

Marina Carr

# GILGAMESH



Gallery Books

## *Characters*

GILGAMESH, King of Uruk.

ENKIDU, Wild Man.

NINSUN, Goddess. Mother of Gilgamesh.

ENLIL, God of Gods.

SHAMASH, God of the Sun.

ISHTAR, Goddess of love, war, death.

SHAMHAT, Harlot.

SHAKANA, Deer Goddess.

HUMBABA, Guardian of the Cedar Forest.

UTNAPISHTIM, The man who can't die.

UR SHANABI, The Eternal Boatman.

BRIDES, Four.

GROOMS, Three.

ELDERS, Three.

INTERVIEWER

HUNTER

G I L G A M E S H

## Scene One

INTERVIEWER (*Holds out a mic to* UTNAPISHTIM) Testing . . . testing . . . It's pleasant here.

UTNAPISHTIM Is it?

INTERVIEWER How long have you lived in these parts?

UTNAPISHTIM Seventeen thousand and forty-three years.

INTERVIEWER It's remote.

UTNAPISHTIM Last place on earth.

INTERVIEWER Okay, I think we're good to go. Utnapishtim can you tell me what you remember about Gilgamesh?

UTNAPISHTIM That's a while back.

INTERVIEWER How long?

UTNAPISHTIM He showed up here in twenty-seven fifty-seven.

INTERVIEWER Twenty-seven fifty-seven?

UTNAPISHTIM Thereabouts.

INTERVIEWER So how long ago would that be?

UTNAPISHTIM What century are we in now?

INTERVIEWER The twenty-first.

UTNAPISHTIM That's right. I forget. So the guts of five thousand years ago.

INTERVIEWER What was he like?

UTNAPISHTIM A blaggard of the first order.

INTERVIEWER Anything else?

UTNAPISHTIM I'll tell you this, I never saw a young man so broken in body and soul and I've seen many of the broken in my time. He wept here in front of me, where you're sitting there, wept like a child.

INTERVIEWER Wept for what?

UTNAPISHTIM For himself, of course. For Enkidu maybe.

INTERVIEWER Enkidu?

UTNAPISHTIM His friend. Lover. Heart's companion, whatever you want to call him. But I'm telling it backwards, getting ahead of myself.

INTERVIEWER Yeah, could you give us a bit about yourself first?

UTNAPISHTIM I certainly could. I am Utnapishtim of Shur-  
rupak. I was king there once, and that wasn't  
today or yesterday.

INTERVIEWER Shurruapak?

UTNAPISHTIM You've heard of it, no doubt?

INTERVIEWER I'm sorry to say I haven't.

UTNAPISHTIM That's a great pity. In its time Shurruapak was  
the greatest city of the known world. All gone  
with the flood. All destroyed. I live here now  
at the edge of nowhere with my old wife. The  
last of the Immortals. On this blue globe at  
least. We can't die. We can never die. A gift  
from Enlil, lord of all the gods, if you call it a  
gift. Our destiny? To watch the rise and fall of  
men and women as they work out their piti-  
ful fates against merciless Time. The waters  
rise again. The air smells of rot and decay.  
The animals are fewer, the skies darker, the  
sun burns hotter, the seas and rivers going to  
sewer. All as it was before the deluge. All  
ready to happen again.

INTERVIEWER Let's not scare the folk, let's talk about Gilga-  
mesh. How would you describe him?

UTNAPISHTIM Well, he was a king, though that didn't impress  
me. When you've been king of Shurruapak,  
when you've been called the king of kings,  
with your likeness in hammered gold tower-  
ing over you on every city street and in front  
of every building you walk by. Shurruapak,  
where the women were famous for their  
beauty and the men for their skill with the  
horse, where gardens of jasmine and olean-  
der leaned over the majestic Euphrates. In  
summer we left our palaces, pitched our tents  
along the river, counted the stars and took  
our ease. In Uruk they did much the same. I  
never saw Uruk but I have heard it described  
down the years. Not as beautiful as Shurruapak,  
but not far off, it seems. A city of canals and

temples, of vast libraries and lapis lazuli  
walls built by Gilgamesh's slaves. There was  
the palace of Ishtar, the palace of Enlil and the  
new palace where Gilgamesh was born. His  
mother, it was said, was the Goddess Ninsun  
but I take that with a grain of salt. In Uruk  
every trumped-up jackass claims they're  
descended from some god or other. Those  
gods have done more damage than good.  
Wasn't that the very reason himself, Gilga-  
mesh I mean, wasn't that the very reason he  
sought me out here at the end of the earth?  
Just hand over your secret of immortality,  
Utnapishtim, says he, brandishing his axe,  
big arrogant jaw on him. If I could swop with  
you I would, says I. Take this immortal hell  
from me if you can and lower me into the  
dust like every other mortal born. Do you know  
who you're talking to? says he. Gilgamesh!  
That's who! A living god! And I'm damned if  
I'm dying like a beast of the field.

*Fade.*