

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn Book Notes

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn by Betty Smith

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Contents

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn Book Notes.....	1
Contents.....	2
Author/Context.....	4
Plot Summary.....	6
Major Characters.....	8
Objects/Places.....	12
Quotes.....	14
Topic Tracking: Economics.....	17
Topic Tracking: Education.....	19
Topic Tracking: Growing Up.....	21
Topic Tracking: Love.....	24
Book 1, Chapter 1.....	26
Chapter 2 and 3.....	27
Chapter 4 - 6.....	28
Book 2, Chapter 7.....	29
Chapter 8.....	30
Chapter 9.....	31
Chapter 10 and 11.....	32
Chapter 12 - 14.....	33
Book 3, Chapters 15 - 19.....	34
Chapters 20 - 25.....	36
Chapters 26 - 30.....	37
Chapters 31 - 36.....	39
Chapters 37 - 42.....	41
Book 4, Chapters 43 - 45.....	43



[Chapters 46 - 48.....45](#)

[Chapters 49 - 51.....46](#)

[Chapters 52 - 54.....47](#)

[Book 5, Chapters 55 - 56.....48](#)



Author/Context

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Betty Smith (1896-1972)

Betty Smith was born Elizabeth Wehmer on December 15, 1896, the exact same birth date five years earlier than her fictional heroine of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, Francie Nolan. Smith grew up in the poor section of Williamsburg, Brooklyn as the daughter of German immigrants. She left school at age 14 with an eighth grade education to work in factories. She married George H.E. Smith and followed him to the Midwest where he pursued law at the University of Michigan. She raised two daughters, Mary and Nancy, before she completed her education. She eventually studied at the University of Michigan where she pursued journalism, drama, writing, and literature. She excelled in this area, winning several awards, including the prestigious Avery Hopkins Award for work in drama. She also attended Yale Drama School for playwriting.

Smith wrote features for several newspapers and read plays for theater projects while she acted in summer stock productions. She divorced Smith in 1938 and married fellow journalist/writer Joe Jones of the *Chapel Hill Weekly* in 1943. The year 1943 was not only romantically promising with her new marriage, but also professionally rewarding. Her first novel, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, was published to garner critical acclaim and best-seller status. The book is semi-autobiographical and encapsulates the world of Brooklyn with all of its intricacies. Smith's themes mainly cover hope and poverty and track the lives of individual people struggling with both.

Although known mainly for her phenomenal success with *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, Smith also penned three novels, *Tomorrow Will Be Better* (1947), *Maggie-Now* (1958), and *Joy in the Morning* (1963). They did not live up to the acclaim of her first novel and are often criticized as falling short of her first success.

She is known for *Brooklyn* by the critics: "Here is a first novel of uncommon skill; an almost uncontrollable vitality and zest for life, the work of a fresh, original and highly gifted talent...*A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* is a warm, sunny, engaging book as well as a grim one."

Despite her single-book success, Smith has garnered a long career as a writer and dramatist. She has written several one-act and full-length plays for which she has won both the Rockefeller Fellowship and the Dramatist Guild Fellowship.

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Plot Summary

Francie Nolan, a young girl raised in the poor section of Brooklyn, Williamsburg, grows up in the pages of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* from a sickly infant to a capable, intelligent young woman. Francie's eleven-year old world is described in impeccable detail. She collects junk with her little brother, Neeley, and turns it in for pennies at Carney's. She frequents the library where she reads a book a day, and reads one page from the Bible and one page from Shakespeare each night before bed.

Francie's story shifts to her parents' courtship. Katie Rommely and Johnny Nolan were married in 1901 after a short courtship in which Katie stole Johnny from her best friend, Hildy O'Dair. Katie gives birth to Francie within the year, and Neeley one year later. They struggle to stay afloat with no money, no education, and two children. Johnny is a singing waiter who occasionally works between his drinks, and Katie works as a janitress. They must move houses several times because of their loud noise and Katie's older sister Sissy's sexual reputation. They move from Bogart Street to Lorimer Street to Grand Street and learn to play piano. The two children start grade school together so that they can keep each other strong and share each other's company. Neeley is popular and good-looking, just like his father, and Francie is more homely and solitary. She is extremely interested in books and writing and works hard in all of her classes, despite the discrimination she feels for being poor. Francie convinces her father to help her go to a better school across town by telling a white lie that she lives in a house there. She loves that school and is one of the best writers in her class.

