she admired his great beauty and said to him, "Come marry me, Gilgamesh! You will be my husband, and I will be your wife."

She added, "I shall harness for you a jeweled and golden chariot, with golden wheels and brass borns. Storm demons will be your mighty steeds and will pull your chariot. The fragrance of cedar will greet you when you enter our house. Kings, princes, and nobles all will bow before you, kiss your feet, and bring you the fruits of the plains and the hills as tribute. Even the mountains and the plains will pay tribute to you. Your goats will give birth to triplets, your sheep to twins. Your colts will have the strength of burden-bearing mules. The horses that pull your chariot will be famous racers. The ox that pulls your plow will have no equal."

"And why should I marry you?" Gilgamesh asked. "You have harmed everyone you have ever loved! Listen, for I am happy to list your lovers for you. You loved Tammuz when you were young, but you left him and caused him to weep year after year. You struck the spotted shepherd-bird that you loved and broke his wing. Now, year after year, he stays in the orchards and cries, 'My wing! My wing!' Then you loved a stallion that was famous in war. First you whipped and spurred him into galloping twenty-one miles, and then you made him drink muddy water, causing him to die! His mother still weeps for him.

"Then," Gilgamesh continued, "you loved the herdsman who placed piles of ash-cakes at your feet, and every day he killed the finest of his goats for your

pleasure. You rewarded his love by striking him and turning him into a wolf! His own shepherd boys drove him away from the flocks, and his hounds bit into his legs. Then you loved your father's gardener of the palm trees. Every day he brought you baskets of ripe dates for your table. You turned him into a mole and buried him in the earth, where he cannot move either up or down! If I let you love me, you would only treat me as poorly as you have treated all of your other lovers!"

Gilgamesh added, "You are like a pan of white-hot coals that go out in the cold. You are like a back door that fails to keep out the blasts of a tempest. You are like a palace that crushes the king within it. You are like a headdress that does not cover the head. You are like an elephant that shakes off its carpet. You are like pitch that blackens the one who carries it. You are like a waterskin that soaks the person who carries it. You are like a limestone rock that falls from the stone wall. You are like a shoe that pinches the foot of the one who wears it."

Ishtar became enraged as she listened to his words. She went up to heaven and tearfully complained to her father, Anu. "Father," she began, "Gilgamesh has hurled great insults upon me! He has recounted to my face all of my wicked deeds!"

Anu replied, "I believe that you started the quarrel and caused Gilgamesh to tell you of your shameful deeds."

Undaunted by his criticism, Ishtar pleaded, "Father, please give me the Bull of Heaven and let me use it to kill Gilgamesh. If you refuse, I shall break the bolts and smash the gates of the Underworld, letting them stand open. I shall cause the dead to rise to the world above, where they will eat among the living and outnumber them."

Anu replied, "If I give you the Bull of Heaven, there will be seven years of famine in the land of Uruk. Have you gathered and stored enough grain to feed the people through those lean years? Have you grown enough grass for all the animals?"

Ishtar said, "Yes, Father, I have stored grain for the people, and I have provided the beasts with grass to last seven lean years."

Then Anu gave Ishtar the Bull of Heaven, and the goddess led the bull into the strong-walled city of Uruk. When the bull snorted, pits opened in the earth and 200 young men of Uruk fell into them and died. With its next snort, more pits opened in the earth and 200 more young men of Uruk fell into them and died. With its third snort, the bull sprang upon Enkidu.

Enkidu leaped up and seized the Bull of Heaven by its horns. The bull foamed at the mouth and blew its foam into Enkidu's face. Then it struck him with the tassled end of its tail. Enkidu held fast, and Gilgamesh came to his aid. As the two heroes fought with the bull, Enkidu chased it and hung onto the thick part of its tail. Gilgamesh finally killed it by thrusting his sword between its neck and its horns. Then the two friends tore its heart from its body and dedicated it to Shamash.

Ishtar then climbed upon the strong walls of Uruk and shouted, "Woe to Gilgamesh, for he has insulted me by killing the Bull of Heaven!"

Upon hearing these words, Enkidu tore off the right thigh of the Bull of Heaven and threw it in the goddess' face. "If I could capture you as I captured this bull," he shouted to Ishtar, "I would treat you as I have treated it!"

Ishtar then gathered the temple women and mourned over the right thigh of the Bull of Heaven. Meanwhile, Gilgamesh gathered the armorers, the craftspeople, and the artisans and told them to take the parts of the bull they could use. Gilgamesh himself kept the valuable horns and hung them in his bedroom. He then made an offering of oil to honor his dead father, Lugalbanda.

Then the two friends washed their hands in the Euphrates River and rode together through the market street of Uruk. The people gathered to gaze upon them, and singers sang praises. Gilgamesh asked, "Who is the best of the heroes? Who is the most noble among men?"

The people replied, "Gilgamesh is the best of the heroes! Gilgamesh is the most noble among men!"

That evening Gilgamesh held a joyous celebration in the palace to mark their victory over the Bull of Heaven. During the night Enkidu had a dream. He awakened Gilgamesh and said, "My friend, listen to my dream. The great gods, Anu and Enlil, wise Ea, and radiant Shamash took counsel together. Anu said to Enlil, 'Because Gilgamesh and Enkidu have killed Humbaba and the Bull of Heaven, the one who removed the cedars from the mountain must die!' Enlil replied, 'Gilgamesh will not die, but Enkidu should die.'"

