

Ashtar, Mistress of Secrets

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Act One

Setting the scene for the vindication of Ashtar

In an old temple in the city of Sumer
Resides Ashtar, Astarte, Ishtar, Eana a
throned queen
Her countenance glowing in beauty
Her body wrapped in the symbols of majesty
and power
She holds the lapis lazuli scepter in one hand
And the seals of the kingdom in the other.

The virgins of the temple surround her in ceremonial dress, their faces covered in sheer veils worshipfully dancing in the midst of
Clouds of burning incense and myrrh.
The dance is to the beat of drums that rise and subside beaten by two handmaids seated to the right and the left front- stage. Visitors are pouring the essence of nardine at the feet of the goddess manifested in the queen. They

are burning the oil of carnations and marine amber at her feet. They arrive bearing baskets full of the grapes and apples and apricots of the orchards and the oranges of the valley. With one gesture from the queen all movement stops and the virgins fall to their knees front stage:

-Today, every complaint and every plea and every oath is brought to silence. All roles are reversed for today Ashtar speaks a tragedy as grand and awesome as the gods themselves. Who has said that the gods do not need to be heard? Who said that the stories of the gods are less tragic than those of mortals?

Ashtar stepping out of her silence:

-I am a woman just like you
A woman from the loins of the gods
A woman from the wombs of women
A woman who loved and so

Shone like a shooting star in the dark
And in the heart of the underworld I fell.

My eyes fell on Tammuz
I the goddess of earth, the sensual,
The merry, the delicious one
Loved Tammuz an insane love
Tammuz the god of vegetation and plenty
The god of growth and reproduction
In the city of Akkad
The holiest of Sumer's cities
We were drawn to each other
Madly and we fulfilled our union
In delicate embrace that lasted the
Whole of winter. Tammuz was minding
His stock under the shade of the Arida tree
In otherworldly fields. His stock invisible
To the eyes of mortals
The animals of earth he would save from
The burning sun of noon.
It was that sun that burnt in my body
When my eyes first fell on Tammuz...

To meet Tammuz I bathed in cool water
With sweet scented soap I rubbed my body
And wore the robes and symbols of power
I knew how to call Tammuz to desire
Just as I know how to carry the house
And the sanctuary into joy and song
The people of Sumer called on me
To open up the wombs of women to
Receive their children and so Tammuz
And I decided to take our marriage vows
In the city of Sumer. The women had
To follow in the footsteps of the two gods'
Union and get prepared to awaken men's
Instincts to pleasure without stint.

All the men had to follow in the footsteps
Of Tammuz the god of reproduction and growth
He who is held in the yoke of Nana
And her magic.
For the sake of Sumer's men and women
We held the rituals of our divine marriage
Before I met Tammuz.
I had already given my thirsty sensual

Body to all men alive on earth
Now I only desired one man alone
He in whose arms I knew love first
And lived that wonderous feeling
Of being filled and made whole.
That feeling that is only given men and women
Who have been created for each other alone.
That desire for the single and only lover
Made the goddess the wombs of women
To follow suit the example of the pleasure
Begotten by physical union. For it is not enough
That pleasure should permeate the senses alone
Pleasure should quench the thirst of the heart
as well
Tammuz has quenched the thirst of my heart
When he joined his heart to mine...
A single embrace from Tammuz was worth all
the
Other embraces I have known put together.
He has crowned my heart with love
He was dearer to me than all the earth's men
Put together.
My senses would flow only in his presence

He lit my every sense with hope and I was
Led by a single desire.
Alone that desire informed my every considera-
tion
The desire to own a single man my heart loved
And who filled me with all the happiness in win-
ning
Him and surrendering to him.
I had always been proud of my father Sen
The god of the great Moon in the city of Ur
One of the largest cities of Sumer
So I sent him a message telling him of my
Intent to marry Tammuz.
I wanted to consult Sen
Before going on my own to my
Lover in my temple of Gebar.
I loved my mother Nengal dearly
And followed her advice. Occasionally
I have deceived her I'll admit to that.
When Tammuz asked me to say with him longer
In the orchards under the light of the Moon.

Last night Tammuz led me to his orchard

And led me to his own garden
I walked with him among the trees and stopped
with him
Under the apple tree I the goddess of the
flower sung a hymn
"last night when I the queen shed my light on
the darkness I dances and sung the hymn of
the rising sun
Meet with me, meet with me,
Tammuz put his hand in mine and held me
against his heart.

