

# CROATOIA

*A short story of the  
Last Colony of Roanoke*

**JENNI WILTZ**

# CROATOA

A short story of the  
Lost Colony of Roanoke



Jenni Wiltz



Decanter Press  
PILOT HILL, CALIFORNIA

Copyright © 2014 by Jenni Wiltz

The original version of “Croatoa” appeared in *A Rustle of Dark Leaves*, published by Misanthrope Press in 2012.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the publisher at the address below.

Decanter Press  
P.O. Box 277  
Pilot Hill, CA 95664  
<http://DecanterPress.com>

Publisher’s Note: This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are a product of the author’s imagination. Locales and public names are sometimes used for atmospheric purposes. Any resemblance to actual people, living or dead, or to businesses, companies, events, institutions, or locales is completely coincidental.

Book Layout ©2015 BookDesignTemplates.com

# Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Author's Note](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Part One](#)

[Part Two](#)

[Part Three](#)

[Part Four](#)

[Part Five](#)

[Manteo: A Historical Note](#)

[Roanoke Colony Timeline](#)

[Thank You](#)

[Preview: A Vampire in Versailles](#)

[About the Author](#)

## Author's Note



ON JULY 22, 1587, 150 English settlers set sail from Plymouth for Roanoke Colony. They expected to meet up with a garrison of men left there by a previous expedition in 1586.

All they found was a single skeleton.

The governor, John White, sailed home to ask for more men and supplies, leaving 115 men, women, and children behind...including his daughter, Eleanor Dare, and his newborn granddaughter, Virginia.

When White returned in 1590, there was no one left to help and no settlement left standing. To this day, no one has conclusive proof of what happened to the missing settlers.

# Prologue



Roanoke, Virginia Colony  
January, 1588

**M**ANTEO SAYS THE trees hear everything. He says our footsteps send reverberations deep within the earth, great quaking motions that trees feel like the lashes of a whip. They shed tears we cannot see beneath their gnarled bark, tears that seep down into the soil and make it barren. A land filled with sorrowful trees, he says, will produce nothing but bitterness.

We have made the trees sad unto death, I fear, and they will do the same for us.

# Part One



Roanoke, Virginia Colony  
February, 1588

**A**NNANIAS GAVE ME two wooden buckets and told me to come back when they were full. Worn thin by hunger, his voice and throat ground against each other like a mortar and pestle. “We are all hungry, Eleanor,” he said, “but we will leave something for you.”

What he meant was that he would order Manteo to make the gruel and the seven of them would eat the bulk of it while I was gone. They were tired of offering me food when I did few of the daily chores, tired of hearing me beg for Virginia to be given more.

It burdened their consciences to have me starve in front of them. They wished me to do it farther away, out of their sight. “I understand,” I said.

“I knew you would,” he replied.

His hand brushed mine when I reached for the buckets’ rope handles. I shrank from him. My insides still ached from

Virginia's birth, six months ago. Some days, blood and strange purple jelly stained my thighs. Sometimes I saw things or heard things that were not there. I was ill with fatigue and could rouse no desire for anything, but I did not dare confess it.

The omens were ill enough already.

I did as Annanias asked and carried the buckets to the wooden palisade that surrounded our shelter, nodding at Thomas, the sentry. He pulled the rope that opened the gate and I walked out into the woods.

Unlike English trees, which grow straight and true, trees in the New World entwined like lovers, their tangled limbs knit together in an embrace that smothered the sky. Looking up, all I saw was a mesh of black bark and black leaves, cascading overhead in a thick canopy of lust. Our lives mattered nothing to them as long as they were left alone in their fevered embrace.

I walked through the forest quickly, emerging near the shore and its estuaries. Soil gave way to sand, where pampas stalks billowed over the dunes like farthingales, ladies-in-waiting curtseying to their sovereign. The verdigris sea tossed and rolled its way to England, where my father had gone to beg for the means to support us. When he left, there had been 115 of us. That is what he would tell everyone in England.

*We must survive, Annanias said. Your father will bring help. He will not let us perish. But it was impossible.* We were a woman, an infant, a savage, and five hungry men. We were doomed and he was the only one who failed to see it.

I stumbled toward the cistern from which we drew our water. I did not have the strength to step over the marshy puddles pooled in the troughs of the dunes. I stepped through

them, feeling the pull of my sodden wool skirts as the water seeped into them. Bent nearly double beneath their weight, I did not see it until I crested the last sandy rise: a creature with a human body and the face of a corpse. Its visage was pointed at cheeks and chin, with skin stretched so thin it took on the gray cast of death. Despite its pallor, the creature had a fullness to its cheeks that no one on this island had worn for half a year. Long black hair streamed over its gray shoulders.

It leaned against our cistern, drumming feathery fingers against the stones and staring at me with opaque black eyes, spilled vials of ink that blotted out its soul.

“Eleanor Dare,” it hissed, forked tongue flicking at me like a serpent’s.

I dropped the buckets.

A fortnight ago, I had seen a mastiff chase a squirrel up a tree, climbing with claws thick as a deer’s antlers. Annanias assured me no such thing could be, that ill humors lingering after Virginia’s birth had traveled to my brain. For perhaps the first time, I wanted Annanias to be right.

I put a hand to my forehead, testing for fever. I felt none. “You are not real,” I whispered. “You cannot be.”