Enkidu's dream made him ill with fear. With the coming of day, he raised his head and wept before radiant Shamash. With tears streaming down his face also, Gilgamesh said, "Oh, dear Brother! Why would the gods spare me and punish you? Shall I sit down at the door of the spirits of the dead and never be able to see you, my dear brother, again?"

Enkidu cursed the events in his life that had brought him to the point of death. Raising his eyes, he said, "Oh, you gate to the Cedar Forest that hurt my hands! How I admired your size and your beautiful, fragrant cedar! Your wood is unsurpassed in all the land! Surely a master craftsman built you. But if I had known, oh gate, that your beauty would bring about my death, I would have set upon you with my axe and destroyed you!"

"And Shamash," Enkidu continued, "I ask you to destroy the power and wealth of the hunter. May his life displease you. May the beasts escape from the traps he sets. May his heart be sad."

Enkidu then said, "I curse you, young woman of the temple, most of all and for all time to come! May you never have a house that pleases you. May you eternally be forced to live in the dust of the crossroad. May the desert be your bed. May you be unwelcome where other women gather. May the shadow of a wall give you your only comfort. May thorns and brambles tear your feet. May the refuse of the road, the dirty and the thirsty, strike your cheek. May the drunkard soil with his vomit any place you enjoy."

When radiant Shamash heard these words, he called down from heaven. "Enkidu, why do you curse the young woman of the temple? She gave you food worthy of the gods and drink worthy of royalty. She clothed you with fine garments and led you to your best friend, Gilgamesh."

The god continued, "And has Gilgamesh not treated you like a king? He has given you a royal bed on which to sleep. He has seated you in comfort at his left hand. He has honored you and has encouraged the princes of the earth to kiss your feet. When you die, he will make the people of Uruk weep over you. Sorrow

in their hearts will then overcome any thought of joy. He will make his people serve you even after your death. When you depart, Gilgamesh will let his hair grow long and will wander over the grassy plains clad in a lion skin."

When Enkidu heard the words of Shamash, his heart became calm. "I who have cursed you shall now bless you, woman of the temple," he said. "May kings, princes, and nobles love you. May you receive jewels and gold. May anyone who does not respect you be punished. May poverty find his storehouse and his home. May the priest let you enter the presence of the gods."

Still feeling sick, Enkidu lay down all alone. The next morning he said to Gilgamesh, "My friend, last night I had another dream. The heavens groaned, and the earth replied. While I was standing alone between heaven and earth, a young man with a very dark face and with claws like the talons of an eagle leaped upon me and overpowered me. Then he transformed my arms into the wings of a bird. He led me along the road of no return into the House of Darkness and Dust, which no one can leave once he has entered it."

Enkidu continued, "Those who live there dwell in eternal darkness, and there is no way to return to the land of the living. Their food consists of clay and dust. They are clothed with wings, like birds. I saw many people there who had been royalty during their lives on earth. All of the rulers I saw had removed their crowns, for they are of no use in the House of Darkness and Dust."

By the end of the day following Enkidu's unfavorable dream, he was ill. For the next twelve days he remained in bed, and his suffering increased. Finally he called Gilgamesh to his side and said, "The goddess Ishtar has cursed me! I shall not die honorably like one who falls in battle."

Gilgamesh cried, "May the bear, the hyena, the panther, the tiger, the deer, the leopard, the lion, the oxen, the deer, the ibex, and all the wild creatures of the plain weep for you. May your tracks in the Cedar Forest weep for you unceasingly, both night and day. May the Ula River, along whose banks we used to walk, weep for you. May the pure Euphrates, where we used to draw water for our waterskins, weep for you."

Gilgamesh continued, "May the nobles of strong-walled Uruk weep for you. May the warriors of Uruk weep for you. May those in Uruk who praised your name weep for you. May those who provided grain for you to eat weep for you. May those who put salve on your back weep for you. May those who put beer in your mouth weep for you. May the young woman of the temple who put fragrant oil upon you weep for you."

Gilgamesh's heart overflowed with grief and loneliness when Enkidu died. The king said, "Oh, elders of strong-walled Uruk, listen to me! I weep for my friend Enkidu. I moan bitterly like a wailing woman. An evil demon has robbed me of my dearest friend. He was like the bow in my hand, like the dagger in my belt, like the axe and the sword at my side, like the shield that protects me, like my ceremonial robe, and like my glorious royal decorations."

"Oh, Enkidu," Gilgamesh said to the body of his dead friend. "You chased the wild creatures of the hills and the panther of the grassy plains! Together we conquered all things! We climbed the mountains. We seized and killed the Bull of Heaven. We overthrew Humbaba, who lived in the Cedar Forest. What kind

of sleep has come upon you, Enkidu, that you cannot hear me? You do not lift your head. When I touch your heart, it does not beat!"

Gilgamesh covered his friend in rich clothing and veiled him as a bride is veiled. First he roared over Enkidu's death like a lion. Then he cried over him like a lioness deprived of her cubs. Back and forth before Enkidu's body he paced, tearing out his hair and flinging off his clothing as if it were unclean.

With the first glow of dawn, Gilgamesh issued a summons throughout the land for coppersmiths, goldsmiths, jewelers, and engravers. "Create a statue of my friend Enkidu," he commanded. "Choose jewels for his breast and fashion his body from the purest gold."