I pretended I would flee his embrace
I did not know what to tell my mother
I called on him: *Come this moment O you who
are the wild bull
Set me free, for what am I to tell my mother
Nengal? I must
Return now.*
I was happy when his answer reached me
I shall tell you Enana, who are the world's
craftiest
Woman. Tell her that a friend took you to the

public square

And there you lost the time in music and
dance.

That is how you should greet your mother, in
deception.

All the while in truth we were drinking deep of
pleasure

Tammuz and I on the green velvet pasture of
the fields, a pure

Noble, sweet bed scented by the rays of the
Moon in perfect

Happiness.

When Tammuz tasted of the fruit of true love
He made me an oath. I shall be his true lawful
wife.

I ran then to my mother singing

*I have come to the gates where my mother re-
sides*

Walking in joy, to the gates of Nengala

He will come to my mother and say the word
He will pour the precious oil of cedars on the
ground

At her feet, he whose home so sweetly scented

Shall spread the scent of his word in joy and
pride

My master, whose residence should be the Sa-
cred Fortress

The son in law of Sen

The god Tammuz well suited to the Sacred
Fortress

The son in law of Sen.

I have not forgotten Sen.

I was proud of my father the

Great god Sen the holy Moon of the

City of Ur. I felt now I needed his

Consent to my union with my lover.

To marry the herdsman Tammuz.

I wrote to Sen

I am making a home

My home, my home shall be

The sacred shrine of worship for people.

There they will make my fruitful bed

*And cover it in the petals of the lapis
golden shrub*

Al Doro.

*I shall bring Tammuz to my bed
And put my hand in his
And my heart shall embrace his
Refreshed we shall hold each other
To the height of joyful pleasure.*

Act Two

Ritual of the Divine Wedlock

Before we enter the scene of the holy wedding
Tammuz must come to my mother's home to
ask

For my hand in marriage.

I ran to my mother asking her advice

And waiting for her consent

When the door knocked merrily

For her consent and my mother joyous at his
presence sang:

That boy is your father

He is your mother.

*His mother shall spoil you the way your own
mother does*

*His father shall spoil you the way your own
mother does.*

*Open up the house, my little queen open up the
house.*

My mother had prepared me for the holy wed-
ding

To meet Tammuz my promised husband in ways
fit
For a Sumerian queen.
She bathed me in the holy water of the sacred
flask
And rubbed my body with scented soap
In the silver bathing tub
And with amber she anointed my mouth
And lined my eyes with kohl
And decked me out in precious stones and
Jewels on every part of my body
From a treasure given to me by one of
My doting lovers she chose a piece for every
Detail of my body
Lapis lazuli for my neck and bosom
Oval beads for my head and hips
And mother of pearl for my braids.
Bronze earrings for the lobes of my ears
And all sorts of other gems for my face my
nose
And my buttocks
Sparkling alabaster for my navel
And lovely slippers for my feet.

In the court room of the regal palace that
oversaw
The land's activities, the seat of the king of all
mortals
The house of Life- On the eve of the New
Year,
In Uruk one of the largest of the land of Sumer
We chose to hold the ceremony.
Slaves had built a beautiful bed of cedar wood
and oak
And spread the most wonderfully unique bed
spreads on it
They sweetened the air with the best incense
And poured aromatic oils on the floors
In the heart of the palace a huge canopy was
spread
People with black heads congregated.
Tammuz manifested in the person of the King
The great king of Uruk
He had changed into the robes for the sacred
ritual
And decked his brow with crown of Majesty
He spread the light of his glory in all the palace.

When my own beauty was complete
I held the seal of power in my hand
And wrapped the royal ceremonial robes around
me.

The officiating priests then dressed in linen
Announced my arrival to Tammuz
Who was standing by door of Lapis Lazuli
Impatiently waiting to behold me burning with
desire

The priests then invited him closer to approach
my holy of holies I,
Anana queen of the earth and sky.

There was erected Enlil, the of all Sumerian
gods and

They were singing a tune that moved the heart.
Nansipur my faithful minisister to lead me to
my groom,

She asked me to bless him with all he needs to
Make his rule wise and joyfully recalled.

