

# Gilgamesh

*Ancient Sumerian epic, stage adapted by Cat Hearth.*

## **Characters:**

*Storyteller  
Gilgamesh  
Bride  
Bridegroom  
Friend of Bridegroom  
Animals  
Enkidu  
Trapper  
Temple Prostitutes/Dancers  
Prostitute  
Trapper's Family  
Nimsun, mother of Gilgamesh  
Humbaba  
Inanna  
Bull of Heaven  
People of Uruk  
Bird-People  
Belit-Sheri  
Lion-Man  
Scorpion-Man  
Scorpion-Woman  
Siduri  
Sursunabu  
Ziusudra  
Ziusudra's Wife  
Ziusudra's Family & Servants  
Enlil  
Enki  
God of Storm  
Serpent*

## **Scenes:**

*Story Place, Wedding House, Forest, Temple, Trapper's House, Streets of Uruk, Wilderness, Entrance to Mount Mashu, Inside Mount Mashu, Garden of the Sun, Shore, Ziusudra's Place, The Sea, the Pool.*

## **PROLOGUE:**

*[Backdrop is constellations of Orion & Taurus, lit from behind. As Storyteller enters, lights come slowly up. Storyteller carries a tambourine and chants. As he begins to tell the story, he gestures to the actors and they become the characters.]*

*Storyteller: Gather round, people. Gather round, people, and I will tell you a story. [repeat]  
[Actors come in by ones and twos and sit around Storyteller. They carry instruments, costumes, masks, etc.] I will tell you the story of the great king Gilgamesh of Uruk, who lived in the land called Sumer between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers many centuries ago.*

He was two thirds god, one third man, strong as a wild bull. The people hated him because he made them work so hard to build the city. When a girl married, Gilgamesh would sleep with her the first night, before the husband. He would come to the wedding...

**ACT I scene i Wedding house**

*[Wedding: music, dancing, Bride, Bridegroom, guests. Laughter and dance. Enter Gilgamesh, who takes the bride and leaves. The Bridegroom tries to follow but his friends hold him back.]*

*Bridegroom:* I can't fight him, he is two thirds god.

*Friend:* We have to work hard for him, every day.

*Bridegroom:* I wish the Gods would create someone who can fight him.

**ACT I scene ii Forest**

*[Dance, music. Animals in cages. Enkidu enters, frees them, they do a wild animal dance of happiness and freedom.]*

**ACT I scene iii Temple**

*[Gilgamesh in Temple. Temple prostitutes doing sacred dance, music. Incense, candles. Trapper enters.]*

*Trapper:* Gilgamesh, I salute you. We ask for your help. In the wildlands there is a wild man. He frees the animals from their traps. He is as strong as a star from heaven, and we are afraid.

*Gilgamesh:* Trapper, go back. Take with you this sacred prostitute from the temple of Inanna, the Goddess of Love. She is skilled in the arts of pleasure. When the wild man comes to drink water, she will seduce him and then the animals will reject him.

**ACT I scene iv Forest**

*[Prostitute waiting. Enter Enkidu with the animals. Dance, music. Prostitute dances, taking off her clothes, seducing Enkidu. He is cautious but circles around her and approaches while the animals leave one by one. Finally they embrace and lights down.]*

**ACT I scene v Trapper's House**

*[The Trapper, his Family, and the Prostitute are teaching Enkidu to eat bread and drink wine and dressing him in clothes.]*

*Enkidu:* I am like a man now. I will go to Uruk. I will challenge Gilgamesh.

*[Trapper, Family, Prostitute cheer him on.]*

**ACT I scene vi Uruk**

*[Wedding, as before. Gilgamesh enters, goes towards bride. Enkidu enters, bars his way. They fight, the people taking sides to cheer. Gilgamesh and Enkidu are worn out, neither can win. They look at each other, panting, and burst out laughing. They embrace.]*

**ACT II scene i Temple**

*[Music, sacred dance. Gilgamesh and Enkidu watching dances.]*

*Enkidu:* I am weak, my arms have lost their strength, I am oppressed by idleness.

