Surpassing all kings, powerful and tall
beyond all others, violent, splendid,
a wild bull of a man, unvanquished leader,
hero in the front lines, beloved by his soldiers—
fortress they called him, protector of the people,
raging flood that destroys all defenses—
two-thirds divine and one-third human,
son of King Lugalbanda, who became
a god, and of the goddess Ninsun,
he opened the mountain passes, dug wells
on the slopes, crossed the vast ocean, sailed
to the rising sun, journeyed to the edge
of the world, in search of eternal life,
and once he found Utnapishtim—the man
who survived the Great Flood and was made immortal—
he brought back the ancient, forgotten rites,
restoring the temples that the Flood had destroyed,
renewing the statutes and sacraments
for the welfare of the people and the sacred land.
Who is like Gilgamesh? What other king
has inspired such awe? Who else can say,
“I alone rule, supreme among mankind”?
The goddess Aruru, mother of creation,
had designed his body, had made him the strongest
of men—huge, handsome, radiant, perfect.

The city is his possession, he struts
through it, arrogant, his head raised high,
trampling its citizens like a wild bull.
He is king, he does whatever he wants,
takes the son from his father and crushes him,
takes the girl from her mother and uses her,
the warrior’s daughter, the young man’s bride,
he uses her, no one dares to oppose him.
But the people of Uruk cried out to heaven, and their lamentation was heard, the gods are not unfeeling, their hearts were touched, they went to Anu, father of them all, protector of the realm of sacred Uruk, and spoke to him on the people’s behalf:

“Heavenly Father, Gilgamesh—

noble as he is, splendid as he is—

has exceeded all bounds. The people suffer from his tyranny, the people cry out that he takes the son from his father and crushes him, takes the girl from her mother and uses her, the warrior’s daughter, the young man’s bride, he uses her, no one dares to oppose him.

Is this how you want your king to rule?

Should a shepherd savage his own flock? Father, do something, quickly, before the people overwhelm heaven with their heartrending cries.”
Anu heard them, he nodded his head, then to the goddess, mother of creation, he called out: “Aruru, you are the one who created humans. Now go and create a double for Gilgamesh, his second self, a man who equals his strength and courage, a man who equals his stormy heart. Create a new hero, let them balance each other perfectly, so that Uruk has peace.”

When Aruru heard this, she closed her eyes, and what Anu had commanded she formed in her mind. She moistened her hands, she pinched off some clay, she threw it into the wilderness, kneaded it, shaped it to her idea, and fashioned a man, a warrior, a hero: Enkidu the brave, as powerful and fierce as the war god Ninurta. Hair covered his body, hair grew thick on his head and hung...
down to his waist, like a woman’s hair.
He roamed all over the wilderness, 
naked, far from the cities of men, 
ate grass with gazelles, and when he was thirsty 
he drank clear water from the waterholes, 
kneeling beside the antelope and deer.

One day, a human—a trapper—saw him 
 drinking with the animals at a waterhole.  
The trapper’s heart pounded, his face went white, 
his legs shook, he was numb with terror. 
The same thing happened a second, a third day. 
Fear gripped his belly, he looked drained and haggard 
like someone who has been on a long, hard journey.

He went to his father. “Father, I have seen 
a savage man at the waterhole. 
He must be the strongest man in the world, 
with muscles like rock. I have seen him outrun
the swiftest animals. He lives among them, eats grass with gazelles, and when he is thirsty he drinks clear water from the waterholes. I haven't approached him—I am too afraid. He fills in the pits I have dug, he tears out the traps I have set, he frees the animals, and I can catch nothing. My livelihood is gone.”

“Son, in Uruk there lives a man named Gilgamesh. He is king of that city and the strongest man in the world, they say, with muscles like rock. Go now to Uruk, go to Gilgamesh, tell him what happened, then follow his advice. He will know what to do.”

He made the journey; he stood before Gilgamesh in the center of Uruk, he told him about the savage man. The king said, “Go to the temple of Ishtar,
ask them there for a woman named Shamhat,
one of the priestesses who give their bodies
to any man, in honor of the goddess.
Take her into the wilderness.
When the animals are drinking at the waterhole,
tell her to strip off her robe and lie there
naked, ready, with her legs apart.
The wild man will approach. Let her use her love-arts.
Nature will take its course, and then
the animals who knew him in the wilderness
will be bewildered, and will leave him forever.”