The creature blinked slowly. “But of course I am real. Do you think I don’t do this costume for my own amusement? I would no sooner wear a human skin than you would hooves and fur.” It raised one long claw to scratch its face. “It itches terribly.”

My knees began to shake. “It is the fever. Annanias told me so and I did not believe him.”

“I am not the product of your fever and you know it.”

I swallowed, but my throat had closed as if it meant to choke me. "If you are real," I whispered, "then so is God, your enemy. He will protect us." Even as I spoke the words, I knew they were not true. He had not protected the one-hundred-and-seven of us who lay buried in the New World's embrace.

The creature scratched away a patch of flesh beneath its eye and poked at the bloody tissue beneath. "How can you bear to feel the blood moving inside these tiny cisterns? It pulses every moment of every hour of every day. Does it not drive you mad?"

*It already has*, I thought.

"How do you do it?" the creature asked.

I smiled the only way I knew how, with lips closed to protect my heart. "I am a woman," I said. "Blood is my trade."

"I have chosen wisely, then, for it is blood I have come to bargain for."

"I am a Christian woman. I hold no traffic with devils."

"As I understand it, lying is a very un-Christian thing to do."

"It is no lie to tell you I am Christian."

"It is if you believe it."

The very act of speaking had set wingbeats of hunger aloft in my belly. "What do you want with us? Your master already hunts us in the form of redskins, disease, and starvation."

"As you may have guessed, he is not a patient creature." The demon bent forward in a bow. "Forgive me for not introducing myself. My name is Croatoa, and I have come to ask for your help."

The strip of dried venison I ate yesterday was no longer enough to sustain me and my legs folded onto the wet sand. A

trickle of blood snaked its way down my thigh. "I can help no one," I said. "Not even myself."

The creature twined skeletal fingers in its hair. "I tried to warn you before you set foot on my shore. I dispatched your predecessors, but lo, there came a hundred more of you. It vexed me greatly."

*Grenville's men*, I thought, sent by Raleigh a year before us. We had searched for them when we came ashore and found nothing: no blood, no hair, no graves. Just one lonely pile of bones that, for all we knew, could have been a savage. In death, it seems, we all look the same. "What happened to them?" I asked.

"I ate them," Croatoa said, licking his lips. "With dandelions and salt." Then the demon knelt beside me and grasped my chin with its cold, dead hand. "Can you not see, sweeting? This settlement of yours is not meant to be. I will fight you with every tool at my disposal."

"My father—"

"Will not return for another two years. He thinks he sails to you in a month, but I will send the entire Spanish fleet against your queen. Every available ship will be commandeered. Unless he can swim the ocean, he will remain across it."

"He will find a way. He promised."

The creature shook its head. "What you want has nothing to do with what actually happens in the world, sweeting. Everything your pathetic kind accomplishes is because someone like me allowed it, because we have a use for you." The demon picked up a handful of sand and let it fall through his fingers. "Do you even know what this is?"

“It is sand.”

He blew the remainder onto my skirt. “Look again.”

I scooped up a handful and held it to the light. There, in my palm, lay a collection of skulls and bones each the size of a grain of sand. I looked at their shape. The skulls were those of men, not of cows or chickens or dogs.

The demon smiled. “Every rock, every cliff, every mountain in your world is simply a pile of bones. Every house, every street, every castle...you have built it on the backs of those we have killed. But you do not see it. *He* does not allow it. *He* shields you from what the world truly is. He causes you to see towers and ramparts and gardens. But none of it is real, sparrow. None of it at all.”

The salty sea air stung my throat. “I want to go home,” I said. “I want to wake up.”

“This is not your home,” the demon said. “This has never been your home. I gave the natives my own name as a warning. They will not succor you. If you think you can husband the earth, you cannot. I drank all the water in the soil, more than I have drunk in eight hundred years. I did it to keep you away.”

“You are killing us,” I said. “You cannot do this.”

“But I have,” he said. “And you will die, sparrow.”

His fingers moved from my chin to my skull. They came away with a clump of anemic strands. “You see? Even your body succumbs to me. Your people will never gain a foothold in my land, Eleanor—I will make sure of it. But I offer you the prospect of a painless end for the ones who are left. I follow orders, but I am free to carry them out as I wish. It is the best I can offer you.”

“No,” I said, crawling away. Blood stained the sand beneath where I had lain.

“Bring them to me one by one and I will give them a painless end,” the demon said. “Or let them suffer and choke on the bark of this world’s bitter trees. Our servant Judas offered your Christ a similar bargain and he choose poorly. Do not imitate him, Eleanor. I will show you no mercy.” He licked his lips. “Think about it, sparrow.”

Then he crawled back into the cistern, hiding in the dark, watery corner of hell that sheltered Satan’s flock.

I closed my eyes and lay down upon the sand. The ill wind blew each tiny grain of bone against my face, scraping away the skin I knew and perhaps the person as well. The sea smelled of brine and purple thistle and I dreamed of eating those thistles until the thorns scraped away my throat, leaving me no voice with which to answer the demon’s call.

*God has forgotten us*, I thought. I cried at the bitterness of being abandoned by two fathers now. My life was nothing; I was nothing. But Virginia’s was brand new. She had committed no sin in this life. For God to abandon her meant He was no better than the rest of us. I screamed her name into the black night sky to remind God of her existence.

He could do what He wished with me, but who would send a demon to collect a child? The New World was cursed and because I had brought her to it, so was I.