When Tammuz entered his light spread over
The sanctuary like the Moon.
He stood staring at me filled with joy and then

held me

Close and kissed me and I blessed him :

O Wild bull, Eye of land

I shall bring life to the people

I shall answer all the needs of the land

I shall make the people establish justice

In the grand house, and shall make each crescent moon

Say: Justice rules in the Court.

I blessed him and the house while the holy of holies

Rang with the words of the blessing hymn

And the poets singing in the name of Tammuz.

Who was longing to be led to the holy matrimonial bed.

"He desires it, he desires the matrimonial bed

The bed that brings joy to his heart

The bed in which every embrace is sweet

Make the bed a sweet bed, there where every embrace is sweet.

Tammuz had ordered the bed purified and

blessed

That it may always be sweet and fruitful.

I sang my groom the wedding song:

O ye groom, who are so dear to my heart,

How sweet your beauty like honey sweet,

*You have moved me so let me shiver standing
before you*

O groom let me give you love

*For my love is luscious and sweet sweet as hon-
ey*

*In the lovely bed let me enjoy your captivating
beauty,*

My master, protector and beloved,

Be kind and gentle with your delicious love.

I lay on the holy bed after taking off my wed-
ding veil,

And the perfumed oil of cedar was sprinkled
before the king

To walk to me his head held high and once in
the bed he said:

I want to play with you the game of love

*In the light of the moon over the bed of maj-
esty and pride*

I want to unbraid your hair.

He then held my waist between his hands
And anointed me with milk and honey
Enthralled by the plenteousness of my breasts
Dreaming of immortality inside my body.
After I have cleaned the sacred embrace
I cajoled my master
And wrote for him a lovely fate
For now he held my heart to his
We have united and the waters of heart have
over flown
The lush green of life spread around us every-
where.

The meadows broke into delicious flowers
And the fruits of the earth ripened in every
orchard.

Tammuz my eternal lover over my bosom mur-
muring to me

O my great and wonderful queen, your bosom
is your field

O Anana, your bosom is your field

Your great field thrusting forth the fruits of

life

And bringing love forth to the world and the
water

That falls from above - the good- all good from
where I shall

Always drink.

The people rose singing to my body

Saying it was the barge of heaven

And the newborn crescent and the fertile land

Saying it was the high field and deep meadow

When I rested enough on the fruitful bed

And the sacred embrace

The pleading reached to bless the king in this
night of love:

The Sun has gone to sleep and the day is over

While you are staring at him and anointing the
god,

While you are giving him life

Give the god majesty and power.

In the morning I gave him the scepter of rule
and the seals of power.

I have chosen him to be the herdsman of all
mortals

And king above all.

In a banquet held in the great ceremonial room
of the palace

Food was plentiful and drink and lovely singing
and music filled the air. People passed in line
before us, we the two wedded gods sitting be-
side the throne, and sang:

*May the god you have called to your heart,
The king, your husband live long in your sweet
sacred breast*

Give him wisdom and a great rule

Give him a throne with steady foundation

*Give him the power to run the affairs of peo-
ple smoothly*

*Give the scepter to rule and the seals to
judge*

Give him a crown that never goes to waste

*And a garland of light to shed light on people
from when the sun sets to when it rises again,
from north to south and from the high seas
to the low seas even should it make the river
flood and let the grains in the field multiply and
the vines bring forth wine and honey. May the*

*two mighty rivers overflow and on the banks
the green shrubs grow and fill the meadows.
May the sacred queen of all things green sow
grain in the height of hillocks and mountains.
This we pray our queen, queen of heaven and
earth, that he, the king may have many long
days resting on your sacred bosom.*

Act Three

Going down into the Underworld.

"the underworld is dark like graves and filled with ghosts.

Candles dancing. Arishkegal - the queen of the underworld is seated on her throne, surrounded by the seven Anona: the seven great judges."

I was delicious
I had kept Tammuz
The strong young herdsman
In a state of constant desire
All the days of our nuptials
And so he bloomed into the glory of full
Manhood
So he wanted to prove to me his valor in
In the chase as he has proved it in bed.
In one of his hunts he was fatally wounded

By a wild boar
I loved Tammuz and was prepared to take on
Any danger for his sake
To prove to all that a woman in love must
Accept all sacrifices to win her beloved and
keep him
By order of love she must never back down
not
Even in the face of death itself
So I started my journey towards the underworld
To bring my beloved back to life
By bathing him in the sacred fount.
And went into the dark frightful house of the
dead
To bring back my beloved and husband
But people did not appreciate my sacrifice
The accused me that I was not satisfied with
ruling
The kingdom about the earth, but wanted to
spread
My dominion to the underworld as well.

