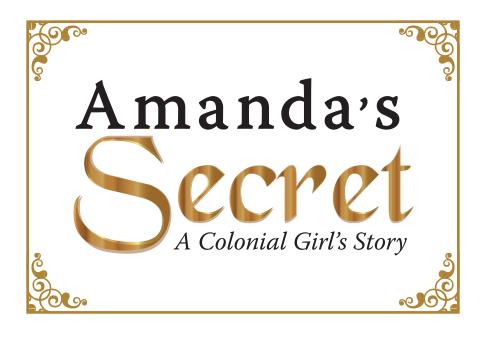


Jami Borek



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Amanda's Secret

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chapter 1



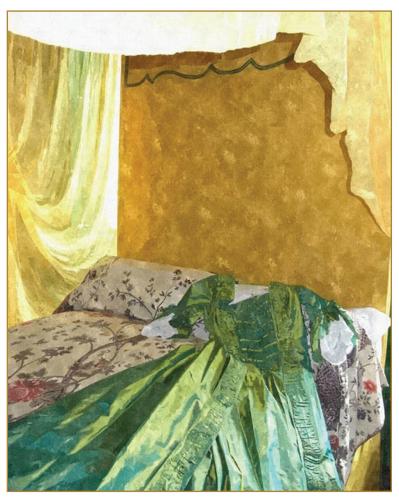
tell that it was bound to happen, though no one knew it at the time. As soon as Jane arrived at the Lambertson's plantation, Amanda's life was bound to change. The only question was,

would it be a change for the better or (as it would be, if Jane had her way) a change for the very much worse?

It all started January sixth, the twelfth day after Christmas. Amanda had turned twelve just a few weeks ago, and she was going to her very first ball. She was excited for the company as much as for the dancing. It was pretty lonely, living on a large Virginia plantation and being the only child. She had no close friends to speak of, no one she knew really well. She was the kind of girl who could make friends easily, but she hardly ever had the opportunity to go to the neighboring plantations or to Williamsburg, the closest town. Everyone was always so busy, there was no one to take her, and she hadn't been allowed to go off visiting on her own. Her father was a lawyer, so when he wasn't at his office in Williamsburg, he was usually working in his study. Her mother was always busy too, running the plantation, and the servants of course had their own work to do.

So Amanda was very lonely, but she wasn't bored. She always had something to occupy her time. Most of the day she studied, with her mother's help or on her own. She practiced her reading and writing and sums, learned French and how to dance. She played the piano forte pretty well by now, and there was always her needlework when all else failed. She was still practicing fancy embroidery, but her plain sewing was already very fine. She'd made a shift for herself and a shirt for her father, and just yesterday she'd finished making her doll a ball gown with leftover bits of fabric from her own new gown.

Her new ball gown! It was thrilling just to think of it. It was yards of shimmering green silk, with a petticoat



It was the most beautiful gown she'd ever owned

and a matching over-gown. The gown had a tight-fitting bodice trimmed with lace at the neckline, and the sleeves were trimmed at the end with flounces of lace. It had full, long skirts but was open at the front from the waist on down, so the richly ruffled petticoat could be seen beneath.

It was the most beautiful gown she'd ever owned. And this evening, this very evening, she would be wearing it out dancing, at her very first Twelfth Night ball. She was so excited, she could barely stand the waiting, and she woke up even before the dawn.

She lay in her four-poster bed in the velvet darkness, imagining how fine it all would be. The carriage ride through the silvery moon-lit forest would be magical—the moon would be full, the sky would be clear, and the ground would be covered with fresh new snow. After traveling through the forest and fields, she would finally see Mr. and Mrs. Hunt's house where the ball would be held. It would shine like a beacon in the darkness, brightly lit with candles in every room.

The coachman would help her down from the carriage and up the steps to the house. Then a footman would open the door and whisk away her warm wool cloak. The ballroom would be full of music, candle-light, and laughter. It would have blazing fires in every fireplace and be decorated for the Christmas season with holly and mistletoe. When she entered, every eye would turn to see who it was. They would all gaze at her admiringly, the young men especially, with her lovely green silk gown

trimmed with ribbon roses, her dainty satin slippers, and more jewelry than she'd ever worn—a pearl necklace, pearl earrings, and strands of pearls woven into her hair. Then the musicians would pick up their flutes and fiddles and she would dance and dance all the evening, until she could dance no more.

She felt a sudden urge to look at her gown again, to feel the silky fabric against her skin. She poked one foot out from under the covers but just as quickly drew it back again. It was cozy and warm under the covers, but her room was bitterly cold!

Of course it was cold, so early in the morning, with the fire gone cold. Maybe she should just stay in bed until Jane came to light the fire?

Don't be such a ninny, she told herself sternly. Are you afraid of a little cold? She forced herself to throw back the covers and leapt out of bed. For a moment she just stood there, shivering in her thin linen shift. Then she looked at her ball gown, hanging there on a wooden peg on the wall, and made her way across the room.

Amanda slipped on the gown and held it tight against her. Then she danced barefoot in the moonlight around the room, imagining herself at the ball. Round and round she danced, as light and graceful as a swallow, until she was brought back to earth by her mother's voice. "Amanda! Breakfast is ready, where are you? Are you still sleeping, you lazy thing?"