# Part Two



Roanoke, Virginia Colony  
February, 1588

I DO NOT know how long I lay upon the sand before Manteo came for me. He muttered in his language and wrapped me in his otterskin cloak, carrying me back to the knotty palisade we trusted to keep us safe against all the forces that destroyed our Lord. “Leave me outside,” I said. “I will die and Croatoa will vanish.”

Manteo stopped, tightening his hands on the cloak and the bundle of bones inside it. “What word did you speak?”

I could not bring myself to say the name. I turned my head away and he did not ask again.

Manteo carried me into the shelter, a one-room hut shared by all. Black rocks, the color of the demon’s eyes, circled the fire in the center of the room. Virginia’s cradle lay next to it, but I could not look at it, not if looking meant remembering what the demon had asked of me.

“She is ill,” Manteo said, placing me on the cornhusk pallet I shared with Annanias. “You should not send her out alone.”

“Gathering water is woman’s work,” Annanias said. “And a man’s wife belongs to him and no other. Your stay in England should have taught you that, redskin.”

Manteo crossed his arms. He stood with his back to the fire and rocked Virginia’s cradle with one foot. She whimpered and stretched her arms toward him. *The poor child does not know which man is her father*, I thought.

My husband ignored his child. He set down his whittling and bent over our pallet. I looked into his eyes, green like the mildew that clings to walls when too much moisture hangs in the air. “You are an embarrassment,” he said, jabbing me in the belly with his fingers. “To me, to your father, and to this colony. You do nothing but cry and bleed. A goat would be of more use.”

There was no liquid inside me but blood, so I could not cry.

I wondered what would happen when I became too weak to gather water. Would Annanias set my bones on fire to provide heat for those still strong enough to hunt and chop wood? Would he trade my child to the savages for deerskin robes? If I could save her from either fate, should I not do it?

Virginia began to cry, angry at not being lifted from her cradle.

“Silence her!” Annanias cried.

“As you wish,” I said.

# Part Three



Roanoke, Virginia Colony  
February, 1588

**A**NNANIAS SENT ME for water again the next morning. During the night, the wound in my womb had soaked the cloth between my legs with blood. I had no need to feign illness and asked leave to take someone with me to the cistern.

Near the palisade, Annanias chopped wood, swinging as if it were my neck stretched across the block. “George,” I said. “Let me take George.”

I felt Manteo’s eyes on me from across the palisade yard. I had never asked for help before. He knew it was not right, but he did not know why.

I slipped on my hood to hide my shame. “Please,” I said.

Annanias nodded and swung hard enough to split the surface of the earth. I imagined it opening, steaming and warm, like the crust of the meat pies my mother used to bake. If the earth opened, I could sleep in the gnarled roots of these strange

trees and they would protect me from any demon that knew my name. I wanted it with the force of a hurricane.

Annaias swung again.

“Harder,” I said.

He set down the axe. “I take no orders from a woman.”

“Our savior’s mother, the queen of Heaven, will be disappointed.”

“Are you so ready to meet her?”

“Soon enough,” I said. “George, will you come with me to fetch water?”

George followed me into the woods, whistling through a bent tooth. I tried to find the words I would say to him as I delivered him to the demon. Somewhere he had a mother and father, and perhaps he dreamed of a wife and child of his own. The demon was taking this away from him. I was taking this away from him.

*It is for Virginia, I thought. She must endure nothing, and as a result, you must endure much. It is the way of things.*

“George,” I said.

“Yes, Mistress Dare?”

“Did you sleep well this past night?”

“Well enough, I suppose.”

“Did you dream?”

He smiled, revealing the apex of his jutting teeth. “As I do every night, of having my own shelter so I won’t have to listen to your husband snore.”

“You do not dream of England?”

“If I did, I would not have left it.”

*God forgive me, I prayed, and walked on in silence.*

When I crested the last dune before the shoreline, my eyes swept the sand on either side of the cistern. I saw nothing. Perhaps I had imagined the whole thing, as Annanias would have told me. I turned to George, confused. "Do you see him?"

George reached for the axe at his belt, stolen from the body of a savage. "Who, Mistress Dare?"

"The demon."

George's eyes fell to my face. "Mistress Dare, you are ill," he said softly.

I closed my eyes. It was what I had been telling them all along.

"Please," I said, handing him the buckets. He took them, careful not to touch me.

He marched up to the cistern and leaned over the side. *Perhaps, I thought, he will simply fill the buckets and we will return to the shelter to face another night of slow starvation.*

But then George began to speak. They were words I understood, words of interrogation and accusation. The demon had come to claim him, rising up through the cistern's waters like a leviathan. George's voice rose, first in anger and then in fear. He spoke words I did not understand, wet words that had no lips or teeth to shape them. I saw his arms flail and grasp the edge of the cistern, bracing his body against the grip of something inside.

First George's heels left the sand. Then his toes. Then the fronts of his boots scraped against the cistern wall as the demon pulled him up and over the edge. The words stopped. Something crunched like dry oak leaves and a spray of red shot up from the cistern, like the fountains in a lord's garden.

I covered my face and began to cry. Blood trickled from my body onto my skirts. *I am made of blood*, I thought. *God forgot to encase it all inside a heart.*

When it was over, the demon emerged from the cistern and filled the buckets for me. Streaks of blood dyed his hair and face, painting him in the manner of a savage. My father had told me of the savages' custom, painting themselves in ferocious colors before making war. He had thought the intention was to frighten the other combatants, but now I knew. It was not a warning—it was a prayer to Croatoa.

