

# SADIE JANE

## CHAPTER 1

### WOODS MOTOR COURT 1937

“Sadie Jane, if you’d go set the minnow trap and catch us some fish, I’d fry them up for supper.” Pearl Woods, wearing a plain blue-striped cotton dress and scuffed black oxford shoes, stood in the doorway of the largest of the nine rock cabins that stood on a rise a hundred yards from the St. Francis River.

Nine-year-old Sadie Jane, cradling a hen in one arm, looked up from the book she was reading. “Can’t today, Mama.” She was sitting on the stone-walled planter from which sprung the sign for Woods Motor Court. The green background paint was chipped and peeling but the words in white were still readable. The name slanted upward to the right, and underneath it said *Modern Cabins with Electric Lights*. In smaller letters at the bottom was written *Phip Woods, Proprietor*.

“And what are you doing that’s so all-powerful important that you can’t get us each a nice smallmouth or even a few bluegill for supper?”

“The river’s not safe today, Mama. The alligators are on the move.”

Pearl shook her head. “Sadie Jane, you come here and get this cracker and then you fetch the minnow trap and your fishing pole out of the shed.”

Sadie Jane uncrossed her legs, set the chicken, its wings flapping, on the ground, and slipped the book into the large front pocket of her overalls as she walked toward her mother. “Don’t you care if your little girl gets eaten by the alligators?”

Pearl handed her the cracker. “How many times do I have to tell you there are no alligators in the St. Francis? Not in Missouri, anyway. It’s too cold for them in the winter.”

“But it’s May. I think they swim up here in the summer and then go back down south in the winter.”

“Sadie Jane, I have washing to finish and hang out so it’ll dry this afternoon. You go on down to the river.”

Sadie Jane drew a circle in the dust with her bare foot. “If Daddy was here, he’d—”

“Well, your daddy’s not here. He’s in St. Louis, trying to earn enough money so we don’t lose this place when the taxes come due. Now you go on down to the river and we’ll have a nice supper. Maybe if they’re really biting, we’ll have enough for a fish stew for the next couple of days. Go on, now. You should catch a fine mess by lunchtime.”

Hunching her shoulders, Sadie Jane turned and started for the shed behind the house.

“And Sadie Jane.”

The young girl looked back toward her mother.

“There are no alligators.”