

SIXTY ACRES

by

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Sample Pages 1-9

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FADE IN

EXT. MILL'S POND, GEORGIA-SPRING 1935

EXT. MAIN STREET

Hustle and bustle of a small Southern town on a beautiful Saturday morning.

SAVANNAH (V.O.)

From a young age I had always considered Mill's Pond my own private fiefdom. Undoubtedly this was due to the fact that my family at one time had the distinction of being the wealthiest landowners in all of Bascomb County. This belief also led me to conclude that my family, and by consequence our small community, was immune to the slings and arrows of the outside world...I was wrong.

EXT. RAMBLING OLD MANSION

Stately columned home.

INT. PRICE HOUSE/KITCHEN

SELMA BROPHIE, black, early 50's, housekeeper and woman of the house, stands by the stove, flipping eggs with the dexterity of a short order cook.

REYNOLDS PRICE, mid 40's, distinguished attorney and widower, walks in, briefcase in hand.

SELMA

I made you eggs, Mr. Reynolds. Sunny side up, just the way you like it. The bacon will be along shortly. I'll get you coffee.

REYNOLDS

I'm afraid I shall have to pass, Selma. I have a meeting this morning with Byron Lee.

SELMA

That robber baron? Surely you got time for one cup.

Reynolds hesitates.

REYNOLDS

One cup.

Selma grins to herself as Reynolds sits.

INT. BEDROOM-SAME TIME

SAVANNAH PRICE, 10, precocious tomboy, puts on a shirt and overalls.

Selma enters and frowns.

SELMA

Hold on, Miss Savannah. Did you wash between them ears?

SAVANNAH

It's Saturday. How come I still have to wash?

SELMA

It's Saturday. How come I still have to cook?

Savannah exits as Selma makes Savannah's bed.

SELMA (CONT.)

When I was your age by this time I'd milked the cows, fed the chickens, baked two apple pies and three loaves of bread.

Savannah runs in, grabs a sweater and attempts to bypass Selma, but the older woman grabs her by the overalls.

SELMA (CONT.)

You ain't stepping foot outside this house until I fix your hair.

Selma takes a brush from the bureau and begins briskly brushing Savannah's long tresses.

SAVANNAH

Not so hard. That hurt.

SELMA

If you don't stop squirming I'm gonna have Booker use you for crawfish bait.

Selma starts braiding.

SAVANNAH

I wish Daddy would let me cut my hair. It don't do me no good.

SELMA

Bite your tongue. In this life your beauty is your calling card.

SAVANNAH

Daddy says it's brains.

SELMA

Your Daddy might be the smartest man in Bascomb County but he sure is the ugliest.

SAVANNAH

Selma, do you think Daddy will ever get married again?

SELMA

He better. This old house is crying out for babies. That would knock you down a peg or two. We need new blood.

SAVANNAH

I thought you said he needed a wife.

SELMA

Mr. Reynolds is what the ladies call an eligible gentleman of a certain age.

SAVANNAH

You just said he was ugly.

SELMA

Being ugly has nothing to do with being eligible. Your Daddy has character.

SAVANNAH

What kind of woman do you think Daddy should marry?

SELMA

She's got to be pretty like your late Momma. Smart too. With wide hips.

SAVANNAH

Mary Ellen Pincher?

Selma SNORTS.

SELMA

The woman walks like a duck and
laughs like a hyena.

SAVANNAH

How about Millicent Hawthorn?

SELMA

I said smart. Miss Hawthorn can't
even spell her own name.

SAVANNAH

Charlotte Atwill?

Selma SIGHS. Savannah takes this to mean that Charlotte is a
serious contender.

SELMA

Miss Atwill comes from good stock
and she's gonna come into a heap of
money when her Daddy kicks the
bucket.

SAVANNAH

Daddy doesn't care about money.

SELMA

Since when? What do you think keeps
this house going and your belly
from growling?

Savannah stares into the mirror.

SAVANNAH

Am I beautiful like my Momma?

SELMA

Gracious no. You take after your
Daddy, all legs and bones.

SAVANNAH

Good. I don't want to be a girl. I
want to be a boy.

Selma LAUGHS.

SELMA

Child, one day you'll be thankful
you're not, maybe sooner than you
think. What about Master Will
Arthur? He walked you home just the
other day.

Savannah makes a face.

SAVANNAH

Will? Yuck. He's got lips like a bull frog.

SELMA

Even frogs turn into princes. There. At least now you look presentable.

SAVANNAH

Show me Momma's ring. Please?

SELMA

I don't have time for such nonsense. I still have to do the wash before we go to town----oh, all right.

Selma exits; Savannah flops down on the bed.

Selma returns holding a small black box, which she hands to Savannah. Savannah opens the box and admires an emerald and diamond ring.

SAVANNAH

It's so shiny.

SELMA

Looks like glass to me.

