

*(Author's Note: I would invite the RAFT to co-create the questions for each Gate, which could translate to the foci for each ritual)*

The hero of the cedar forest  
spurns the great goddess herself.  
Hot anger shakes her Heavens and she swears vengeance.  
Reckless, selfish, lashing out  
with tongue of silver and crown of gold.

For this, the Great Bull has fallen,  
cut down like wheat, puppet strings loosed from their moors.  
His blood pools around the feet of an impetuous Queen.  
She does not care to seek forgiveness,  
but redemption will find her, nonetheless.

The Great Below shakes  
when the Great Bull of Heaven is slain.  
The horror of his passing shakes  
the Dread Queen of the Dead,  
catalyzes the labor pains,  
summons the child now without a father.

Shining Queen Above hears the cries,  
she hears the cries of her sister  
echoing through the earth  
and she must go she must go she must go  
but she will not.  
The abyss yawns before her there  
and here is far too luscious.

She must go she must go she must go  
and she tries not.  
But then the pulling, then the tearing,  
then the silver threads of destiny  
coursing through her blood.  
She knows not  
but she must go.

And so she goes.  
Her sister knows.  
To the Great Below...

## **The First Gate**

Laden with gold, rare stones, and silk,  
Inanna approaches the Gate of Authority.  
What better to show her own, as the Star of the Heavens?  
But the gate is closed before her. *(She has never seen a door closed to her expectations.)*  
She screams at the gate and pounds at the locks,  
and behind the threshold, Neti plants their feet.  
The chief Gatekeeper calls out, demands her name and her reason,  
and she gives them, thinking that should be enough.

But then,  
Neti asks her a question.

By the end of the exchange, the gate unlocks,  
Inanna crosses the threshold,  
and she reluctantly leaves the royal crown in her wake.

*What would make a Queen relinquish her crown?*

## **The Second Gate**

The Underworld is cold, her head bare to the chill.  
Inanna reaches the Gate of Perception with her staff at hand  
and Neti before her yet again *(though she knows she left them standing at the first gate  
and she can only see one path)*.  
She bristles that she must undergo this indignity once again;  
she sneers at the Gatekeeper who dares to know more than she.  
They smile at her outrage  
as if she is exactly what they had expected.

And then,  
Neti asks her a question.

There is nothing for it.  
Bitter Inanna leaves behind the royal scepter,  
and the chill of the Underworld seeps further into her heart.  
Neti  
unlocks the gate.

### **The Third Gate**

At the third gate, she sets her jaw and clears her throat,  
voice thick with entitlement and pride.

Neti stands before her yet again.

They smile, pleasantly, placatingly, patiently  
and she wants to claw the expression from their face.

The Gate of Communication lies locked, the Gatekeeper stands between,  
and Inanna demands entry without sacrifice.

“I am above this insulting charade,” she says.

“We are above nothing in the Great Below,” Neti laughs.

And then, they ask her a question.

After moments pass and voice now cracked,

Inanna pulls the beads of lapis lazuli from ‘round her neck.

The strands break in her hands and one by one, the spheres of blue and gold roll glistening  
through the unlocked gate.

### **The Fourth Gate**

Her chest aches with cold and the weight of her warrior's breastplate.

She knows the Gate of Compassion is around the bend and her feet falter.

Of course Neti stands at the gate with that smile,

though it is different now,

softer in a way that sets the goddess' teeth on edge. *(She had not asked for anyone's pity)*

Inanna breathes deep, the shining metal of her armor rising and falling,

and she can see her breath in the air.

Here, Neti asks her a question.

Here, she removes her breastplate herself for the first time,

and she will admit to no one that it is easier to breathe.

Neti opens the fourth gate.

## **The Fifth Gate**

She is tired now, this goddess.

Fingers shaking in the frigid air, she pulls them into her sleeves  
and closes her fists around the golden rings on each hand.

She is seeking the source of heat within her and cannot find it.

Inanna, Queen of the Heavens, feels the first flicker of fear.

Before her is the Gate of Power.

There stands Neti, torch at hand, and though Inanna aches for that warmth,  
she will not give them the satisfaction.

The way they look at her has changed; it is an expression she has worn often but never received.  
There is a hollow where her anger had once burned hot and rampant.

Neti holds out their hand and asks her a question.

Soon, each ring is dropped in Neti's waiting palm.

The gate swings open as if already unlocked.

## **The Sixth Gate**

Exhaustion drags at her feet

while determination pulls at her spirit.

Inanna struggles to keep her eyes open,

yearns for her bed and the sky at dusk.

Neti sits in the space between the goddess and the Gate of Creativity,  
a small fire built and a pile of cloth to its side.

They gesture to the makeshift bed and Inanna curls into the softness in spite of herself.

As she drifts off to sleep and into her dreams,  
she hears the question.

When she wakes, Neti meets her gaze.

She removes the sparkling jewelry from her feet and ankles  
and throws them to the flames.

Neti leads her through the door.

## **The Seventh Gate**

Where she expects a gate,  
there stands only a black mirror.

Neti has vanished,  
and Inanna stands alone,  
staring at her own reflection  
and the echoes of the gates she has passed.  
She sees the reflection of that which she has sacrificed  
for herself.

But here, Inanna can hear her sister's voice  
through the glass. Here, Ereshkigal  
wails. The Dread Queen weeps.  
The Goddess of the Underworld screams  
in grief, in anger, in pain.

And Inanna can feel it all, though she knows it is still  
but a fragment of her sister's agony.  
She strips her robes from her shoulders,  
falls to her knees, presses her face and hands against the glass.  
Hot tears run down the Gate of Manifestation,  
and she begs forgiveness.  
She asks to help ease the pain, the suffering, the burden.

Inanna seeks to change.

In the space between contractions,  
Ereshkigal asks her the final question.

*“Will you walk with integrity?”*

The goddess of the Above bows her head.  
The mirror fades away.

Inanna crosses the threshold,  
and faces the reality  
of their mirrored worlds.