

**Ezdubar Enters Hades—The Song of the Dalkhi in the
Cavern of Horrors—The King Passes Through
Hades to the Garden of the Gods, and Sees the
Wonderful Fountain of Life's Waters**

From The Epic of Ishtar and Izdubar

By Unknown

In a weird passage to the Under-World,
Where demon shades sit with their pinions furled
Along the cavern's walls with poisonous breath,
In rows here mark the labyrinths of Death.
The King with torch upraised, the pathway finds,
Along the way of mortal souls he winds,
Where shades sepulchral, soundless rise amid
Dark gulfs that yawn, and in the blackness hide
Their depths beneath the waves of gloomy lakes
And streams that sleep beneath the sulphurous flakes
That drift o'er waters bottomless, and chasms;
Where moveless depths receive Life's dying spasms.

Here Silence sits supreme on a drear throne
Of ebon hue, and joyless reigns alone
O'er a wide waste of blackness,—solitude
Black, at her feet, there sleeps the awful flood
Of mystery which grasps all mortal souls,
Where grisly horrors sit with crests of ghouls,
And hateless welcome with their eyes of fire
Each soul;—remorseless lead to terrors dire;
And ever, ever crown the god of Fate;
And there, upon her ebon throne she sate
The awful fiend, dark goddess Mam-mitu,
Who reigns through all these realms of La-Atzu.¹

But hark! what are these sounds within the gloom?
And see! long lines of torches nearer come!
And now within a recess they have gone;
The King must pass their door! perhaps some one
Of them may see him! turn the bags of gloom
Upon him, as he goes by yonder room!
He nearer comes, and peers within; and see I
A greenish glare fills all the cave! and he

¹ Hades, hell, the spirit-world.

Beholds a blaze beneath a cauldron there;
Coiled, yonder lie the Dragons of Despair;
And lo! from every recess springs a form
Of shapeless horror! now with dread alarm
He sees the flitting forms wild whirling there,
And awful wailings come of wild despair:
But hark! the *dal-khis*' song rings on the air!
With groans and cries they shriek their mad despair,

Oh, fling on earth, ye demons dark,
Your madness, hate, and fell despair,
And fling your darts at each we mark,
That we may welcome victims here.

Then sing your song of hate, ye fiends,
And hurl your pestilential breath,
Till every soul before us bends,
And worship here the god of Death.

In error still for e'er and aye,
They see not, hear not many things;
The unseen forces do not weigh,
And each an unknown mystery brings.

In error still for e'er and aye,
They delve for phantom shapes that ride
Across their minds alone,—and they
But mock the folly of man's pride.

In error still for e'er and aye!
They learn but little all their lives,
And Wisdom ever wings her way,
Evading ever,—while man strives!

But hark! another song rings through the gloom,
And, oh, how sweet the music far doth come!
Oh, hear it, all ye souls in your despair,
For joy it brings to sorrowing ones e'en here!

“There is a Deep Unknown beyond,
That all things hidden well doth weigh!
On man's blind vision rests the bond
Of error still for e'er and aye!

But to the mighty gods, oh, turn
For truth to lead you on your way,

And wisdom from their tablets learn,
And ever hope for e'er and aye!"

And see! the bags disperse within the gloom,
As those sweet sounds resound within the room;
And now a glorious light doth shine around,
Their rays of peace glide o'er the gloomy ground.
And lo! 'tis Papsukul, our god of Hope,—
With cheerful face comes down the fearful slope
Of rugged crags, and blithely strides to where
Our hero stands, amid the poisonous air,
And says:

“Behold, my King, that glorious Light
That shines beyond! and eye no more this sight
Of dreariness, that only brings despair,
For phantasy of madness reigneth here!”
The King in wonder carefully now eyes
The messenger divine with great surprise,
And says:

“But why, thou god of Hope, do I

Thus find thee in these realms of agony?
This World around me banishes thy feet
From paths that welcome here the god of Fate
And blank despair, and loss irreparable.
Why comest thou to woe immeasurable?”

“You err, my King, for hope oft rules despair;
I oftentimes come to reign with darkness here;
When I am gone, the god of Fate doth reign;
When I return, I soothe these souls again.”
“So thus you visit all these realms of woe,
To torture them with hopes they ne'er can know?
Avaunt! If this thy mission is on Earth
Or Hell, thou leavest after thee but dearth!”
“Not so, my King! behold yon glorious sphere,
Where gods at last take all these souls from here!
Adieu! thou soon shalt see the World of Light,
Where joy alone these souls will e'er delight.”

The god now vanishes away from sight,
The hero turns his face toward the light;
Nine *kaspu* walks, till weird the rays now gleam,
As *zi-mu-ri* behind the shadows stream.
He sees beyond, umbrageous grotts and caves,
Where odorous plants entwine their glistening leaves.