SAVANNAH

Daddy says this ring is going to be mine one day.

SELMA

When you get married just like your Momma and her Momma before her.

SAVANNAH

Daddy ought to save himself the trouble and give it to me now.

Selma takes the box and snaps it shut.

SELMA

You're too uppity for your own good, Miss Savannah. One of these days that smart mouth of yours is going to land you in hot water. Now let me do my work in peace.

Savannah runs out of the room and down the stairs.

SAVANNAH (V.O.)

I had no idea just how prescient
Selma's words would turn out to be.

INT. PICK UP TRUCK-LATER

Selma dressed in her Sunday best; she sits beside her husband, the stately BOOKER, the Price household's handyman, as he drives. His shirt is buttoned to the neck, even though it's mild. He has an air of melancholy, even when he smiles, which is often.

Savannah sits in the open cab.

SAVANNAH (V.O.)

I had never heard Booker Brophie utter a single word and I knew of no one who had. It was rumored that Booker had suffered a grievous injury to his vocal cords, the nature of which remained unclear and which was the subject of much wild and devilish speculation amongst us young folk.

EXT. MAIN STREET-LATER

The truck pulls along a row of stores.

INT. PICK-UP TRUCK

Savannah stands by the car as Selma hands her some change.

SELMA

We'll pick you up at the grain store at three o'clock. And I don't want you lollygagging around with that trash Aaron Thibodeux.

SAVANNAH

Yes, ma'am.

The truck pulls away. Savannah looks up at the store directly in front of her, shielding her eyes as she reads the gilded sign of The Mercantile & Cotton Exchange.

INT. MERCANTILE & COTTON EXCHANGE

Typical general store that sells everything from penny candy to wedding dresses. As Savannah enters she spots her school chums WILL ARTHUR and IKE KINGSLEY by the counter.

SAVANNAH

Hey, Will, Ike. What you boys doing?

WILL

We're deciding on what to get today, black or cherry licorice.

SAVANNAH

I'm partial to cherry myself but I'll take black in a pinch. I've got two cents.

IKE

I've got one.

WILL

And I've got five. We're rich.

The store's clerk, the courtly, middle-aged THOMAS ELKIN, greets them.

ELKIN

How may I be of service this glorious afternoon?

As Savannah, Will and Ike discuss their options, a young woman enters the store and approaches Elkin. This is LOUISA CARMODY, early 30's, a Northerner of plain dress and demeanor.

ELKIN (CONT.)

Good day, ma'am.

LOUISA

Good day. Are you the proprietor of this establishment?

ELKIN

No, that would be Mr. Orenstein, and he's presently unavailable. May I be of assistance?

Having made their decision, Savannah, Will and Ike stand behind Louisa.

LOUISA

I'm Miss Louisa Carmody. I've come to stay with my cousins, The Whitehalls----

ELKIN

I know them very well.

LOUISA

I'm looking for employment as a governess or tutor. I've been advised that Mr. Orenstein might be able to help me. I was most recently in the employ of The Cruikshanks of Boston. My references----

Louisa hands a letter to Elkin. A shadow falls behind Savannah; she turns around and sees AARON THIBODEUX. Aaron wears tattered overalls and is barefoot.

AARON

What are you crybabies up to?

SAVANNAH

You stay away from us, Aaron. I'm warning you.

AARON

You can't tell me what to do. Guess what? My Pa's back.

SAVANNAH

I thought your Daddy went away.

Aaron eyes a penny-filled jar on the counter.

AARON

That kike. I bet he's got lots of pennies stashed away. Dollars, too. My Pa says we should put all them hymies on a ship and sink it in the middle of the Gulf of Mexico.

Will and Ike seem unperturbed but Savannah knows an insult when she hears one.

SAVANNAH

You take that back about Mr. Orenstein.

AARON

Make me.

Savannah pushes Aaron and his elbow hits the penny-filled jar. The jar falls onto the floor; glass shatters and pennies roll every which way.

ELKIN

Hey now!

Aaron, Will and Ike run away, Elkin in hot pursuit. Savannah and Louisa pick up the pennies.

Moments later, Elkin returns.

SAVANNAH

I'm sorry about the jar, Mr. Elkin.

LOUISA

It wasn't this child's fault, that bully was taunting her. I'd be happy to pay for the damages.

ELKIN

That won't be necessary, Miss Carmody. Miss Savannah is well known around here.

Louisa offers a handful of pennies to Elkin.

LOUISA

You will see to it that Mr. Orenstein receives my letter?

ELKIN

Directly, ma'am.

LOUISA

(to Savannah)

In the future, young lady, I'd choose a better caliber of friend to associate with. If you run with wolves, you might be thought of as one.

Louisa exits.

Savannah puts more change on the counter as Elkin gives her a stern look.

ELKIN

Come with me, Miss Price. I think you'd better see Mr. Orenstein.