**ACT 4, scene two: THE PAGEANT OF THE FLOOD**

CHORUS

Now when Utnapishtim was a mortal man,

He dwelled in the city of Shurupakk, on the river Euphrates—

Already an old city then, and rich and bustling,

Loud with life, and rife and gaudy with goods—

Favored by the human tribe both great and ordinary;

And the gods came there often also, walking among them.

UTNAPISHTIM *(showing it off)*

My city!

CHORUS

Until for some reason—who knows why with gods—

Certain of the greatest gods—

Enlil; Anu; even Aruru, our Creator—

Grew angry with us—

NARR. 3 / ENLIL

*Why? Why?!* Too many people!

NARR. 4 / ANU

And most of them vicious. Self-involved, lascivious, and disrespectful of their betters!

NARR. 2 / ARURU

If I make a second batch, maybe I can make them nicer—

ENLIL

So many of them, and such noisy buggers that a god can’t bloody sleep!

CHORUS

And they took it in their heads to destroy us utterly.

Certain of them held secret council:

Enlil and Anu were the instigators,

But there were others in on it, even mother Aruru.

Even Ea, though he was unEasy about it...

And Enlil proposed, and with Anu's support, made it law—

That there would come—

ENLIL

A mighty deluge!

ANU

Warn no one!

ENLIL

And we can be done with the lot of them.

CHORUS

And they went their godly way, leaving only Ea not quite persuaded.

COMPANY

UnEasy.

NARR. 1 / EA

As you wish, Enlil. But why kill Utnapishtim?

CHORUS

He went to Utnapishtim's reed-house, and as Utnapishtim lay dreaming,

The god Ea, in a voice like the wind breathing,

Spilled the gods' secret to the walls:

EA

Reed house, reed house! Walls, walls!

Reed house, listen! Walls, consider!

Let the man who lives within you tear you down and build a boat.

Let him abandon all he owns and build a ship, as wide as it is long,

And populate it with specimens of every living creature.

UTNAPISHTIM

And in my dream I answered him, saying,

Of course, Lord Ea!

But how should I explain this to the neighbors? And to the elders?

EA

Sshh! Walls, tell that sleeping man not to interrupt.

Sleeping man, go about your business, I’m talking to the *walls*!

Walls, let the man say that he's heard that Enlil hates him,

And since this is Enlil's city, let him claim he has no choice but to leave.

He should say he's going down to the sweetwater marshes,

To live in the land of Ea, who likes him better.

UTNAPISHTIM

I will, my lord. But why really?

EA

Reed walls, reed walls, tell him a great rain is coming.

*That* much the man may tell everyone, since they won’t listen anyway:

That the skies are going to open, and pour down on them its wildness of water!

Now, here is how he must build his boat, and how he must load it.

CHORUS *(chanting instructions, as Utnapishtim prepares)*

Lay out an acre of floor space, with a six score cubits high wall—

Make six lower decks and one upper, amounting to seven in all—

Build each deck with nine compartments, sealed watertight with plugholes—

Pack log piles, and slide planks, and sink rods, and pet food, and kettles, and lug-poles—

For the furnace room, 50 thou gallons of pitch—

Plus some tar, and some oil: maybe 25 thou or so gallons of each.

WITNESSES *(variously, as the building begins)*

What you up to, Utnapishy? *What* is *that*, a boat?

I wouldn’t worry about it; Enlil doesn’t like *any*one.

Are you hiring, then?

Nice area, the sweetwater marshes. I might retire there.

What *is* that, a boat? What, a battleship or something?

Rain? Well, we need rain.

Are you still hiring?

That's a *boat*?

EA

And treat your workmen well, so that when they die they'll die a little happier!

UTNAPISHTIM

Hard, thirsty work, isn’t it! Go on, have a beer! Hey, Fred, slaughter a bullock for us, will you? Joe, roast a few more sheep! Take a break, Bucky! Hey, there, Nelly, my old neighbor, come sit, if you've got a moment! Grab yourself some of this good food before the rain sets in!

CHORUS & WITNESSES

And freely he poured the drink—

*Red wine, white wine, ale and beer by the barrel*—

Until we could barely think—

*Red wine, white wine, ale and beer by the barrel*—

But doing our best with the boat—

*Red wine, white wine, ale and beer by the barrel*—

To build it so it would float—

*Red wine, white wine, ale and beer by the barrel*—

Spilling an interesting mix of things on our apparel—

A WITNESS

My wife’s going to curse my name, trying to get this robe clean!