“Thank you, Mistress Dare,” the demon said. “That one still had a bit of meat on his bones. So tasty this time of year.”

“He dreamed of this place,” I said.

“And now he does not. Life is simple, sparrow.”

He held out the buckets for me. I took them and limped into the forest. The trees hid me from God and His angels, who in all likelihood, had not looked upon me since Annanias's ring first encircled my finger. *There is alchemy in the metal*, I thought. *It hides me from Heaven's sight.*

Gloomy thoughts bowed my head and I did not hear the signs of an approach. But perhaps there were no sounds to be heard—he could move as swiftly and as silently as the breath of God when he chose to do so.

From nothing, he appeared and became everything—a cinnamon-colored shadow that took the heavy buckets from me so I could stand up straight once more. A wispy stream of blood flooded my thigh and I was glad he could not see it.

Manteo scooped his hands into one of the buckets and raised them to my lips. The shell bracelets he wore tinkled

like the harpsichord I'd left behind in England. I stared at the pool of water contained in the world of his skin. Not a drop fell from between his fingers. Why could he not hold Virginia that tightly? Why could he not hold me that tightly? Surely the demon would not have found me if I had been tucked away inside those hands.

"Everything has gone wrong here except you," I said. Then I pulled his hands to my lips and drank. The water tasted like mustard seed and violets. There were no bones in it, no particles of people who used to be and now were not.

Manteo drank when I had finished, then he grasped my hands and helped me lower myself to the ground. I leaned against the furry bark of the New World's enormous trees, but it brought me no relief. Darts of pain shot from my abdomen into my extremities. I had never been ill before Virginia's birth. I used to ride and run and tumble in the sweet open air of Bankside, along the Thames.

"God hates me," I said, looking at the twined tree limbs above me.

"Why?" Manteo asked.

I thought of Annanias and the way he thrust himself inside me at night, when he believed the others were asleep. "Because He is a man."

"You can know this about your god?"

I looked at the shape of his lips, made with sharp planes that did not exist in England. The faces I had known were plump, round, smooth, translucent. None pleased me the way his did. "Why do you not return to your people? Do you not know we are cursed?"

“I know it.” He lowered his head and silky strands of black hair pooled in his lap. “I do not care.”

“Take our muskets and ironware. Your people must need them.”

Manteo reached for my hand and stared at the blue veins visible through my worn skin. “The demon,” he said. “You have seen him.”

Tears gathered in my eyes and I wanted to drink them instead of the water that might keep me alive. I thought of George and his lipless, toothless words. “Sometimes I see things that are not so.”

“Not this.”

“Then you must go,” I said. “He did not ask for you.”

Manteo did not answer.

I stared at our fingers, laced like the branches of the trees above us. “Why will you not go?”

Manteo’s fingers held tight to mine.

My throat closed, unwilling to take in the air required to speak the words. I ripped my hand out of his and gripped the dry tree bark, pulling myself up. A gush of something warm slipped out of me. I lifted my skirts and watched it slide to the ground. The clump of bloody matter spread over the carpet of dried leaves. I wondered if the trees could drink my blood, if that would replenish what Croatoa had stolen from them.

Manteo’s eyes stared at the bloody ground and his lips compressed into a tight line. “You have to go,” I said.

He spoke to me no more that day.

# Part Four



Roanoke, Virginia Colony  
March, 1588

**T**HOMAS, THE SENTRY, went in with one great heave. The demon snapped his feet off at the ankles. Robert's head was separated from his body, which I then had to lift and push over the edge of the cistern. John had a fever and slipped in on his own, delivering the demon a prize he had not earned. It made him greedy and he demanded the rest in a single visit: Annanias, Virginia, and myself.

When he vanished into the depths of the water with John's body, I sank against the cistern in despair. Four lies ago, this task had seemed small in comparison to the reward: a painless death for my daughter, who would otherwise starve or freeze.

But now my arms ached as I realized I would have to carry my baby daughter in them one last time and then drop her into the well. I thought of her heartbeat, so small and fierce inside my body for those nine months. How could I silence it, when I had given my own life for it? It was against the laws of nature,

of man, of God, of anything that had a claim to creatures of flesh and blood.

I stared at the sea, at the foam and brine that separated me from my home. Croatoa had said he drank all the water in the soil, but there was an unlimited supply of water in the sea. It contained all the salty tears cried by God and the saints as they watched us sin in ignorance and anger. Did it grow saltier with every sin? If man had never sinned, would the oceans have remained pure?

*We die not because of pestilence or savages or war, I thought. We die because the things we do to each other make God cry. We would live forever if only we knew how to be kinder to each other.*

It was dark when I returned to the shelter. A torch burned brightly behind the palisade, its amber light gentling the blade in Annanias's hand. "Where is John?" he asked, breathing on the blade and polishing it with a cloth. "You left with a companion and return without one. This is not the arithmetic of survival."

"There were savages," I said, dropping the buckets. "You must help me collect his body for burial."

In our crude hut, I saw Manteo's gentle form bent over Virginia's cradle. Annanias would not have known if the babe were alive or dead. He had held her less than five times since her birth, none of them by choice.

My husband looked at the water sloshing in my buckets. "Savages attacked you and you ran from them while carrying water?"

