

## **CHRISTMAS SPECIAL**

ELEANOR:

Welcome back, all!

CORDELIA:

Hello!

ELEANOR:

Today is a very special episode, since  
it's Christmas time!

CORDELIA:

We would like to make a note for our  
listeners that may not celebrate  
Christmas. We see you, and we  
understand how overwhelming the  
Christmas season can be.

ELEANOR:

We want to wish everyone who does not  
celebrate Christmas the warmest of  
wishes. I hope our Jewish listeners  
had a very blessed Hanukkah.

CORDELIA:

And anyone who celebrates, have a  
Happy Kwanzaa.

ELEANOR:

And especially for our Pagan friends,  
may you have a blessed Yule and  
Solstice.

CORDELIA:

Our family is an Irish Catholic one,  
so Christmas is a bit of a big deal in  
our house.

ELEANOR:

If you have to spend the holiday away  
from your loved ones, good for you for  
being safe. I know it feels a bit  
lonely, but losing your loved ones  
forever is much more lonely.

CORDELIA:

And if you are seeing your parents,  
like we are, make sure you've been  
tested negative, and have quarantined  
for a week before.

ELEANOR:

And for those of you who are less than  
thrilled to spend the holiday at home,  
we have a special gift for you.

CORDELIA:

Today, Ellie and I are going to look  
for an entry that is Christmas-themed.  
But, with a twist.

ELEANOR:

Specifically, we want to find an entry  
about the origins of the many Pagan  
traditions that have been co-opted by  
Christians for Christmas.

CORDELIA:

So, if you want to ruin Christmas for  
relatives you don't like, feel free to  
tell this story at the dinner table!

ELEANOR:

Let's see what Christmas horrors the  
book has in store for us.

**SOUND: The Book is opened.**

CORDELIA:

Hmmm. . .it looks like it has a  
holiday section!

ELEANOR:

Oh my god. . ."Yule Recipes: How to  
Win a Husband with your Yule Moon  
Cookies". That doesn't sound  
horrifying.

CORDELIA:

"Proper Apologies for the Trees",  
"Mistletoe: Not just a Romantic Root"

ELEANOR:

"Bacchus's Winter Fashion: Ivy and  
other Plant-Based clothing", that  
sounds iconic. And. . .oh, look,  
"Caroling: A History". None of these  
sound terrifying. They all sound  
delightful.

CORDELIA:

Why don't we try the last one? You  
know how dad loves caroling, maybe  
we'll have a fun story to tell him  
about its history when we see him.

ELEANOR:

Alrighty, "Caroling: A History", page  
nine hundred and ninety nine.

## **SOUND: PAGES TURNING**

ELEANOR:

"Long, long ago, in a land beset by  
the frost and snow of a long and dark  
winter, a tribe of northern folk  
appointed their new king. This was  
likely not a "true" king as we would  
think of it, mind you- not a lineaged  
monarch, nor a station of absolute  
power held for years unending until  
old age or illness or assassination  
parted the man from his title. Very  
likely, the operation of the tribe's  
politics, war efforts, and economy  
would fall to another so-named, or a  
council of elders, or the like. No,  
this "king" was chosen not for the  
people, but for the gods.  
And so the gods were left to decide  
upon him. Perhaps it was a hard bean

or jewel or figurine baked into a large cake or loaf of bread, and the gods would choose him in the portion he was served, and know him by the breaking of his teeth (as was done by the Romans in their Saturnalia- though their "kings" held the title for the day only, and with far less to worry about at its conclusion). Or perhaps they would draw straws, or toss bones, or perhaps the tribe's cunning-folk would determine the gods' will through their divinations."

CORDELIA:

Do you have any idea how fucking wild Saturnalia is?

ELEANOR:

No, and I would be insulted if you didn't tell me.

CORDELIA:

As you can imagine, it is a celebration of the Roman god Saturn, who the Romans believed ruled the world and ushered them into their Golden Age. It was a time where social norms were out the window, slaves could be nasty to their masters, men could dress as women and women could dress as men, and it was literally considered lawful to be hammered the entire time. It also ended with some kind of sacrifice at the Temple of Saturn, or another designated Holy site.

ELEANOR:

It sounds like ancient Santa-Con.

CORDELIA:

Honestly, the absolute fuckery of it is a lot like a Santa-con, but it

lasted way longer than just one day. Gambling was permitted, which was normally not a thing in Rome, and people were encouraged to give gifts, and they could be meaningful or a gag gift.

ELEANOR:

People were giving gag gifts to each other in ancient Rome?

CORDELIA:

People were having insane orgies and writing about them on walls in ancient Rome. Humans have not changed much in three thousand years. The people would draw lots to see who would be the King of Saturnalia, and he could make you do whatever he wanted.

ELEANOR:

That sounds like it would turn real dark real quick.

CORDELIA:

It probably did. This is actually thought to be the origin of the Lord of Misrule in British and Scottish folklore.

ELEANOR:

The Lord of Misrule sounds like he's fun at parties.

CORDELIA:

Depending on who the lord of misrule is, yes. But it was thought to be a time of merriment and celebration, which is probably part of the reason early Christians used it as a cover to try to celebrate Christmas.

