

Prologue

Footsteps sounded in the temple of Ningirsu, well past the hour of the last sacrifice, long after the god had gone to bed.

Urukagina sat up, prodded awake by the steady sounds. He crawled across his bed. As he got closer, the footsteps seemed louder, and he could hear voices muffled beneath them. What was happening? He reached out his hand to draw aside the heavy curtain -

"Don't."

Ahanisu sat in the corner of the room. His mother's features were barely visible in the candlelight, but she could see well enough herself. She held a small statue up to her face. She grasped a brush with her other hand and while Urukagina watched, she dipped it into a pot of ashy black paint and slowly coated an arm of the statue. She seemed oblivious to the noises outside.

"Mother - " he began, voice high with confusion.

"Sssh," she whispered. "Sssh. The god is sleeping, and so should you."

"You are not," said Urukagina. "*They* are not."

She raised her head to look at him. "And if another disobeys Ningirsu, is it then fitting for you to do so, too?"

He shook his head, ashamed. "No. No, of course not. Only, what is happening? Who are those people outside?"

"You will learn in time."

"But mother - "

"Patience, Urukagina. Patience always."

He clenched his fists in frustration, then relaxed them. He lay back down and pulled the rough covers over his head. It was not just Ahanisu who commanded him, but Ningirsu, who was great among the gods and protected the city. He must be obeyed beyond all others, beyond Urukagina's beloved mother, beyond even his formidable father.

But -

"Where is father?"

"*Urukagina.*"

"I'm sorry." He stuffed a hand in his mouth to keep his questions inside, but try as he might, he could not fall asleep.

A short while later he heard footsteps approach. The curtain rustled. He heard the sharp sound of his mother's in-drawn breath.

"Is it over?" she asked.

"Yes," was his father's reply.

There was a long silence which Urukagina could not interpret. Then:

"Ahanisu, what is it? Put down your craft, and come kiss me. Come congratulate me."

"What for?"

"... what *for*? I told you, it's over. Enannatum is dead."

Urukagina thought he felt the bed rock beneath him, or perhaps it was the world quaking beneath his bed. Enannatum - the king - was dead?

He peeked out from under the covers, eyes wide and uncertain. Across the room, his mother still painted her statue with shaking fingers. His father stood at the doorway, his face still in the shadows.

"Well? Say something, woman."

"What is it you want me to say, Suni-Nam? You have killed a man. You have killed your *king*. You have disobeyed Ningirsu." Finally, she looked up, and gave to her husband a bitter smile. "Congratulations."

"Disobeyed Ningirsu? It was the god's will that the king be overthrown, and a priest put

in his place."

"Oh, and have you become a diviner, that Ningirsu's will is so clear to you? Can you read the entrails of a sheep? Has the god taken to speaking in your ear as you sleep?"

"Be quiet, woman!" His father took two great steps forward, and raised his arm as if to hit her. Urukagina flinched, but Ahanisu did not. Slowly, Suni-Nam lowered his arm. "I am sorry. I asked you to speak. But you must be jesting with me."

"I never jest."

"His will is manifest, Ahanisu. Enetarzi has tended the god's own temple for many years, and will do much the same for the god's own people. But Enannatum was an impious man, stupid and reckless, a foolish leader - "

"He was the son of Entemena. He was the heir of Eannatum! The gods once granted their line rule over all Sumer. This was not the gods' will, it was yours."

This time he did hit her. Ahanisu could not help but cry out as her statue slipped from her hands and shattered on the floor. She went to her knees, gathering up the pieces, her hair falling to hide her face and her eyes and her tears.

Urukagina wanted to go to her, to help her, but he was too frightened, his father stood too large and angry above her -

Ahanisu finished gathering the pieces, and looked up at Suni-Nam, her eyes filled with contempt. "You may strike me," she said. "You may even strike your king."

