

REIGN/FALL

by

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## CHARACTERS

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| ISHTAR (INANNA) | Goddess of rain, fertility, sexual love, war. Queen of Heaven and Earth. ERESHKIGAL's sister. |
| ERESHKIGAL      | Queen Consort of the Underworld. Older sister of ISHTAR.                                      |
| UTTA            | The Recordkeeper.   |

## SETTING

The Underworld, according to the ancient Sumerians. Nothing on the set should in any way resemble conventional depictions of purgatory or hell.

## TIME

An expanse of years that may or may not end in present day.

## Notes

"/" Indicates overlapping dialogue.

"Once Ishtar, Queen of Heaven, had descended into Kurnugi,  
After the Goddess went down into the Realm of No Return,  
Then there was not one single bull that impregnated a cow,  
And there was not one single donkey that mounted a jenny,  
There was not one single youth who made love to a local girl."

*The Descent of Ishtar*, ca. 2100 B.C.

"Your separation from God is a part of divinity itself"

Slavoj Žižek

## I

*A spare, open room that suggests a deteriorated stateliness. There ought to be at least two sittables somewhere. A simple coffin downstage. A beautiful but unadorned crown rests on top.*

*Ereshkigal stands in elaborate mourning attire. She collects herself. After a beat she speaks, fighting a surge of passion.*

## ERESHKIGAL

At last.

Dear one.

We've crossed the threshold.

The shroud has lifted.

We're unmoored.

This feels like a beginning,  
the provenance of something.

May you never walk far from me  
into other hands, other heads.

May you never stray from my mind.

I who never bore children-  
no tongue taken to my swollen breast,

a womb packed with sand.

You are the only thing.

You always were.

May you never cease to touch me.

May you always kiss my forehead.

May you always make me wet.

*She crosses downstage to the coffin.*

At last, we've found our way together  
among the listening stones.

## ERESHKIGAL (Continued)

You and I, right here.

*Delicately and with great, lustful ceremony she picks up the crown and speaks to it directly.*

Now, I can't be kept from you.

*Ishtar appears in the doorway in funeral garb, carrying a black parasol. They look at each other in silence, a long beat. Ereshkigal sets the crown back on the coffin, produces a cigarette from an ornate case and lights it.*

ISHTAR

You look beautiful.

ERESHKIGAL

My husband is dead.

ISHTAR

*(Sincerely)* It suits you.

*Beat.*

ERESHKIGAL

I heard you were coming. But I didn't believe it.

ISHTAR

This place looks nothing like they described.

ERESHKIGAL

We've remodeled.

*Beat.*

ISHTAR

/ I'm sorry for your loss-

ERESHKIGAL

Would you like / a cigarette?

ISHTAR

Oh, excuse me. / Go ahead.

ERESHKIGAL

No, I insist.

ISHTAR

How long has it been?

ERESHKIGAL

That depends on how you cipher the time.

ISHTAR

Does it differ, from one place to another?

ERESHKIGAL

Here, the hours pass with less regard to those who chronicle them.

*Beat.*

ISHTAR

Can't you even look at me?

ERESHKIGAL

I am looking at you.

ISHTAR

You're...

ERESHKIGAL

Beautiful. I know.

ISHTAR

...so different.

ERESHKIGAL

I'm quite a bit older.  
So are you.

ISHTAR

We don't look at all alike.  
Our eyes. Our skin.  
We did, once. Don't you remember?

ERESHKIGAL

Yes. Two sides of the same coin.

ISHTAR

Like falling into a mirror.

ERESHKIGAL

I remember.

ISHTAR

They used to mistake us, one for the other.

ERESHKIGAL

That was a lifetime ago.

ISHTAR

I didn't think something like that could change.

ERESHKIGAL

Time and distance can undo anything.

ISHTAR

I wish that were true.

*Beat. Ereshkigal smokes.*

ERESHKIGAL

I'm surprised you found me. On your own.

ISHTAR

I hope I didn't interrupt anything. / When I came in.

ERESHKIGAL

No / no.

ISHTAR

/ Good.

ERESHKIGAL

Of course not.

ISHTAR

I'd like to be sensitive.

Give you *space*.



ERESHKIGAL

Yes.

ISHTAR

Because I think mourning is a bit like / death itself...

ERESHKIGAL

Absolutely.

ISHTAR

It only seems authentic when it happens...

ERESHKIGAL

Yes.

ISHTAR

...in the next room.

*Beat.*

ISHTAR

This place is quite a labyrinth, isn't it?

ERESHKIGAL

Yes.

Yes.

I suppose it is.

*Short beat.*

ISHTAR (CONT'D)

It was a difficult trip. I came to pay my respects.

ERESHKIGAL

That's very thoughtful of you, after all this while. When you return you might find things altered from the way they were.

ISHTAR

I don't plan to stay long.

ERESHKIGAL

Even so.

ISHTAR

You're right. I should hurry. Every time I leave things have a way of, well, going to shit. When is the funeral?

ERESHKIGAL

You're currently attending it.

*Beat.*

ISHTAR

Quite a turnout.

ERESHKIGAL

You aren't dressed at all appropriately.

ISHTAR

Well, I *was*.

But your porter took my jewelry.

ERESHKIGAL

Her name is *Utta*.

It's the custom here. Everything will be returned to you.

ISHTAR

Have I done something wrong?

ERESHKIGAL

I'm not sure what you mean.

ISHTAR

It's been a very, very long time, Gala. I'm not here to pick a fight.

ERESHKIGAL

Millennia, by your figures, isn't that right?

ISHTAR

As if there were some other way to count the clock.

ERESHKIGAL

Ah. No one told you before you came.

ISHTAR

Told me what?

*ERESHKIGAL rings a small handbell. UTТА enters.*

UTТА

You rang.

ERESHKIGAL

How long since the king's death?

UTТА

Twenty three hours, six minutes and forty two seconds, ma'am.

ERESHKIGAL

How long since my sister descended?

UTТА

Eight minutes eleven seconds.

ERESHKIGAL

How long by her time?

UTТА

Twenty eight years, ten months and four days.

ERESHKIGAL

At a rate of?

UTТА

Three point five three years per minute by the clock of the dead.

ERESHKIGAL

*(To Ishtar)* Does that clear things up?

ISHTAR

...

UTТА

Eight minutes eleven seconds. Twenty eight years, ten-

ERESHKIGAL

Shut it.

*(To Ishtar)* Utta keeps our records. She's something of a savant. Listen to this.

*(To Utta)* Kings of the Underworld. Reverse alphabetical.

UTTA

Tishpack, Tammuz the younger, Tammuz the elder, Ninazu the Tall,  
Lagash III, Lagash II, Lagash I-

ERESHKIGAL

Fuck off.

*Ereshkigal rings the bell.*

UTTA

Ma'am.

*Utta exits.*

ERESHKIGAL

Is everything okay?

ISHTAR

Yes.

Yes. Everything's fine.

ERESHKIGAL

I understand if you'd rather leave. I know you're responsible for a great  
many people.

ISHTAR

No one is more important than my sister.

ERESHKIGAL

You're very sweet. And all it took to get you here was the death of a king.

ISHTAR

I'm sorry.

ERESHKIGAL

Tell me why you've come, Isha.

ISHTAR

For the funeral.

ERESHKIGAL

Don't begin with a lie.

ISHTAR

(*Ref: her funeral dress*) Look at my dress. I wouldn't be caught dead in this.  
Sorry.

ERESHKIGAL

Where's *your* husband, by the way? I'd love to meet him.

ISHTAR

He couldn't make it.

ERESHKIGAL

Drove another off already, is that it?

ISHTAR

No, actually. This time it's serious. We have children.

ERESHKIGAL

Oh. Congratulations.

ISHTAR

Two wonderful boys.

ERESHKIGAL

Sons?

A thing like that.

Well. I'm so.

Happy for you.

ISHTAR

I'd love you to meet them.

ERESHKIGAL

You should have brought them along.

ISHTAR

They're a little young.

ERESHKIGAL

And your husband? He couldn't be bothered to come?

ISHTAR

This place isn't exactly a getaway destination. But he sends his regards.

ERESHKIGAL  
How kind of him.

ISHTAR  
We've been busy.

ERESHKIGAL  
With what, exactly?

ISHTAR  
Screwing like the day we met.

ERESHKIGAL  
Don't be crass.

ISHTAR  
Crass? You haven't seen me in a while.

ERESHKIGAL  
Stop it.

ISHTAR  
You've always been ashamed of yourself.

ERESHKIGAL  
You're so *liberated*.

ISHTAR  
Yes. I am.

ERESHKIGAL  
I'm a woman too.  
I enjoy. The relations.  
I happen to have a sense of propriety, that's all.

ISHTAR  
I bet you still won't say the word "vulva".

ERESHKIGAL  
That's not true.

ISHTAR  
Oh really? Say it.

ISHTAR (Continued)

Go on.

ERESHKIGAL

No wonder your / husband isn't here. You're so infantile.

ISHTAR

Vulva vulva vulva vulva vulva vulva-

ERESHKIGAL

Ishtar!