I put on the most beautiful of my clothes

And wore my most beautiful gems and jewels
And held fast to my scepter and symbols of
sacred
Power in one hand and fastened the tablets of
the
Seven Fates around my waist.
I gathered all creeds of life and put them in
my hands
The greatest laws
I stayed at the foot of the sacred Shogra tree
and put on my
Brow the crown of the valleys. Then my face
shone forward
Its beauty and glory.
I held the strands of my hair on my brow
And lapis lazuli round my neck
Around wrists I wore beautiful gold bracelets
And palms were beautified by rings of gold
On my breast I wore the invitation: come to
me
Hanging from my neck. I wiped my face with
scented oils and put the kohl of fliate around
my eyes

And with the clothes of majesty I wrapped my body.

When my grooming was complete I set forth to

Enter the fearsome land of ghosts

The moon was in the fullness of his majesty
in the middle of the lunar month

I was the queen of the moon and the goddess
of the sky

Shone with him.

And because the moon does not become full
except

That it begins to recede in the second half of
its journey

I too knew that I shall not come forward long
before

Arshegal, queen of the underworld, my sister
and

My sworn enemy will want to kill me for daring
to

Invade the domain of her rule and will never
forgive me

That journey into her realm. That is why I

called

Upon Nenshipur my minister and my messenger

And told her:

*You are my minister, she of the truthful word
She who holds the true message of my word
uncorrupted*

I go now to the underworld.

*Hold a wake for me at the site of the ruins
yonder*

In the center of the pantheon

*Beat the drums for me and tear out your eyes
for me*

*Tear your mouth out for me, and get dressed
in poor rags for me*

*And alone head to the house of Enlil at the
Eikor*

*When you enter the Eikor weep and cry
My father Enlil, do not let your daughter die in
the underworld*

*Do not allow the rich metal of your loins to be-
come tarnished in the underworld.*

Do not allow your precious lapis lazuli to crack

like the stone of the quarry.

*Do not allow your priceless wood be sawn like
the wood of ordinary carpenters.*

*Do not allow the virgin Enana to die in the un-
derworld.*

I made her promise as well

*That if Enlil refuses to side with you and help
you*

Make the rounds of all the other gods

*If you find no response from them cry before
Enke*

*For the father Enke the god of wisdom knows
the taste of life and the water of life and will
certainly return me to life for I in going there*

I only wanted to make sure that my life shall be
renewed even if the worst of dangers should be-
fall me. Then I went straight to the court of the
underworld and stood daringly at the gates:

I called: *"Open ye keepers of the gates open
Nati, open the house I am alone.*

I heard a voice asking:

'Kindly identify yourself

I answered passionately:

I am the goddess of the sky there where the sun rises

But the keeper of the gates was suspicious
'If you are truly the queen of heaven why by your mercy have you come to the place from which there is no return. Why did you take this road of no return. How did your heart lead you?'

It is then that I made up the excuse that I came to behold the funeral of Goglana the husband of my sister who has been slain.

But this excuse did not make the door keeper less suspicious. He asked me to wait, until he took council with his mistress.

I was losing patience and my anger took hold of me I screamed:

I am the queen of heaven, who will ever deny me a wish?

Open your gate doorkeeper for if you do not allow me to enter I shall smite the gate and smash it down and break the lock and shake the door on its frame, yeah I shall break the frame. I shall wake the dead from their slum-

ber, the dead who eat the living, that the numbers of dead shall supercede by far the number of those who belong to the kingdom of shadows.

The gatekeeper is frightened and enters the house of his queen and describes me to her exactly as I was with all my splendor and the scepter and the jewels and the lapis and the bracelets, not a detail does he leave out.

As soon as Arshegal heard these descriptions she knew immediately who it was who was standing at the door threatening to bring the gates down and why.

She was overwhelmed with anger but kept in control

She said in seeming sympathy:

I too weep the men who have been torn from their wives

I too am a woman whose husband has been torn from me.