"But in the end, Ningirsu will punish you as he sees fit." She turned, and gazed through the doorway, to the heart of the temple where the god lay still. She held up the pieces of the statue, and whispered a prayer to him in his sleep. "May Ningirsu see fit to let you burn."

Chapter 1

"Urukagina! Come here!"

Suni-Nam's voice echoed across the wide central chamber of the temple, reaching his son where he stood laughing with his friends. Other boys might have ignored their fathers, but Urukagina walked quickly to his father's side. To shout in Ningirsu's temple was disrespectful. Few would dare to tell Suni-Nam as much, but Urukagina bowed his head, feeling the god's displeasure.

His father's reproach was near as heavy. "It is past the time for playing, son. There are things you must learn."

"But school is over," Urukagina said. "The master let us out early today."

"No," replied Suni-Nam. "I did not mean sums and symbols. There are things you must learn about the temple, about your future as nubanda." He held up a hand to forestall Urukagina's protests. "I will not live forever, you know. Even the great Gilgamesh found his way to the underworld eventually."

Urukagina followed his father down the hall, past the storerooms, to the southern door. He grimaced as he stepped outside. The temple provided sanctuary and shade, and its grounds were cool, if dry. Beyond its walls the hot sun ruled. He felt as though his skin had caught fire, and mumbled a small prayer to the sun god.

Suni-Nam was watching him. "Utu's temple is not far away, if you want to make an offering. His altar is heaped with birds and jewels, but as yet there is no success."

"That's all right," said Urukagina quietly, raising a hand to shield his face from the sun. If anyone would intercede for them, Ningirsu would.

Suni-Nam resumed walking, striding as purposefully through the city as he had through the temple. Once again he headed for the southern door. There was commotion all around them, merchants and artisans calling out bargains, their shawls pulled up over their heads to block the heat. Suni-Nam did not even glance at them, and they did not try to make him. Why would they? He was dressed in the robes of a nubanda, and in the finery of a servant of Ningirsu.

Urukagina left the merchants behind and passed with his father through the gate. He wiped a hand across his brow, trying to keep sweat from stinging his eyes.

Suni-Nam looked at him, then over at the fields. "The weather is truly awful," he admitted. "The crops fair little better than you, my boy."

"Will there be enough for all of us?" Urukagina asked. Between the gods and the temple officials and the laborers was more hunger than he cared to imagine.

"For enough of us," said Suni-Nam. "We need not rely on the whims of the gods, however. There are things we can do to increase our harvest."

"Such as?"

Suni-Nam gestured ahead of them. In the distance, Urukagina could make out the silhouettes of many men at work. As they drew nearer, he saw that they were dredging the canals which distributed water throughout the fields. It seemed hard work. Six men pulled the heavy metal plow, the muscles of their backs straining, sweat glistening on their skin.

"Haven't we animals to pull this plow?"

"Not enough of them," Suni-Nam replied. "Besides, these men are better than any animals. They know how to work together, how to speak and to listen. Observe."

As Urukagina watched, the workers came upon a large stone. Two young men, both near his own age, stepped away from the plow. They each went to one side of the stone and, grunting in unison, picked it up and heaved it over the side of the canal.

It was clear that neither of them could have lifted the rock on their own. Nor could an ox have lifted it between his hooves. "Truly Enki was wise to create men," murmured Urukagina. "We serve the gods much better than beasts."

His father nodded in satisfaction as the men returned to their places on the plow. They grasped their handles and began to pull, yet even as they did so, the plow faltered. A young man no older than Urukagina had fallen asleep where he stood.

The worker next to him slapped him sharply to make him wake. As if by reflex, the young man raised his arms to protect himself. Still heavy with sleep, he stumbled against the other man, who lost his balance and fell back against the hard corners of the plow. After a moment, he scrambled up again, but Urukagina could see his back was cut and his pride bruised.

"Imiga!" the man spat.

"I'm sorry - " the young man began.