*Short beat. Ishtar softens.*

ISHTAR

Ha.

ERESHKIGAL

What is it?

ISHTAR

No one's called me that for a thousand years.

ERESHKIGAL

Really? What do they call you now?

ISHTAR

Inanna.

ERESHKIGAL

Inanna.

Did they gave you the name of a concubine on purpose?

ISHTAR

This was a wonderful visit.

*(ISHTAR goes to exit.)*

ERESHKIGAL

Where are you going?

ISHTAR

I didn't come down to make this harder for you. And time's wasting, apparently.

ERESHKIGAL

Jumping ship already. What a surprise.

ISHTAR

This was a mistake.

ERESHKIGAL

You'll never find the way out on your own.

ISHTAR

I'll ask for directions.

ERESHKIGAL

Why did you come, Isha?

ISHTAR

I came to support you. You've never done it for me.

ERESHKIGAL

I can't simply leave. I don't have that choice.

ISHTAR

You did once.

ERESHKIGAL

What good would it have done, anyway? You've always made such an event of your independence.

ISHTAR

I've needed you.  
A thousand times.

ERESHKIGAL

When? When did the Great Queen need *me*?

ISHTAR

Well, for instance.  
When I was...  
When he.



ERESHKIGAL

You dealt with him.

ISHTAR

I still think about it.

ERESHKIGAL

Ancient history. Literally, by your standards. *Ancient.*  
And you know, you didn't exactly-

ISHTAR

*(Exploding)* I know, okay? I know.  
I did not. Handle it well.

ERESHKIGAL

The Goddess of Understatement. We're still cleaning up your mess.

*Ereshkigal extinguishes her cigarette and produces another.*

ISHTAR

That's a disgusting habit.

*Ereshkigal takes out another cigarette, puts both in her  
mouth and lights them.*

ERESHKIGAL

So. Are you going to pay your respects?

*Ishtar slowly approaches the coffin with the crown on top.  
Her attention is drawn to the crown. Ereshkigal clocks this.*

ISHTAR

He died suddenly, I heard.  
It's such a shame he never named a successor.

ERESHKIGAL

Yes.

ISHTAR

I'm sure you'll be more than willing to continue his legacy.

ERESHKIGAL

Of course.

ERESHKIGAL (Continued)

What do you mean?

ISHTAR

This must be *very* difficult for you. *Sole* ruler. Sovereign.

ERESHKIGAL

It *is* difficult. It's a lot of responsibility.

ISHTAR

Yes, but something tells me you're ready. I bet you spent days, years even, preparing for this moment.

ERESHKIGAL

I have nothing to hide.

ISHTAR

Do you think I'm a fool?

ERESHKIGAL

Stop it. You're being cruel.

ISHTAR

(*With mocking performative intensity*) How did you do it?

ERESHKIGAL

Do what? That's enough. Get away from there.

(*Ishtar picks up the crown.*)

Put that down.

ISHTAR

I just want to look at it.

ERESHKIGAL

You have no idea what you're doing.

ISHTAR

I've heard the legends.

ERESHKIGAL

Put it down, you little trollop.

ISHTAR

Is it really that dangerous?

ERESHKIGAL

It's more powerful than you can possibly imagine.

ISHTAR

This might surprise you, but I have a pretty vivid imagination.

ERESHKIGAL

You're no different from the rest. Always plotting. Always scheming.

ISHTAR

Paranoia! Definitely ranks high among the queenly virtues.

ERESHKIGAL

Just hand it over, will you?

*(Ishtar teasingly floats the crown above her head.  
Ereshkigal panics.)*

ERESHKIGAL (CONT'D)

Ishtar. Ishtar.

Stop.

Please. I implore you.

ISHTAR

You *implore* me?

ERESHKIGAL

Please.

ISHTAR

Repeat after me:

*My sister is the tits.*

ERESHKIGAL

...

ISHTAR

... !

ERESHKIGAL

My sister is.  
The tits.

ISHTAR

*They sing her praises  
From up the mighty Tigris  
All the way down the Euphrates.  
And so do I.*

ERESHKIGAL

They sing her praises from up the mighty Tigris all the way down the Euphrates and so do I.

ISHTAR

*The angel of fertility,  
The regent of rains,  
The goddess of horny goat-love-*

*(Ereshkigal grabs at the crown. Ishtar jerks back. They each have one hand on it. Sound. Something low, seismic, guttural, but very distant. A beat.)*

ISHTAR

Let go.

ERESHKIGAL

I see right through you.

ISHTAR

Don't be so dramatic.

ERESHKIGAL

Take your hand off.

ISHTAR

You first.

*(Neither lets go. The crown remains between them. Sound. Still very distant. Ishtar releases the crown. The sound fades. Ereshkigal sets the crown back on the coffin.)*

ERESHKIGAL

This is a very delicate affair. The transfer of powers.

ISHTAR

What a touching eulogy.

ERESHKIGAL

I know why you're here.

ISHTAR

Well, don't keep me in suspense.

ERESHKIGAL

Nature abhors a vacuum, moth to a flame...

ISHTAR

We used to be inseparable.

ERESHKIGAL

You can't help yourself.

ISHTAR

What are you talking about?

ERESHKIGAL

My husband dies. A vacant seat. A crown without a head.

ISHTAR

That's not what this is.

ERESHKIGAL

Do you expect me to believe you came out of concern?

ISHTAR

I am concerned...

ERESHKIGAL

How sweet.

ISHTAR

...that you may be unfit for this responsibility / *at the current moment.*

ERESHKIGAL

I knew it.

ISHTAR

It's next to impossible to be a mourner, a leader and a woman and still be taken seriously.

ERESHKIGAL

Try me.

ISHTAR

Look at you. You're so bereft.

ERESHKIGAL

(*Coldly, lighting a cigarette*) Every day's a struggle.

ISHTAR

This is your home. No one is going to take that from you.

ERESHKIGAL

You have everything. The whole world. You always did. What now, Isha? You want more?

ISHTAR

Everything I have I wrought into being.

ERESHKIGAL

And now it's my turn.

ISHTAR

You're not ready.

ERESHKIGAL

The decision isn't yours to make.

ISHTAR

I don't think you understand who I am.  
I invented thunder. I *invented* it.

ERESHKIGAL

I know who you are. You're a frightened, damaged, petulant little girl.

ISHTAR

Do not. Insult me again.

(*Sound. Something deep and inanimate groaning under immense weight. Distant.*)

ERESHKIGAL

Your power doesn't extend this far, Isha.

ISHTAR

Listen. This doesn't have to be difficult. We can work together.

ERESHKIGAL

What do you mean?

ISHTAR

Unite our realms. (*Subtly suggesting herself*) Under a single leader.

ERESHKIGAL

Absolutely not.

ISHTA

Why? Everyone benefits. What's the big secret down here, anyway? Why all the mystery?

ERESHKIGAL

You can't simply *show* people the place they go when they die. No one would ever get anything done.

ISHTAR

Well, I'm not talking about giving tours.

ERESHKIGAL

I deserve this, Ishtar. You know I do.

ISHTAR

You have no experience. Your whole life you've been the *companion* to great men. Passed around like a jug of cheap wine.

ERESHKIGAL

I've played the part. For thousands of years I've curtsied and simpered and demurred and *waited*. I've dressed myself in silence and I've waited.

ISHTAR

Not everyone gets a chance, Gala. No matter how long they wait.

*(Short beat.)*

You could be my second. Two sisters. On top of the world.

ERESHKIGAL

I know what that means.

ISHTAR

What?

ERESHKIGAL

You'll use your position to strip me of everything.

ISHTAR

No. It's important to me that you're taken care of.

ERESHKIGAL

This is really of no consequence anyway. If you want control, the Judges will have to approve.

ISHTAR

The Judges?

ERESHKIGAL

A council of our elders.

Patriarchs, mostly.

No one wears the crown without their approval.

*Long beat.*

ISHTAR

Did you know that some people have learned to write?

ERESHKIGAL

Really? Up there?

ISHTAR

That's right. Men, women. Just a handful at the moment, but it might catch on. It's clumsy, crude. Not very subtle. They scratch it into chunks of clay.

ERESHKIGAL

How primitive.



ISHTAR

It is. But, truth be told, before I came along they didn't have much reason to.

ERESHKIGAL

What do you mean?

ISHTAR

Imagine being so moved, so *awed* by something that you literally carved it into the earth.

ERESHKIGAL

I can't imagine that.

ISHTAR

They learned to write so they could worship the dirt where my name is printed.

ERESHKIGAL

Everything revolves around you, doesn't it?

ISHTAR

Actually. Yes. In this case, I guess you could say that.

ERESHKIGAL

You are one haughty shrew.

ISHTAR

I love you, Gala. I do. But it will be better for both of us if you let me handle this.

ERESHKIGAL

I'm afraid I can't do that.

ISHTAR

Don't be prideful.  
Think what they might write about *you*.

ERESHKIGAL

You'd better hurry, Ishtar.

ISHTAR

Why's that?