And lo! the trees bright flashing gems here bear!
And trailing vines and flowers do now appear,
That spread before his eyes a welcome sight,
Like a sweet dream of some mild summer night.
But, oh! his path leads o'er that awful stream,
Across a dizzy arch 'mid sulphurous steam
That covers all the grimy bridge with slime.
He stands perplexed beside the waters grime,
Which sluggish move adown the limbo black,
With murky waves that writhe demoniac,—
As ebon serpents curling through the gloom
And hurl their inky crests, that silent come
Toward the yawning gulf, a tide of hate;
And sweep their dingy waters to Realms of Fate.

He cautious climbs the slippery walls of gloom,
And dares not look beneath, lest Fate should come;
He enters now the stifling clouds that creep
Around the causeway, while its shadows sleep
Upon the stream that sullen moves below,—
He slips!—and drops his torch! it far doth glow
Beneath him on the rocks! Alas, in vain
He seeks a path to bring it back again.
It moves! snatched by a *dal-khu's* hand it flies
Away within the gloom, then falling dies
Within those waters black with a loud hiss
That breaks the silence of that dread abyss.

He turns again, amid the darkness gropes,
And careful climbs the cragged, slimy slopes,
And now he sees, oh, joy! the light beyond!
He springs! he flies along the glowing ground,
And joyous dashes through the waving green
That lustrous meets his sight with rays serene,
Where trees pure amber from their trunks distil,
Where sweet perfumes the groves and arbors fill,
Where zephyrs murmur odors from the trees,
And sweep across the flowers, carrying bees
With honey laden for their nectar store;
Where humming sun-birds upward flitting soar
O'er groves that bear rich jewels as their fruit,
That sparkling tingle from each youngling shoot,
And fill the garden with a glorious blaze
Of chastened light and tender thrilling rays.
He glides through that enchanted mystic world,
O'er streams with beds of gold that sweetly twirled

With woven splendor 'neath the blaze of gems
That crown each tree with glistening diadems.
The sounds of streams are weft with breezes, chant
Their arias with trembling leaves,—the haunt
Of gods! O how the tinkling chorus rings!—
With rhythms of the unseen rustling wings
Of souls that hover here where joy redeems
Them with a happiness that ever gleams.

The hero stands upon a damasked bed
Of flowers that glow beneath his welcome tread,
And softly sink with 'luring odors round,
And beckon him to them upon the ground.
Amid rare pinks and violets he lies,
And one sweet pink low bending near, he eyes.
With tender petals thrilling on its stem,
It lifts its fragrant face and says to him,
“Dear King, wilt thou love me as I do thee?
We love mankind, and when a mortal see
We give our fragrance to them with our love,
Their love for us our inmost heart doth move.”
The King leans down his head, it kissing, says,
Sweet beauty, I love thee? with thy sweet face?
My heart is filled with love for all thy kind.
I would that every heart thy love should find.
The fragrant floweret thrills with tenderness,
With richer fragrance answers his caress.
He kisses it again and lifts his eyes,
And rises from the ground with glad surprise.

And see! the glorious spirits clustering round!
They welcome him with sweet melodious sound.
We hear their golden instruments of praise,
As they around him whirl a threading maze;
In great delight he views their beckoning arms,
And lustrous eyes, and perfect, moving forms.
And see! he seizes one bright, charming girl,
As the enchanting ring doth nearer whirl;
He grasps her in his arms, and she doth yield
The treasure of her lips, where sweets distilled
Give him a joy without a taint of guilt.
It thrills his heart-strings till his soul doth melt,
A kiss of chastity, and love, and fire,
A joy that few can dare to here aspire.
The beauteous spirit has her joy, and flees
With all her sister spirits 'neath the trees.

And lo! the *gesdin*² shining stands,
With crystal branches in the golden sands,
In this immortal garden stands the tree,
With trunk of gold, and beautiful to see.
Beside a sacred fount the tree is placed,
With emeralds and unknown gems is graced,
Thus stands, the prince of emeralds, Elam's tree,
As once it stood, gave Immortality
To man, and bearing fruit, there sacred grew,
Till Heaven claimed again Fair Eridu.

The hero now the wondrous fountain eyes;
Its beryl base to ruby stem doth rise,
To emerald and sapphire bands that glow,
Where the bright curvings graceful outward flow;
Around the fountain to its widest part,
The wondrous lazite bands now curling start
And mingle with bright amethyst that glows,
To a broad diamond band,—contracting grows
To *uk-ni* stone, turquoise, and clustering pearls,
Inlaid with gold in many curious curls
Of twining vines and tendrils bearing birds,
Among the leaves and blooming flowers, that words
May not reveal, such loveliness in art,
With fancies spirit hands can only start
From plastic elements before the eye,
And mingle there the charms of empery.
Beneath two diamond doves that shining glow
Upon the summit, the bright waters flow,
With aromatic splendors to the skies,
While glistening colors of the rainbow rise.

Here ends the tablet, "When the hero viewed
The fountain which within the garden stood."

² The Tree of Life and Immortality.