But despite that Arshegal could not spare me-
I Anana- queen of the earth and sky from suf-

fering and the humiliation of pain demanded to enter her domain for it was written in the old ways, that I had to enter the kingdom of the underworld naked as the day I was born. Arshegal beat her thigh and pinched it:

There is only one way out of this. Enana must die. But nothing could become of this way, if she is not stripped of the symbols of her majesty and her jewels. So she cried out to the doorkeeper:

Come here Nati, head of my guards at this underworld. Listen and do exactly as I say and leave nothing out.

Remove the locks on all seven gates of the underworld. On the palace gate too.

Nati did as his queen ordered. He unlocked the gate of the palace called Ganzeer that was the entrance gate to the underworld. And when the gate stood open he called:

Come in Enani, enter herein.

I put a daring foot forward and I entered. Hardly had I entered through the first gate when the crown of the valleys called Shogra

was stripped from my head and I cried out:

What is that, that you are doing?

The gate keeper said: The laws of the underworld have been

Fashioned perfectly and whole. Do not question the rituals of the underworld. As soon as I entered through the second gate, he took from my hand the scepter of kingship and the wires of lapis lazuli and I cried out to the gatekeeper: Mercy, for this is too much. 'Quiet Enana, these are the laws of the underworld, do not hold them in disrespect. At the third gate I was stripped of the oval stones at my breasts and the pendant that hung from my neck and decked my bosom. At the fourth gate, all the jewels, at the fifth gate my golden ring went. At the sixth, the shield at my bosom, and at the seventh all the robes of majesty and might were removed. Every time, I cried out: What is this you're doing?

They would answer: That is the law of the underworld. The laws have been fashioned perfectly and are whole in their completeness.

Do not question the rituals of the underworld Enana. Until, I the queen of earth bowed and was brought in totally naked to the presence of Arshegal for the moment of breaking the laws of the gods have come, and I stood at the foot of Arshegal's throne and she was surrounded by the Enona, the seven judges. They spoke the sentence in front of her and Arshegal set her eyes of death on me and spoke a word of anger against me. The word which causes the soul to suffer and be tormented. She found me guilty but the truth which you know and every woman knows is that Arshegal was jealous. My sister and my enemy was jealous of the beauty of my body when the guard stripped me of all my splendor and my robes. You know the beauty of naked body and that beauty passed her sentence in me in one of the rooms of her palace so that my beauty should wilt and all the ailments of the world would carry away splendor of my face and body. Arshegal set against me sixty ailments. First she visited me with the diseases of the eyes and then the ribs and

bones and then my organs were attacked, and then my head and then my heart. Not a part of my body was left without illness and disease. I put up with all torments for the sake of my husband. I became a lifeless corpse and the corpse was tied to a pole. These calamities did not fall upon me alone, but overtook all aspects of life on earth, In my kingdom, man and beast stopped breeding. No man went after the girls and no bull mounted a cow. No donkey gave birth even to a mule. No man made fertile a maiden and the women slept alone, and all the festivals of pleasure were put out. In the sky the moon receded piece by piece and fell slowly from the center of the sky, every night. Until on the last and seventh day. The day when I was finally stripped of all my robes and stood naked and humiliated in front of my sister, the moon disappeared entirely and when I fell to the ground a lifeless corpse, then the people were overtaken with grief as Nenshur waited patiently for my return from the underworld. Seven nights and seven days and I

did not succeed in returning and so she carried out my orders one at a time...

'my messenger Nenshur

She of the true and faithful words

Started to make the rounds of all the pantheon

She cried and wept and filled the sky with screams for me

She ran to the house of the gods for me

Her eyes were bloodshot and her mouth was sad because of me

Like a poor, homeless beggar she wore only one robe and went to the house of Enlil alone and cried in his presence:

O father, O Enlil

Do not let your daughter die in the underworld

Do not allow the precious metal of your loins be tarnished

Or your priceless lapis lazuli be broken like the rock of the quarry

Do not allow your timber to be sawn down like that of the carpenter.

Do not leave the virgin Enana die in the under-

world O Father!