*Sound. An ambient rumble. Like the beginnings of a distant earthquake.*

ERESHKIGAL

Time is running. The world is turning. And you don't know the way out.

*The sound grows in volume as the lights fade.*

## II

*The same room, sans coffin. Ereshkigal's handbell sits on a small table. Ishtar sits in a chair at center, very upright, her hands on her knees. Her parasol is pitched above her, in expectation of rain. She takes a deep breath, shuts her eyes. Her palms turn up toward the ceiling. She concentrates. A long beat. She opens her eyes, looking up. She puts out one hand, then sticks out her tongue. She stands, still looking up, and holds out her palm again.*

### ISHTAR

That is not a good sign.

Great Anu,  
you tireless steward,  
keep vigil in my absence.

Watch the lowlands  
see the seed is cast,  
the dark earth turned.

Proctor the thirsty roots  
that waste themselves away  
without me, resentful things.

Banish droughts, banish barrens,  
banish fire that swallows the hills,  
and for fucks sake leave my temples  
exactly where they are.

After all- what are without your Queen?

*(Ishtar crosses to the table and rings the bell. UTТА enters.)*

### UTТА

You rang.

### ISHTAR

Yes. Hello. How are you?

UTTA

The diurnal cycle is the province of Sin who dictates a lunar interval of twelve hours and twenty-five minutes.

ISHTAR

Okay.

I will update my calendar.

UTTA

Twelve hours twenty-five minutes.

ISHTAR

I wondered if you could tell me how long I've been gone.

UTTA

Three hours, nineteen minutes, nine seconds.

ISHTAR

No, not how long I've been *here*. How long I've been *gone*.

UTTA

Six hundred ninety six years, six months, two days.

ISHTAR

What?

UTTA

Six hundred ninety six years, six m-

ISHTAR

I heard you. I'm having a moment.

UTTA

One moment.

ISHTAR

How do you know?

UTTA

You just told me.

ISHTAR

No- how do you know the exact times?

UTTA

It is the duty of the Recordkeeper. The duty. To observe and record the passing of time and the events of the world.

ISHTAR

So you're sort of an emissary between the two places?

UTTA

Recordkeeper.

ISHTAR

Do you write anything down?

UTTA

No, ma'am.

ISHTAR

Do you have an office?

UTTA

No, ma'am.

ISHTAR

A library?

UTTA

No, ma'am.

ISHTAR

An archive?

UTTA

No, ma'am.

ISHTAR

So you don't actually *keep* records?

UTTA

I'm a recordkeeper.

ISHTAR

I don't understand.

UTTA

I keep the records.

ISHTAR

Let's circle back to this.

*(Enter Ereshkigal.)*

ERESHKIGAL

Still here, I see.

UTTA

Six hundred ninety six years, six m-

ERESHKIGAL

*(Picking up the bell, to UTTA)* Fuck off.

*She rings the bell. UTTA exits.*

ERESHKIGAL

Wait.

*She rings the bell. UTTA enters.*

UTTA

You rang.

ERESHKIGAL

Did you give her the message?

UTTA

Sorry?

ERESHKIGAL

Give her the message, please. From her husband.

ISHTAR

There's a message from him? *(To UTTA)* Why didn't you say anything?

UTTA

Apologies, ma'am. You did not ask.

ERESHKIGAL

Oh, for god's sake, tell her.

UTTA

(*To ISHTAR*) Ma'am. A message for you from Dum-oozi, The Shepherd.

ERESHKIGAL

(*With a liquid 'u'*) It's Dumuzi. (*To ISHTAR*) Dumuzi, isn't that right?

UTTA

(*To ISHTAR*) A message from Dum-oozi.

ERESHKIGAL

Dumuzi.

UTTA

A message from Dum-ewe-zee.

ERESHKIGAL

Mew. Meeew.

UTTA

Like a kitty?

ERESHKIGAL

Yes. Not unlike a kitty.

UTTA

Mewww. Dum-ewwww-z.

ERESHKIGAL

Mewww / meeeewwwwwwwww.

UTTA

Oooooooooewwwww / eeeewwwww.

ERESHKIGAL

Good. Stay the course.

ISHTAR

Give me the message!

UTTA

Ma'am a message for you from Dum...from your husband.

(*She reports the following with emotionless vacancy*):

## UTTA (Continued)

*Dearest wife- I am not a great man of words but I pray that as the years pass these will find their way to you, for you are beyond the reach of my arms and I am sick without the sound of your footfalls. I dreamt a terrible dream, Inanna. I dreamt that you never left the clutches of your sister. What a bitch she is. What a terrible, terrible, inconceivable bitch. I dreamt last night that the years passed like rain and you never came back and that in your absence the world consumed itself. Your sister is a bitch. I know I already said that, but it bears repeating. Come back to us, my sweet. Your kingdom is waiting. Come back. Come back. When I awoke last night I washed myself with your soap. It smells of your body. I remembered, then, all the pleasures we shared together. Full of eagerness. Like the young moon. The thrusting tongue-play, how I was wont to water your womb, / plow your wet ground, station my oxen in your dyke. How I long to fill your holy churn with honey cheese-*

ERESHKIGAL

Oh!

ISHTAR

Oh! / You can stop.

ERESHKIGAL

Good / God.

ISHTAR

He's really just / fooling around.

ERESHKIGAL

(To UTTA) That / will do.

ISHTAR

This is / how we joke.

ERESHKIGAL

Station / his oxen?

ISHTAR

He has an irreverent / sense of humor.

ERESHKIGAL

Stop. Stop. / Stop!

Why. Why did you keep going.



UTTA

This concludes Dum-oozi's message.

ERESHKIGAL

Fuck off.

*ERESHKIGAL rings the bell. UTTA exits.*

ISHTAR

He's thinking of me.

ERESHKIGAL

Yes. He is.

ISHTAR

You're not a bitch. He just misses me, that's all.

ERESHKIGAL

Then, by all means, run to him. This may be your last chance.

ISHTAR

You mean...I can just leave?

ERESHKIGAL

Well, no. It isn't quite that simple. For one, the Judges would need to approve your return.

ISHTAR

Approve my- ? It doesn't matter. I'm not going anywhere until we've agreed on a solution.

ERESHKIGAL

I'd like to say it will be a fair hearing, but the Judges don't take kindly to foreigners.

ISHTAR

Can't we just work this out ourselves?

ERESHKIGAL

I'd prefer arbitration by a third party.

ISHTAR

I'm your family.

ERESHKIGAL

You're a snake.

*(Sound. Shifts of glacial scope and slowness. Still distant,  
but closer than in the first scene.)*

ERESHKIGAL (CONT'D)

Time is running. You're truant. Who knows what will become of things.

ISHTAR

What's happened to you, Gala?

ERESHKIGAL

Nothing. Nothing has happened.

ISHTAR

It just occurred to me. You're completely alone.

ERESHKIGAL

Yes.

ISHTAR

You have no one now.

ERESHKIGAL

*(A hint of self-pity)* I never really did.

ISHTAR

You've become so brittle.

ERESHKIGAL

I haven't spent much time in the sun.

*Beat.*

ISHTAR

Come back with me. We could both leave. Right now.

ERESHKIGAL

What?

ISHTAR

Listen to me-

ERESHKIGAL

And go where?  
Up there?

ISHTAR

Why not? Let's forget about all this. Leave it behind.

ERESHKIGAL

Don't be ridiculous.  
I can't simply- I'm needed here.  
There are...there are...*administrative exigencies*.

ISHTAR

I know what that means. Don't waste your time taking small orders from groups of small men.

ERESHKIGAL

It's my duty.

ISHTAR

You have so much more to offer. I know you do.

ERESHKIGAL

I-  
No. No. It's impossible.  
We'll never find the way.  
What makes you think I'd want to?

ISHTAR

Do you remember what the light feels like?

ERESHKIGAL

...

ISHTAR

What about the sky? How it stretches?

ERESHKIGAL

No.

ISHTAR

The inflection of birds.

ERESHKIGAL

I don't remember.

ISHTAR

Father. We could see father. You remember the Moon, don't you?

ERESHKIGAL

Does he ask about me?

ISHTAR

Of course he does. All the time.

ERESHKIGAL

Don't lie to me, Ishtar. Does he talk about me?

ISHTAR

Like you never left.

ERESHKIGAL

I wish.

I wish he were here.

ISHTAR

I know.

ERESHKIGAL

You always *accomplished* so much. Like a little man. Built things, destroyed them. Conquest after conquest. At a certain point I think he just stopped seeing me.

ISHTAR

*(Tenderly)* I'm not like any man.

ERESHKIGAL

He always loved that about you.

ISHTAR

The world is different now, Gala. I'll find a place for you.

ERESHKIGAL

This is my home.

ISHTAR

This is a refuge from failure.

*Beat.*

But you haven't failed. I know you think you have, but you haven't.  
You don't belong here. Neither of us belong here.

ERESHKIGAL

The truth is, Isha, I don't remember any of it. Sometimes it feels as though  
I was never there at all.

