

The Story of Ereshkigal

Narrator

Grandfather Enki, wisest of all the gods
sat with Ninshubur on the balcony
that overlooked the place
where the salt waters of the ocean met the sweet waters of the rivers.
He cleaned his fingernails and began a story:

Enki

The *me* of the Netherworld are sacred laws
that belong to the soul.
Unlike the *me* of the Above World,
they can never be taken.
They must be earned.
Little does Inanna know by whom
she is being threshed like a grain of wheat,
to remove the husk of her vanity.

*(Pause. Enki is working away on something
he has taken from underneath his fingernails. He continues.)*

In the time before people had been created
and the city of Nippur was inhabited by gods alone.
The young man of the city was the god Enlil.
Its young maid was the goddess Ninlil
and its old woman was Ninlil's mother.

One day, evidently setting her heart and mind
on Ninlil's marriage to Enlil
The old woman instructed her daughter:

‘Bathe in the pure stream, Ninlil.
Walk along the bank of the stream.
The bright-eyed lord, Enlil, will see you.
The shepherd, Enlil, who decrees fates,
will see you.
He will embrace you and kiss you.’

Ninlil joyfully followed her mother's instructions
And everything happened the way her mother described.
But being very young and unknowledgable,
Ninlil was not prepared for what came next.

The Lord spoke to her of love, she was unwilling.

Enlil spoke to her of intercourse, but she was unwilling.

My lips are too small,
They do not know how to kiss.
My vagina is too little,
It knows not how to copulate.

Enlil called his lieutenant, Nusku
And told him to bring the boat that sailed the heavens.
Nusku brought the boat and while sailing on the stream of stars
Enlil took the young maid by force.
She became pregnant with the moon god, Nanna-Sin.

The gods were dismayed by his immoral deed
Even though Enlil was their king, they banished him from Nippur
To the Netherworld.
The fifty great gods and the seven fate-decreeing gods
Seized him as he walked about in his private shrine.

However, Ninlil, pregnant with Nanna-Sin
Refused to remain behind. She followed Enlil
On his forced journey to the Netherworld.
Enlil was disturbed by this because he knew
Nanna-Sin was destined
to be in charge of the largest luminous body in the sky.
But now, the moon would have to dwell in the dark gloom
of the Netherworld instead.

So, he devised a complicated scheme.
On the way to the netherworld from Nippur,
he arranged to meet with three minor deities.
He took the shape of each deity and as Ninlil
passed them, he impregnated her three more times.
Now, Nanna-Sin had three substitutes
And would be free to ascend the heavens.

Ninlil stayed in the Netherworld
delivering all four of her children
suffering much pain and alone.
The oldest, Nanna-Sin ascended to the heavens.
Nergal became the unsparing judge of the Netherworld.
Ninazu became the healing god of the Netherworld and
Nungal became the goddess protector of the black-haired people.

Ninlil reigns in the Netherworld, even now –
Having taken the name ‘Ereshkigal’,
Strictly speaking, she is Inanna’s grandmother.

Lady Inanna has her grandmother's blood in her.

Over the eons, Ninlil became content with her strange rulership.

Rumor has it, her head is covered in leeches
And she is clothed about in black feathers-
But I found her interesting and lordly handsome.

Her palace is reported to be dry as dust but
I found it glowing –
black basalt laced with shining quartz and silver
vaulted roofs high as the eye can see.
She built fine palaces for all the deities
With crystal rivers, tumbling from great heights
pooling in gardens of lapis lazuli.

She has her seven robed judges who name the destinies
of souls newly dead. Each soul is given work and place befitting.

Deities visit from the World Above,
Utu, each night.
Nanna-Sin on the twenty-eighth day of each month
and I, occasionally.

She manages it well but
She is an unwelcome force to deal with
if her word is not obeyed.

Frankly, I like her ... and a little bit more.

There now ... Here's what we'll do.