Then Gilgamesh said to his friend, "Oh, Enkidu, I gave you a couch of honor on which to lie. I seated you on a seat of ease at my left, so that the princes of the earth would kiss your feet. I shall make the people of strong-walled Uruk weep over your death. These once joyful people will now lament and be sad, and they will perform services for you. And once you are gone, I shall let my hair grow long and roam over the grassy plains clad in a lion skin."

Chapter 6

Gilgamesh goes to Utanapishtim, the survivor of the great flood, to learn how a human being can gain immortality. He travels through a long, dark tunnel, receives advice from the fishwife Siduri, and finally is taken by boat to Utanapishtim.

Gilgamesh wandered the grassy plain, bitterly weeping over the death of his dearest friend. "When I die," he said to himself, "my fate will be just like Enkidu's! Grief tears at my heart, and fear of death gnaws at my stomach. I must travel as quickly as my feet will take me to the home of Utanapishtim (*uta*: he found + *napishtim*: life), who is called the Faraway. He is a human being just as I am. Yet he has found everlasting life and has joined the assembly of the heavenly gods. Surely he can teach me how to live for days without end!"

Gilgamesh traveled alone across the grassy plain and the scorching desert. One night, upon a mountain pass, he was confronted by two lions. The sight of them flooded his heart with terror. Raising his head to the moon, Gilgamesh prayed, "Oh, Sin, god of the light that brightens the night sky, protect me!"

Then Gilgamesh courageously drew the dagger from his belt and raised the axe in his hand. Approaching the beasts as straight as the flight of an arrow, he killed them, skinned them, and chopped them into pieces. He wrapped his body in their warm skins, for his own clothing had already become torn and tattered. He ate some of their flesh, for the food he had carried with him no longer could sustain him.

After many weeks of travel over land and sea, Gilgamesh came to Mount Mashu, whose twin peaks reach to the roof of heaven and guard Shamash as the sun rises and sets each day. There he found scorpion-men guarding the gate to the mountain. The halos around their heads dazzled the mountain itself, and

their glance could kill any human being their eyes fixed upon. The sight of these guards caused Gilgamesh's heart to flood with terror. However, he forced himself to gather his courage and continue forward.

When they saw Gilgamesh approaching, one of the scorpion-men called to his wife, "This man who has come before us has flesh like the heavenly gods! He must be one of them!"

The scorpion-woman replied, "No, only two-thirds of him is god; one-third is human. The man who stands before you is Gilgamesh, king of strong-walled Uruk."

The scorpion-man then addressed Gilgamesh. "Child of the gods, why have you made such a difficult journey to this distant place? Tell me why you have wandered so far over land and sea."

Gilgamesh replied, "I have come to find Utanapishtim, the Faraway. I know that he has found everlasting life and has joined the assembly of the heavenly gods. I wish to talk with him about life and death."

The scorpion-man said, "Gilgamesh, no human being has ever found Utanapishtim! It is beyond the courage of any human being to make the journey! In order to reach the Faraway, you must first travel through a tunnel deep within the mountains. The tunnel extends for thirty-six miles in darkness black as pitch. From one rising of the sun to the next, no light penetrates that darkness."

Gilgamesh took the words of the scorpion-man into his mind and into his heart, but he was not dissuaded from making the journey. "I intend to take that path," he said. "Neither pain, nor sorrow, nor tears, nor extreme cold, nor scalding heat will stop me! Open the gate of the mountain so that I can continue my journey!"

The scorpion-man replied, "I shall open the gate of Mount Mashu to you, Gilgamesh. Go in safety, and may your feet bring you a safe return as well!"

Gilgamesh entered the tunnel of Mount Mashu. He kept the words of the scorpion-man alive in his mind and in his heart so that knowledge of what lay before him would lessen his fear of the darkness.

Gilgamesh traveled from east to west as the sun travels each day. When he had walked three miles, so thick was the darkness that he could see nothing ahead of him and nothing behind him, for there was no light. When he had walked nine miles, so thick was the darkness that he could see nothing ahead of him and nothing behind him, for there was no light. When he had walked eighteen miles, so thick was the darkness that he could see nothing ahead of him and nothing behind him, for there was no light.

When he had walked twenty-four miles, he was weary and impatient, and he cried out in protest. So thick was the darkness that he could see nothing ahead of him and nothing behind him, and still there was no light.

When Gilgamesh had walked twenty-seven miles, so thick was the darkness that he could see nothing ahead of him and nothing behind him, for still there was no light. But he could now feel a wind blowing into his face, so he quickened his steps. When he had walked thirty-three miles, he saw the rose color of dawn in the sky in front of him, and by the time he had walked thirty-six miles, the sky ahead of him was bright from the light of the sun.

Upon leaving the tunnel, Gilgamesh came upon an orchard of jewel-bearing trees. The jeweled fruits and foliage dazzled his eyes as they sparkled in the sun-

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light. A light wind helped show off their beauty by leading them in a graceful dance among their branches. Gilgamesh gazed in fascination at the glorious garden. For a short while, he forgot his grief and his pain, his fatigue and his fear. He was certain that he had entered the garden of the heavenly gods.

While Gilgamesh gazed in wonder at the orchard, radiant Shamash looked down from the sky and saw a human being clothed in animal skins. When he realized that the figure he saw was that of Gilgamesh, he became concerned. Shamash approached Gilgamesh and said, "Where are you going? You will not find the life for which you are searching."

Gilgamesh replied, "After wandering over the grassy plain and the scorching desert, must I lay my head in the heart of the earth, where there are no stars and no sun, and sleep the endless sleep? I want my eyes to feast upon the sun! I want its light and its warmth to fill my heart with joy! Light drives away the darkness!"

