

What Happened to Alice?

By Jana Jones

Episode 3 - The Girls In The Glade

“Leave a message. Thanks.”

Ami rolled her eyes at her father’s curt voicemail greeting. She was beginning to grow frustrated that she could make contact with neither her father or her sister. While she was glad to have connected with Aunt Darlene and Uncle Clinton, the whole purpose of the extended visit was to meet Faith in person.

Faith didn’t mention going on vacation when they had last spoken. Ami worried that perhaps cold feet was the real reason for Faith being unavailable. Maybe she had moved too fast. Maybe she should have told John she was coming down to Faidley to see Faith and the family. Questions swirled in Ami’s head as she laid back in bed and closed her eyes.

The moon shined through the hotel room curtains. Ami’s mind went to the traffic stop with Officer Dawson and the hissing noise coming from the woods. She would only imagine what kind of wildlife lurked in that darkness. Her thoughts then jumped to her enterprising cousin Shaun and the pride the family had toward him. The casual disdain the Dawsons felt toward John stood in stark juxtaposition.

Ami got up one time to take a melatonin pill. Back in bed to wait for sleep, Ami massaged her temples. Tomorrow would bring a new day.

It was a perfect late-Spring morning. The sun sat high in the sky, and the much-appreciated breeze kept Ami cool as she jogged on the gravelly path. She nodded and smiled at the bikers and stroller-pushers along the way. Ami could have easily jogged for miles with the weather being in its current state. She took a few sips of water from a cute, collapsible water pouch that came courtesy of one of the many events Ami attended for work.

As Ami continued to run, more and more trees sprouted up along what had been a cleared trail. Soon after, the sun vanished behind the steadily thickening mass of trees. Ami ran until she came upon a glade illuminated by narrow streaks of sun rays desperately fighting through the tree foliage. Ami did not feel afraid but her senses told her to be on alert. For what? Possibly an animal awakened by her presence? Ami checked her phone - no reception.

“Of course.” Ami stuffed the cell phone back in the zippered armband.

Ami heard laughing in the distance. Hopefully, other joggers were nearby. She began running in the direction she’d come from. Just then, two little girls happily skipped into the glade from another part of the forest. The sunrays seemed to get brighter as a ring of light formed on the forest floor. Both girls had mahogany brown skin with round, cherubic faces. Their hair was gathered in plaits wrapped up in white ribbons that matched the white, frilly dresses they wore.

They laughed gleefully and, as they swayed back and forth in their revelry, neither one noticed Ami staring at them - spellbound. Soon a playful chant went up in the glade, filling the wooded clearing as if it were an amphitheater:

Up on the hilltop, a red house sat.

Five walked up, but four came back.

The sound of giggles ricocheted through the trees. The girls looked angelic as they twirled in the sunlight. Ami began to feel disoriented as the massive trees began to bow and buckle around.

her. She started running— harder and faster than she had ever pushed her body. Ami’s lungs felt as if they would explode as she desperately tried to get back to safety.

“Riley knows and Ruby knows and M.E. knows and John knows!” a child’s voice sounded throughout the forest.

Running at full speed, Ami violently shook her head just as she finally broke through the suffocating darkness of the forest to reach daylight.