The trapper found Shamhat, Ishtar’s priestess,
and they went off into the wilderness.
For three days they walked. On the third day
they reached the waterhole. There they waited.
For two days they sat as the animals came
to drink clear water. Early in the morning
of the third day, Enkidu came and knelt down
to drink clear water with the antelope and deer. They looked in amazement. The man was huge and beautiful. Deep in Shamhat’s loins desire stirred. Her breath quickened as she stared at this primordial being.

“Look,” the trapper said, “there he is. Now use your love-arts. Strip off your robe and lie here naked, with your legs apart. Stir up his lust when he approaches, touch him, excite him, take his breath with your kisses, show him what a woman is. The animals who knew him in the wilderness will be bewildered, and will leave him forever.”

She stripped off her robe and lay there naked, with her legs apart, touching herself. Enkidu saw her and warily approached. He sniffed the air. He gazed at her body. He drew close, Shamhat touched him on the thigh.
touched his penis, and put him inside her.
She used her love-arts, she took his breath
with her kisses, held nothing back, and showed him
what a woman is. For seven days
he stayed erect and made love with her,
until he had had enough. At last
he stood up and walked toward the waterhole
to rejoin his animals. But the gazelles
saw him and scattered, the antelope and deer
bounded away. He tried to catch up,
but his body was exhausted, his life-force was spent,
his knees trembled, he could no longer run
like an animal, as he had before.
He turned back to Shamhat, and as he walked
he knew that his mind had somehow grown larger,
he knew things now that an animal can't know.

Enkidu sat down at Shamhat's feet.
He looked at her, and he understood
all the words she was speaking to him.

“Now, Enkidu, you know what it is
to be with a woman, to unite with her.
You are beautiful, you are like a god.
Why should you roam the wilderness
and live like an animal? Let me take you
to great-walled Uruk, to the temple of Ishtar,
to the palace of Gilgamesh the mighty king,
who in his arrogance oppresses the people,
trampling upon them like a wild bull.”

She finished, and Enkidu nodded his head.
Deep in his heart he felt something stir,
a longing he had never known before,
the longing for a true friend. Enkidu said,
“I will go, Shamhat. Take me with you
to great-walled Uruk, to the temple of Ishtar,
to the palace of Gilgamesh the mighty king.
I will challenge him. I will shout to his face:
‘I am the mightiest! I am the man who can make the world tremble! I am supreme!’

“Come,” said Shamhat, “let us go to Uruk, I will lead you to Gilgamesh the mighty king. You will see the great city with its massive wall, you will see the young men dressed in their splendor, in the finest linen and embroidered wool, brilliantly colored, with fringed shawls and wide belts. Every day is a festival in Uruk, with people singing and dancing in the streets, musicians playing their lyres and drums, the lovely priestesses standing before the temple of Ishtar, chatting and laughing, flushed with sexual joy, and ready to serve men’s pleasure, in honor of the goddess, so that even old men are aroused from their beds. You who are still so ignorant of life, I will show you Gilgamesh the mighty king.
the hero destined for both joy and grief.
You will stand before him and gaze with wonder,
you will see how handsome, how virile he is,
how his body pulses with erotic power.
He is even taller and stronger than you—
so full of life-force that he needs no sleep.
Enkidu, put aside your aggression.
Shamash, the sun god, loves him, and his mind
has been made large by Anu, father of the gods,
made large by Enlil, the god of earth,
and by Ea, the god of water and wisdom.
Even before you came down from the hills,
you had come to Gilgamesh in a dream.”
And she told Enkidu what she had heard.
“He went to his mother, the goddess Ninsun,
and asked her to interpret the dream.
‘I saw a bright star, it shot across
the morning sky, it fell at my feet
and lay before me like a huge boulder.
I tried to lift it, but it was too heavy.
I tried to move it, but it would not budge.
A crowd of people gathered around me,
the people of Uruk pressed in to see it,
like a little baby they kissed its feet.
This boulder, this star that had fallen to earth—
I took it in my arms, I embraced and caressed it
the way a man caresses his wife.
Then I took it and laid it before you. You told me
that it was my double, my second self.’
The mother of Gilgamesh, Lady Ninsun,
the wise, the all-knowing, said to her son,
‘Dearest child, this bright star from heaven,
this huge boulder that you could not lift—
it stands for a dear friend, a mighty hero.
You will take him in your arms, embrace and caress him
the way a man caresses his wife.
He will be your double, your second self,
a man who is loyal, who will stand at your side
through the greatest dangers. Soon you will meet him, the companion of your heart. Your dream has said so," Gilgamesh said, "May the dream come true.
May the true friend appear, the true companion, who through every danger will stand at my side.""