Shamash then left Gilgamesh to his journey, and in a short time, Gilgamesh reached the sea. There he saw the fishwife Siduri living in a cottage by the shore of the deep sea.

Siduri was sitting in her yard, gazing into the distance, when she noticed the haggard-looking, shaggy-haired stranger clothed in animal skins. When she saw that he intended to talk with her, Siduri's heart flooded with fear. She said to herself, "This man looks like a murderer! I wonder where he is going!" Obeying the counsel of her heart, she got up, locked the door of her house, and barred her gate with the crossbar.

Gilgamesh, watching her, picked up his pointed staff and placed his hand on the gate. Then he said, "Fishwife, what do you see that has made you bolt your door and bar your gate? Tell me, or else I will shatter your gate and smash your door!"

"I am Gilgamesh, king of strong-walled Uruk," he continued. "I have overthrown and killed Humbaba, who guarded the Cedar Forest in the land of the living. I have seized and slaughtered the Bull of Heaven, and I have slain the lions who guarded the mountain passes."

Siduri said, "If you are indeed the hero you say you are, then why are your cheeks so pale and your face so gaunt? Why do you look like a stranger who has traveled here from afar with the ravages of heat and cold seared upon your face? Why does grief tear at your heart and fear gnaw at your stomach? And why do you roam over the grassy plain and the scorching desert searching for the home of the wind?"

Gilgamesh replied, "Oh, Fishwife, I have crossed the mountains from the east, as the sun rises, and I have roamed like a hunter over the grassy plain and the scorching desert. I have had to kill the bear, the hyena, the lion, the panther, the tiger, the stag, and the ibex. I have eaten the flesh of wild beasts and crawling creatures, and when my clothing hung about me in tatters, I had to wrap my body in their skins.

"Why should I not look as I look and wander as I wander?" Gilgamesh continued. "Enkidu, my friend, whom I dearly loved and who endured all kinds of hardships with me and helped me conquer all things, has met the fate of all human beings. Ever since Enkidu died, I have felt that he took my life with him on his journey to the House of Darkness and Dust!"

Gilgamesh concluded, "Because Enkidu has died, I fear my own death! How then can I be silent? How then can I be still? My friend, whom I dearly loved, has returned to clay! In time, must I also lay my head in the heart of the earth, where there are no stars and no sun, and sleep the endless sleep? Oh, Fishwife, now that I have seen your face, do not make me see my death, which I dread!"

Siduri replied, "Gilgamesh, where are you roaming? The life that you are seeking you will not find. When the heavenly gods created human beings, they kept everlasting life for themselves and gave us death.

"So, Gilgamesh, accept your fate," Siduri advised. "Each day, wash your head, bathe your body, and wear clothes that are sparkling fresh. Fill your stomach with tasty food. Play, sing, dance, and be happy both day and night. Delight in the pleasures that your wife brings you, and cherish the little child who holds your hand. Make every day of your life a feast of rejoicing! This is the task that the gods have set before all human beings. This is the life you should seek, for this is the best life a mortal can hope to achieve."

"You may have given me wise counsel, Fishwife," Gilgamesh replied. "Nevertheless, tell me, which is the way to Utanapishtim, the Faraway? Living on the shore of the sea as you do, you must be able to tell me the signs that mark the way. If necessary, I shall cross the deep sea. Otherwise, I shall continue to roam like a hunter over the grassy plain and the scorching desert."

Siduri replied, "Gilgamesh, there is no way to cross this deep sea! Since the beginning of time, no one who has come here has been able to travel over these waters."

Then Siduri added, "I have thought of one possibility. Perhaps Urshanabi, the boatman of Utanapishtim, would be willing to help you. He possesses sacred stone figures, which he keeps in the forest. If he will permit you to accompany him, I advise you to cross the deep sea with him. If not, you must withdraw and return to your strong-walled city of Uruk."

When Gilgamesh heard these words, anger flooded his heart. He drew the dagger from his belt and raised the axe in his hand. He entered the forest and sought to threaten the boatman who possessed the sacred stone figures. He found the sacred images, but not the boatman. He approached the images as straight as the flight of an arrow and in his rage he shattered them.

Urshanabi, who was close by, saw the gleam of Gilgamesh's dagger and heard the sound of the destruction. He ran to Gilgamesh and asked, "Who are you, and what are you doing here? Why do you look like a traveler from afar, with the ravages of heat and cold seared upon your face?"

Gilgamesh replied, "You must be Urshanabi! Gilgamesh is my name, and I am king of the strong-walled city of Uruk. I have crossed the mountains from the east, as the sun rises, and have come a long way. My friend, whom I dearly loved, has returned to clay. I am afraid that, in time, I also must lay my head in the heart of the earth and sleep the endless sleep.

"Urshanabi, show me the road to Utanapishtim, the Faraway!" Gilgamesh pleaded. "If necessary, I shall cross the deep sea. Otherwise, I shall continue to roam like a hunter over the grassy plain and the scorching desert. Oh, Urshanabi, take me to Utanapishtim!"

Urshanabi replied, "Your angry hands have hindered the sea journey. In your rage, you have destroyed the sacred stone images that enable me to cross the deep sea without touching the Waters of Death. Go into the forest, cut 120 poles, each 100 feet long, and bring them to me."