*Gilgamesh:* I want men to remember my name. I will go to the cedar forest and kill the old god Humbaba.

*Enkidu:* Humbaba! Humbaba is terrible to all flesh.

*Gilgamesh:* What man can climb to heaven?

*Enkidu:* Humbaba's roar is the storm, his breath is fire, his jaws are death!

*Gilgamesh:* The gods live forever but we men live only a few days.

*Enkidu:* The forest is ten thousand leagues in every direction! Weakness overpowers whoever enters it.

*Gilgamesh:* Our projects are just gusts of wind.

*Enkidu:* When one fights Humbaba it is not an equal struggle.

*Gilgamesh:* You are already afraid!

*Enkidu:* Humbaba is a great warrior, a battering ram!

*Gilgamesh:* I will go first, you can cry, "Forward, there is nothing to fear!"

*Enkidu:* Gilgamesh, Humbaba never sleeps.

*Gilgamesh:* If I die my name will live on, people will say, "Gilgamesh went down fighting ferocious Humbaba."

**ACT II scene ii Temple**

*[Nimsun, dancers. Enkidu and Gilgamesh with weapons. Incense, dance, music, chanting.]*

*Nimsun:* Utu, god of the sun, protect my son. *[repeat.]* *[Nimsun hangs sacred talisman around Enkidu's neck.]*

**ACT II scene iii Forest**

*[Forest of cedars. Mysterious, spooky music and lights. Gilgamesh and Enkidu enter, cut down a tree. Humbaba enters, dance, fight. They overpower Humbaba.]*

*Humbaba:* Gilgamesh, let me go. I will be your servant. I will build you a palace of cedar. Gilgamesh, please let me go.

*Enkidu:* Gilgamesh, don't listen to him. Humbaba must die!

*Humbaba:* Enkidu, you are jealous. Gilgamesh, let me go.

*Gilgamesh:* If we kill him the glory and glamour of the forest will disappear.

*Enkidu:* No, kill him and we will get the glory and glamour. *[They kill him. Animals dance, mourning Humbaba while Enkidu and Gilgamesh do a victory dance.]*

**ACT II scene iv Temple**

*[Gilgamesh is dressing. Enter Inanna the goddess of love and war, admires Gilgamesh.]*

*Inanna:* Gilgamesh, come, be my lover. *[She dances erotically. Gilgamesh begins to dance with her, hypnotized, then moves away.]*

*Gilgamesh:* Inanna, if I become your lover, you will destroy me as you destroyed all your other lovers.

*Inanna [Furious]:* I will tell my father An to send the Bull of Heaven. There will be seven years of drought and famine. The wheat will be seedless husks. *[Gilgamesh laughs.]*

**ACT II scene v Uruk**

*[Bull of Heaven causing havoc. People wailing. Dance, music, drums. Gilgamesh and Enkidu catch the bull by the horns.]*

*Enkidu:* My friend, you wanted people to remember your name. Thrust in your sword between the neck and horns. *[They kill the Bull of Heaven.]*

*People of Uruk:* *[They lift Gilgamesh up. Happy music, dancing.]* Who is the most glorious of heroes? Who is the greatest of men? Gilgamesh! Gilgamesh!

**ACT II scene vi Temple**

*[Enkidu is asleep, dreaming. Inanna and Enki enter, stand behind him.]*

*Inanna:* One of them must die. They killed Humbaba, they killed the Bull of Heaven. One of them must die. *[Inanna and Enki exit. Bird-People enter, dance, music. They lift Enkidu who begins to dance with them in a dreamy way. One of them becomes Belit-Sheri with the book of death. The dancers dance Enkidu up to her and throw him down. He ends up where he was before.]*

*Belit-Sheri:* Who brought this one? [*Bird-people exit. Enkidu wakes, cries out, Gilgamesh enters.*]

