

## Sumerian Legend of Lilitu

*Translated by Charles Alexander Moffat from an ancient Hebrew version*

Before the stars were born  
Before people built great cities  
The great mountain Atlen shook  
And bled fiery blood  
As it gave birth to Lilitu

The land all around burned  
Many animals and people died  
When Lilitu opened her eyes  
Lilitu saw the ashes of her birth  
And wept tears like rain

Lilitu's tears became rivers and streams  
Flowers grew where Lilitu walked  
Trees grew where Lilitu sat  
The ashes became fertile soil  
And an orchard became Lilitu's home

In Lilitu's orchard many animals are  
People came to live in paradise  
Lilitu gave them grain and taught them to harvest  
Lilitu made bread and beer  
The people rejoiced, ate and drank

One day a great prince came to the land of Atlen  
He spied Lilitu and wooed her  
But Lilitu spurned and rejected him  
The great prince became very angry  
He spied two lions and killed them both

Lilitu wept for the lions  
She cradled their heads in her arms  
The lions awoke to her tears  
The lions licked away her tears and became strong  
They became Lilitu's loyal friends

The great prince saw this  
And again he wooed Lilitu  
But Lilitu became a bird  
She flew away from him  
Angry, the prince began hunting birds

Lilitu saw this and was upset  
To spite the prince she spat at him  
And mated with a serpent  
Lilitu gave birth very quickly  
Her child was like no other

The child had six arms  
The child had a serpent's tail  
The child was very strong  
Lilitu called the child a marilitu  
The Marilitu attacked the great prince

The great prince and the marilitu fought  
They fought day and night  
For night after night  
And day after day  
But neither could win the fight

Lilitu saw this and mated again  
Another marilitu was born  
And another and another  
Two hundred and sixteen were born  
In fear the great prince ran away

The people of the orchard rejoiced  
The marilitus farmed the land  
The marilitus protected the people  
But the great prince swore vengeance  
He cursed the mountain Atlen and its land

Atlen became angry at this curse  
The mountain and the land shook  
Atlen shook and bled and cried  
Its fiery blood made fires  
And its tears made floods

Afraid Lilitu turned into a great bird  
She grasped people in her feet  
She carried animals on her back  
The marilitu's and the lions carried people too  
Together they fled the land of Atlen

Lilitu went west and east  
Lilitu went north and south  
Finally she came to dry land  
The people thanked Lilitu greatly  
The people built statues in her honour

Lilitu wept for her lost home  
Her tears formed two rivers  
The rivers joined together  
They flowed into the ocean  
The people grew grain by the river

The people grew great orchards  
They built buildings and towers of stone  
The people grew healthy and the land rich  
Merchants from far places travelled there  
News of the wealth of the land grew

The great prince heard of the land  
He sent his heralds to inquire of its lady  
But Lilitu fed his heralds to her lions  
The great prince sent an army  
But the marilitus destroyed his army

Finally the great prince went  
When he saw the beautiful orchards  
When he saw the six-armed marilitus  
The great prince knew the lady was Lilitu  
In fear he disguised himself as a woman

The great prince went to Lilitu's temple  
His disguise fooled the people  
But the lions knew his scent  
The two lions warned Lilitu  
So Lilitu prepared a trap

Lilitu summoned thirty-six young men  
She filled a hall with thirty-six silver platters  
She ordered thirty-six beasts slaughtered  
At last she was ready  
She invited the people to the feast

People came from all over the land  
The great prince came too  
The great prince arrived in disguise  
But Lilitu knew him eagerly  
She welcomed him as an honoured guest

The great prince accepted her hospitality  
He sat before all the people  
The thirty-six young men were brought forth  
"Please choose a man," Lilitu commanded  
Not wanting to be rude the great prince chose one

Lilitu bade the great prince to sit beside the young man  
The silver platters were brought forth  
The people feasted on the meat of thirty-six beasts  
Great gifts were brought forth  
Lilitu gave the gifts to the great prince

Confused the great prince accepted  
Then the feast was finally over  
Curious, the great prince questioned Lilitu  
"Do you always give such grand gifts to strangers?"  
"Only when someone is married," Lilitu answered

Realizing what had happened the great prince became angry  
He ripped off his disguise  
He drew his sword and his dagger  
"Why have you made me marry this man?" he demanded  
"Because you can never marry me," Lilitu answered

Enraged the great prince attacked Lilitu  
The two fought endlessly for Lilitu was very strong  
Whenever the prince would get too bold  
Lilitu would change into a bird  
The great prince fell to the ground and wept in despair

The great prince professed his love  
He promised that he would never quit  
He prepared to cut his own throat  
Finally Lilitu grew tired of this game  
She felt pity for the great prince

"I will grant you one kiss," Lilitu declared  
Desperate the great prince accepted  
The moment the great prince's kiss had been dealt  
His body flooded with life and then death  
So great was the pleasure of one kiss that he died

Lilitu wept for the great prince  
But the great prince remained dead  
Saddened Lilitu knew she could never love  
No mortal man could taste her kiss and live  
Her tears brought life, but her kiss brought death