

What Happened to Alice?

By Jana Jones

Episode 13 – The Angel of Faidley Woods

The Children & Families conference had been in Memphis. It was Ami's first visit, and after all the fun she had on Beale Street, she added the frolicking city to her "vacation places" list.

Ami checked her watch. She had a flight to catch. Time was getting short, but she had to get her book signed. The keynote speaker for the Children & Families conference that year was Dr. Alice Smith-Fleming. Noted child psychologist and author, she had a pop-up book signing for her latest best-seller *The Angel of Faidley Woods*.

Dr. Smith-Fleming's story had the entire convention hall riveted. She spoke lovingly about her grandparents, Wallace and Rhoda, and how they raised her to stand tall and be proud. One fateful day, she recounted, a beautiful woman emerged from the woods not too far from the family's home. The woman helped Wallace and Rhoda protect young Alice from a group of strange men with guns.

"I was scared. Everything felt upside-down. We were poor folks. We didn't bother anyone, and yet those men wanted to harm us. And then this woman arrived, and she was sweet and kind," Dr. Smith-Fleming recalled.

Ami had heard her share of paranormal stories, but the casual, everydayness of Dr. Smith-Fleming's story is what resonated with Ami the most. The possibility that there were multiple timelines occurring simultaneously. A portal with the ability to send you back and forth through time. Feelings of *deja vu* may hold deeper meanings than one may think.

It was almost Ami's turn to get her books signed. She purchased two, one for her and one for her mother who was also an avid reader. As Ami got closer to the signing table, she got a better look at Dr. Smith-Fleming. The stately older woman wore a gorgeous, jewel-toned caftan. Her salt-and-pepper hair was styled in neat, two-strand twists with a pair of gold earrings providing the finishing touch. With her pleasant yet commanding presence, Dr. Smith-Fleming could have been the Oracle in anyone's science fiction story.

She greeted Ami with a gleaming, genuine smile as she signed the young woman's books. After signing both books, she paused and gave Ami a curious glance. She tilted her head slightly as she examined Ami's face.

"Dr. Smith-Fleming, this is such an immense honor," Ami noticed the woman looking her over and silently prayed that she hadn't done anything wrong. "I've cited your research in my graduate school papers and I—"

Just then, Dr. Smith-Fleming took Ami's hands into hers and squeezed them softly.

"I apologize for staring. It's just that... I feel that we know each other. I was just trying to place where. Are you or your people from Philadelphia, by chance?"

"Not to my knowledge. My family is from Cincinnati. And our people came up from Kentucky."

"Your face...I thought I knew it." Dr. Smith-Fleming gave Ami a wistful smile as she slowly released her hands. "Thank you so much for your support. I hope that you enjoy your book."

With that, the two women said their goodbyes.

Tell your wife I just bought her some new reading material - Ami smiled down at the text she'd just sent her father. She was equal parts of both of her parents, and she knew her mother already had a sizeable mountain of book pages to tackle.

"Sometimes reality can surpass even the wildest of imaginations. Unbelievable, yet all so real." Dr. Smith-Fleming's words rang through Ami's head as she waited for her luggage at the concierge stand. She pulled out her phone and clicked on a travel app.

In the destination field, Ami typed in Faidley, South Carolina.