But the other worker had him around the throat and was shaking him, so violently it seemed his head might roll off and lay like a stone in the hollow of the canal. Imiga gasped for air and struggled to land blows on the bigger man's body. The workers crowded around them, faces twisted, yelling.

"Stop," said Urukagina weakly, confused. They didn't look up. They didn't even hear him.

"Stop."

Suni-Nam's voice made the men freeze. Only their chests moved, taking in shuddering breaths. After a moment Imiga shook himself free of the worker who held him.

Suni-Nam walked to the rim of the canal, and Urukagina hastily followed. He could feel the sun on the back of his neck, see his shadow cast across the workers.

"This is unacceptable," said Suni-Nam, his words carrying beyond their piece of land to where other groups of workers looked on. "You, all of you, are privileged to serve in Ningirsu's own fields, to till his own soil. In return for your work, you are given not only food to eat, and a place to sleep, but the god's favor. He smiles upon those who work for him. But he frowns upon those who do not."

He gazed down at Imiga, his face hard. "You have displayed both laziness and bad temper. I shall punish you on the god's behalf."

"You shall be made a slave."

Imiga seemed like he might faint again. He began to sob. He wrapped his arms around himself to keep from shaking, and even the worker he'd fought with looked at him sympathetically.

"Father - "

"Not here."

Then where? Urukagina wanted to ask. As he stood there, feeling numb, his father directed two of the workers to bring Imiga to the overseer. The young man leaned heavily on them, and they dragged him down the canal as they had the plow.

"Walk with me," Suni-Nam commanded, and turned to go.

Urukagina had to rush to keep up. "Why did you do that?" he asked. His voice was ragged, as though he too had been fighting. "Why did you make him a slave?"

"It's a fitting punishment, for those who wreak ruin upon the fields of Ningirsu."

"Ruin? He fell asleep." Urukagina's face twisted. "If such is the punishment for every sleeper, we should live in a city of slaves."

"He fought as well," Suni-Nam reminded him. "I'm surprised by you, son. You are always so pious. I thought you wanted Ningirsu to be treated with respect."

Urukagina fell silent. What his father said was true. Yet, as if sensing his uneasiness, Suni-Nam stopped and placed a hand upon his shoulder.

"It is not an easy thing, to be nubanda. Like the king and the high priest, the nubanda makes hard choices. He must be guided by what he feels is Ningirsu's will. I did as I thought I must."

He nodded at last, although still somewhat reluctantly. Suni-Nam smiled at him, and

began to walk inside.

Urukagina looked around. They had not yet reached the temple. They'd stopped instead near the great house Suni-Nam had been given when Urukagina was still a boy, when Enetarzi had been made king and Suni-Nam had been made nubanda.

But Enetarzi was dead, and his son Lugalanda ruled. Urukagina was not a boy anymore, either.

"I think I must pray," he said.

"Then do so," said Suni-Nam, his face unreadable. He went inside.

Urukagina walked slowly past the house, up the street to where the temple stood in the center of the city.

It was not the only temple - far from it. There was the temple of Enki, ruler of the gods, old and proud and solid. There was the temple of Utu, the sun god, where people went to seek retribution. There was the temple of Inanna, where people went to find favor in love.

Each temple had its own high priest, and its own nubanda. Each temple was visited by the people of Lagash, who were drawn by hope and fear and duty. Each temple was beautiful, its floors kept clean and its shrines kept full.

But Ningirsu's temple was by far the most magnificent.

"And so it should be," Urukagina whispered. "For you are our master, our protection. You shield us from your storms, from Inanna's tricks and Utu's heat. You speak for us in the great council of gods."

Urukagina couldn't help but feel relief as he stepped back into the still coolness of the temple. He took a deep breath, then made his way towards the shrine, stopping first at the storerooms. Along the walls were stacked sheaves of wheat and barley, pots of lentils, bowls of dates. On the outer grounds there were birds ready to be sacrificed, he knew, and artists like his mother Ahanisu made sculptures and weavings for the shrine. He didn't spend time going to get them. He took a handful of dates.