*(Sound. A low-pitched, driving wind. Distant.)*

ISHTAR

You left so long ago. Back the lifespan of a stone. Before the advance of the  
glaciers. Before we bothered with time. Everything has changed.

ERESHKIGAL

I want to see it all, I do.

ISHTAR

You can. You can. All you have to do is come with me.

ERESHKIGAL

I'm afraid, Ishtar.

ISHTAR

I know.

ERESHKIGAL

I'm terribly afraid.

ISHTAR

I know, sweetheart.

ERESHKIGAL

I don't think I can do it.

ISHTAR

Give me your hand.

*(ISHTAR extends her hand, after a beat ERESHKIGAL takes it and is nearly overcome.)*

ERESHKIGAL (CONT'D)

Father. I'm going to see my father.

ISHTAR

He's waiting for you, Gala.

ERESHKIGAL

Water. The taste of cool water.

ISHTAR

You can drink til you're sick.

ERESHKIGAL

*(Laughing and crying)* Nighttime. There will be nighttime with a beginning and an end, won't there?

ISHTAR

Yes. You can stay up and watch as it passes. Or you can sleep.

ERESHKIGAL

Sleep.

I had forgotten about sleep.

ISHTAR

It's very popular.

ERESHKIGAL

Will you make sure-

Will you stay with me while I sleep?

It might be a long time.

ISHTAR

I will.

ERESHKIGAL

Will you sing to me like you used to?

ISHTAR

As much as you want,.

ERESHKIGAL

Will you keep me safe?

ISHTAR

Always.

ERESHKIGAL

I love you. I love you.

*They embrace. ERESHKIGAL is broken.*

ISHTAR

Shh. Shh shhh shhhhh. You're my sister. I'll take care of you.

*A long beat of this.*

Give it all to me. Give me your tears, give me your laughter, give me the crown, give me your loneliness.

*A beat. ERESHKIGAL stops crying, her head still buried in her sister.*

That's it. This will be easier for both of us.

*ERESHKIGAL backs slowly away.*

Gala?

*She stares at ISHTAR. A beat. With a pained cry she charges her and wreathes her hands around ISHTAR's neck. In their struggle they knock over the table sending the bell to the floor. When UTTA enters, they are wrestling on the ground.*

UTTA

You rang.

*ERESHKIGAL is straddling ISHTAR, choking her. ISHTAR gasps for breath. After a beat of this, ISHTAR manages to shove ERESHKIGAL off.*

ISHTAR

*(To Ereshkigal)* Are you out of your mind? You could have killed me. Do you know what happens if I never make it back?

ERESHKIGAL

No.

ISHTAR

Neither do I! THERE'S A REASON NO ONE KNOWS WHAT HAPPENS WITHOUT ME BECAUSE WITHOUT ME THERE IS NOTHING.

*(Sound. Rumbling, a wave of distant thunder.)*

UTTA

Seven hundred forty one-

ISHTAR

Fuck off!

*ISHTAR rings the bell. UTTA exits.*

ERESHKIGAL

*(Taking the bell)* Don't tell her to fuck off!

*ERESHKIGAL rings the bell. UTTA enters.*

UTTA

You rang.

ISHTAR & ERESHKIGAL *(in unison)*

Fuck off!

*ERESHKIGAL rings the bell. UTTA exits.*

ERESHKIGAL

Wait.

*ERESHKIGAL rings the bell. UTTA enters.*

UTTA

You rang.

ISHTAR

I meant everything I said.



ERESHKIGAL

(*To ISHTAR*) Shut up. (*To UTTA*) What are you waiting for?

UTTA

You just said shut up.

ERESHKIGAL

Why would I tell you to shut up?

UTTA

It seems like something you would say to me.

ERESHKIGAL

Assemble the Judges.

UTTA

Are you sure?

ISHTAR

How long will that take?

UTTA

A matter of hours, ma'am. Possibly days.

ISHTAR

Days?

UTTA

They move slowly.

ISHTAR

But I've already been here- what did you say? Six hundred ninety...?

UTTA

Seven hundred forty one years, four months, seventeen days.

ISHTAR

Since when!?

UTTA

It's been nearly fourteen minutes since I last saw you, ma'am.

ISHTAR

I HATE THIS PLACE.

### III

*ERESHKIGAL sits reading a book and smoking a cigarette. ISHTAR is sitting on the opposite side of the stage, fidgeting. She looks down and discovers that she is barefoot. UTTA is doing something. ISHTAR looks down and discovers that she is barefoot. A long beat.*

ISHTAR

Have either of you seen my shoes?

ERESHKIGAL

No. But we've got our best minds on it.

UTTA

Would you like me to look, madam?

ISHTAR

No. No. That's alright.

*Beat.*

ISHTAR

What are you reading, Gala?

*ERESHKIGAL shows ISHTAR the book jacket. It is completely blank. She continues reading.*

*Beat. She extinguishes her cigarette.*

ERESHKIGAL

*(Still reading)* Utta, get my cigarettes.

UTTA

Which would you like?

ERESHKIGAL

The little brown ones. Not the white ones or the yellow. The *brown*.

*Sound. Something that suggests a great tree falling. Maybe a little dust falls from the ceiling. Distant. All acknowledge the sound, then move on.*

UTTA

Do you mean the ones in the case?

ERESHKIGAL

No. The ones on the shelf.

UTTA

...which shelf?

ERESHKIGAL

You go out this way, down the corridor, through the passage on your-

ISHTAR

*(Suddenly rising)* Alright. Where are they? Where?

ERESHKIGAL

They'll come in their own time. Relax.

ISHTAR

Relax? *(To UTTA)* I need to know when they'll be here. Right now.

UTTA

It's difficult to say, ma'am. It could be minutes, it could be days...

ERESHKIGAL

Weeks, even.

ISHTAR

Weeks?

UTTA

That's unlikely-

ERESHKIGAL

It could be weeks.

ISHTAR

No, no. I don't have that long. A *week* is...it's...

UTTA

Thirty five thousand, five hundred eighty two years, four months, eighteen days.

ISHTAR

We're doing this now.

ERESHKIGAL

What?

ISHTAR

I'm not waiting a moment longer. We're going to do this right here.

ERESHKIGAL

Absolutely not.

ISHTAR

Are you afraid?

ERESHKIGAL

There's nobody to hear the case. How will we know who's right?

ISHTAR

What about Utta?

ERESHKIGAL

Ha. She's hardly qualified.

ISHTAR

Utta, would you like to arbitrate?

UTTA

I don't know. I've never judged anyone before.

ISHTAR

Sounds impartial to me.

ERESHKIGAL

*(Setting the book aside, rising)* Fine. I'll play your little game. *(To UTTA)* Go find something to make you look significant. Fuck off.

*ERESHKIGAL rings the bell. UTTA exits.*

ERESHKIGAL

You are aware this will have no bearing whatsoever on the actual succession? The stakes literally couldn't be lower.

ISHTAR

Sure. Think of it like a dry run. Considering the state of your love life, you should be familiar with those.

ERESHKIGAL

Try as you might, I will never stoop to your level, Ishtar.

ISHTAR

That's why you'll never be Queen.

ERESHKIGAL

Utta!

*ERESHKIGAL rings the bell. UTТА enters wearing a barrister's wig.*

UTТА

You rang.

*Beat.*

ERESHKIGAL

Explain yourself.

UTТА

It was all I could find.

ISHTAR

I think you look wonderful. Very authoritative.

ERESHKIGAL

You do look more like a man. That helps.

ISHTAR

Let's begin.

ERESHKIGAL

*(To UTТА) Sit down.*

*UTТА goes to sit.*

ISHTAR

Ah! You're the judge, you don't have to do what she says.

*(UTTA freezes.)*

ERESHKIGAL

Just sit down, Uta.

*(UTTA goes to sit.)*

ISHTAR

Don't listen to her. Stand up.

*UTTA freezes. ISHTAR and ERESHKIGAL glare at her. A beat. UTTA proudly and decisively puts one foot up on the chair.*

UTTA

State your names, please. Can I ask you to do that?

ISHTAR

You can ask whatever you like.

ERESHKIGAL

...

ISHTAR

Do as she says.

ERESHKIGAL

Ereshkigal, Queen of the Underworld.

ISHTAR

I'm sorry, but that's not your *official* title, is it?

UTTA

Queen *Consort* of the Underworld.

ISHTAR

Ah. *Consort*. What a slippery little word. Easy to overlook, but what a difference it makes. Correct me if I'm wrong but that word implies a symbolic position that's defined and limited by a relationship to another.

UTTA

The spouse of a reigning monarch.

ISHTAR

Exactly. The wife of someone important.

ERESHKIGAL

Objection.

(*Beat.*)

UTTA

Do I have to do something?

ISHTAR

Say, "overruled".

ERESHKIGAL

No, that isn't-

UTTA

Overruled!

ISHTAR

As I was saying. My own title, *Queen Regnant*, gives me *sole* authority.

ERESHKIGAL

Over what, exactly?

ISHTAR

Fertility, sexual love, rainstorms, war, vegetable futures-

UTTA

Overruled!