*Enkidu:* My friend, I dreamed a dream. The heavens thundered, the Earth roared. An awful man-bird picked me up and carried me to the house of death. Rulers, princes, everybody who was alive sits in darkness, their food is dust, their meat is clay. I saw Ereshkigal, the queen of the underworld. Belit-Sheri squatted there with the book of death. She raised her head, saw me, and said, "Who brought this one?" [*Enkidu dies. Enter mourners, music, chanting.*]

[*Gilgamesh with mourners: drumbeats, song. During song, they wrap Enkidu in black cloth and put a mask over his face, then stand him up as a monument.*]

*1<sup>st</sup> part of mourners* [*as song baseline, repeating*]: Oh Enkidu, I weep for you.

*2nd part of mourners* [*baseline, repeating*]: I weep Enkidu, my brother for you.

*Gilgamesh* [*sings*]: O Enkidu, my brother, I weep for you  
You were the axe at my side, the strength of my hand, the sword in my belt, my shield in front.

I weep for you.

The wild animals of the forest weep for you.

The paths that we walked weep for you.

The murmuring river weeps for you

The high mountain weeps for you

The strong warriors of Uruk weep for you

The comely maidens of Uruk weep for you

You are lost in the dark, you cannot hear my voice

Sleeping, never to wake, you are gone forever

Enkidu, my brother, I weep for you, Enkidu, Enkidu.

[*Gilgamesh roars, wails, tears off his clothes, as the dancers finish wrapping Enkidu's body, lift and drag to upstage center. All exit leaving Enkidu standing rigid as lights fade*]

### **ACT III scene i Wilderness**

*Gilgamesh:* [*Alone, long hair, beard, dressed in ragged animal skins and carrying a spear.*]  
How can I rest, how can I be at peace? My brother Enkidu died, I must also die. I fear death. I will go to find Ziusudra the Faraway who lives in Dilmun where the sun rises. He survived the great flood and the Gods gave him everlasting life. [*Lion-Man enters. Dance, they fight. Gilgamesh kills him and takes his lion skin, puts it over his shoulders.*]

### **ACT III scene ii Entrance to Mount Mashu**

*Gilgamesh:* [*Approaching. Man-scorpions watch him.*] I have reached the mountain of Mashu where the sun goes at night.

*Man-scorpion:* This one is flesh of the Gods.

*Woman-scorpion:* Two thirds is God but one third is Man.

*Scorpions:* Why have you journeyed so far?

*Gilgamesh:* My brother Enkidu died, I must also die. I fear death. I want to find Ziusudra the Faraway and learn from him about life and death.

*Man-scorpion:* No mortal man has gone into the mountain.

*Woman-scorpion:* It is twelve leagues of darkness.

*Scorpions:* There is no light.

*Gilgamesh:* [*Almost overpowered*] Sorrow, pain, sighing, weeping - I must go. Open the gate.

*Scorpions:* Go, Gilgamesh. [*They push him toward the gate.*]

*Woman-scorpion:* You may pass through the mountain of Mashu.

*Man-scorpion:* May your feet carry you safely home. [*They laugh.*]

### ***ACT III scene iii Inside the mountain***

[*Darkness, drums, strange sounds. Chorus chants, as Gilgamesh stumbles and calls out.*]

*Chorus:* Thick darkness, no light, nothing ahead, nothing behind. [*repeat*]

*Gilgamesh:* One league [*pause*], two leagues [*pause*], three leagues [*pause*], four leagues [*pause*], five leagues [*pause*], six leagues [*pause*], seven leagues [*pause*], eight leagues [*Gilgamesh cries out, pause*], nine leagues - I feel the North wind [*pause*], ten leagues - the end is near [*pause*], eleven leagues - I see light.