But Enlil did not listen. According to him I have defied the laws of the gods. I wanted to add the kingdom of the underworld to my kingdom of earth and for that he did not hold me in special sympathy. Enlil, ignored my sacrifice for the sake of Tammuz so Nenshipur had to go to the temple of Ekshenogal in the city of Ur and repeat her pleading in front of all the gods But they all thought the same as Enlil. Everyone of them imagined I went to extend my sovereignty and invade my sister's rightful domain. Finally, my messenger arrived at Enki in the city of Ur.

He was the god of pure water who hurries to give resuscitating water to a dying god to save him or her. He was appalled and full of worry that creation might disappear. For no one would worship the gods should mankind die out.

And he addressed Nenshipur:

"What has become of my daughter, tell me. I am worried about Enana. What happened to

the lady of all?"

Enki is responsible for food. The food of life and the water of life. That is how the gods are saved from death. It was necessary to set a plan to reach Arshekegal and win her trust and make her promise without her ever suspecting what was going on. Enki was capable of that for he possessed great cunning and flattery that never failed. It was Enki who baptized the gods. Enki who created from the depths of the sea water two creatures without sex from the mud off his fingers. Kogaro and Klathor.

He gave Kogaro the food of life

And to Klathor the water of life

And prayed for them that they would not be discovered and enter the underworld undetected. He told them that they will find the goddess Arshegal naked and in great pain from many ailments, and he advised them to show her great sympathy that if she cried: *o my organs, you too should cry the same and if she said oh my limbs you too should say the same.*

Then she will make you a promise. She will tell you that if you are gods, she will speak a specially kind word for you and if you were mortals then she will see that you get a fit fate for your deeds. They begged her to fulfill her promise and never forget. Then she advised them to go forward and should they bring water to drink from the river they must refuse, and should they be given food from the grains of the fields they should also refuse and ask only for the corpse hanging by the nail.

The two creatures did as Enki told them exactly. They saw the pain of Arshegal and echoed her plaints and cries, as though her pain had touched them very deeply. Arshegal was touched by such sympathy and decided to answer their request. She gave them the corpse of sacred dead Enana. She gave them my corpse. They instantly shed the warmth of fire on my face, and sprinkled the water of life on me sixty times and the food of life sixty times. As soon as the food of life and the water of life

touched me, I came back to life and stood up. They held me by the hand to take me back to earth, but I refused, for I have not yet found Tammuz. He for whom I went to the underworld for whom I endured all the torture and humiliations at the hands of Arshegal, became a very lifeless corpse for his sake. Arshegal my enemy and sister, was keeping for me the surprise that would kill me. She told me that she released Tammuz my lover, when she saw that I myself was dead. She sent back to play in the meadows of earth and find himself a woman other than me. Still, I was about to leave with the two creatures, when the Anonaki got hold of me and reminded me that the law forbade anyone to leave and return to earth unless they can provide a ransom from above. Someone who would take their place in the underworld. That was the law that held, now and always. I had no other way but to show consent so that I was given permission to leave and to ensure that I would follow through with my word, Arshegal sent with me the jinni of Gala, those who

know no mercy in bringing the ransom into the underworld. Should there be no ransom, they would drag me back from whence we came.

Act Four

Procession of the jinn

I went out amidst the procession of ghosts
and jinn

And ascended to my city of Uruk with the jinn
in front of me.

They are the small Gala as big as the head of
a spear.

The big Gala as big as the head of a catapult
In front of me though not a minister was car-
rying a miter

And just beside me walked if not a messenger
a jinn

That carried the sign of a messenger to his
waist.

Those who walked ahead of me were strange
unknown creatures. They knew not drink or
food

The did not eat the bread of offerings nor
drank the wine

Of the altar. They were creatures that car-

ried away a wife
 From her husband and snatched the child from
 the bosom of its mother. The first I met as
 this procession moved forward
 Was my minister Nenshipur, the faithful one
 who even as she
 Saw her mistress approach from the under-
 world, and by her side
 Walked the hideous creatures of the Gala,
 fell to her face in the dust and the jinn went
 straight to her thinking to take her in my stead
 seeing that she offered herself thus dressed
 in coarse cloth.
 I stopped them saying: *This is my minister and
 my messenger
 The faithful one who carries my true word
 Who has obeyed me to the letter and never
 Ignored a word I uttered.*

I reminded them that it was she who went
 from one
 Temple to the other in tears
 Begging mercy from the gods to save her mis-

tress

From the hands of Areshegal until Enki responded
The jinn gave up on Nenshipur and gave up too
on their

The second time, the sons of Lolal and so it
went every

Time we met one of my courtiers I would find
a reason

Why they should not take them in my stead.