Johnny tries to show his love to his children, but does not have steady work and can often have poor judgement. He tries to quit drinking, but dies on Christmas after contracting pneumonia. The family buys an insurance policy and buries him. Francie and Neeley struggle to move on with their lives; however, Francie's writing is affected by the tragedy. Her writing scores decrease and she sinks into a slight depression. The kids proudly graduate from grade school. Katie continues to work hard, but with a third baby coming, she knows that both children cannot continue school. Neeley goes on to high school because he does not want to and Francie enters the working world because Katie knows she will find a way to return to school. She works in a factory and then moves on to the newspaper bureau in Manhattan, where she is promoted to the coveted position of city reader at twenty dollars per week. Katie gives birth to Laurie several months after Johnny's death and the family survives well on Francie's salary. Evy's husband, Willie Flittman, gets kicked by a horse and suffers from low self-confidence. He runs away with the hopes of becoming a one-man band. Sissy gives birth to a baby boy with the help of a hospital and a doctor. She re-falls in love with her husband, Steve.

Francie takes summer school courses at Brooklyn Heights College, where she meets and is enamored with Ben Blake. They get along extremely well, however, are not romantically involved because of the large age difference and Ben's motivated lifestyle. Francie goes on a blind date with Lee Rhynor, a visiting marine, and falls in love with him quickly. She promises her life to him, only to receive a letter after he leaves saying



that he married someone else and played a trick on her. She is devastated and takes comfort with her mother.

Sergeant McShane proposes to Katie and offers his love and financial security for her family for the rest of their lives. They get married and he adopts Laurie. Neeley continues his education and Francie goes to the University of Michigan with the promise of a ring from Ben and their possible future together. Francie looks out the window to see another young girl, reminding her of herself seven years earlier. The tree that grows in the yard has been cut down; but a new tree growing from the stump stands in its place.



Major Characters

Francie Nolan: Francie Nolan is the central character in this coming of age novel. The story revolves around her life, from her daily routines to her intimate feelings about family, life, and love. She is born to poor, young parents on December 15, 1901 with beautiful hands and long thick brown hair. She is not gorgeous, but she gets by. She is a combination of her mother's strength and her father's zest for life; she becomes a very intelligent and motivated young woman. She grows up quickly, wants to be a writer, and attends the University of Michigan. After working hard as a young girl, surviving her beloved father's death, a broken-heart, and poverty, Francie grows into a young woman with unlimited potential.

Neeley Nolan: Neeley Nolan, born 'Cornelius,' is Francie's younger brother by one year. He looks just like Johnny (his father) with his blue eyes, thick curly blonde hair, and charismatic handsome face and body. He is not as motivated as Francie, but Katie loves him more than he loves her. Katie vows to never show her strong love for Neeley, but her favoritism shines through at times. Neeley and Francie go through school together and are each other's support through their poor youth. Neeley is allowed to continue to high school when he does not want to and Francie is forced to work when she wants to continue school. Although the two siblings have a small rivalry, they love each other dearly and are always there for one another.

Katie Nolan: Katie Rommely Nolan McShane is Francie's mother. She is the youngest of four sisters. She is of German descent and steals Johnny from her best friend. She loves Johnny, but marries him too young and pays the price by working as a janitress to support her two young children (and eventually third). She is realistic and non-demonstrative of her feelings. She is always working hard for her children so that they will have a better life, and refuses to accept charity. She is devoted to her family, their future, and her pride. She banks on education as the one quality that her children must have in order to become something important in the world. Like her sisters, Katie needs the love of a man. She marries Sergeant McShane at the end of the novel and plans to live out her years comfortably.

Johnny Nolan: Johnny is Francie's father. He is a very handsome man with curly blonde hair and blue eyes. His family comes from Ireland. Every man in his family dies before the age of 35, and he believes he will as well. When he works, he is a singing waiter; but he is usually drunk. He is extremely proud of his Waiter's Union and always dresses well in his one tuxedo and dickey. Francie is very close with Johnny. Johnny tries to be a good father and a role model, but unfortunately fails in his responsibility. He dies of pneumonia on Christmas Day, leaving the family in heartbreak and even worse financial straits. The family moves on, but never forgets Johnny.