When he reached the shrine, he laid the fruit down gently on the altar, then stepped back, bowing his head. *Great Ningirsu*, he thought. *My father says you wanted that man made a slave. My father is nubanda, surely he knows your will better than I. Yet it seemed so harsh, and the man looked so unhappy. Why must you do things like this? Why can't you show any mercy?*

Urukagina closed his eyes, trapping his tears there. He stood still for a long moment, gathering himself, then turned to leave. He was surprised to find a young girl standing in his way.

"Forgive me," she said quickly, bowing her head as Urukagina had at the altar, but she didn't move out of his way. "Please, I must speak to you."

The way she prostrated herself disturbed him. He put his hand beneath her chin and lifted her head up. "Speak - " he began, then found he couldn't.

Her dark eyes stopped his words in his throat. They were too sad, too angry and too sad, for such a young face. She couldn't have been more than a few years past her first bleeding.

"My name is Shagshag," she said. "They say you know what's happened to my brother."

"Your brother - ?"

"Imiga," she said, and her voice wavered on his name. "They say you made him a slave."

"No, I didn't, my father - " Urukagina stopped himself. "Who is 'they'?"

"Those who worked beside him. They say the nubanda came and didn't like his looks." Her voice grew stronger. "That he made him a slave for no good reason."

"He fought - "

"Everyone fights," Shagshag scoffed. She recovered herself and lowered her eyes, saying more modestly, "It is true. We fight against Umma. Sometimes we fight the Elamites."

Even the elders, with their power and their wealth, find reasons to fight with each other. Why then do you punish Imiga for fighting?"

"He was sleeping - "

"Do you know the last time my belly was full?" she asked, and he looked past her beauty to see she was terribly thin. "Imiga did not fall asleep. He *fainted*."

Urukagina struggled for words. "We must - there must be a good example made, we cannot let the fields dry out and die because the workers are sleeping."

"So reprimand him. Beat him, if you must! Do not make him a slave." She took his hand and pressed it between hers. "He is the only brother I have."

He held her hand tightly, and looked over at the altar. *Oh, Ningirsu!*

"I'm sorry," he said. "I am not the nubanda yet. If I were, I would release Imiga. But it is my father's decision."

"Can't you persuade him?"

"He's a - a very hard man to persuade - " He felt his cheeks flush with shame.

Shagshag took a deep breath. "... what if there was an exchange?"

He dropped her hand, stunned.

"What if you made me a slave instead?" Even as she made the offer, her eyes were tight with dismay. "It is not so hard, for a woman. I could sew, or clean, or prepare food, I could - I could give my body to the temple. I am old enough. I have bled."

"You would do this?" he asked, amazed.

"Is it so hard to believe? I may not be as learned as you, but I know well the tale of Dumuzi."

Dumuzi. Killed and betrayed, dragged down to the underworld, leaving the land above empty and barren. He might have stayed there for all time, had his sister, Geshtinanna, not followed him. But she did, begging for his life, asking to exchange it for hers.

And she had been answered.

"Please," Shagshag whispered.

Urukagina felt as though a great weight had been lifted from his shoulders. "I know what must be done," he said.

He smiled at her, and began explaining the terms of her slavery.

Chapter 2

"You should not be doing this," warned Imiga as he dug his spade into the thick, damp sand which made up the wall of the canal.

"But it goes so much faster when I help you," Urukagina replied. He grasped his own spade tightly in his hand. "Surely Ningirsu does not mind efficiency?"

Imiga pushed the spade half-heartedly, causing clumps of sand to fall around his feet. "Ningirsu may not mind, but Suni-Nam will." He eyed Urukagina with a little wariness. "They are different, you know. The god and your father."

"Of course I know!" he protested. Imiga shook his head. "They must be different. After all, Ningirsu knows I have come to the fields to help you, but my father, let us hope, will never find out."