I grasped my skirts and lifted them to my thighs. Painted red like a poppy field, their light and dark shades streaked together

beneath the kiss of firelight. "I am all but dead already. They did not bother me."

"Cover yourself," Annanias hissed. "By the saints, you go to your demise at your leisure."

"Walk with me to retrieve John's body and I may come closer still."

He sheathed his dagger. His green eyes gave no indication of the joy I knew my words must have brought him. "Let us go," he said. "I want no part of these woods by moonlight."

I nodded. "I will be ready in a moment."

"You ask for help to bury a man and then tell me to wait?"

"It is perhaps the last thing I will ever ask of you."

"From your mouth to God's ears," he said, reaching for the cloak tossed over a decaying stump.

"The delay is not for me, but for Virginia," I said. "I would not leave her here with only a savage to watch her."

Annanias nodded, his loathing for Manteo blinding him to my lie. "Fetch her," he said.

I turned away before he could see my smile.

Inside our shelter, Manteo stood beside the fire with one foot rocking Virginia's cradle. His eyes followed me like the mad winds that whipped the coast, changing directions to allow me no hope of escape. When I passed by him, my skirts brushed his bare foot. "Go," I whispered. "It is time."

He did not move.

"I do not require you to speak to me," I said. "I ask only one thing."

He did not answer.

I bent my head. The lies I spoke easily to others would not come for him. Grasping my skirt hem, I knelt and took a piece of burned wood from the corner of our firepit. Its glowing embers singed my skin and I smiled. The more of me I burnt away, the less there was for the demon to take.

Manteo jumped forward and tried to pry the smoldering wood from my grasp. "Stop," he said. "Eleanor, why do you harm yourself?"

"I am beyond that," I said softly, pulling my wrist from his grasp. "There is one more thing I must ask of you. Carve these letters somewhere nearby, so my father will know what has happened here."

Manteo rocked back on his heels. "You believe he will return?"

Firesmoke stung my eyes. "He will try."

Along the hem of my skirt, I used the burnt end of the wood to scrawl out the black letters of the demon's name. I drew the letters tall and straight, like the English trees I would never see again: C-R-O-A-T-O-A.

After the demon's name, I drew two bars for the top hatch of a Maltese cross, the distress signal we had agreed upon before my father sailed for England.

As I drew the lines, my husband's impatient boots stomped across the threshold behind me. Without a word, he grasped me beneath the arms and tossed me aside, away from Manteo. The charred wood in my hand streaked across the fabric. The unfinished cross became an "N," the two bars of the top hatch crossed with a diagonal line.

I pulled myself up from the ground slowly, feeling my hands and my legs shake. They bore too much weight and would collapse soon. *Not yet*, I willed them. *Not just yet*.

“I gave you leave to fetch the child and nothing more,” Annanias said, pointing at Manteo. “Tarry further with this savage at your peril.”

Manteo met my wet eyes with a nod as dry as the soil. *He will live*, I thought. *He is not like us. He is a child of this place*.

I lifted Virginia from her cradle and clasped her to my breast. She smelled of milk and cornhusk. Her plump red lips blew bubbles as she grabbed my collar. I kissed her forehead and pressed my face to hers. The pulse of life lay within her, the pulse I had given her, the pulse that grew fainter in me each day. “You are the sweetest part of life I have ever known,” I said to her. She would not remember my words, but I prayed she would remember the love that had prompted them.

Manteo raised his hands to his neck and unclasped his otterskin cloak. He held it out to me, his face as weathered as the gnarled, lovesick trees.

I turned my back to him and wrapped Virginia in the cloak. She reached for him, but I pulled her hand away.

# Part Five



Roanoke, Virginia Colony  
March, 1588

ANNANIAS CARRIED A spade attached to his belt. I carried Virginia. She shivered and I willed the heat from my body to flow into hers. I imagined the branches above us were Manteo's fingers, laced with mine. *We are protected*, I thought. *We are safe.*

The sea grew saltier with my lie.

At the cistern, Annanias pulled the spade from his belt and looked from side to side. "Where is John? I see no body."

"He is here," I said.

"Woman, if this is one of your humours—"

"His body is in the cistern. You must raise him."

My husband tossed the spade toward me. It sprayed the charred edge of my skirt with sand. "Dig a grave," he growled. "Whether I bury one or two has yet to be decided."

I stood on paper legs, begging them not to crumble into pulp until my task was complete.

Annaias bent over the cistern and pulled out his knife to prod the water's surface. A strangled howl issued forth from the well, followed by the sound of waves lapping at the edges.

"That hurt," a lisping voice echoed. "You need only call me and I will come, Eleanor."

Annaias whirled to face me. "What is this thing that speaks your name? What have you done?"

While my husband's back was turned, Croatoa rose up behind him. Water slid from his inky black hair, sheeting over his taut muscles. He wrapped his long fingers around Annaias's neck, piercing the skin. Annaias began to leak blood the same way I did. I stared at the man who was my husband, trying to summon what feeling I could for him.

There was none.

Too many nights I had bit my lip to stop a cry of pain. Too many days I limped from bed, sore and weak. I was dying and he cared nothing for it. Months ago, the doctor told him I might recover if I were left in peace but he refused to comply. He pinched, prodded, pushed, penetrated, pillaged, and silenced any protest I ever made. All the pain I endured in our marriage bed might have equaled that which the demon doled out in death.