Gilgamesh took the dagger from his belt, raised the axe in his hand, and went into the forest. After he had returned to Urshanabi with the poles, the two men climbed into the boat, cast off into the waves of the deep sea, and drifted away. In three days they covered the distance it would have taken another craft a month and a half to cover. Then they found themselves at the Waters of Death.

Urshanabi said to Gilgamesh, "Take one of the poles and push us forward, but be careful not to let your hand touch the Waters of Death!"

Gilgamesh could use each pole only once if he wished to keep his hand completely dry, so it was not very long before he had used up all 120 poles. Then he pulled up his tunic and held it aloft as a sail.

While they were sailing upon the Waters of Death, Utanapishtim spied them far in the distance. "Why have the sacred stone images of the boat been broken?" he asked himself. "Why is someone riding in the boat who is not her master?"

When the boat landed, Utanapishtim, the Faraway, looked upon Gilgamesh and said, "Who are you, and why have you come here? And tell me, why are your cheeks so pale and your face so gaunt? Why do you look like a traveler from afar, with the ravages of heat and cold seared upon your face? Why does grief tear at your heart and fear gnaw at your stomach? And why do you roam over the grassy plain and the scorching desert searching for the home of the wind?"

Gilgamesh replied, "My name is Gilgamesh, and I am king of the strong-walled city of Uruk. I have crossed the mountains from the east, as the sun rises, and have come a long way. Why should my cheeks not be pale and my face drawn? Why should I not look like a traveler from afar, with the ravages of heat and cold seared upon my face? Why should my heart not be torn with grief and my stomach gnawed by fear? And why should I not roam over the grassy plain and the scorching desert searching for the home of the wind?"

"Enkidu, my dear friend, who chased the wild creatures of the hills and the panthers of the plain, who scaled the mountains with me, who endured all kinds of hardships with me and helped me conquer all things, who helped me seize and slaughter the Bull of Heaven and overthrow and kill Humbaba in the Cedar Forest, Enkidu, whom I dearly loved, has met the fate of all human beings."

Gilgamesh continued, "I wept over Enkidu's body for seven days and seven nights. I hoped that my sorrow and my pleas would arouse him from his endless sleep. The burden of my friend's death weighs heavily upon my heart. Ever since Enkidu died, I have felt that he took my life with him on his journey to the House of Darkness and Dust.

"Because Enkidu has died, I fear my own death! How then can I be silent? How then can I be still? My friend, whom I dearly loved, has returned to clay! In time, must I also lay my head in the heart of the earth, where there are no stars and no sun, and sleep the endless sleep?"

"My eyes have seen little of sweet sleep, and my joints have felt much pain," Gilgamesh concluded. "I have roamed like a hunter over all lands, including the

grassy plain and the scorching desert. I have crossed high mountains and choppy seas to come face to face with you, Utanapishtim. I wish to talk with you about life and death. I know that you have found everlasting life and have joined the assembly of the gods. I too wish to live on earth forever. Teach me what you know, so I can live as you do!"

Utanapishtim, the Faraway, replied, "Oh, Gilgamesh, do we build a house that will last forever? Do we seal arguments forever? Do brothers divide property into equal shares forever? Does hatred persist forever? Does the river rise and flood its banks forever? Should no one experience death? Since ancient times, nothing has been permanent. The shepherd and the noble have an identical fate — death."

Utanapishtim concluded, "When the heavenly gods gather in assembly, they decree the fate of each human being. The gods determine both life and death for every human being, but they do not reveal the day of anyone's death."

Chapter 7

Utanapishtim tells Gilgamesh about the great flood: how it came about, what it was like, and how he survived.

Gilgamesh said to the Faraway, "I know that you can live for days without end, Utanapishtim, but your features look the same as my own. Nothing about you looks strange; you resemble me in every way. I had expected that you would wish to do battle, but here you are, lying lazily upon your back. You appear to feel as I do, no longer interested in contests with the sword or with the bow. Tell me, how did you acquire everlasting life? How did you join the assembly of the heavenly gods?"

Utanapishtim replied, "Gilgamesh, I will reveal to you a secret of the gods." And so he began his tale.

You are familiar with the city of Shuruppak, on the banks of the Euphrates River. When both the city itself and the gods within it were already old, the gods decided to bring forth a great flood. Enlil, ruler of all the gods, called them together in assembly.

"The people who live upon the broad earth have become numerous beyond count, and they are too noisy," he complained. "The earth bellows like a herd of wild oxen. The clamor of human beings disturbs my sleep. Therefore, I want Adad to cause heavy rains to pour down upon the earth, both day and night. I want a great flood to come like a thief upon the earth, steal the food of these people, and destroy their lives."

Ishtar supported Enlil in his wish to destroy all of humanity, and then all the other gods agreed with his plan. However, Ea did not agree in his heart. He had helped human beings to survive upon the earth by creating rich pastures and farmland. He had taught them how to plow the land and how to grow grain. Because he loved them, he devised a clever scheme.

When Ea heard Enlil's plan, he appeared to me in a dream and said, "Stand by the wall of your reed hut, and I will speak with you there. Accept my words and listen carefully to my instructions. I will reveal a task for you."

I found myself wide awake, with Ea's message clearly etched in my mind. So I went down to the reed hut and stood with my ear to the wall as the god had commanded. "Utanapishtim, king of Shuruppak," a voice said. "Listen to my words, and consider them carefully! The heavenly gods have decreed that a great rainstorm will cause a mighty flood. This flood will engulf the cult-centers and destroy all human beings. Both the kings and the people whom they rule will come to a disastrous end. By the command of Enlil, the assembly of the gods has made this decision.