ERESHKIGAL

(*To ISHTAR*) You've created a monster.

ISHTAR

I am *Queen Regnant* of the Earth.

UTTA

Yes, yes, I see. Very good.

ERESHKIGAL

Titles are meaningless.

ISHTAR

Why are you here, then? If the position means nothing to you?

ERESHKIGAL

That is not what I said.

ISHTAR

Titles are the way the world knows who we are.

ERESHKIGAL

Ah! I'd like to direct the attention of the court to this very statement!

*(Beat.)*

UTTA

Do I...do I have to do something?

ERESHKIGAL

Just listen. *(To ISHTAR)* This has always been your problem, Ishtar.

ISHTAR

What has?

ERESHKIGAL

You crave adulation! Without approval, you'd wither like an old man's member.

ISHTAR

Objection!

UTTA

Overruled!

*(UTTA gives ISHTAR a hearty thumb's up.)*

ERESHKIGAL

What kind of leader would you make?

ISHTAR

I *am* an excellent one.

ERESHKIGAL

A leader has to have convictions. You can't spend the whole time looking over your shoulder making sure you've pleased everyone.



ISHTAR

You have no idea what I've done- what I've had to sacrifice.

ERESHKIGAL

Always the martyr. What happened to you doesn't exempt you from scrutiny.

ISHTAR

You don't know what happened to me, you weren't there.

*(Sound. A tectonic fissure. Distant.)*

ISHTAR (CONT'D)

You said, earlier, that you're still cleaning up my mess.

ERESHKIGAL

You don't know the half of it.

ISHTAR

I didn't realize, that it would affect...

ERESHKIGAL

I guess you failed to think that far ahead, didn't you?

ISHTAR

I don't need a lecture, Gala.

ERESHKIGAL

I think perhaps you do. If you hadn't provoked him...

*(Beat.)*

ISHTAR

Finish that thought.

ERESHKIGAL

Never mind.

ISHTAR

Finish it, you hag.

UTTA

I think I might be very bad at this.

ISHTAR

You're doing great.

ERESHKIGAL

(*To UTTA*) Just take charge.

UTTA

Take charge take charge.

ISHTAR

Please, tell me what I should have done differently.

ERESHKIGAL

You punished everyone  
for what he did.

You buried the earth  
in sheets of ice a half mile thick.  
You fissured mountains,  
you flooded, you froze,  
you sterilized.  
You clawed at the land  
until it took the exact  
shape of your pain.

You set the clock back  
ten thousand years.

The earth turned  
and men groped about  
on all fours  
in the corridors of darkness  
like abortive things,  
witless and half-blind.

UTTA

Do you know how many died?

ISHTAR

...

ERESHKIGAL

Do you?

UTTA

No. Even I don't.

ERESHKIGAL

Too many to reckon. The overcrowding. It was ghastly.

ISHTAR

I'm sure.

ERESHKIGAL

The dead take up more space than you'd expect. And the Judges were furious, I can tell you that. They laid it all at the feet of a scorned, unstable woman.

ISHTAR

I wasn't scorned, I was...

UTTA

Raped. By your gardener, isn't that right?

ISHTAR

Yes.

ERESHKIGAL

A deplorable thing like that. The canker in the hedge.

UTTA

Deplorable.

ERESHKIGAL

But are you aware just how frequently these...incidents occur?

UTTA

Every one hundred ten seconds.

ERESHKIGAL

They're nearly common as births, deaths. Common as prayer.

ISHTAR

I don't see how this is relevant.

ERESHKIGAL

What happened to you was unforgivable. (*Diplomatically*) But the...phenomenon isn't exactly unprecedented. (*To UTТА*) Victim Queens. Reverse alphabetical.

UTТА

Siddu, Sidari, Ninhursag, Ningal, Lilith, Lana, Kuaya, Ki, Hanish, Hadya-

ERESHKIGAL

Shut up. Countless numbers, every day, every moment. But they don't turn the world upside down. They *endure*. They check their impulses. That is what's expected of us.

ISHTAR

I have. No response to that.

ERESHKIGAL

I didn't make the world this way, Isha. You did.

(*ISHTAR turns away.*)

UTТА

(*To ISHTAR*) Respond.

ISHTAR

(*With contained rage*) What?

UTТА

Oh. I apologize.

ERESHKIGAL

(*To UTТА*) That's it. Take charge.

UTТА

Respond.

ISHTAR

Shut up.

UTТА

Do you dare defy the court?

ERESHKIGAL

(To UTТА) That's it.

UTТА

(To ERESHKIGAL) Silence!

ISHTAR

Who do you think you're talk-

UTТА

Respond to the question or I will...I will be very upset indeed.

ISHTAR

You're a nobody.

UTТА

Respond.

ISHTAR

Actually, you *serve* a nobody-

UTТА

Respond.

ISHTAR

Which would make you-

UTТА

Respond.

ISHTAR

Nothing.

*(UTТА leaps up and bellows with tyrannical rage. For the first time, maybe in her life, ISHTAR shrinks. )*

UTТА

RESPOND. Are you a queen or just a PAMPERED, SELF CONGRATULATING WHORE WITH NOTHING TO BLAME FOR HER COLOSSAL MISTAKES BUT HER OWN APPETITE?

*(UTТА rages. Is she talking to one or both of them?)*

## UTTA (Continued)

Respond. RESPOND. I said respond. Tell the court. Tell ME. WHAT'S IT LIKE BEING THE CENTER OF THE FUCKING UNIVERSE?

*A long beat. ISHTAR weeps softly. Utta removes the barrister's wig and contemplates it for a moment. ERESHIKGAL crosses to UTTA and slaps her. As if emerging from a trance, UTTA suddenly rushes to comfort ISHTAR.*

*ISHTAR stands suddenly, tears still in her eyes.*

## ISHTAR

How rude of me. I never gave my name to the court.

I am the second daughter  
of the Moon.

I am the drought and the flood,  
I am the feast and the famine,  
the spear and the boar.

I am the field and the ox,  
I am its yoke,  
I am the seed,  
I am the soil that collects it.

*(Sound. Long peels of thunder. Drawing nearer this time.)*

My hand makes the midday heat  
and sends it over the sea.  
My heart knocks and time amends  
its measure.

Look at me. Both of you.  
I did not come here  
to ask permission.

I am Inanna, called Ishtar.  
Stand in my way  
And I will devour you.

## ISHTAR (Continued)

I've left my home  
for this crown  
and I WILL HAVE IT.

*(The thunder dies down for a moment. UTTA looks out.)*

## UTTA

Look. They've come.

*(Sound. The thunder is in the room.)*

#### IV

*(Ishtar sits alone, smoking a cigarette. She is unkempt and now wears nothing but a simple frock of the same material as ERESHKIGAL's.)*

*(A beat. ISHTAR smokes. Sound. Something turning, too large to be seen. ISHTAR acknowledges it and continues smoking. She does a perfunctory version of the rain ritual from the top of Scene II. UTTA enters.)*

ISHTAR

What do you want?

UTTA

I thought you might like to know the time.

ISHTAR

That's alright.

UTTA

I was dispatched. Dispatched. To report the hours.

ISHTAR

I'd rather not-

UTTA

Twenty two hours, seven minutes, fifty seconds-

ISHTAR

Alright.

UTTA

Four thousand, six hundred forty seven years, eight-

ISHTAR

That's enough!

*(Beat.)*

UTTA

Are you comfortable?



ISHTAR

Do I look comfortable?

*(Short beat.)*

ISHTAR

You can't just keep me here.

UTTA

I'm told the Judges will render their decision soon.

ISHTAR

What's the hurry.

UTTA

It is conceivable that you could be kept here. For a very long time.

ISHTAR

What's happening to me, exactly? Am I dead?

UTTA

Well-

ISHTAR

*(Ref: her appearance)* That would explain...this.

UTTA

Not dead, exactly. No.

ISHTAR

What then?

UTTA

Lapsed, you might say. Like us.

*(Beat. ISHTAR contemplates a follow-up question but abandons the thought. She takes a long drag of her cigarette.)*

UTTA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. For what I said earlier.

ISHTAR

What are you talking about?

UTTA

I got carried away.

ISHTAR

I haven't thought about it.

UTTA

I have. I've thought about it a great deal. I think some people can't be trusted with responsibility like that. Take a dog, for instance. You keep it in a kennel its whole life, there's no telling what it will eat when you suddenly let it out. Now, take me for instance. I'm a *peripheral* person. If you put a peripheral person in the center of things then all of a sudden the peripheral person sees the periphery differently because now they're looking at it from the center- *it* being the periphery. And you can't expect them to see the periphery clearly because they've never had to look at it before, because if you're *in the middle* of something how can you actually *see* it, or *yourself* in it for that matter? So the instant you're in the center you no longer see *yourself* in the center but simply *are in* the center and the periphery becomes another thing entirely. I think perhaps a peripheral person should stay peripheral. It's really best for everyone involved. Including the peripheral person.