Aunt Sissy: Aunt Sissy is the oldest Rommely sister. She is brassy, voluptuous, flirtatious, and fun loving. Francie has a very special connection with her. Sissy has been married three times (never by the Catholic church), had ten stillbirths, and longs for children of her own. She is often considered 'bad,' because of her risqué behavior,



but truly has a massive heart for the Nolan family. She has a special place in her heart for Francie and pretends to be her mother at school to help her. She also brings magazines and gifts for the children from the factory in which she works. She eventually falls in love with her husband Steve (whom she calls John), gives birth to her own healthy baby, and settles down.

Aunt Evy: Aunt Evy is the third Rommely sister and is the voice of reason among the girls. She is poor as well, but has enough money to support her family before her crazy husband, Willie Flittman, runs out on her. She and Katie sometimes join forces when Sissy is out of control, to try to protect their families. Katie gives Evy \$200 of the \$1000 she receives from McShane as a wedding present, because that is the sum she would have collected from Willie's life insurance.

Minor Characters

Hildy O'Dair: Hildy is Katie's childhood girlfriend from whom she stole Johnny. Johnny and Hildy were dating when Katie met him. The two got married shortly and went their own way, while Hildy went hers.

Flossie Gaddis: Flossie is one of Francie's childhood acquaintances. She has only one arm and gets dressed in costumes every week. Francie visits her and begins to understand about worse hardships than her own.

Henny Gaddis: Henny is Flossie's brother who dies of consumption at a young age. Francie learns about death for the first time.

Maudie Donovan: Maudie is another friend of Francie's from the first home. She is an orphan. She is one of the first friends to develop into a woman. Francie realizes that she is growing up when she sees Maudie change.

Tynmore sisters (Miss Lizzie and Miss Maggie): The Tynmore sisters are music teachers. Lizzie teaches piano while Maggie teaches voice. Katie hires Lizzie to teach her piano, while she slyly has the children look on to her lessons and learn the piano as well. The Tynmores don't have much money and survive on the coffee they are given from their clients after lessons.

Thomas Rommely: Thomas Rommely is Katie's father, a very harsh, unloving man from Austria. He was upset when Katie married Johnny.

Mary Rommely: Mary Rommely is Katie's mother who lives until her 80s. She tells Katie that education is the key that will separate her children from others and will give them a future.

Ruthie Nolan: Ruthie Nolan is Johnny's mother. She survives her husband and four sons and never forgives them for leaving her (either through death or marriage).



The Nolan Boys (Georgie, Frankie, Andy): Johnny's brothers, who were handsome singing waiters, and all died before the age of thirty-five.

Eliza Rommely: Eliza Rommely is the second daughter of the four girls. She joins a convent and has only a small role in Francie's life.

Mr. Jensen: Mr. Jensen is the beloved janitor of Francie's second school. He is supposedly more educated than the teachers, but makes more money as the janitor. He gives Francie hope in school and signs her yearbook with style.

Mr. Morton , Miss Bernstone: The respective music and art teachers who visit Francie's school once a week and are the treasure of the students and teachers. They also give Francie something to look forward to in school and attend both her old and new schools.

Joanna: Joanna is a girl in Brooklyn who got into trouble and proudly displays her bastard child. She is stoned by other cruel women. Katie uses her as an example of what should not happen to Francie, but Francie sees how the other women treat her and decides that she will never be friends with a woman.

Lucia: Lucia is a young Italian girl who gets into trouble and gives her baby to Sissy. Sissy feigns pregnancy and raises Lucia's baby, Sarah, as her own.

McGarrity: McGarrity is the owner of the pub in which Johnny drinks. He is also very upset with how his family turned out. When Johnny dies, he befriends the Nolans and employs Francie and Neeley.

Mae: Mae is McGarrity's wife who would rather hang out in the bar than be a good housewife and mother to their children.

Sergeant Michael McShane: McShane is a middle-aged Irish police officer-turned politician who falls in love with Katie. After his wife dies and Johnny dies, he marries her and brings the Nolans out of poverty and into a life of comfort.