Annaias's arms flailed, reaching back behind him and tearing at the demon's hair. "Ouch," the demon said. "That smarts." He squeezed the head from Annaias's body and tossed both parts down to the place where he stored our bones. Blood shone black on the cistern walls beneath the white moonlight. "Thank you, sparrow," he said, wiping wet hands on his legs. "We are almost finished here."

The demon held out his hand and waved me toward him, the grooves of his skin stained with my husband's blood.

I pressed Virginia to my chest, girding my arms with all the strength I had never been able to muster for God or Annanias. "You lied to me," I said softly.

Croatoa flicked his hair over his shoulder. "Have you forgotten? The sin is not in the telling of a lie, but in the believing of it. Are you a sinner, sparrow?"

"I was," I said. "I wish to be no longer."

"You have been very obliging up to this point, sweeting. I will not hurt you, I promise."

A wave from the estuary licked the shore and I wondered how much salt had been put in it by our lies, mine and the demon's combined. I closed my eyes so I would not have to see it. "I do not believe you," I said. "You will hurt her."

From somewhere behind my eyes, I heard my name. I imagined it was the ocean, hissing at the tears it was forced to hold because of my crimes. "Forgive me," I whispered.

Then the voice spoke again. "Eleanor," it said.

Virginia kicked in my arms and I opened my eyes to settle her. Manteo stood before me. My daughter reached for him, her tiny hand a five-pointed star in the night.

I said his name and it was the first true prayer I'd ever prayed.

"I will not let it hurt you," he said.

"Of course you will!" Croatoa hissed. "She and I have struck a bargain. It has been agreed upon."

"Not by me." Manteo pulled a blade from the sheath at his waist. "And it is I who stand before you in her stead."

The demon fixed his inky eyes on me and I felt his hatred open a grave inside my bones. "You think your magic is stronger than mine?" he hissed.

I thought of the way Manteo stood beside Virginia's cradle, his foot rocking her into the wee hours of the night. The way he pulled my cloak up over my shoulders if I threw it off in fever during the night. "It is not magic," I said. "That is why you do not understand it."

"You will obey me, Eleanor. I will not live like my cousin, Cracatoa, crated inside a mountain. I will stalk this land and make it fertile for whomever I choose. I will fill it with my seed, and those who bear my name will feast on its bounty."

I thought of what it was like to lie unwilling under a man's caress. To be turned over, picked up, thrown down, and held against my will every time he wished to spill his seed. To grow large with child and toil against my will to bring it forth. To feel my ribs crack and tissues tear. To feel them rip anew with each fresh assault. *The demon and the English want to turn the earth into a woman.*

Croatoa curled his lips. "I will kill every one of your kind who tries to stop me. You of all people know this, sparrow."

I thought of the ship that had brought us to the New World. There were hundreds like it docked on the Thames in London. "There will be more than even you can kill."

"I can kill a goodly sum. Have I not done well so far?"

"They will never stop. Not even when the earth cries out in pain. Not even when they know they are killing it."

I looked from Croatoa to Manteo. I wished it had been Annanias who had sickened to death instead of me. If it had

been so, I could have slipped away through the palisade with Virginia one night and never returned, hidden in the embrace of the forest and the one who knew it best.

Manteo held my gaze. He who could track game through swamp, snow, and mud would know what I wished to say even when the words went to ground.

As he read my face, Manteo blinked and set his jaw, as steady as the ancient wood flesh that embraced above us. Their seeds, their pulp, their life, was all in him. And a part of me was, too, in the blood I had bestowed upon this place.

My lips carved out a slow, sad smile. He closed his eyes, basking in its warmth like a child in the springtime sun. Then he grasped his knife and slashed out at the demon. Their blades crossed and thrust and crossed again. I held Virginia, wrapped tightly in Manteo's otterskin cloak, and walked out into the sea. I whispered to her that we would walk home, so she might live among right-thinking God-fearing men.



The End

# Manteo: A Historical Note



**M**ANTEO WAS A member of the Croatan tribe, native to the North Carolina coast. (Their name is also spelled “Croatoan,” depending on the source.) He befriended the men of the first English expedition to Roanoke in 1584. At their request, he and another Native American man named Wanchese sailed for England to offer a report on the area to Sir Walter Raleigh. Based on Manteo’s favorable report, Raleigh decided to send more men to Roanoke.

Manteo returned to Roanoke in 1585 with Sir Richard Grenville’s expedition. He made one more trip to England and spent additional time with Sir Walter Raleigh, learning more about English customs, technology, and religion.

In 1587, Manteo returned to the colony with a party led by Governor John White (Eleanor’s father). This group of settlers also included Eleanor and her husband, Annanias Dare. That year, Manteo became the first Native American to become a member of the Church of England.

But all had not gone well in his absence. When White’s party landed, Manteo learned that the nearby Roanoke tribe had killed several of the English settlers of Grenville’s party.

These men had been left behind to maintain a presence in the fledgling colony, but they had difficulty maintaining friendly relations with the Native Americans. After the Roanoke tribe's attack on them, the English arranged a counter-attack to seek revenge. Unfortunately, they killed several members of the Croatan tribe instead, including one of their leaders—Manteo's own mother.

This put Manteo in a very difficult position. He worked hard to maintain his loyalty both to his own tribe and the English. Some of his tribesmen called him a traitor for his continued loyalty to the English, even after they killed his mother. He continued supporting the English colonists up until their disappearance.