"Therefore," Ea continued, "I want you to abandon your worldly possessions in order to preserve your life. You must dismantle your house and construct a giant ship, an ark that you should call *Preserver of Life*.

"Make sure the ship's dimensions are equal in length and width," Ea counseled. "Build it of solid timber so the rays of Shamash will not shine into it. Take care to seal the structure well. Take aboard your wife, your family, your relatives, and the craftspeople of your city. Bring your grain and all of your possessions and goods. Take the seed of all living things, both the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens, aboard the ship. Later, I will tell you when to board the ship and seal the door."

I replied, "Ea, my lord, I will do as you have ordered. However, I have never built a ship. Draw a design of this ark on the ground for me, so that I can follow your plan. And when the people of Shuruppak ask me what I am doing, how shall I respond?"

Ea then replied to me, his servant, "I am drawing the design of the ship upon the ground for you as you have asked. As for the people of Shuruppak, tell them, 'I have learned that Enlil hates me so that I can no longer live in your city, nor can I place my feet anywhere in that god's territory. Therefore, I will go down to the deep and live with my lord Ea. However, Enlil intends to shower you with abundance. After a stormy evening, you will find the most unusual birds and fish, and your land will be filled with rich harvests.'"

With the first glow of dawn, I began to construct my giant ship. The people of Shuruppak gathered about me with great interest. The little children carried the sealing materials, while the others brought wood and everything else I would need. By the end of the fifth day of hard labor, I had constructed the framework for my ship. The floor space measured an entire acre. The length, width, and height each measured 200 feet.

I divided the height of the ark so that the interior had seven floors, and I divided each level into nine sections. I hammered water plugs into it and stored supplies. I made the craft watertight. Every day I killed cattle and sheep for the people and feasted the workers with red wine, white wine, and oil as though they were water from the Euphrates. We celebrated each day as if it were a great holiday!

Finally, on the seventh day I completed my preparations and moved the ship into the water. When two-thirds of the ship had entered the water, I loaded into it whatever remained that I intended to take with me. This included what silver and gold I possessed and what living things I had. I put aboard my family and relatives. I put aboard all of the craftspeople. I put aboard animals of the field, both wild and tame.

Ea had given me a time by which I had to be ready to depart. He had said to me, "When Adad causes the heavens to darken with terrible storm clouds, board the ship and seal the entrance."

So I watched the heavens carefully. When they looked awesome with the gloom of an impending storm, I boarded the ship and sealed the entrance with clay. Long before the storm began to rage upon us, we cast off our ship's cables and prepared to let the sea carry us wherever it would.

The people of the land watched, bewildered and quiet, as Adad turned all that had been light into darkness. The powerful south wind blew at his side, uniting the hurricane, the tornado, and the thunderstorm. It blew for a full day, increasing speed as it traveled, and shattered the land like a clay pot.

In order to observe the catastrophe the heavenly gods lifted up their torches so that the land might blaze with light. But the storm wind raged furiously over the land like a battle. It brought forth a flood that buried the mountains and shrouded the people. No person could see another, and the gods looking down from heaven could not find them either. Its attack ravaged the earth, killing all living creatures and crushing whatever else remained.

As the heavenly gods watched the flood waters pour forth upon the land and destroy everything that inhabited the earth, they too became frightened. They took refuge in their highest heaven, the heaven of Anu. There they crouched against the outer wall, trembling with fear like dogs. Nintu, the Mother Goddess, wept for the people who lived on the earth.

The goddess Ishtar cried out for the victims of the flood like a woman in labor. "All that used to exist upon the earth in days of old has now been turned to clay," she moaned, "and all because I added my voice to Enlil's in the assembly. How could I agree with the order to attack and destroy my people when I myself gave birth to them? Now the bodies of my people fill the sea like fish eggs!"

Humbled by the enormity of their deed, the heavenly gods wept with Ishtar. For seven days and seven nights the stormy south wind raged over the land, blowing the great flood across the face of the earth. Each day and each night, the windstorms tossed my giant ship wildly about upon the tumultuous sea of flood waters. On the eighth day, the flood-bearing south wind retreated, and the flood waters became calm. Radiant Shamash ventured forth once again. He spread his sunlight upon the heavens above and the earth below and revealed the devastation.

When my ship had rocked quietly for awhile, I thought that it would be safe to open a hatch and see what had happened. The world was completely still, and the surface of the sea was as level as a flat roof. All humanity except us had returned to clay. I scanned the expanse of the flood waters for a coastline, but without success.

As Shamash brought his rays of light and warmth inside my ship, I bowed my face to the ground before the powers of the universe. They had destroyed the world, but they had saved my ship. I knelt in submission and respect before Shamash, who nourishes human beings with his healing rays. In gratitude for our survival, I sacrificed an ox and a sheep to the heavenly gods. Then I sat and wept, letting my tears course freely down my face.

My ship floated upon the waters for twelve days. When I next opened the hatch and looked outside, far in the distance in each of the fourteen regions a mountain range had emerged from the surrounding waters. In time my ship came to rest, secure and stable, upon the slopes of Mount Nisir.

For the first seven days, Mount Nisir held my ship fast, allowing no motion. On the seventh day, I set free a dove and sent it forth. The dove could find no place to alight and rest, so it returned to the ship. Next I set free a swallow and sent it forth. The swallow could find no place to alight and rest, so it too returned to the ship. Then I set free a raven and sent it forth. The raven could see that the waters had receded, so it circled but did not return to my ship.