### ***ACT III scene iv Garden of the Sun***

[*Bright light, laughter, singing. Siduri, making wine.*]

*Gilgamesh* [*Entering*]: The Garden of the Sun! The Garden of the Sun! Hooray! [*He runs and leaps.*]

*Siduri:* This must be some criminal. [*She tries to shut the door but Gilgamesh stops her.*]

*Gilgamesh:* I am Gilgamesh of Uruk. I killed the Bull of Heaven, I conquered Humbaba of the Cedar Forest. I killed the lions in the mountain passes.

*Siduri:* Gilgamesh! Why is your face burned with heat and cold? Why have you journeyed so far?

*Gilgamesh:* My brother Enkidu died, I must also die. I fear death. Now that I have seen

your face, don't let me see the face of death.

*Siduri:* Gilgamesh, you will never find everlasting life. Stay here, eat delicious food, drink wine, dance, feast and rejoice. Enjoy a warm bath, wear nice clothes, cherish the little child that holds your hand, and make your woman happy in your embrace. [*She starts to seduce Gilgamesh, who begins to dance with her.*]

*Gilgamesh:* No! How can I rest, how can I be at peace? My brother Enkidu died, I must also die. I fear death. Siduri, beautiful girl, who makes the wine, please tell me the way to Ziusudra.

*Siduri:* Nobody can cross the ocean and the waters of death. Only the sun crosses. Gilgamesh, by the shore you can find Sursunabu the ferryman. He may take you across.

**ACT III scene v** [*Shore, boat of Ziusudra.*]

[*Gilgamesh enters. Angry, he tears up the tackle of the boat.*]

*Sursunabu* [*Entering*]: I am Sursunabu, ferryman to Ziusudra. Who are you?

*Gilgamesh:* I am Gilgamesh, from Uruk.

*Sursunabu:* Gilgamesh! Why is your face burned with heat and cold? Why have you journeyed so far?

*Gilgamesh:* My brother Enkidu died, I must also die. I fear death. Sursunabu, please take me to Ziusudra.

*Sursunabu:* Gilgamesh, your anger has destroyed your way to cross the ocean. You destroyed the tackle, the safety of my boat. [*He sighs, thinks.*] Gilgamesh, go into the forest, cut one hundred twenty poles, sixty cubits long, bring them back.

**ACT IV scene i Ziusudra's Place** [*He is relaxing, surrounded by his wife, family and servants, who are massaging and feeding him and playing music.*]

*Ziusudra:* Who is this strange man coming here?

*Gilgamesh:* [*Enters, bows to Ziusudra*] I am Gilgamesh from Uruk.

*Ziusudra:* Gilgamesh! Why is your face burned with heat and cold? Why have you journeyed so far?

*Gilgamesh:* My brother Enkidu died, I must also die. I fear death. Ziusudra, please tell me. How shall I find everlasting life?

*Ziusudra:* There is no permanence. Do we build a house to last forever? Do we sign a contract for eternity? The sleeping and the dead are much alike. No one knows the day of his death.

*Gilgamesh:* Ziusudra, you are a man like me. You don't look anything special. How did

you get everlasting life?

**ACT IV scene ii Story of the Flood**

*Ziusudra:* [*He is the Storyteller, the Family and Servants take on the roles of the story.*] Gather round people, gather round people, and I will tell you the story of the great flood. I lived in the city Shurruk, on the banks of Euphrates. Many, many people, the world bellowed like a wild bull. [*The actors act having a party and fighting.*] Enlil, the great god, became angry. [*One actor becomes Enlil.*]

*Enlil:* People are too noisy. I can't sleep. I will destroy them with a flood.

*Ziusudra:* Enki came to me in a dream. [*He acts being asleep. Another actor becomes Enki.*]

*Enki:* Ziusudra, I am Enki. Enlil will send a flood. You must build a boat. Abandon your wealth and save your life. Take on board the seed of all living creatures. Build a boat. Build a boat.