"I'm coming, Mother, just a moment," she called back to her. Her mother didn't sound really angry, but Amanda hurriedly took off the gown and scurried to get dressed in her normal clothes.

She needed help with her stays, though—where was Jane? She was awfully late coming up to her room. Just as she was struggling to lace up the stays by herself, Jane came in at last. Jane was a new servant, just come over from Ireland. She could have been attractive, with her dark eyes and her long dark hair, if she wasn't always looking mean and scowling. She was scowling now.

"Where have you been? It's awfully late, you know!"

As soon she said it, Amanda was sorry for the sharpness of her tone. Jane was so much older than she was (she must have been well past twenty) that it seemed disrespectful. And maybe Jane just made a mistake, because she hadn't been a servant very long. She'd wanted to come to Virginia from Ireland, so she'd agreed to work to pay her fare. She'd work for six years for someone—whoever bought her agreement from the captain—and they she'd be free and on her own. It was called being an "indentured servant" and a lot of people came over to Virginia that way.

"Well I'm here now, aren't I?" Jane said crossly, roughly turning Amanda around so she could get at the back of the stays where the lacing was. As she laced them up, she pulled the string tighter and tighter and tighter—so tight, that Amanda could hardly breathe.



"Looser, please!" Amanda cried, but Jane only gave an especially vicious tug and pulled it even tighter. So Amanda took a deep breath to make her chest as big as possible, held it while Jane finished off the lacing, and then let it out only when she was done.

Amanda put on her own petticoat and a clean white neck handkerchief around her shoulders, and then Jane helped her into her gown. Now she was nearly dressed.

"Thank you, Jane, I can do the rest myself." Amanda tried to sound as firm and dignified as her mother always did when speaking to servants. "You can light the fire now."

"Whatever you say, *Miss* Amanda." Jane sneered and pretended to curtsey, in the most mocking, sarcastic way.

"That's not very nice you know." Amanda was feeling pretty ill-used, to tell the truth. "Even if you are older than I am. My mother's very particular that everyone should treat each other with respect."

"Your 'mother,' that's what you call her?" Jane had an odd little smile on her face, as if she knew some secret but she wouldn't tell. "How very peculiar."

Then she turned her back on Amanda and knelt down by the fire to light it.

Amanda stared at her, feeling strangely disturbed. What an odd thing to say! Didn't every child call their parents "Mother" and "Father?" Of course, calling them "Mr. and Mrs. Lambertson" was more correct and formal. Maybe that's what she meant?

"Amanda!" Mrs. Lambertson called up the stairs again.
"I'm coming!" Shaking her head to dispel her puzzlement, Amanda left her room and ran down to her.

"How many times must I tell you to walk, Amanda?" Mrs. Lambertson scolded her as she bounded down the bottom stair. She stood just outside the dining room in the hallway, a slim woman in a white and blue gown, with a fine gauze cap covering her chestnut-colored hair. Usually she was happy and smiling, but now she shook her head disapprovingly.



"Amanda, breakfast is ready"

"You're a young lady now, not a child. You must learn to behave like one."

"Yes Mother," Amanda answered obediently, and she took her place at the table.

As she ate her bread and cold leftover ham, Jane's strange and challenging words came back to trouble her.

She almost told her mother about it, but she felt oddly reluctant to do so. Looking at her, sitting there across from her at the table, she had a sudden vision of another woman's face, a sad, pale face surrounded by rust-red hair like her own. It was a dim sort of picture, vague and fuzzy around the edges, like a forgotten bit of dream. And like a dream, it quickly vanished, and once again she saw her mother's familiar features.



welve-year old Amanda seems to have everything any girl could ask for—a nice plantation home just outside of Williamsburg, loving parents, even a brand-new grown-up ball gown for the upcoming Twelfth Night ball. It's like a dream—and like a dream, she will all too soon awaken. Little does she know, the ball will be the last night of life as she's known it—how drastically things will change!

The first hint is the little ship charm she finds in the Twelfth Night cake. It's supposed to be a token of her fortune, but it's such an odd sort of charm for a young lady to get. Whatever could it mean? The next hint comes from the servant Jane, angry that she has to stay up late for Amanda to get home. How unfair it is, she mutters darkly, that she has to stay up waiting for Amanda, when Amanda is "just a common girl" like she is. Jane won't explain what she means by it, though. "You can go ask your 'mother,' as you call her," she says meaningfully, as if it wasn't really true.

She's only a common girl? Her mother is not her mother? Whatever could Jane mean? Jane has a mean and envious streak, there's no question, but the trouble is, she's right. There are secrets in Amanda's past that were hidden from her all along and nothing is what she thought it was. "Just you wait," Jane predicts gleefully, "this is only the beginning. Next they'll be coming for you, to take you away." Amanda isn't one to sit passive in the face of disaster, though. She resolves to find the truth and to change her fate. All the same, she can't help being fearful what will come. So far, Jane has been right about everything she says. Could she be right about this as well?

Amanda's Secret is the heartwarming story of a young colonial girl who confronts misfortune with resourcefulness, determination, and courage, and her quest to make everything right.

Ages 8 to Adult \$10.95