*(Sound. A subdued but violent tremor. Maybe things in the room rattle a bit.)*

ISHTAR

There haven't been any messages, have there?

UTTA

Yes. I mean. No.

ISHTAR

Have there or haven't there?

UTTA

There haven't.

ISHTAR

But you said yes.

UTTA

Well. There is a message. Yes. One message.

|   |        |
|---|--------|
| ...is it for me?                                  | ISHTAR |
| Yes.  | UTTA   |
| What are you waiting for?                         | ISHTAR |
| I'm forbidden to say.                             | UTTA   |
| By whose authority?                               | ISHTAR |
| The Queen's.                                      | UTTA   |
| What's the harm in it?                            | ISHTAR |
| I cannot. I'm not allowed.                        | UTTA   |
| You need to give me the message.                  | ISHTAR |
| That is the opposite of what I am supposed to do. | UTTA   |
| <i>(Short beat.)</i>                              |        |
| <i>(Calling)</i> Gala! / Gala!                    | ISHTAR |
| What are you doing?                               | UTTA   |
| Gala! / Come here.                                | ISHTAR |
| Please. Don't.                                    | UTTA   |

ISHTAR

O, mighty Queen, / I think you'll want to hear this-

UTTA

Stop. Stop. Please. It's from your husband.

ISHTAR

Tell me. I can keep a secret.

*(UTTA reluctantly assumes the messenger posture and reports the following with a very subtle tenderness.)*

UTTA

*Dearest wife- I have nothing left now but faith, blind faith that this will find you. The centuries have swept all other virtues away. Something is happening, Ishtar. The air doesn't feel the same anymore. I can't recall the last time it rained. Fear and suspicion govern in your place. I beg you to make amends with your sister and leave without another thought. Lately I've wondered what's so noble about hoping for something with no evidence it will ever happen. I hope you can forgive me for that. I hope you can forgive us all. I love you.*

*(A beat. Ishtar lights another cigarette and weeps silently.)*

UTTA (CONT'D)

This concludes Dum- your husband's message.

*(Beat.)*

ISHTAR

Well? Go on. Fuck off.

*(Uttā doesn't move.)*

UTTA

I think I'll stay for a while.

ISHTAR

Since when do you get to decide that?

UTTA

You don't have the bell.

*(UTTA sits down next to ISHTAR.)*

UTTA (Continued)

I had a child. Did you know that? A daughter.

ISHTAR

You?

UTTA

They said it was impossible. But I had her.

ISHTAR

I thought that couldn't happen here.

UTTA

They told me to give her up. She was just a little grey thing. Her head was approximately the size of a doorknob.

ISHTAR

What did you do?

UTTA

I took her out the seven gates. Then up. Up. Up. The way was long. I don't remember how long. She should have died. When I came to the top, it was so strange, there was something growing on one of the stones at the mouth of the passage. Lichen, I think. The sun could touch it just so. Just like this. Only a sliver for a few minutes every day. But it was enough to turn the whole stone green. I set her down right there. Right there on that little bed with the temporary sunlight. Her whole body was the color of ashes. Her feet looked like two tiny piles of ashes.

ISHTAR

And you left her there?

UTTA

I left her there.

*(Long beat. Sound.)*

UTTA (Continued)

I know the way out.

I know the way.

ISHTAR

You do?

I can show you. UTTA

What? ISHTAR

I can show you the way out. UTTA

Are you being sincere? ISHTAR

What other way is there to be? UTTA

They'll stop us. Won't they stop us? ISHTAR

I'll make sure no one sees. UTTA

Why would you do this for me? ISHTAR

*(Short beat.)*

What is it? ISHTAR (CONT'D)

No one has ever asked me why I do anything. UTTA

I have nothing to give you, but- ISHTAR

I only ask one thing in return. UTTA

Alright. ISHTAR

You'll need to do it before we leave. Before. UTTA

ISHTAR

What is it?

UTTA

Kill the Queen.

*(Beat.)*

UTTA

Please do not make me say it again.

ISHTAR

I. Can't.

I won't.

UTTA

You're Inanna. You can do anything.

ISHTAR

Not this.

UTTA

Eight minutes twelve seconds have elapsed since my last report.

ISHTAR

I told / you, I don't want-

UTTA

Twenty four years, / eleven months, eighteen days.

ISHTAR

Stop it. / I don't want to hear this.

UTTA

Four thousand six hundred seventy two years, two months, three days in total.

ISHTAR

She's my sister.

UTTA

She'll keep you here. She'll keep you. You know she will. Think of your husband. Think of your people.

UTTA (Continued)

They may love you now, pine for you, even. But time will unfold itself. It does that. Divides endlessly, repeats aloud its own name until all others are forgotten. And those people, those subjects, their affection will harden into resentment. They have been abandoned, after all. You abandoned them. Resentment will nurse hatred and hatred will erode- will erode slow as stone- into indifference. And then you will simply be lost. You will have never existed at all.

*(Short beat.)*

ISHTAR

You might be *the* most guileful person I've ever met.

UTTA

What will they do without rain?

ISHTAR

Listen to me. She may be my enemy. She may be a cruel, sexless, self-hating thing but she's still my sister. Can't you understand that?

UTTA

No. No. Truly, I can't. I have no point of reference.

ISHTAR

You have a child.

UTTA

Not anymore.

ISHTAR

I know how she treats you-

UTTA

You don't. You don't know.

ISHTAR

Why can't *you* do it, then?

UTTA

I'm a peripheral person.



ISHTAR

This is ridiculous. I won't do your bidding.

*(UTTA hands Ishtar a knife.)*

UTTA

You don't know the way out.

ERESHKIGAL

*(From off)* Utta!

ISHTAR

*(ref: the dagger)* Take it. She's coming.

UTTA

You don't know. The way out.

*(ERESHKIGAL enters, now in regal finery. ISHTAR manages to hide the knife on her person just in time.)*

ERESHKIGAL

Utta! What are you doing in here? Where's your bell?

UTTA

I don't know, ma'am.

ERESHKIGAL

Which don't you know?

UTTA

Either, ma'am.

ERESHKIGAL

Either?

UTTA

Neither.

ERESHKIGAL

What?

UTTA

Both, I mean.

ERESHKIGAL

Just fuck off, will you?

*(Beat. UTTA looks to ISHTAR.)*

ERESHKIGAL

Fuck off, I said. I don't want you in here with her.

UTTA

Ma'am.

*(UTTA exits.)*

ERESHKIGAL

You look unwell.

ISHTAR

I don't feel at all myself.

ERESHKIGAL

The prisoner is penitent.

ISHTAR

Would you like a cigarette?

ERESHKIGAL

No, thank you.

ISHTAR

Where's your crown?

ERESHKIGAL

I'm not wearing it at the moment.

ISHTAR

Not wearing it? You?

ERESHKIGAL

Well.

I haven't been named just yet. A formality, to be sure.

ISHTAR

Gala.

ERESHKIGAL

*(With relish)* I thought I might inform you, we've had some alarming reports. From...*(she gestures upward)*.

ISHTAR

I see.

ERESHKIGAL

There's been no rain whatsoever, which I understand is less than ideal.

ISHTAR

It is.

ERESHKIGAL

Fertility has sharply declined. Across the board.

ISHTAR

...

ERESHKIGAL

Wealth among your people has amassed in a somewhat...shall-we-say lopsided manner.

ISHTAR

Gala...

ERESHKIGAL

Oh, and something is happening to the sea. They weren't clear about that.

ISHTAR

Gala. You have to let me go.

ERESHKIGAL

Going straight at it this time. A bold strategy.

ISHTAR

Please. Take the crown. I don't want it.

ERESHKIGAL

Would you stop?

ISHTAR

I'm serious.

ERESHKIGAL

This is a poor performance.

ISHTAR

I'll simply leave. You'll never hear from me again.

ERESHKIGAL

I'm afraid I can't trust you, Ishtar.

ISHTAR

Yes, you can.

ERESHKIGAL

Every word you've said since you arrived has been a lie.

ISHTAR

I'm your sister.

ERESHKIGAL

Even that! It sounds so hollow when you say it.

*(Sound. Closer, this time. Deep, resonant.)*

ISHTAR

I don't want to do this.

ERESHKIGAL

Do what?

ISHTAR

I love you.

ERESHKIGAL

What are you talking about?

ISHTAR

*(Drawing the knife)* I love you. Don't scream. I'll end it before anyone hears you.

ERESHKIGAL

What are you doing? Isha.

ISHTAR

You know what I'm doing.

ERESHKIGAL

You're going to murder your sister? Even you're not that brazen.

ISHTAR

Do you understand what will happen if I don't go back?

ERESHKIGAL

I have some idea. But I'd like to know for certain.

ISHTAR

Do you want to be responsible for the ruin of the natural world?

ERESHKIGAL

Your avarice has led you here, Isha. Nothing else. If things fall apart, you have yourself to blame.

ISHTAR

I should never have come. I know. But this is bigger than the two of us now.

ERESHKIGAL

*(Ref: the knife)* Where did you get that?