No one knows what happened to Manteo when the colony of Roanoke disappeared.

# Roanoke Colony Timeline



**March 25, 1584:** Queen Elizabeth I grants Sir Walter Raleigh a charter to colonize the New World.

**April 27, 1584:** Raleigh sends Philip Amadas and Arthur Barlowe to explore the area.

**July 4, 1584:** Amadas and Barlowe arrive and make friends with the Croatan and Secotan tribes.

**Late 1584:** Barlowe returns to England with Manteo and Wanchese. Manteo reports on the area to Sir Walter Raleigh.

**April 9, 1585:** Manteo and Wanchese sail for Roanoke with the second English expedition, headed by Sir Richard Grenville.

**May 11, 1585:** Grenville's ship is blown off course by a storm. He lands in Puerto Rico and awaits the other ships in the expedition.

**June 7, 1585:** Grenville, tired of waiting for the other ships in the expedition, sails for Roanoke.

**June 26, 1585:** Grenville arrives in Ocracoke Inlet.

**Early July, 1585:** Grenville meets up with two of the expedition's other ships in the Outer Banks, a group of barrier islands off the coast of North Carolina and Virginia.

**Late July / Early August 1585:** Grenville's men attack the village of Aquascogoc, believing its inhabitants stole a silver cup from them.

**August 17, 1585:** Grenville sails for England to get more men and supplies. He leaves Ralph Lane and 107 men on the north end of Roanoke Island.

**June 1586:** Native Americans attack the colonists' fort, perhaps in reprisal of the earlier attack on Aquascogoc.

**Summer 1586:** Sir Francis Drake stops by and offers to take the settlers back to England. They accept, abandoning the colony.

**Summer/Fall 1586:** Grenville returns with the men and supplies he promised to bring. He finds Roanoke abandoned and decides to go back to England. He leaves behind a few men to maintain a presence and preserve Sir Walter Raleigh's charter for colonization.

**Spring 1587:** Sir Walter Raleigh sends a new group of 150 colonists to Roanoke, under the direction of John White (father of Eleanor White Dare). He tells them to meet up with the men Grenville left behind.

**July 22, 1587:** White's party lands, but finds only a skeleton. Grenville's men are nowhere to be found.

**Summer 1587:** White tries to patch up the bad relationship with the Native Americans, but it doesn't go well. They won't speak to him and one of his colonists is killed while searching for food.

**1587-1589:** The worst drought in 800 years strikes the area, according to Professor David Stahle of the University of Arkansas and Professor Dennis Blanton of College of William and Mary.

**August 18, 1587:** Eleanor gives birth to a baby girl, Virginia. She is the first English baby born in the New World.

**Late 1587:** John White, Eleanor's father, sails for England to get more men and supplies. 115 colonists stay behind, including Eleanor and her new baby, Virginia.

**Early 1588:** Spain plans to invade England with a great fleet of ships known as the Spanish Armada. It is the largest fleet Europe has ever seen. All English ships are needed for the country's defense.

**Spring 1588:** White finds two ship captains who agree to take him and the supplies he's gathered to Roanoke, but they are captured by the Spanish. Their cargo is seized, and the men return to England empty-handed.

**Summer 1590:** White finds a private expedition willing to take him to Roanoke.

**August 18, 1590:** White lands in the New World on Virginia Dare's third birthday. But there is no settlement to be found—everyone has disappeared, as has the fort. The palisade and cabins have all been dismantled. He finds the word “Croatoan” carved into a post and “Cro” carved into a tree. There is no sign of the agreed-upon distress symbol, a Maltese cross.

**August 19, 1590:** White's men refuse to search for the missing colonists, due to a massive storm about to hit the area. They are eager to depart, and the expedition sails back to England that day.

**1590:** The Spanish find the remains of the colony, but assume it is just an outpost; they believe the main settlement is elsewhere. No one is willing to pay for an expedition to seek out that settlement.

**1602:** Sir Walter Raleigh pays for another expedition to Roanoke. The leader, Samuel Mace, lands in the Outer Banks and spends so much time gathering woods and plants to send back to England that they have no time to search for the colonists before the weather turns. They sail back to England without setting foot on Roanoke Island.

**March 24, 1603:** Queen Elizabeth I dies childless. The throne passes to James of Scotland, the son of Mary, Queen of Scots. James dislikes Raleigh's anti-Spanish policies, preferring a more peaceful approach to foreign relations.

**Late 1603:** Sir Walter Raleigh is charged with plotting against the throne. He declares he is innocent, but is convicted and spends the next 13 years in the Tower of London, unable to pursue further colonization attempts.

**1607:** Captain John Smith is tasked with finding out what happened to the Roanoke settlers. Chief Powhatan (father of Pocahontas) claimed his tribe killed the settlers, who had taken shelter with the Chesepian tribe. Little evidence was found to support his claims. There were reports in the Jamestown Colony of English captives being held by the Wainoke as slaves.

**1607:** Francis Nelson, a Jamestown settler, draws a map of the area that says four men from “Roonock” lived with the nearby Iroquois.

**1612:** William Strachey, another Jamestown settler, writes that four English men, two boys, and one girl have been seen with the Eno tribe. He says they are captives who escaped a Native American attack on Roanoke.

**1709:** John Lawson writes a book about his travels to North Carolina and notes that the Croatan tribe claims to have several white ancestors.

There is no solid archaeological proof for any of the theories about the colonists' disappearance.