Imiga laughed. Urukagina found himself smiling, too. Full of a sudden energy, he thrust his spear into the wall. A whole section came crumbling down, coating him with dirt and sand. He glanced over at Imiga and saw his grin had widened.

"It had to come down anyway," he defended himself. "Why not all at once?"

"Why not?" agreed Imiga, and continued digging into the wall at his slow, steady pace.

They were building a connection between their canal and the next. The latter had been overflowing of late, while the crops irrigated by the former had begun to wither. A small channel had been proposed to even it out. It was a great deal of work for one man to do, thought Urukagina, especially when that young man was also needed for - well, for confiding in, and for wrestling.

It was wrong to deceive his father, Urukagina knew, especially for a slave, but he couldn't help himself. "I shall miss this," he said. "Even though it makes my arms ache, I shall miss this."

Imiga seemed not to like the sentiment.

"Oh, I know it's strange of me. You must think me demon-touched, that I enjoy all these tasks you're forced to do. Perhaps it's because I'm not forced to do them." He shook his head. "Anyway, when your sister takes your place, I suppose I'll have to learn to sew instead."

The other boy's grin had faded. Urukagina wished he hadn't spoken. "Come, you're tired," he said uncertainly. "Let us rest."

The two young men took seats along the opposite wall, where there was some small shade from the late morning sun. Imiga grabbed a pebble and began to absent-mindedly sharpen his spade. Urukagina watched him, deep in thought.

It was an odd position he was in. Urukagina had never owned a slave before. He knew many, of course - they worked the temple lands and served in his father's house. But he'd always resisted the idea of slavery. Men belonged to the gods, not to other men. He wanted no man to bow to him before Ningirsu.

Suni-Nam had been displeased. Urukagina would one day be nubanda. He would oversee not one slave, but hundreds. When Urukagina had asked to make Imiga his slave, Suni-Nam had been too relieved to care about his son's conditions.

Of course, Imiga had quickly become more than a slave. Urukagina looked at the other boy fondly. He'd closed his eyes and was sharpening the spade by feel alone. His brow was furrowed and troubled, but his fingers moved smoothly around the sharp edges of the tool.

It impressed him, how apt Imiga was. He'd seemed so frail and clumsy at first, but once Urukagina had gotten him good food and ample rest, he'd changed completely. Imiga could run faster and farther than Urukagina, could lift twice his weight, and had won every wrestling match that Urukagina was foolish enough to challenge him to.

Imiga, in turn, was awed by Urukagina's knowledge and his piety. Urukagina had made a point of taking Imiga to the temple. He'd shown him how to prepare a sacrifice, had taught

him the many names of the many gods.

"I will teach you how to write," he'd said. "I will teach you how to do sums. If you want, you can become a scribe, and then your family will not have to starve."

The other boy had flinched away, as he always did when Urukagina mentioned his family. His dark face paled, and he pressed his lips together and would not say anything.

As Imiga's overseer, he could have demanded a reply. As Imiga's friend, he would never.

The other boy opened his eyes suddenly. "What day is it?"

"The tenth day of the tenth month," said Urukagina.

"The month of Dumuzi."

"Yes." He paused, before continuing gently. "It has been six months. Near time for you to go home."

Imiga's expression was unreadable. "It will rain soon."

Urukagina looked up at the sky. It was ceaselessly blue. "I will send a message to your sister. So she knows when to come."

"Do not bother. She will have counted the days." Imiga turned his head away.

Urukagina hesitated, then reached out and placed a hand on his friend's shoulder. "I am sorry," he said. "That I must enslave her. That I have enslaved you. It seemed so right, when I thought of it. As though Ningirsu was speaking to me."

"Perhaps he was," Imiga muttered.