When Shamhat had finished speaking, Enkidu turned to her, and again they made love.
Then Shamhat gave Enkidu one of her robes and he put it on. Taking his hand, she led him like a child to some shepherds' huts.

Marveling, the shepherds crowded around him.

“What an enormous man!” they whispered.

“How much like Gilgamesh he is—tall and strong, with muscles like rock.”

They led him to their table, they put bread and beer in front of him. Enkidu sat and stared.

He had never seen human food, he didn’t know what to do. Then Shamhat said,

“Go ahead, Enkidu. This is food, we humans eat and drink this.” Warily he tasted the bread. Then he ate a piece,
he ate a whole loaf, then ate another.
he ate until he was full, drank seven
pitchers of the beer, his heart grew light,
his face glowed, and he sang out with joy.
He had his hair cut, he washed, he rubbed
sweet oil into his skin, and became
fully human. Shining, he looked
handsome as a bridegroom. When the shepherds lay down,
Enkidu went out with sword and spear.
He chased off lions and wolves, all night
he guarded the flocks, he stayed awake
and guarded them while the shepherds slept.

One day, while he was making love,
he looked up and saw a young man pass by.
“Shamhat,” he said, “bring that man here.
I want to talk to him. Where is he going?”
She called out, then went to the man and said,
“Where are you going in such a rush?”
The man said to Enkidu, “I am on my way to a wedding banquet. I have piled the table with exquisite food for the ceremony. The priest will bless the young couple, the guests will rejoice, the bridegroom will step aside, and the virgin will wait in the marriage bed for Gilgamesh, king of great-walled Uruk. It is he who mates first with the lawful wife. After he is done, the bridegroom follows. This is the order that the gods have decreed. From the moment the king’s birth-cord was cut, every girl’s hymen has belonged to him.”

As he listened, Enkidu’s face went pale with anger. “I will go to Uruk now, to the palace of Gilgamesh the mighty king. I will challenge him. I will shout to his face: ‘I am the mightiest! I am the man who can make the world tremble! I am supreme!’ ”
Together they went to great-walled Uruk,
Enkidu in front, Shamhat behind him.

When he walked into the main street of Uruk,
the people gathered around him, marveling,
the crowds kept pressing closer to see him,
like a little baby they kissed his feet.
“What an enormous man!” they whispered.
“How much like Gilgamesh—not quite so tall
but stronger-boned. In the wilderness
he grew up eating grass with gazelles,
he was nursed on the milk of antelope and deer.
Gilgamesh truly has met his match.
This wild man can rival the mightiest of kings.”

The wedding ritual had taken place,
the musicians were playing their drums and lyres,
the guests were eating, singing and laughing.
the bride was ready for Gilgamesh
as though for a god, she was waiting in her bed
to open to him, in honor of Ishtar,
to forget her husband and open to the king.

When Gilgamesh reached the marriage house,
Enkidu was there. He stood like a boulder,
blocking the door. Gilgamesh, raging,
stepped up and seized him, huge arms gripped
huge arms, foreheads crashed like wild bulls,
the two men staggered, they pitched against houses,
the doorposts trembled, the outer walls shook,
they careened through the streets, they grappled each other,
limbs intertwined, each huge body
straining to break free from the other’s embrace.
Finally, Gilgamesh threw the wild man
and with his right knee pinned him to the ground.
His anger left him. He turned away.
The contest was over. Enkidu said.
“Gilgamesh, you are unique among humans. Your mother, the goddess Ninsun, made you stronger and braver than any mortal, and rightly has Enlil granted you the kingship, since you are destined to rule over men.”

They embraced and kissed. They held hands like brothers. They walked side by side. They became true friends.