

Kathleen Ernst
WRITING AT THE INTERSECTION OF PEOPLE, PLACES, AND THE PAST

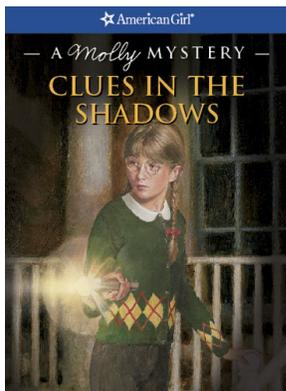


Preview of *Clues In The Shadows*

A Molly McIntire American Girl Mystery

Written by Kathleen Ernst

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Molly still does her patriotic duty to help American win World War Two, but in the spring of 1945 she's weary and troubled. Dad is home safe . . . but he seems different now. Her favorite Red Cross leader abruptly quits. Her archrival, Ronnie Vanko, is driving her crazy. And now someone is sneaking into the backyard shed and messing with the scrap she's collecting for the latest wartime drive. Who is the intruder: Ronnie, her own brother Ricky—or a prowler she spied in the night?

Includes a richly illustrated "Peak Into The Past" essay.

AN ARREST!

"Are you sure you want to go to the library *now*?" Molly asked Linda and Susan. "Before school?" The three girls stood in Linda's garage, staring at a box of books they'd collected from neighbors.

"Molly McIntire, we must go to the library this morning," Linda insisted. "It's our patriotic duty!"

Molly understood patriotic duty. She'd tried hard to do her part during the past three and a half years—collecting scrap metal, weeding her family's Victory garden, even learning a special tap-dance routine for the Miss Victory program. On top of all that, Molly's father was a doctor, and he had joined the Army Medical Corps when World War Two began. He'd been sent to England, and although he'd been home for a month, Molly would never forget the long years her family had spent



worrying that German pilots might bomb his hospital.

Her two best friends knew all that, of course. And Linda's father was still serving overseas, so Molly understood how she felt. "I just wish we could have done it yesterday evening, after our Junior Red Cross meeting," she said.

"We're not supposed to be out after dark anymore," Linda reminded her.

"I know." Molly sighed. Coal and heating oil were becoming scarce because of the war, so the government had instituted a "brownout." Business owners eliminated outdoor and display lighting. No one left porch lights on anymore. When dusk fell, the girls' familiar neighborhood became a different, slightly spooky place.

Susan was hesitating, too. "It is our patriotic duty," she said. "But we might be late for school if we go to the library now."

"We've got plenty of time," Linda scoffed. She began shoving donations into her book bag. "And the librarian has to box up the donated books this morning. Don't you two want Jefferson to win the competition?"

"Sure," Molly said. All the public libraries in Illinois were collecting books and magazines for wounded soldiers. The library that donated the most would receive a certificate.

Molly wanted the Jefferson library to win as much as anyone. But the truth was, she just didn't get *quite* as excited about war-work contests as she used to. She didn't want to admit that, though. It wasn't patriotic.

"You're right," she said instead. "We've got time for a quick detour."

As the girls divvied up the books, a car pulled up at the curb and Linda's mother climbed out. She waved to the other women in her car pool, then trudged up the driveway. She wore grease-stained slacks and a snug fitting blouse. A bandanna captured her hair. Molly knew how proud Linda was of her mom, who had gone to work at Jefferson's airplane factory to help the war effort.



“Good morning, girls,” Mrs. Rinaldi said. She kissed her daughter on the top of her head. “Did you get breakfast, Linda?”

“Yes, and I packed lunches for Joey and me, too.” Joey was Linda’s younger brother.

“Thanks.” Mrs. Rinaldi managed a tired smile, and turned to Molly and Susan. “Did Linda tell you that I got switched to third shift? I’m still getting used to working all night and sleeping during the day.”

Molly didn’t like the long hours her own mother worked at the Red Cross office, but at least her mother didn’t have to be away over-night! Thankfully, kind neighbors took turns staying at the Rinaldi house, so Linda and Joey weren’t alone. Molly sometimes thought that the war brought out the best in many people—people who were quick to help out wherever they were needed.

“What you’re doing must be very important,” Susan said.