CHORUS

*Red wine, white wine, ale and beer by the barrel!*

UTNAPISHTIM

Okay, everyone, I’d say we’re ready. Let’s launch it!

Party whoops and hollering.

CHORUS

Rowdy but difficult was the launching—the great river

Barely able to accommodate his boat’s vast bulk.

But soon enough—

UTNAPISHTIM *(to celebratory roars)*

Launched it is! Let's load it up!

CHORUS & WITNESSES

Whatever he owns of gold—

*Wild beasts, tame beasts, game beasts, birds, bugs, lizards*—

And of silver goes into the hold—

*Wild beasts, tame beasts, game beasts, birds, bugs, lizards*—

Family and kinfolk too—

*Wild beasts, tame beasts, game beasts, birds, bugs, lizards*—

You human and animal zoo, onto the boat with you—

*Wild beasts, tame beasts, game beasts, birds, bugs, lizards*—

Some craftsmen, some crew, some strays with tipsy gizzards—

A TIPSY WITNESS

Oops, I thought I was getting *off*, but I’ve gotten *on*!

CHORUS *(scurrying on to the boat)*

*Wild beasts, tame beasts, game beasts, birds, bugs, lizards!*

Half the cast are aboard, hemmed about by

a host of stuffed animals. Half are ashore.

UTNAPISHTIM

Shipwright, before we seal the hatch—let me thank every one of you for your help. You are

all very dear to me, and I trust I gave proof of that by letting you consume the entire contents of my cellar! Shipwright, I leave you my house and anything you may find left in it! Well, I think the rain’s coming. So: all the best. Farewell, and stay dry!

Cheers and applause punctuate the speech, turning briefly to laughter as the skies open.

But soon the storm is a howl. We may spy

the faces of the mariners, aghast behind

portholes, but do not hear them; only the

cries of those left on shore—who look about

for shelter; reach out after the ship; begin to

drown. The stage's darkness is split by forks

of light; the sound effects are deafening.

UTNAPISHTIM *(miked or even recorded; not visible)*

Swell after giant swell of waves rocked us out to sea, away and still farther away from the

buffetings of the drowned figures in our wake. From the sky’s dome to its horizons, we saw the Annunaki, the seven great death-dealers of the Underworld, tuning the lightning of their gaze. And striking, scouring the land of life. All day, the storm raged like a war, sweeping us with it through a wrecked world. Blinded we were by the darkness; yet when the lightning flared, what of earth was there left to see?

CHORUS *(miked, unseen)*

Only the wind—the sea—the darkness—the dancing savageries of light—

UTNAPISHTIM *(miked, unseen)*

And hurled like whale carcasses through the howling sky, the great, hard, broken slabs of

our dismantled land.

A major thunderclap and lightning strike; a

noise like a slab of land breaking off to hit

the auditorium; the audience should scream!

CHORUS *(miked, unseen)*

Even the gods fled, to Anu’s high palace—

NARR. 3 / ENLIL *(miked, unseen, gleefully)*

Did you hear that wimp Aruru lamenting?

NARR. 2 / ARURU *(miked, unseen, woefully)*

We have done great wrong! Oh, my poor, smashed, massacred children!

CHORUS *(miked, unseen)*

And the second day was no different, nor the third, fourth, fifth or six.

The dialogue ends; the storm effects persist,

until the storm begins to feel interminable…

Until at last, light breaks on a bare stage.

CHORUS *(re-entering)*

But relief did come, eventually. On the seventh day.

VOICE OF MRS. UTNAPISHTIM

Husband, it's ending. Open the hatch!

The pair of them emerge from a trapdoor,

and are up onto the deck.

UTNAPISHTIM

How sweet to feel the sunlight on my face!

MRS. UTNAPISHTIM

O you poor, poor human race. Just itsy bits of clay.

UTNAPISHTIM

Why aren’t we moving?

MRS. UTNAPISHTIM

The waters have receded. We’ve run aground!

VOICE OF EA *(the whisper again)*

Actually, Utnapishtim, you’ve struck a mountain. Mount Nizir.

UTNAPISHTIM

Ea?