It seemed so wrong now, to hold his friend in bondage. Playing overseer to Shagshag would be no easier. It hurt his heart to think of the young girl bowing and scraping before him. *Was I wrong? Did I interpret the signs wrong? Did I make them mean what I wanted them to mean?*

"If you want," said Urukagina, haltingly, "I can give you some money. I can help you buy your freedom."

Imiga shuddered. Urukagina could no longer stand aside and watch him suffer. He reached out and grabbed his arms, turning the other boy to face him. He was surprised to see he had tears in his eyes.

"You would free me," murmured Imiga. "Of course, you would free me. The one person in all of Lagash - in all of Sumer - who I would stay a slave for, and you would free me."

Urukagina rocked back on his heels. "Imiga - "

"It's not fair!" The words seemed torn out of him. "When I was first made a slave, I was so frightened. My parents fought so hard to keep me from becoming one. They starved, rather than sell me. I thought it must be truly awful. Now you offer me my freedom. You tell me I can go home! I don't want to go home. I want to remain a slave."

"It is a shameful thing, I know, but I think it is better to be a slave. I am not hungry. I do not work too hard. And you teach me things I never learned as a free man, you teach me how to love Ningirsu..."

Urukagina felt a great warmth. It overflowed him, spilled out into his smile. *Then I have done Ningirsu's will. And Ningirsu's will is a good one.*

"Imiga - "

"I will go home. Yes, I will go home. But only so that Shagshag will have the chance to be your slave."

For weeks the people of Lagash had been coming to Dumuzi's temple, laying sacrifices and chanting prayers. Yet it seemed as though the poor of the city, those who could least spare the time and the strength to make it to the temple, where those who filled the place. As the light dwindled and disappeared, Urukagina and Imiga began to walk there. They were surrounded by workers from outside the city walls, their clothes dark with dirt, their feet scabbed and bare.

"Wait," said Imiga, stopping him at the door to the temple. "I wish to speak with you

before we enter."

Urukagina nodded. He was pleased to see the respect Imiga had learned. "There is an empty space, around the corner."

They walked over to it. Once they were there, Urukagina looked at his friend - no, his slave, still, for a little longer. He looked at his slave's face and saw that it was solemn.

"I wish to thank you," he said. "For many nights, I have dreaded returning to my home. I fear what I will find there. But it is right that I should return, even if it not the joyous return of Dumuzi to his people. I may be lonely, but I will be free."

"You need not be lonely. You may come and visit," said Urukagina, and then, hesitantly, "I would like it if you come and visit."

Imiga smiled. "Your offer. May I still accept it? I would like to be a scribe."

Urukagina could only nod. "All is as it should be, then," he said, feeling deeply satisfied. With a smile, he looked north towards Ningirsu's ziggurat, barely visible against the darkening sky.

They turned back to Dumuzi's temple, walking through those who crowded the entryway. Seeing the rich brightness of Urukagina's clothes, they parted for him, and he led Imiga to the front of the room.

All faced the altar in the center of the room as they sang a hymn. Urukagina joined with them, his eyes half closed, singing the words he knew by heart:

*Our lament is the lament for a herb that grows not in the bed.
Our lament is the lament for the corn that grows not in the ear.
Our lament is for a great river where no willows grow,
for a wilderness where no cypresses grow,
for the meadows, where no plants grow.
Our lament is for the depths of the garden, where wine and honey grow not.*

The people beside him sang with a passion he could not match. Their voices trembled on the words 'wine and honey'. He looked at them and saw the way their clothes hung off their bodies, the way their skin hung off their bones.

Urukagina swallowed with difficulty, bile and sympathy in the back of his throat. *Dumuzi will rise tonight*, he told himself. *Then we will have the harvest, and the sacred marriage.* Just as Imiga would go to earn food for his family, so would Dumuzi's return provide for all of them, priests and slaves alike, making the fields fertile and their bellies full. Not just in Lagash, but everywhere, in Erech and Uruk, and even Umma.

Urukagina clung to that certainty, and when the lament ended he raised his voice to lead them in a more hopeful song.