*ERESHKIGAL looks to where UTTA exited. Realizes.*

ERESHKIGAL (CONT'D)

What did she promise you in return?

ISHTAR

Let me go.

ERESHKIGAL

You won't do it.

ISHTAR

...

ERESHKIGAL

You won't do it. You're scared. Your eyes, the way you're breathing. It was the same when you were a girl.

ISHTAR

I'm not afraid.

ERESHKIGAL

You're my blood, Isha. You can lie to me, but I've seen all the parts of you worth knowing.

ISHTAR

You'd better hope you're right about that.

ERESHKIGAL

What would you tell father?

*(Short beat.)*

ISHTAR

Let me go.

ERESHKIGAL

It won't be that simple.

*(ISHTAR maintains her threat but gradually softens.)*

ISHTAR

If they crown you-

ERESHKIGAL

*If* they crown me? When.

ISHTAR

When. When they crown you. What good will it do you to keep me here?

ERESHKIGAL

Do you really want to know? It might surprise you.

ISHTAR

What? Tell me.

ERESHKIGAL

I'm somewhat embarrassed.

ISHTAR

Go on.

ERESHKIGAL

*(Sincerely)* I'd like to spend more time with my sister.

*(Beat.)*

ISHTAR

I'm sorry, Gala. For everything. All these years I've been absent.

ERESHKIGAL

There's blame on both sides. *(Ref: the knife)* Here, give it to me. We'll talk.

*(ISHTAR inches closer to ERESHKIGAL.)*

ISHTAR

I don't want to do this. Don't make me do this.

ERESHKIGAL

I know. That's it. You'll just stay a while and we'll talk.

ISHTAR

I'll stay. Just a short while.

ERESHKIGAL

And who knows? Soon I'll be named Queen. Things will change. Maybe your people will be amenable to a shift in leadership.

*They've come close enough to touch one another. Short beat. ISHTAR suddenly seizes ERESHKIGAL by the hair and puts the knife to her throat with renewed ferocity. Sound. A subdued earthquake, drawing nearer.*

ISHTAR

You will never be me. Even if I die here and turn to dust and nothing of my legacy remains. You. Will. Never. Be. Me.

ERESHKIGAL

Ishtar, please.

ISHTAR

Release me.

ERESHKIGAL

You'll never find the way out on your own.

ISHTAR

That's none of your concern. Release me.

ERESHKIGAL

I told you I can't.

ISHTAR

Don't make me choose, Gala. You won't be happy with the outcome.

ERESHKIGAL

I *can't* let you go! I don't have the authority.

*UTTA enters. ERESHKIGAL lashes out at her, but is restrained by ISHTAR.*

ERESHKIGAL (CONT'D)

You conniving little pig!

UTTA

Ma'am.

ISHTAR

What is it?

UTTA

The Judges have reached a decision.

ISHTAR

They have?

UTTA

*(Ref: their entanglement)...* may I help either of you in any way?

ERESHKIGAL

*(To UTTA)* Treacherous cretin.

UTTA

Perhaps I should return once you've resolved this.

*(UTTA goes to exit.)*

ERESHKIGAL

/ Don't you dare walk away from me.

ISHTAR

Where do you think / you're going?



ERESHKIGAL

Where the fuck is your / bell!?

ISHTAR

(To ERESHKIGAL) Shut up!

UTTA

You both seem chagrined.

ISHTAR

(To *UTTA*) Tell me what they said.

UTTA

Are you sure you'd like to know...before you...?

ISHTAR

Uta. What did the Judges say?

UTTA

They are prepared to release you, on one condition. That you find someone to take your place. One living soul. Someone close to you. Someone you love.

ISHTAR

What will happen to them?

UTTA

They will be kept here, in your stead.

ISHTAR

For how long?

UTTA

They said you have once chance to choose. One chance. If they reject your initial offer, you will be kept here indefinitely.

ERESHKIGAL

What about the crown? Did they mention the crown?

UTTA

They are not yet prepared to name a successor.

ERESHKIGAL

Underhanded bastards! No matter. No matter.

ISHTAR

As long as it's in their hands, they'll never give you what you want, Gala.

UTTA

(*To ISHTAR*) What are you waiting for? Kill her while you have the chance!

*ERESHKIGAL glares at UTTA.*

UTTA

(*To ISHTAR*) No. Be merciful.

ERESHKIGAL

You're going to kill your only sister? When there's a perfectly viable alternative?

UTTA

(*To ISHTAR*) Take matters into your own hands. Your own hands. For those of us who can't.

*ERESHKIGAL spits at UTTA.*

UTTA (Continued)

Take the bargain.

ERESHKIGAL

You haven't thought this through. Where will you go once I'm dead?

UTTA

I know the way out.

*ERESHKIGAL lunges at UTTA, restrained by ISHTAR.*

UTTA (Continued)

But I do get lost very easily.

ERESHKIGAL

Spare me. And all will be forgiven

UTTA

Kill her. And you have your freedom.

I love you, Isha. ERESHKIGAL

She hates you. UTTA

Fuck off! ERESHKIGAL

You fuck off! UTTA

Shut up! Both of you. ISHTAR

There's one other thing. One other. *(To ISHTAR)* A message for you. From your husband. UTTA

What does he say? ISHTAR

It isn't very long. UTTA

Go on. ISHTAR

*(Reporting the message)* Redeem us. UTTA

*Sound. Blackout.*

V

*The two sisters stand close to each other. ISHTAR lights ERESHKIGAL's cigarette, then her own. The two stand in silence for a long time, smoking.*

ISHTAR

When do you suppose she'll be back?

ERESHKIGAL

Soon, I should think.

*Beat.*

ERESHKIGAL

Are you sure about this?

ISHTAR

I trust her.

*Beat.*

ISHTAR

How long / do you suppose it's been since-

ERESHKIGAL

I meant are / you sure-

ISHTAR

Sorry, / what?

ERESHKIGAL

I meant are you sure / about-

ISHTAR

Yes.

Yes.

*Short beat.*

Of course I'm not. How could anyone be?

ERESHKIGAL

Try not to think about it. That helps.

*Sound. A tremor, something splitting in two. Dust falls from the ceiling.*

ISHTAR

I wish she were here.

ERESHKIGAL

Do you need the time?

ISHTAR

No. That doesn't matter anymore.

ERESHKIGAL

The Judges won't deny your offer.

ISHTAR

What makes you so sure?

ERESHKIGAL

They won't.

ISHTAR

Aren't you waiting for them, same as I am?

ERESHKIGAL

They'll name me.  
They will.

*Beat. Sound. They smoke as things collapse in the distance.*

ISHTAR

If you're right, about the Judges-

ERESHKIGAL

I'm right.

ISHTAR

You could keep me. You'd have the power.

ERESHKIGAL

I haven't decided.

ISHTAR

You haven't decided...?

ERESHKIGAL

I haven't decided if I'm going to let you go.

ISHTAR

I wouldn't be your sister if I hadn't tried to kill you once or twice.

ERESHKIGAL

They'll crown me first. They'll make me Queen. Then I'll choose.

*Beat.*

ISHTAR

You know. I've been thinking. What's to stop you doing it yourself?

ERESHKIGAL

Doing what?

ISHTAR

*Naming* yourself.

ERESHKIGAL

Don't be daft.

ISHTAR

What's to stop you?

ERESHKIGAL

One can't simply...*decide*...to...

ISHTAR

Can't one?

ERESHKIGAL

No. One can't. There are rules. Statutes.

ISHTAR

Statutes.

ERESHKIGAL

What would it mean, anyway? Without their approbation? What would any of it *actually* mean?

ISHTAR

Maybe it's time to find out. The crown itself means something, doesn't it?

ERESHKIGAL

It's an object.

ISHTAR

As a symbol, then?

ERESHKIGAL

A symbol. That will show them.

ISHTAR

I'm trying to help you.

ERESHKIGAL

You can't. This is the way things are done. You take the proper channels. You wait. For ages, if necessary. Do I wish it worked differently? Of course I do.

ISHTAR

You've waited long enough.

ERESHKIGAL

Do you know why you're in this situation? Why you're a prisoner to your own sister and will almost definitely be responsible for some kind of cataclysmic disaster?

Pride.

You're a prideful fool, Ishtar.

ISHTAR

You're right.

ERESHKIGAL

Don't cry. It can't earn you anything.

*Long beat.*

ISHTAR

Where is she?

ERESHKIGAL  
She'll come.

ISHTAR  
You'll make a fine Queen.

ERESHKIGAL  
I know.

ISHTAR  
What's the first thing you'll do? Your first act.

ERESHKIGAL  
Improve the lighting.

*Beat.*

ISHTAR  
Do you remember the Great River?

ERESHKIGAL  
Vaguely.

ISHTAR  
You remember.

ERESHKIGAL  
I remember a great deal of mud.

ISHTAR  
The most fertile soil in the world. You set your ear to the ground and it practically hummed.

ERESHKIGAL  
I wonder what's growing there now.

ISHTAR  
We used to fight like mad over it when we were little. Everything was a competition. Who could swim fastest, who could dive deepest.