MRS. UTNAPISHTIM

Ea’s talking to you?

VOICE OF EA

Sshh! It's only the wind, Utnapishtim. The wind and the slap of the water.

UTNAPISHTIM

Oh, yes, of course.

MRS. UTNAPISHTIM

What’s he saying?

UTNAPISHTIM

No, it’s only the wind! The water!

VOICE OF EA

You’ll be here a week, before the waters go down.

UTNAPISHTIM

My *guess* is we’re on a mountaintop. We could be stuck up here for, what, a week? Maybe

in a few days I should send forth a dove? To see if it finds land, right? And if it doesn’t, then I'll wait a bit and send another one... Oh, a swallow next time?

He releases a bird; watches it circle back.

Then a second one. Then the third.

CHORUS

When the third bird, a raven, did not come back, they knew it had found land;

And then Utnapishtim and the others released all the birds and animals,

To find their way into their new, cleansed world.

UTNAPISHTIM

Seven kettles we’ll set out, and another seven, and heap them with sweet cane,

With cedar, and myrtle, to honor the gods who have protected us.

CHORUS

Aruru came first to the offering.

NARR. 2 / ARURU

I shall not forget what has happened here.

Let all the gods be welcome at your offering—except only Enlil.

Because it was his fault we brought the flood upon you, to destroy my people.

The cheering is somewhat nervous.

CHORUS

But who could keep Enlil away?

NARR. 3 / ENLIL

There are mortals still breathing? How is that possible? Who is responsible?

NARR 1 / EA

Enlil, you are the greatest of us, but in this case, your solution was unreasonable.

If a particular mortal offends you, punish *him*.

If a group of mortals offends you, send famine, or a scourge of lions, or a plague.

Anyway, I didn’t exactly betray your secret.

All I did was talk to the reed walls of a house!

Who knew Utnapishtim would overhear?

Come on, he was asleep at the time. Off in dreamland!

ENLIL

Mmmh.

WITNESSES

The wondrous Utnapishtim!

NARR. 2 / ARURU

And so Anu said to the other gods:

NARR. 4 / ANU

Let us take counsel.

The gods/Narrators huddle and confer.

Utnapishtim, step this way, please.

With a little sick look, Utnapishtim obeys.

ENLIL

You too, Mrs. Utnapishtim.

MRS. UTNAPISHTIM

Me? But I’m only a woman.

ENLIL

Everyone else—

He motions them away and they scatter.

ANU

Utnapishtim. Mrs. Utnapishtim. Our public relations situation has grown delicate. We

attempted an act of mass extinction.

ARURU

It was possibly ill-considered.

ANU

A group of humans opposed it and they triumphed.

ENLIL *(unsheathing a sword)*

We see only one solution. Kneel.

Very nervously, they do.

ANU

Hitherto, Utnapishtim has been no more than a man. Henceforth, he and his wife shall

become like gods, and live as immortals, at the mouth of the eternal rivers.

Enlil anoints them with his sword.

ENLIL

Now we announce it to the masses, and we clean up this mess… Mortals! Assemble!

The Witnesses and Chorus edge back in.

ANU

Behold the wondrous Utnapishtim, the virtuous Utnapishtim,

In whose name, and by whose grace, the human race has been preserved.

And whom the gods have now rewarded:

Behold Utnapishtim (and Mrs. Utnapishtim) the newly immortal!

The predictable tumult of reactions: relief,

pride, triumph, readiness to party, jealousy,

suspicion, vapid rowdiness.

CHORUS/WITNESSES/ALL

Now freely we pour the drink—

*Red wine, white wine, ale and beer by the barrel*—

Until we can barely think—

*Red wine, white wine, ale and beer by the barrel*—

Doing our best not to gloat—

*Red wine, white wine, ale and beer by the barrel*—

That we’ve gotten the gods by the throat—

*Red wine, white wine, ale and beer by the barrel*—

Honoring Utnapishtim with this carol—

A WITNESS

And try not to sell us out now you’re one of them!

CHORUS

*Red wine, white wine, ale and beer by the barrel!*

The pageant revels itself to a close, until we

are back at the barer stage of Utnapishtim’s

distant shore. The Witnesses are once again

part of the landscape; Utnapishtim, Mrs.

Utnapishtim, Gilgamesh, and Urshanabi are

seated at a small table.