Until we reached Uruk my great city and its
sacred province of Kilab. There I found my
husband Tammuz, dressed in all his

Finery seated on his high throne

Blowing his flute for another

He was not weeping or mourning or smudging

His face in dust whose site would have torn
the heart

Of anyone, amidst the monsters and the jinn.

I was overcome by wrath

And set my eyes, the eyes of death upon him.

I spoke the word against him the word of
wrath.

And sent a cry up to condemn him. I turned to

the gala
And pointed to him: *This one...take this one.*
I gave him up myself to them
The Gala were awaiting their victim impatiently
And as soon as Tammuz fell into their hands
they tied him up
And beat him up and tortured him without
mercy
Preparing for the journey to the underworld.

The moment Tammuz realized what predicament
he was in
He started pleading with the gods the way I
did
He went to his father in law Uto, the god of
the sun

*Oh Uto I am your friend, a youth you know well
I took your sister for my wife
And I went to the underworld because she
went to the underworld. To redeem herself
she named me as ransom
Oh Uto you are the judge who ensures justice
do not let me die.*

But the jinn did not stop torturing Tammuz
He ran away and hid in a barn and they followed

The first jinni hit Tammuz on the face with a long nail

And the others followed and hit Tammuz with the wand of the herdsman. The third entered the barn and threw out the milk

From the butter maker and the fourth efreet followed and threw

The sacred planet from the hanger that holds it up

And the fifth efreet broke the glasses and Tammuz

No longer was among the living

And his barn was gone to waste.

Act Five

The Funerary rites for Tammuz

Tammuz had known before leaving to the underworld

That he was about to die.

His heart was full of tears

And he went into the desert

He pulled his flute to his mouth

And ordered his instrument to create a wake.

Amongst the cankers of the sea hold a funeral

And let my mother cry out in wailing

The day I die she will be left with no one to care for.

I cry for the desert like my mother shedding tears,

Like my sister shedding tears.

The desert echoed these words of wailing all day.

The reapers in the spring fields mourned for Tammuz

And re-enacted his death and his cruel pains

and tortures

Near and far I was made to carry the sin of
his death

By all and sundry. And they forgot how I went
to the

Underworld to bring him back and forgot that
when I returned

He was seated on his sumptuous throne

Decked out in all his glamour while was thrown
as an old rag in the darkness of the land of no
return.

Not only did they think of him as a victim, my
victim,

They turned him into a hero

And an important factor in the story of sacri-
fice

A hero who walks to his death in courage to

Fulfill his role:

Arise hero and walk to the road of no return

*And he arises and walks and disappears into
the earth.*

*He spreads great bounty on the land of the
dead*

*Arise hero and walk to the distant land
Behind sight of mortals.*

My old lover Gilgamesh the sunny hero in all
his

Arrogance defying the station of the gods saying:
*Which of your lovers have you been constant
to*

*What herdsman succeeded in keeping you hap-
py over the ages?*

*You have condemned Tammuz your husband to
sadness year after year.*

To atone for my sin I wounded my cheeks and
tore my mouth

I looked upon my waist and tore apart my
robes

I wailed for the tortured master

And cried and wept every year me and my wor-
shippers

Over the death of Tammuz the murdered one.

Every year I would open the ceremony of wail-
ing myself

And the rest of the wailers joining in:

The took my beloved husband away

He went looking for food and became himself
food
My groom has been led to captivity and no
longer
Bathes in the waters of Arido
He no longer treats Enana's mother as his own
He no longer performs his sweet mission
amongst
The virgins of his town
He no longer carries his sword between the
fighting men
Of his village, O wail for the noble one who is
no longer
Dear to his followers."
We would have special commemoration wakes
for the memory of Tammuz every year in all
the cities of Sumer
We held the rites and performed the ceremo-
nies of mourning
And in the end I would remain alone at the
resting place of Tammuz. When all the wailers'
breath have been spent and they went to sleep
I alone would remain wakeful and sing even in

my sleep:

Herdsmen who lie under the green soft grass

Arise and come to care for me

Tammuz, you who are resting arise by day

*And care for me, and rest at night and care
for me*

Care for me in every way

Act Six

The cry of Ishtar

Weeping and wailing alone do not bring back a dead god.