# Thank You

**T**HANK YOU SO much for signing up for my newsletter. From here on out, you'll get every short story I publish for free. I'll send an email to let you know when there's a new story, or you can always download them all here, in multiple filetypes, anytime you like: <http://jenniwiltz.com/super-secret-page-for-really-cool-people/>

## Preview: A Vampire in Versailles

IF YOU ENJOY historical fiction with a paranormal twist, you might also like *A Vampire in Versailles*. Our hero, Jean-Gabriel de Bourbon, is a vampire whose survival is tied to the French royal family. As long as a king sits on the French throne, Jean-Gabriel lives. But the year is 1788, and the French Revolution draws near. Is anyone, even a vampire, strong enough to stop the force of destiny?

### PARIS, 1788

IF NO ONE'S hair caught on fire, Jean-Gabriel de Bourbon was prepared to consider the night a dismal failure. He would have loved to see one of the provincial countesses light up like a Chinese firework, howl like a wolf, and plunge her head into the punch bowl. Anything could happen, after all, since the party was hosted by a commoner.

The Princess de Tursan had mounted her sconces improperly, resulting in the dangerous proximity of flame and female coiffures. The women promenading around the room were little more than lacquered tinderboxes and Jean-Gabriel knew which one would light up first. *The Duchess de Lavedan*, he thought, spotting the woman by her immense powdered wig, a proud sweep of hair that rose fifteen inches above the already vast expanse of her forehead. She seemed to think the height of one's hair determined one's height in society. At this party, all it would determine was the speed with which one burst into flame.

He watched the horse-faced duchess parade her daughter in front of all the eligible bachelors in the room. Some of the men were granted special attention: a deep curtsy that gave them full view of the daughter's décolletage. When the pair reached a tall man who wore the colors of the Polignac family, the girl flashed a shy smile and dipped into her curtsy. Not satisfied, the duchess placed a bony hand on the girl's spine and pushed, allowing the man to see all the way to her navel.

*Charmed, I'm sure*, thought Jean-Gabriel. He stood in his usual place at these parties: shoulder slumped against the wall in a dark corner, legs crossed lazily beneath him, the black heel of his shoe resting carelessly against the yellow fabric-covered walls. *Hardly even a princess*, he thought. Just the daughter of a cabinet minister, married to the impoverished Prince de Tursan because he desperately needed the girl's dowry of a hundred thousand *louis*. That the daughter of a tradesman would attempt to host a proper soirée was amusing to him. He tallied her mistakes in his head.

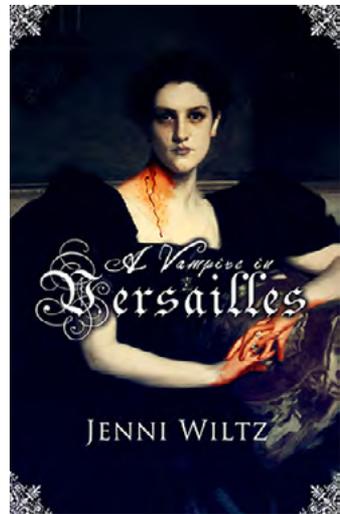
First of all, there was not nearly enough champagne. The perspiring valets swept silver trays into the ballroom, only to have hands reach out like tentacles of octopi and pluck away each flute within a foot of the entrance. The talkers, nearest the doorway, were already on their second or third flutes while the dancers, in the center and far corners of the room, had not yet had their first. Empty flutes lay on the floor, on the mantel, on unoccupied pieces of furniture. *Amateurs*, he thought.

He had not powdered his black hair and wore his lowest-heeled shoes. As a member of the royal family, this soirée was beneath him. He hated this crowd of nouveau riche, the

awkward progeny of shipbuilders and bankers. Men and women alike, they devoured hors d'oeuvres and laughed out loud, half chewed food flopping like dead fish in their mouths. When they spoke, it was all at once in strident voices that would have turned Jean-Baptiste Lully deaf in an instant. But he had heard that the Clermont-Prince heiress would be present and he wanted to see what all the fuss was about. Since an unmarried heiress was as unnatural a being as himself, he felt bound to investigate—if for no other reason than to meet the person about whom all of Paris was gossiping. He was hungry, too, and there would be plenty to choose from here. No one would miss a valet or even a comte.

The hunger pains had begun early that evening, much earlier than usual. His last meal, three days ago, should have lasted five. He could feel the ache deep within his skin and knew what awaited him if he did not feed. The pain would pulse gently for an hour or so and then increase in intensity until his entire body throbbed with need. His empty veins would fill with air and push out against his skin, begging for blood. His canines would descend further, slicing through his gums, impossible to hide until he had satisfied his needs. Already, it was painful to smile.

[Read more](#)  
[on my website.](#)



## About the Author



Author photo by Ryan Donahue

Jenni Wiltz is an award-winning author who writes thrillers, mysteries, romantic suspense, and historical fiction. In 2011, her romantic suspense novel, *The Cherbourg Jewels*, won a Daphne du Maurier Award, presented by the Romance Writers of America's Kiss of Death Chapter. When she's not writing, she enjoys sewing, running, and genealogical research...but not cooking. She is a *terrible* cook. She lives in Pilot Hill, California. Visit her online at [JenniWiltz.com](http://JenniWiltz.com) or email her at [author@jenniwiltz.com](mailto:author@jenniwiltz.com).