

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

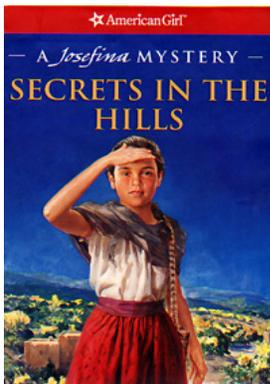


Preview of *Secrets In The Hills*

A Josefina Montoya American Girl Mystery

Written by Kathleen Ernst

Published by American Girl Books



Josefina has heard tales and legends all her life: rumors of gold and silver buried in the hills, and even tales of a ghostly Weeping Woman who haunts the countryside. But she never imagined that such stories might be true--until one day a mysterious stranger arrives at her rancho.

This suspenseful tale is set in New Mexico in 1826. It includes an illustrated "Looking Back" essay and a glossary of Spanish words used in the story.

Long after Francisca and Clara were asleep, Josefina twisted and tossed beneath her blanket. Her mind turned from Señor Rexford, who seemed so nice, to the mysterious Señor Zamora. Was he resting comfortably? Had she made the correct recommendation to Tía Dolores? Josefina had been sure of her choice at the time. Now, the night's dark stillness gave room to creeping doubts.

And who was Señor Zamora? What was he looking for? Was it...could it truly be some kind of treasure? Was he an honest man? Perhaps he was a bandit, returning to recover treasure he'd stolen from good, honest people!

Josefina had grown up hearing tales of treasures hidden by thieves, gold mines with secret entrances, jars of coins buried by old men afraid of being robbed. She'd always enjoyed these legends, shared by good storytellers when shadows were long and imagination ran high. She'd never heard of anyone actually finding



lost treasure. But she'd never seen a map marked with landmarks and strange sketches, either.

Josefina tried to push the image of the map from her mind so she could go to sleep, but it was no use. Finally, afraid she might wake her sisters, she got up and tiptoed out of the sala. She lit a candle and crept to the storeroom where she and Teresita kept their plants and roots.

Josefina loved the musty-spicy smells of plant bundles hanging from poles overhead. She loved seeing bins and gourds and baskets filled with supplies that might help ward away illness or cure disease. Sitting on a banco, she savored the peaceful stillness. She could feel her muscles relaxing. Soon she would be ready for sleep.

Then an unexpected sound jerked Josefina upright. The candle fell to the hard earthen floor and snuffed out. In the sudden darkness, Josefina strained to hear the sound that had disturbed her. There it was again! A faint...crying sound.

Was one of her sisters awake? Was Francisca in the courtyard, weeping for her Ramón? Josefina cocked her head, but when she heard the sound again, she was sure it came from outside the house.

Josefina stepped closer to the window, carefully avoiding a basket of pumpkin stems. Pressing a palm against the wall, she held her breath. And the sound came again, drifting through the open window above her head: a woman's sob, low and full of anguish.

Josefina's bones turned to ice. Only one woman roamed at night, weeping and wailing: the ghost, La Llorona!

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"Rich with tales of buried treasure and local traditions, foods and crafts."
— ***School Library Journal***

"[Josefina's] story is earnest, interesting, and extremely enjoyable."
— ***Children's Literature***

"This award-winning author adds to her growing list of fabulous books."
— ***Mystery Readers Journal***

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