“Yes, but I can’t tell you any more about it.” Linda’s mother made a quick gesture in front of her mouth, like turning a key. “Loose lips can sink ships, you know. Now you girls have a good day at school.”

The girls headed out with their heavy book bags thumping against them. April had just turned to May. Pools of yellow daffodils and purple crocuses bloomed in gardens. Cardinals and robins sang their springtime songs. The warm sunshine seemed full of hope. *Maybe we won’t be late for school*, Molly thought. Maybe Dad wouldn’t have to work so hard at the veterans’ hospital, and Mom wouldn’t have to work so hard for the Red Cross. Maybe the war really would be *over* soon. Molly wanted that more than anything.

Then Molly saw Ronnie Vanko coming toward them, and her bubble of hope popped. Last year, Ronnie and his mother had moved into the little house right behind Molly’s and next door to Linda’s. He was a skinny boy with dark eyes



that always seemed to be half shut, either in an angry squint or in a lazy “who cares” sort of way. Ronnie’s two pleasures seemed to be bragging about his father, who was in the air force, and tormenting the girls in his class—Molly, Linda, and Susan included.

“You dumb girls are going the wrong way!” he hooted now.

“We are not!” Linda retorted. “We’re going to—”

“Oh, come *on!*” Molly interrupted. They would definitely be late if they stopped to argue with stupid Ronnie Vanko!

The girls reached the library just as Mrs. Baker was unlocking the front door. “Gracious!” the librarian said, surveying the panting trio. “Are you playing hooky today?” The library was on Main Street, in the center of town near the post office, the town hall, and shops and businesses—but several blocks from the elementary school.

“Oh, no,” Susan assured her. “We brought books to donate!”

“We were going to come yesterday evening, but we ran out of time before the brown-out started,” Molly explained.

“I’m glad you didn’t try to come after dark,” Mrs. Baker told them. “I’ll be glad when we can leave safety lights on again.”

“We’re not too late, though, are we?” Linda asked anxiously.

Mrs. Baker smiled. “You made it in the nick of time! Here, I’ll take those books. Quickly, now! You girls need to scoot to school!”

Molly grinned at her friends. “I’ll race you!” She bolted down the library steps and took off.



"No fair, Molly!" Susan called. "You got a head start!"

Molly could hear the slap-slap of her friends' shoes against the sidewalk right behind her, and managed an extra burst of speed. Just when she'd pulled ahead, though, a siren split the morning.

The girls skidded to a halt as a police car turned a corner onto Main Street. The car pulled over and parked in front of the telephone company building just ahead of them. Two police officers jumped from the car and hurried into the building.

"There's been some kind of trouble!" Susan gasped. "We should get out of here!"

"Hold on," Linda objected. "I want to see what happens!"

Molly hesitated, feeling some of both Susan's nervousness and Linda's curiosity. Before the girls could move, the front door of the telephone company opened again. The two policemen emerged with a third man held firmly between them. The prisoner was tall and thin. He wore a blue-and-brown plaid jacket. His close-cropped hair was startlingly red—almost orange, really. None of those details fit Molly's image of a robber or gangster.

Then she caught a glimpse of the man's face. He looked mad at the world. As the policemen marched him to the curb, the red-haired man tried to pull from their grasp.

"Cut that out, Fletcher!" one of the police officers barked. "You slugged somebody, so now you're going to jail. Simple as that."

Fletcher tried again to break free. "I might as well have bought the farm, for all that anybody - "

"Save it for the judge!" the second officer said. The officers shoved Fletcher into the police car's back seat, slammed the door, and got in the front. A moment later the car disappeared down the street.

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"Gosh," Linda breathed. "I've never seen anyone get arrested before.

Molly crossed her arms over her chest, suddenly feeling cold. She wished she hadn't gotten such a good look at the man called Fletcher.

"Multiple red herrings interspersed throughout the story keep readers guessing... and the "Looking Back" section fills in some details on life during the end of World War II."

— ***School Library Journal***

"While solving the mystery, Molly learns the effects war can have on the soldiers and on those waiting at home. When she discovers the person responsible for her missing paper, she also learns how past secrets can haunt people and cause them to be fearful. Young readers will enjoy Molly's adventures and will also learn valuable lessons about the effect of World War II on average Americans at home."

— ***Children's Literature***

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