

What Happened to Alice?

By Jana Jones

Episode 8 - The Dog Witch

“Riley and Ruby! Wait up! Ya walkin’ too fast!” the little girl called out to the two older children, who both had preoccupied expressions on their round faces.

“You need to walk up, Alice,” another little girl spoke, matter-of-factly, “before the Dog Witch gets you.”

“THE DOG WITCH IS NOT REAL, M.E.!” the younger of the two boys screamed out in protest.

“John, you be quiet! And she is, in fact, very real,” M.E. snapped back. Her face twisted in annoyance.

Ami tried her best to stay as quiet as possible. She found a spot behind one of the mighty trees and watched the children as they continued marching. It was dawning on her that she wasn’t in the present day anymore. Somehow, she managed to step through a time portal with all her running. Ami’s thoughts and her father’s fearful concerns raced through her head as the children got closer.

“Alice.” Ami spoke just above the slightest of whispers.

Ami remembered her dream and the chant that the girls sang. About a red house on a hill and how five children walked up but only four came back. There was a narrow trail on an incline to the left of where she was hiding.

“This way.” Riley directed the band of children. “We’re going up the hill.”

The sound of crunching leaves and snapping twigs grew louder. Ami slowly bent further down so that her chest was touching the ground.

“What’s up there?” Alice and John called out to their determined line leader, who ignored the question and kept moving.

“Mr. Lily lives up there,” Ruby answered in place of Riley. “He makes toys and other things. You all are too young to remember, but before his wife died, he used to go to Second Baptist.”

Observing Ruby, there was something about the young girl’s mature demeanor that reminded Ami of Aunt Darlene. Ami hadn’t stayed at the dinner long enough to see how all the pieces fit together in the Dawson family’s puzzle.

“Is he friends with the Dog Witch?” Alice asked.

No one bothered answering the little girl.

Ami lifted her head slightly to get a better look at the group. Her eyes immediately went to Alice. A pretty little girl. Her hair was pulled into three plaits. Her dress seemed especially fancy for a day of child’s play in the woods.

The children got closer to Ami’s hiding place behind the tree. She closed her eyes and said a quick prayer. If all of the signs Ami received during her visit to Faidley were correct, Alice would not be making the return trip with her playmates. She would be lost forever. Before Ami’s brain could register what her body was doing, she ran from behind the tree and grabbed Alice.

“THE DOG WITCH!” John screamed. His eyes wide with fear.

“There is no wi-” Riley turned to admonish John but stopped mid-sentence. He stood in shock, staring at the woman with hair made of what he figured were long pieces of twine.

Before Ami’s brain would register what her body was doing, she was in a full sprint through the forest with Alice in her arms. It was as if she hadn’t just finished another manic run only a few hours before. Or had she? Time was upside-down.

“BRING HER BACK!” a voice that belonged to something from the deepest depths of hell roared at Ami’s steadily retreating back. “SHE BELONGS TO US!”

Ami was certain the demonic-sounding voice couldn’t have come from any of the four children she left behind. Too afraid to turn around, she continued to run with Alice in tow.