ERESHKIGAL  
That was you.



What?  
ISHTAR  
ERESHKIGAL  
I never set foot in that river.  
ISHTAR  
Sure you did.  
ERESHKIGAL  
I had no interest whatsoever.  
ISHTAR  
You're joking.  
ERESHKIGAL  
It was freezing.  
And it was outdoors.  
ISHTAR  
I remember you-  
ERESHKIGAL  
Sometimes I think you simply invent these childhood memories.  
ISHTAR  
I do not!  
ERESHKIGAL  
The Gala you recall does not in any way resemble who I was as a child.  
ISHTAR  
That's not true.  
ERESHKIGAL  
Not everything we did in those days *means* something.  
ISHTAR  
I would get mad, throw a fit and the river would flood.  
ERESHKIGAL  
I see your point.

*Short beat.*

ISHTAR

Father said to watch our tempers. They were more powerful than we knew.

ERESHKIGAL

He said that to *you*.

ISHTAR

*When you hurt your sister something greater always suffers.*

ERESHKIGAL

That I remember.

*Beat. They smoke. Things collapse.*

ERESHKIGAL

You were swimming against yourself, Isha. In that river. Always against yourself.

*Beat.*

ERESHKIGAL (Continued)

Weren't there two?

ISHTAR

What?

ERESHKIGAL

Two rivers. I remember two.

*Short beat. UTTA enters.*

ISHTAR

Where is he? Where is my husband?

*UTTA produces a tiny wooden box. It fits in her palm.*

*Short beat.*

UTTA

He's inhabiting the size of his soul. It's very small.

*ISHTAR slowly approaches the box and lays a hand on it. With the utmost care she takes it from UTTA and crosses away, wrapt.*

## UTTA (Continued)

Ma'am. Over six thousand years have passed since you left.

*Short beat.*

I will not lie.  
It is frightening.  
The cycles of things  
have been perverted.  
Reversed. Misshapen.

Droughts. Famine. Fires. Disease.  
Wars have been fought.  
Small wars and great wars.

On the bright side  
most people can read.

*Short beat.*

I brought this back.

*UTTA holds up a jumble of dead leaves and twigs that  
forms a loose wreath.*

I think it died.  
Maybe we can hang it somewhere.

*UTTA sets down the wreath.*

ERESHKIGAL

What about the Judges? Have I been named? Is there any word?

UTTA

No. I mean. Yes.

ERESHKIGAL

What?

UTTA

Yes.

ERESHKIGAL  
Yes WHAT?

UTTA  
There has been word.

*(A short beat.)*

ERESHKIGAL  
...and?

UTTA  
Well.

ERESHKIGAL  
Out with it.

UTTA  
Perhaps it would be better if you heard it from them.

ERESHKIGAL  
Tell me.

UTTA  
I don't like being put in this position. I don't like it.

ERESHKIGAL  
What position?

UTTA  
The bearer of news.

ERESHKIGAL  
That *is* your position.

UTTA  
I wish it weren't.

ERESHKIGAL  
*I* didn't put you there.

UTTA  
Yes, ma'am.

*Short beat.*

UTTA (Continued)

Perhaps you should sit down.

ERESHKIGAL

I'll stand, thank you.

UTTA

I don't relish telling you this.

ERESHKIGAL

Oh.

UTTA

In spite of our...differences.

ERESHKIGAL

Go on.

UTTA

They are concerned.

That you lack. Stability.

That you don't have. The qualifications.

They believe that grief has made you. Sentimental.

*Long beat. ERESHKIGAL sits and stares out.*

ISHTAR

I'm sorry, Gala.

I'm so sorry.

It isn't right.

Maybe, in time...

UTTA

You know, it's not so bad being a peripheral person. I have a great deal of experience. Give it a chance. A chance. It might suit you.

*Beat. Ereshkigal stares out. Maybe a few furious tears belie her catatonia.*

ISHTAR

Gala?

UTTA

(To ISHTAR) Is she alright?

ISHTAR

You've waited this long.

UTTA

Seven hundred fifty eight million minutes, three seconds. By our reckoning.

ISHTAR

You can wait a while longer.

*Sound. Nearby. Something seismic and urgent that continues partway through the following exchange. This prompts ERESHKIGAL to rise very slowly and cross to the wreath of dead flora. She studies it.*

ISHTAR (Continued)

Gala. I'm sorry.

But it's time.

(Looking at the box) I have to be going.

ERESHKIGAL

Not before the coronation.

*Beat.*

ERESHKIGAL (Continued)

You're here.

My darling sister.

You came.

ISHTAR

I'm here. It's okay.

ERESHKIGAL

Listen.

Listen to them.

Waiting in their thousands.

Oh, what a magnificent sound.

UTTA

Ma'am?

ERESHKIGAL

Waiting for a glimpse of their sovereign.

ISHTAR

Maybe you should sit down.

ERESHKIGAL

The time has come. And their Queen will not disappoint. Finally they will see her and it will be like looking headlong into the heat of the sun.

ISHTAR

Gala-

ERESHKIGAL

*(Picking up the wreath)* And *such* a diadem.

UTTA

*(To ISHTAR)* Has she gone mad?

ERESHKIGAL

She who wears it wears the world.

ISHTAR

Gala. Listen to me. They've decided. It's over.

ERESHKIGAL

I'm afraid you don't understand.

*ERESHKIGAL smiles at ISHTAR.*

*(Looking at the wreath)* The apparel that suits a Queen is no longer theirs to give.

*Beat.*

ISHTAR

Let the anointing begin!

ERESHKIGAL

Sound trumpets! Strike up the drums!

*(Sound. The earth is falling apart.)*

UTTA

What is happening.

ERESHKIGAL

*(To UTTA)* Ah. The Duchess of...whaddyacallit. Would you like to perform the coronation?

UTTA

Me?

ERESHKIGAL

*(To UTTA)* You!

ISHTAR

*(To UTTA)* High priestess!

UTTA

Do I...do I have to do something?

ISHTAR

Why, you'll bestow the crown of course!

ERESHKIGAL

Not only that- you will decide the successor. In real time! *(To ISHTAR)* Isn't that right?

ISHTAR

Correct!

UTTA

Decide?

ERESHKIGAL

That's right.

ISHTAR

There is no higher authority.

UTTA

How will I know who to choose?



ERESHKIGAL

Take charge!

ISHTAR

Your heart is also good. Have a look there.

ERESHKIGAL

You could even choose yourself!

ISHTAR

Ha!

UTTA

Ha. Hahaha.

ERESHKIGAL

Quick! The people are clamoring!

ISHTAR

What a day!

ERESHKIGAL

Look! Even the very oldest ones have come!

ISHTAR

Charismatic leaders have a way of attracting the infirm.

ERESHKIGAL

Let us delay no longer.

*With great ceremony, ISHTAR and ERESHKIGAL walk to two separate chairs and sit. Sounds of seismic destruction continue.*

ERESHKIGAL

*(As they walk)* The sky! All those ribbons of white cloud.

ISHTAR

Are those-?

My sons. Those are my sons.

UTTA

To be brutally honest I don't see anything at all but I worry that I am not dressed appropriately.

*ISHTAR notices the box in her hands and breaks the fantasy for a moment.*

ISHTAR

Wait. He doesn't need to be here for this.

*ISHTAR sets the box somewhere downstage, then resumes her "throne".*

ERESHKIGAL

Would you listen to them cheer?

ISHTAR

Take a deep breath. This doesn't last.

ERESHKIGAL

(To UTTA) Retrieve the crown, if you would.

*UTTA retrieves the wreath of dead things.*

ERESHKIGAL

Proceed. We are prepared.

UTTA

Do I have to do something?

ISHTAR

Simply speak the investiture.

UTTA

The investiture?

ERESHKIGAL

The action of formally-

UTTA

Overruled!

ISHTAR

You've got the hang of it.

UTTA

Before we begin. Would either of you like to know the time?

*ERESHKIGAL and ISHTAR look to each other briefly,  
shake their heads.*

ERESHKIGAL

That's of no consequence.

*UTTA holds the crown and steps in the center of the two  
chairs. ISHTAR and ERESHKIGAL close their eyes. Long  
beat. UTTA is unsure how to begin. She struggles. Then  
she speaks, haltingly at first. Her confidence grows as she  
continues.*

UTTA

I, who am mistress of the hours,  
who have seen the passing of things,  
I who wander broodless  
and have stood in the dark  
and eaten the dust  
and have wanted a tongue  
to speak my name by memory  
in this withering world,

I come before you now,  
not by Right  
for I have none,  
not by Justice,  
for I see none,  
not by Pride  
for I know none,

But by faith.  
By faith I come  
and by credit.  
For what can be bestowed  
without these?

What offering can be made  
without hope?

## UTTA (Continued)

What devotion  
without trust?  
What love  
without peril?

This feels like a beginning.  
The provenance of something.

Begin.

Begin.

*UTTA raises the crown, unsure where it will land. She stops. Looks at it. Smiles. Blackout. A heavy rain begins to fall.*

END OF PLAY