The gods had to free him themselves from the hands of death.

There was no other way but for me to go back into the underworld and retrieve him from the hands of Arshegal

She who had leapt with joy and her face broke into smiles

When she knew of my intention to return to the underworld

Broken and stripped of my robes and jewels

Without a miter or a scepter or the talisman of my birth around my neck. Without my crown I was preparing myself to descend into the underworld overtaken by dizziness my head swimming and something moved inside in my womb that cried:

Do not descend to the underworld

*I do not want to be born in the underworld
I do not want to be born in the darkness
I do not want to be born in the world of Arshegal
Oh great mother do descent
Should you descend who shall make the land
fertile*

*You are the first mother
All the people of the earth were born from
your womb
You are the queen of this universe
The beat of your body beats with the throb of
life and nature
You are the mother and the land
You are the feminine and fertility
You are the fruit of the land
You are life and birth without end
Your body overflows into the bodies of others
alive
Just as nature overflows with fruit and grain
and trees
O great mother,
Your womb holds all the world*

*You are all others and they are you
Man has come to realize that and was stunned
And fell to his knees to worship.
Your body gives childhood to mankind
Warmth and safety and peace
No other mother is there but you
Should you go down to the land of shades
You who are the universal womb
The source of all that is alive
You pull out men and women from your womb
and through
You and for you has come to be the human family
The father surrendered to you and you
Greatest mother
Who are the one who teaches love and compassion
Children for mothers and mothers for children
The first and source of all other compassion
All beyond that are lies.
O great one, do not take me into the underworld
For you are the mistress of trees and snakes*

and beasts

Your throne rests solidly on the first mountain

You carry the spear and the scepter

*You are the source of all things and support
for the living*

You fill the universe with fertility and plenty

You were the first physician

You searched tirelessly for herbs and roots

And learnt their magical medicinal secrets

*You are the first to have heard the cry of hun-
ger from a babe.*

The first thirsty cry.

You turned the crop into food

*When you first learnt how to sow and cultivate
the land*

*For you studied constantly the leaves and
herbs for food*

*While men were lost moving from place to place
and still is*

Running after chasing in the hunt in the early times

Producing destruction in war

You were the first priestess

And the first seer

*And the first magician
You were always in charge of children
And still are
You are the first who felt the shiver of the
newborn
And turned the skin of animals into clothes and
warm covers
And sheets
You were the first weaver
Weaving the texture of life itself
And weaving the thread of fate
Queen of the earth and queen of the sky
You gave birth to people and gods
And every evening when the sun disappears
You are born from her every morn
You are the fertile moon
The mother of herbs and teacher of women
You nurture the fields and cultivate the land
Even the blood of women rise and subsides
According to your light
The young women stay from it so that they do
not
Grow old*

Tis you Astarte who have shown the stars their way

*And you are the light of the sun and the moon
You are sight and insight"*

Ishtar danced with joy

When she knew what was moving in her womb

Then she fell silently wailing for the separation from Tammuz

How she wanted to tell him the news herself.

Then she cried:

*All my majesty and my godhead mean nothing
If Tammuz is not beside me*

Blowing his flute for me

And playing the tune of love for me.

Her cry reached the underworld

Arshegal took heed and called her minister

Nemtar. *"Go forth Nemtar and beat the gates of Egalina*

And deck the flagstone with the stone of Areto

Get the Anonti to gather and let them sit on their golden thrones

To make of Ishtar a dead corpse and cast her away.

As for her youthful husband, take him and bathe him in pure water and rub him in pleasant goodly scents

Dress him in a beautiful robe and make play his lapis lazuli flute.

And let the priestesses of the temple visit him and divert him and quiet his thoughts for spring awaits him.

Tammuz arrives in his ceremonial robes in a procession of

Temple virgins who hold up candles and spread sweet clouds of incense all around. 'Make room' orders Areshkegal, 'Tammuz is leaving the underworld to make his way to the upper world of the living. For he is now free'

But Tammuz refuses to leave without Ishatar He makes for his bride and holds her hand and looks at Areshkegal "I shall not leave without Ishtar.

Areshkegal shakes with wrath and anger and screams at the

Enonki

But Tammuz and Ishtar had already left.