*Ziusudra:* We began the next morning. [*Actors mime building a boat and feasting.*] We built a huge ship with seven decks and eight bulkheads. Everybody helped. Strong men carried timbers, children brought caulking, women cooked food, we worked day and night. We feasted like at New Years, ate the best food, I spared no expense, wine and oil flowed like water. We barely finished the boat when the rain began. I climbed aboard and battened down. [*Ziusudra and Wife get in "boat," other actors in masks move them around.*] The god of Storm turned daylight to darkness, smashed the land like a cup. The tempest raged, the gods were terrified. [*One actress is Inanna*]

*Inanna:* Why did I command this evil? Now my people float in the ocean like fish.

*Ziusudra:* For six days and nights the torrent and tempest and flood overwhelmed the world. The seventh day the wind grew calm. [*He mimes opening and looking out.*] Flat as a roof! On every side only a waste of water! [*pause*] There is a mountain. [*Ziusudra and Wife get out of boat, do prayer to gods. Enlil and Enki come.*]

*Enlil:* What man has escaped? No mortal was supposed to escape death in the flood.

*Enki:* Enlil, this flood was stupid. [*Enlil advances angrily on him.*] But I did not reveal the secret, the wise Ziusudra learned it from a dream.

*Enlil:* I said that no mortal man would escape death in the flood. I do not lie. Therefore, Ziusudra and his wife will now be immortal. [*Actors take off masks and become Ziusudra's family again.*]

*Ziusudra:* And that's how I became immortal. It was a unique event and cannot happen again. I'm afraid you will have to find your own way, Gilgamesh. Test yourself. Stay awake for six days and seven nights. [*Gilgamesh goes to sleep. Wife goes to wake him. Ziusudra stops her.*]

*Ziusudra:* He will deny going to sleep. So bake bread, one loaf each day.



**ACT IV scene iii** [*Gilgamesh asleep.*]

[*Lights down and up as Wife brings in each loaf of bread. As she brings in the seventh, Z comes in and wakes up Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh is irritated. Z points to the bread. G counts the loaves, shakes his head. Z nods. G nods.*]

*Ziusudra:* Go home, Gilgamesh, and cleanse yourself to prepare for death.

*Gilgamesh:* What can I do? The thief steals through my body. Each step I take, I am one step closer to death. Each breath I take, I am one breath closer to death.

*Wife:* Ziusudra, Ziusudra, you must give this poor man a gift to take home.

*Ziusudra:* Gilgamesh, you wore yourself out coming here, what shall I give you to take home? I know. At the bottom of the sea grows a plant which will prick you like thorns. But if you eat this plant, it will restore your youth. [*Gilgamesh embraces Z and Wife, bids goodbye.*]

**ACT V scene i** *Sea*

[*(Gilgamesh mimes swimming to bottom of sea and picking plant, bringing it up.)*]

**ACT V scene ii** *Pool* [*Gilgamesh, Sursunabu*]

*Gilgamesh [to Sursunabu]:* Look at this plant. It is called "Old Man is Young Again." I will take it back to Uruk for the old men to eat. Let's go swim in that pool. [*Gilgamesh and Sursunabu swim, play and laugh. Enter Serpent, eats plant, sloughs skin, exit. Gilgamesh comes and finds skin.*] Sursunabi, I have gained nothing. I found and I lost.

**EPILOGUE** [*Storyteller, Actors, as in Prologue.*]

*Storyteller:* And so Gilgamesh and Sursunabu returned to Uruk and, although Gilgamesh was very tired from his journey, he had a task left to do. He realized that even though his body would die, he could go on living in the memory of men. And so he engraved his story on tablets made of stone, and that is why we still remember his story today after five thousand years. And if you look in the sky on a winter night, you can see in the stars the great warrior Gilgamesh, still chasing the Bull of Heaven. [*Lights fade to backdrop of Orion and Taurus.*]

**THE END**

© 1997 Cat Hearth [cathearth.xyz/contact](http://cathearth.xyz/contact)

*First performed at BOD Theater Studio, Prague, Czech Republic, December 1997.*