Then I set free all living things and offered a sacrifice to the heavenly gods. I set up fourteen cult-vessels on top of the mountain. I heaped cane, cedarwood, and myrtle upon their pot-stands, and I poured out a libation to the gods. They smelled the sweet aroma and gathered around me like flies. I prostrated myself before Anu and Enlil.

Then Ishtar arrived. She lifted up the necklace of great jewels that her father, Anu, had created to please her and said, "Heavenly gods, as surely as this jeweled necklace hangs upon my neck, I will never forget these days of the great flood. Let all of the gods except Enlil come to the offering. Enlil may not come, for without reason he brought forth the flood that destroyed my people."

When Enlil saw my ship, he became furious with the other gods. "Has some human being escaped?" he cried. "No one was supposed to survive the flood! Who permitted this?"

Ninurta, the warrior god, said to Enlil, "Do not be angry with us. Only Ea knows everything. Only he could have devised such a scheme!"

Ea then said to Enlil, "You are the ruler of the gods and are wise. How could you bring on such a flood without a reason? Hold the sinner responsible for his sin; punish the person who transgresses. But be lenient, so that he does not perish! Instead of causing the flood, it would have been better if you had caused a lion or a wolf to attack human beings and decrease their number! Instead of causing the flood, it would have been better if you had caused disease to attack human beings and decrease their number! Instead of causing the flood, it would have been better if you had caused famine to conquer the land. That would have weakened human beings and decreased their number!"

"It was not I who revealed the secret of the great gods," Ea said craftily. "Utanapishtim, the most wise, had a dream in which he discovered how to survive your flood. So now, Enlil, think of what to do with him!"

I bowed my face to the earth in fear and submission before Enlil. He took my hand, and together we boarded my ship. Then Enlil took my wife aboard the ship and made her kneel at my side. He placed himself between us and touched our foreheads to bless us.

"Until now," Enlil said, "Utanapishtim and his wife have been human beings. From this time forward, they will live like the heavenly gods. I have brought down for them everlasting breath so that, like the gods, they may continue to live for days without end. Utanapishtim, the king of Shuruppak, has preserved the seeds of humanity and of plant and animal life. He and his wife will live far to the

east, where the sun rises, at the mouth of the river in the mountainous land of Dilmun."

Utanapishtim concluded the story of his adventure. "That is how it came to pass that my wife and I became like the heavenly gods and will live for days without end. Enlil himself conferred everlasting life upon us. But Gilgamesh, king of strong-walled Uruk though you are, who will call the heavenly gods to assembly for your sake so that you can find the everlasting life you are seeking?"

Chapter 8

Utanapishtim challenges Gilgamesh to go without sleep for a week. When Gilgamesh fails the test, Utanapishtim gives him a magic plant and sends him on his way home. Gilgamesh loses the plant before he arrives in Uruk, but he returns home safely.

Utanapishtim, the Faraway, said to Gilgamesh, "If you wish to become like the heavenly gods and live for days without end, you must first possess the strength of a god. Even though you are mighty, I will show you that, like all human beings, you are weak. Starting with this night, I want you to remain upon your feet and stay awake for seven nights and six days."

Gilgamesh obediently squatted down and tried to stay awake. Despite his best intentions, sleep blew upon him like a soft mist and conquered him.

Utanapishtim said to his wife, "Look at this hero who wants everlasting life! Sleep fans him like a soft mist!"

Utanapishtim's wife counseled her husband. "Touch Gilgamesh so that he will awaken and return safely to his strong-walled city. See to it that he will be able to return to his land the way he came, entering through the gate by which he left."

The Faraway responded, "In time, I shall do as you advise. Meanwhile, Gilgamesh will try to deceive you by telling you he has not slept at all. We must devise proof of his slumber to show him how weak he really is. Each day, I want you to bake him a loaf of bread and place it by his head. And record how long he sleeps by placing a mark upon the wall behind him each day."

So each day that Gilgamesh slept, Utanapishtim's wife put a loaf of bread by his head and made a mark for that day upon the wall behind him. By the morning of the seventh day, Gilgamesh was still asleep. Six loaves of bread were lined up in a row by his head and there were six marks on the wall. The first loaf had dried out, the second had spoiled, the third had become soggy, the crust of the fourth had turned white, the fifth had a moldy cast, the sixth was still fresh in color, and the seventh was warm, having just been removed from the oven.

Utanapishtim touched Gilgamesh as his wife placed the seventh loaf of bread next to the others. Gilgamesh awoke and said, "I had hardly fallen asleep when you touched me and awakened me!"

Utanapishtim replied, "Gilgamesh, count the loaves of bread by your head so that you will realize how many days you have slept! Your first loaf is dried out, the second has spoiled, the third is soggy, the crust of the fourth has turned

white, the fifth has a moldy cast, the sixth is still fresh in color, and I awakened you just as my wife put the seventh loaf, still warm from the oven, by your head."

Gilgamesh groaned in resignation and said, "What should I do now? Where shall I go? Now that the robber Death is holding my limbs, I know that Death hides in my bedroom and I shall never escape it! Wherever I place my feet, Death will be there with me! I shall never become like the heavenly gods and live for days without end!"