*May Dumuzi like a farmer till the fields.
May he like a good shepherd make the folds teem.
May there be vines under him, may there be barley under him,
may there be carp-floods in the river under him,
may fishes and birds sound off in the marshes under him.

May old and new reeds grow in the canebrake under him.
May shrubs grow in the high desert under him.
May deer multiply in the forests,
may well-watered gardens bear honey and wine, lettuce and cress,
may there be long life in the palace under him.*

Across the room, he saw the high priest of Dumuzi's temple step up to the altar, a smile

on his face.

"This is a time for hope," he said, his voice carrying through the room, over their heads and into the street. "Long have you worked in the fields of the gods. Long have you toiled with no gain. It has seemed like to, too, were in the underworld, stripped naked and placed upon a stake. Certainly it has been no more pleasant."

"But the hot summer is finally over. Tonight Dumuzi returns, bringing with him your reward - the harvest. There will be feasts laid out before you. Your bellies will groan, too full instead of too empty."

"This is a time for hope," he repeated. "This is the beginning of a new year."

The songs that sounded from Dumuzi's temple had changed from lamentation to celebration, but even joyous songs can make throats sore with use. They waited outside, Imiga morose, Urukagina as always lost in thought.

"Imiga!"

Urukagina felt someone brush by him. A woman had thrown her arms around Imiga. She spun him around, and Urukagina could see her face on her brother's shoulder, and he knew her for Shagshag.

The siblings embraced for a moment longer, then pulled apart. "Where are mother and father?" Imiga asked eagerly, his melancholy forgotten. "Did they come?"

"Father is still in the fields," she said, "and mother went to bring him some bread."

"But it's the feast of Dumuzi," objected Urukagina, and Imiga added, quietly, "And it's dark."

"He works through the night sometimes," said Shagshag. There was something sharp in her voice, like she wanted to wound as well as explain. "He's had to, ever since you were taken away."

"He won't have to any longer." Imiga was smaller and skinnier than most men, but for a moment he seemed broad and tall. He leaned forward and kissed Shagshag's forehead. "Do not worry, sister. This is no underworld you are walking into. It is full of gods and light. Be well."

He turned to Urukagina. "I will visit," he promised. "I will come take lessons as soon as I can."

"I will be waiting."

Imiga bent down his head, dropping his eyes in a slave's farewell, but Urukagina put a hand on his shoulder and pulled him into an embrace. Imiga returned it, looking pleased, then turned to go.

Urukagina watched him go, but not for long - he soon disappeared into the darkness, lost among the crowds of people who walked down the city streets, towards their homes in the fields beyond the walls.

"You have worked quite a change upon my brother."

He turned to look at Shagshag. "He was with me for six months," said Urukagina. "Surely time has played the biggest role."

"I was with him for thirteen years," she replied, "and made no impression on him."

He looked for a smile, to show she was jesting. What sister could expect obedience from an older brother? Yet seemed earnest, her eyes wide and bright with reflected torchlight. Urukagina felt at once that she was very different from Imiga.

"Listen to them," she said, turning towards Dumuzi's temple. "Why are they so happy?"

"Because Dumuzi has ascended," answered Urukagina, puzzled. "Because that is a happy thing."

"And when he rises, who takes his place?" She seemed not bitter, but terribly sad.

"Who mourns for Geshtinanna?"

"Imiga said - and I hope - I have tried to be a good master - "

" - and I will try to be a good slave," she replied. "But I will still be a slave..."

There was no sharpness in her voice. She was not accusing him, as she had Imiga. But suddenly, Urukagina was angry.

I am not Ereshkigal, goddess of the underworld, he protested, even though that was the role he had given himself long ago. *I do not want to hurt you!*

But he did not know how to deal with her. "Come," he said, abruptly. "I will drop you off at the temple before I go home. You will sleep with all the other slaves tonight."

She dropped her head, obedient. "Yes, master," she said, and followed him away.