ELEANOR:

Speaking of that, can we get back to

the entry? Not that this isn't fascinating, because it is, but I don't want this to be a half hour long lecture about ancient Roman holidays.

CORDELIA:

You're right, I'm not a college professor. . .yet.

ELEANOR:

SO, where was I? Ah, yes,  
"Whatever the method, the king was chosen. And he would hold this "station" for the year, until the nights grew again to their unbearable depth and the cold of winter threatened them once more. He would be granted nearly any request, and have his pick of the mead, and the meat, and the hunting. He would be lavished for the year, held in high and fattening regard. And then winter would come again with its long nights and its cold winds and its heavy snow, and it would be time to choose a new king, and send the old king to the gods. The king would be stripped of his regalia and tools, stripped of his wool and linen and furs, ablated, anointed, and then set out to run naked through the snow. His tribesmen, his kin, would follow. With spear and sword and bow, they would follow, in joyous solemnity; the king's last hunt, his sacrifice, his joining with the otherworld, was a holy thing. A promise that the sun again would rise, a bargaining chip against the tempestuous gods to assure the return of summer. And when the king finally lay still, candy-cane red upon the stark white of winter, they would gather him up, dress him in his finest raiment, and parade his noble repose

around the tribe's lands upon a palanquin or gurney, knocking on the doors of homes or long-houses that the people might see their king in his final splendor, his true form. And they would sing for him."

CORDELIA:

UM. Is this saying they. . .they kill the king, carry his corpse around and then sing about it?

ELEANOR:

I- I think so.

"They would sing of their beloved and noble king, dead but alive again in the realm of their deities, his body a promise to the people that the gods would see fit to thaw their frozen world. And their singing was for the gods, too... a gentle reminder to the otherworld that they had sent to them their best, their most beloved and lavished. An act, perhaps, at times. But one ritualized, and therefore true enough. The sun would begin to rise earlier, and the hard grasp of winter would slowly abate thereafter. This, though, was untenable as the world changed. Perhaps the tribe missed a year, and the world did not end. Or perhaps a king got away, but winter still fled. Or, perhaps, they simply met others who did not do such things to make the sun rise. Slowly, the sacrificed king became a symbol instead of a man; often a wren, the King of Birds, was instead hunted, it's body decorated with ribbons and set in a delicate box, or later, simply placed upon a stick. But still, the king was marched about, paraded by young hunters who would sing of his splendor and his sacrifice, in

exchange for treats or coin from the houses they brought such tidings to." Don't they still parade a dead bird on a stick in Ireland?

CORDELIA:

Yes it's the Wren Hunt on St. Stephen's Day. Wow, this entry must be super old if it is taking about how the Wren hunt began. Can I read the rest?

ELEANOR:

Of course.

CORDELIA:

"As word came on the lips of evangelists and christian travellers of a holy king who died to save them, dead but alive elsewhere, it all made a sort of sense... and so very little needed to be changed. And so it is done still; Young and old gather at doorsteps and thresholds to sing of their king, of ancient fables, of birth and sacrifice. Red and white adorn the houses of the doors on which they knock, as blood had once adorned the snow so very long ago. No casket accompanies them now, no grim box with a dead bird is shown upon neighbor's doors, but we sing of them anyway. We use new words and new fables and new stories, but we have not stopped singing. So much of what we do even now is ritual; practices first put into motion at the first inklings of the sublime by our ancestors, far removed, now, from their purpose, but still holding the weight of millenia within it. One must wonder, then, at every feast and every song and every marking of the year: who's story is this, that we



are telling? Who do we honor, now,  
with our cookies on the table and our  
feasts and our wine? There are new  
gods to honor, or even no gods at all  
at these tables. But still, our  
actions are in rough pantomime with  
our stark and violent past.  
So who, truly, do we still sing for?  
Winter still comes and goes, and so it  
must be enough... But we will never know  
what gods we may have angered by  
forgetting them, by denying them their  
king.  
If we ever do learn, it shall be too  
late."

ELEANOR:

And that, listeners, is the exact type  
of Christmas horror we were looking  
for.

CORDELIA:

If you want to ruin Christmas, feel  
free to tell your family members this  
story.

ELEANOR:

You know we definitely will be.

CORDELIA:

How does the book know exactly what we  
needed? Like, we could have picked any  
of those entries and we ended up  
picking the one that's about the blood  
and gore.

ELEANOR:

Just lucky I guess? Weird shit keeps  
happening to us because of this book.  
I think the look on dad's face will be worth it though.

CORDELIA:

I think he'll be both horrified and  
intrigued. You know how he gets when I

tell him shit like this.

ELEANOR:

Or when I try to explain the plot of a  
Cirque show to him.

CORDELIA:

He'll smile and nod and then ask us  
how we think the Phillies will do this  
year.

ELEANOR:

And then launch into the rivalries and  
team match ups.

CORDELIA:

He's so pure.

ELEANOR:

The purest.

CORDELIA:

So, to all our listeners that  
celebrate Christmas, Merry Christmas!

ELEANOR:

And for those that don't, we hope you  
have a very average Friday.

CORDELIA:

Remember to stay safe, wear a mask,  
and be mindful this Christmas.

ELEANOR:

And be thankful for your health. We  
love you all.

BOTH:

Happy Holidays!

