

What Happened to Alice?

By Jana Jones

Episode 5 - Where is Alice?

"Do you think there may be a connection between this missing girl and your family down there?" Ami's best friend, Kamilah, went straight to the possibility that Ami was actively trying to avoid. "You don't think they're involved in any shady business, do you?"

Granted, Ami had only just met her extended Dawson family but she didn't have any reason to suspect that they weren't who they professed to be.

Ami stared at the search results on her laptop screen. She'd been up for hours trying to find information about a missing girl named Alice. "Kam...I'm going to be honest here. I'm just meeting these people for the first time. Everything has been going well so far but..."

"And you still haven't been able to reach your sister?" Kamilah continued. "What's up with that? No calls or texts since you got there? I don't want to scare you, girl, but something is definitely up."

"A damn mess." Ami buried her hand in her palms and let out a sigh.

Ami's text to her father was brief: "Hey, John, I visited Faidley and met Aunt Darlene and Uncle Clinton. Call or text me when you have time."

Ami texted a similar message to Faith. Ami was still hoping she and her sister would meet in person while she was nearby.

A text message from Aunt Darlene came across Ami's phone screen: "Sunday dinner tomorrow? I know you'll be back on the road soon."

Ami stared long and hard at her phone before deciding to text back. "I would love it! Just let me know when and I'll be there. Had a great time at Little Walter's last night with Shawn and his friends."

A quick reply from Aunt Darlene: "I'm so glad you enjoyed Little Walter's. I knew you would. Shawn is going places; he's done us proud. You have to come back when the Pavilion opens."

Ami pulled up a website that archived old newspaper articles in hopes of finding information. She narrowed the location down to South Carolina and used the keywords "Alice" and "missing." Miscellaneous bulletins from crime beats long ago popped up on Ami's screen. Nothing stood out. She figured the key was finding the correct search terms. Ami quickly

typed “Alice,” “missing,” and “Faidley, South Carolina.” A headline appeared in the search results, “*Family holds out hope for granddaughter’s safe return.*”

Ami’s stomach dropped. She clicked on the preview to get more information:

March 1932 – Faidley Township, South Carolina

It has been a year since the beloved granddaughter of Wallace and Rhoda Smith went missing. Alice Smith was last seen playing with a group of friends in Faidley Township. Reverend Russell Dawson of the Second Mount Zion Baptist Church led the massive search to find the young girl.

Ami stared at the name – Reverend Russell Dawson. Ami wondered if this man fit someplace on her family tree. Ami and John never talked much about his lineage or extended family. There was still so much to learn about his life and who he was. Ami felt pushing too far into her father’s past would only sour a budding relationship.

An internet search of the name Reverend Russell Dawson yielded links to articles, photos, and church websites. Russell Jeremiah Dawson was a celebrated citizen of Faidley Township. His grandfather started the Second Mount Zion Baptist shortly after emancipation. He and his lovely wife, the former Miss Mary Ruse, had five children – Russell Junior, Riley, Ruby, Mary Elizabeth and John.

Ami thought about the names that rang through the forest: Riley, Ruby, M.E., and John. Sunday dinner with Aunt Darlene now became a pressing visit.