Utanapishtim replied, "Let your heart not despair, Gilgamesh. It is true the heavenly gods have decreed that you, like all other human beings, cannot live for days without end. They have not granted you life everlasting. But Anu, Enlil, and Ea have granted you other gifts.

"The power to be unsurpassed in might they have granted you. The power to be skilled in wrestling they have granted you. The power to be skilled with the sword, the dagger, the bow, and the axe they have granted you. The power to be like a devastating flood in battle they have granted you. The power to lead attacks from which no one can escape they have granted you.

"The power to be unrivaled in heroism they have granted you. The power to seize and slaughter the Bull of Heaven they have granted you. The power to enter the Cedar Forest in the land of the living, to overthrow and kill Humbaba, and to fell the cedars they have granted you. The power to make the long, difficult, and dangerous journey to meet with me they have granted you.

"And as if extraordinary might and heroism were not sufficient gifts, the power to be supreme among human beings they have granted you. The power to rule your people as king and to be the greatest of leaders they have granted you. The power to bring light or darkness upon your people they have granted you. The power to free people or enslave them they have granted you. The power to teach your people and lead them to wisdom they have granted you.

"Therefore," Utanapishtim counseled, "cast away fear and sorrow. Rejoice in your heart that the heavenly gods love you and have smiled upon you!"

Utanapishtim then turned to his boatman and said, "Urshanabi, take Gilgamesh to the washing place that he may cleanse himself. Let him wash his long hair until it is as clean as snow. Let him remove his animal skins and let the deep sea carry them away, so that the beauty of his appearance may be seen. Let him replace the band around his head with a new one, and let him put on a new cloak to cover his nakedness. Then accompany him on his journey back to strong-walled Uruk."

Urshanabi took care of Gilgamesh as the Faraway had directed. When Gilgamesh was clean and newly clothed, the two of them climbed into Urshanabi's boat and prepared to sail away.

Utanapishtim's wife then said, "Gilgamesh made a long, difficult, and dangerous journey to meet with you. In appreciation of his effort, what gift will you give him to take back with him to his city?"

Utanapishtim asked Urshanabi to bring the boat close to the shore. Then he said, "Gilgamesh, because you have made a long, difficult, and dangerous journey in order to meet with me, I shall send you back to strong-walled Uruk with a secret thing created by the heavenly gods. The plant that you see growing deep in the water there is like the rose. Its thorns will prick your hands when you try

to pick it. However, if you can gather that plant, you will hold in your hands the gift of everlasting youth. This plant cannot make you live forever, but it will keep you young and strong all the days of your life."

Gilgamesh replied, "I can gather the plant if you will give me two heavy stones." He tied one stone to each of his feet and placed his dagger between his teeth. Using a pole to push the boat out into the deep water near the plant, he jumped overboard. The stones pulled his body down into the deep water where he could reach the plant. He picked it successfully even though it pricked his hands. Then he cut the heavy stones from his feet and let the water carry him up to the surface of the sea.

Gilgamesh climbed into the boat once again, stowed the plant safely, and set off with Urshanabi. They successfully crossed the waters of death; in three more days, they covered the distance that would have taken another craft a month and a half.

In time they saw the cottage of Siduri and knew that the first part of their journey was behind them. Being tired and hungry, they steered the boat toward an inviting shore and beached it.

To protect his plant, Gilgamesh removed it from the boat and carried it with him. He wandered over the land, enjoying the freedom of moving about on firm ground and stretching his legs. He followed a freshwater stream inland until it formed a pool. There he put the plant upon the ground along with his clothes and went for a refreshing swim.

A serpent in the water smelled the appealing fragrance of the plant. It glided out of the water, slithered up the bank, took hold of the plant with its mouth, and carried it back into the water. As it returned to the water it shed its skin, emerging younger and fresher looking.

By the time Gilgamesh noticed what had happened, it was too late to save the plant. He sat down and wept. Then he took the hand of Urshanabi and said, "For whom have my hands labored? For whom does the blood of my heart work? I have obtained nothing for myself. I have only helped the serpent! Now the tide will carry the plant back into the depths of the sea!"

After composing himself Gilgamesh continued, "Since it is impossible to retrieve the plant, I must become resigned to my loss. We shall leave the boat on the shore as we had planned and continue our journey overland toward strong-walled Uruk."

When they had walked sixty miles, they stopped to eat. After another ninety miles, they prepared to spend the night. After many days and nights they saw the strong walls of Uruk in the distance. As they walked toward the city, Gilgamesh explained to Urshanabi, "Uruk is composed of four sections: the city, the orchards, borderland, and the precinct of the Temple of Anu and Ishtar."

As they entered the gates, Gilgamesh said, "Urshanabi, I want you to notice the strong walls of our city of Uruk. I built these walls on a foundation created in ancient times by the seven wise men, who brought great knowledge to our land. The top of our outer wall shines with the brightness of copper, but it is made of burnt brick. Now study the inner walls of our city. Examine the fine brickwork. These walls, too, surpass all others! No human being, not even a king, will ever be able to construct more impressive walls than I have built around our city of

Uruk! Now approach the majestic Temple of Anu and Ishtar. No mortal, not even a king, will ever be able to build a structure as beautiful as the one I have created! Climb up and walk upon the walls of Uruk. Examine the fine brickwork. Admire the majestic Temple of Anu and Ishtar. Gaze upon one man's supreme achievement!"

Gilgamesh inscribed these travels and these thoughts upon stone tablets and placed these tablets on the strong walls of Uruk so that his people could gain wisdom and remember him.