

## Eleanor

Summary A woodland walk and a lonely Ritual stir some memories for Giles.

Notes Extracts used from The Raven, by Edgar Allan Poe. (Published anonymously in the New York Evening Mirror on 29 January 1845, and the following month under Poe's name in the American Whig Review.)

The autumn sun glimmered through the trembling gold and russet leaves, tinting his hand a false gold. He remembered when once his hand had been lean fingered and strong, not gnarled and spotted with age.

His basket was nearly full with...oak twigs and russet apples, alongside moss and a garland of ivy. He stooped at the foot of an ancient tree and harvested some mushrooms growing there.

The sun was low in the sky when he returned to his four-by-four. Even in England it wasn't wise to be out after dark on All Hallows Eve.

He drove steadily homeward, his thoughts on merrier times in his childhood. His father left the house at dawn and returned the next evening, so his mother and schoolmates had a party; the usual fare of popped corn, jelly and cake, crisps and cherrysade that his mother pretended was vintage wine...

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A discourteous driver reminded an oblivious Giles of the traffic lights' change to green.

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Much later in the evening when all the children had left, his mother's friends arrived all happy and relaxed wearing vivid coloured robes and crystal jewellery. He liked one lady in particular. She was beautiful, with dark cascading curls and eyes of green. She smelt of cinnamon and roses and always gave him a bosomy hug.

After his mother had tucked him in bed, he crept down to hear soft laughter and chants. Music filtered up the stairs where he crouched and at a certain point, he always felt someone brush past him on the stairs and a greeting echo from the sitting room. October 31st's of his childhood were always safe and warm.

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He parked outside his house and hauled his basket out of the boot. He carried it into his kitchen and flipped the heating switch on. Half an hour later saw him closing the sitting room shutters and lighting a black candle. He stood quietly in prayer with his hazel switch in his left hand... He remembered Jenny, Tara, and Buffy, all fallen fighting the good fight. He invited them to visit, just as he did every year. Then he cleared the half apple, nibbled bread and herbs onto a dish, and placed it on the doorstep.

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Midnight and time for a treat. He settled into his comfortable chair with a Whisky and a

book of poetry.

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered weak and weary,  
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore --  
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,  
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.  
"T'is some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber door--  
Only this and nothing more."

A sudden noise made Giles start so much he nearly dropped his copy of Poe! He stilled his heart and retrieved his cell phone. He glanced at the screen proclaiming the legend, "Xander"

"Hi, G-man, got ya again didn't I?" Xander's deep voice asked mischievously.

Giles smiled and the years melted away from his eyes. "Yes, you did, I was just getting to the good part of the orgy..." He paused for the giggles to die down. "How are your kids?" Giles settled back in his chair and listened as Xander told him the news of the Sunnydale Slayers, the gang his sons belonged to. Apparently, they had come to the aid of a tiny blonde, and then learned that she was a Slayer, her Watcher was inept, and so Xander had stepped into the breach. Giles couldn't contain his pride. "You will be careful Xander..."

"Hey, I worked with the best, something had to rub off. Well, time for me to tuck the baby in. Oh, I didn't tell you about Beth did I? She's a bundle of trouble and twice as cute! Bye Giles..."

Giles knew he'd have another phone call tomorrow, after the patrol. It was a Xander tradition. He closed the connection and picked up his book again.

Ah distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December;  
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.  
Eagerly I wished the morrow; -- vainly I had sought to borrow  
From my books surcease of sorrow -- sorrow for the lost Lenore --  
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore --  
Nameless here for evermore.

A strong rhythmic tapping invaded another verse of Poe. Giles slid his bookmark along the page and went to open his door. He looked out on the empty streets; every house was dark and faceless. As he closed his door, he heard the tapping, louder than before. He turned his head and faced a bird -- A raven level with his eye, pleading for entry at the side window of his porch.

He frowned as the black-rimmed yellow eye gleamed and blinked. It dipped its narrow glossy head and tapped the pane again with a beak of midnight satin. Giles relented and opened the window. The bird stepped from the sill to his shoulder with practiced ease. He grimaced as the sharp claws gained purchase and then closed the door and turned to enter the hall. All the time whilst he walked the bird trembled and preened as if celebrating its invasion of his privacy.

Once in his sitting room the bird took flight and landed on the table with one delicately ridged foot above the discarded Poe. It spoke one word and one word only "Eleanor".

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Giles spent the rest of the night reaching for books and notepaper encouraging the bird to speak more words with treats of biscuits and milk... He'd come in with a tray when he found the unruly Raven guzzling his whisky!

"What! Really my friend, polite fowl usually ask. " He stopped dead when he saw reflected in the Raven's eyes the soft grey shape of an old woman peering into the room from outside. He gathered his wits and taking a deep breath announced an invitation to the spectre.

The scent of cinnamon and roses filled his sitting room and he felt soft hair tickling the back of his neck.

"Eleanor..." Giles whispered in the darkness. He smiled as he heard her warm chuckle as vivid as his childhood memories of her. "May I hug you? " he asked. A blush came to his cheek as he remembered the effect of those creamy bosoms pressed close to his face. He could feel her move around him and embrace him. For the first time in a long time he felt unconditional love.

There are times when only a hug will do!

"Rupert, what would you rather be? A man, old and withered or a bird, wild and free?"

Giles drew back and looked down at the apparition from his long forgotten past. His hand hurt and in the winter, he felt the cold like a spear in his marrow. The thought of feathers to warm him and flight to warmer climes held a certain appeal.

Eleanor smiled and nodded, mimicking her Raven familiar. "You've made a wise choice, join her Rupert. Be together and rejoice. "

He felt faint for a moment, and then found his vision sharpened to a pinpoint. He opened his wings to their full span and breathed deep into his proud chest. He turned his head to the side and looked at his partner, slightly smaller than he. In her eyes, he saw a familiar gleam. He opened his beak to greet her but she found the words before him.

"Hello, England. "

The End.