Willie Flittman: Willie Flittman is Evy's husband who constantly feels like he is a failure. He is kicked by a horse and consequently decides to become a one-man band and leaves his family. He is never heard from again.

Ben Blake: Ben is the handsome, intelligent, athletic, popular, driven young man with whom Francie falls in love at college. He cares for her deeply as a friend and perhaps as a future wife.

Lee Rhynor: Lee is the man with whom Francie falls in passionate love. He plays a cruel joke on her by telling her he loves her and wants to sleep with her before he goes to war. He leaves, gets married to another girl, and disappears from Francie's life. She always thinks of him.



Steve/John: Steve is Sissy's last and final husband. He loves her dearly, but is frustrated with her past and with her feigned pregnancy. She calls him John and eventually falls madly in love with him. The two have two children and live comfortably.

Albie Seedmore: Albie Seedmore is a boy who first asks Francie out on a date after her graduation.

Steven Aaron: Steven Aaron is the first live born baby of Sissy. She has had ten stillbirths until this successful birth in a hospital. He is partially named after the doctor who helped Sissy bear him.

Sarah: Sarah is Lucia's baby who Sissy adopts as her own.

Dr. Aaronstein: Dr. Aaronstein is the Jewish doctor who Steve hires to help Sissy through her labor and birth process. Because of his help, Sissy is able to give birth to a healthy baby.

Miss Briggs: Miss Briggs is one of Francie's teachers at her first school who treats her inferior because she is poor. Sissy pretends to be Francie's mother and scares Miss Briggs into treating Francie well.

Miss Garnder: Miss Garnder is Francie's English teacher who grades her down because she writes about death and drunkenness. Francie writes imaginary plays in which she is her pet. Miss Garnder is the teacher who at first grants Francie the task of writing the graduation play and then takes that privilege away from her because of the change in her writing compositions.

Miss Armstrong: Miss Armstrong is the city reader at the bureau where Francie works in New York. She is the boss's mistress and leaves work to marry him. She is the first real-life mistress that Francie has met and destroys Francie's image of mistresses because she does in fact marry the man she is seeing.

Laurie Nolan McShane: Laurie is the third child of Katie and Johnny. Johnny dies four months before she is born. She is named after the song 'Annie Laurie' that Johnny sings and is adopted by McShane, after his marriage to Katie. She will have a much easier life than Francie and Neeley.

Florry Wendy: Florry is a ten-year-old girl who mirrors Francie when she was a child. She is only in the last chapter, as a representation of the cycle of life.

Little Tilly: The young girl who unfortunately is a forgotten child and who Johnny takes on a fishing trip (a comedy of errors). She cries and illustrates Johnny as an unfit parent and never appears in the rest of the book.



Objects/Places

Cheap Charlie's and Carney: The store by the junkyard where young kids in Williamsburg bring in their junk in exchange for prizes. There is an unwritten rule that only boys are allowed.

Gimpy's Candy Store: The store next to Carney's where the kids buy candy after exchanging their junk for a penny or prize.

The library: Francie spends her afternoons in the library reading. She reads a book a day, starting at the beginning of the alphabet. They allow her to escape into new worlds and lead to her love for the pen.

Pearl studs: Katie gives Johnny pearl studs as a wedding present. They are only worn on special occasions and are never sold, no matter how desperate the financial situations are.

Bogart Street: The Nolan family lives on Bogart Street for a while until they are kicked out because of noise.

Lorimer Street: The Nolan family moves to a flat on Lorimer Street, which is still in Williamsburg. They leave Lorimer Street because of an embarrassing incident with Sissy.

Williamsburg, Brooklyn: The area of Brooklyn where the Nolans live and Francie grows up. It is on the poor side and is full of immigrants.

The Tree of Heaven: Where Francie lives, she sees a strong tree growing in the yard. It fascinates her and she sees it as a metaphor for her life. No matter how many times it is cut down, it always grows back with thicker branches and wider leaves.

Prima Donna: Johnny calls Francie 'prima donna' as a little pet name.

'Molly Malone': Johnny sings 'Molly Malone' on his way home. It becomes his theme song and everyone knows he is coming up the stairs when they hear that song.

The tin can bank: Mary Rommely tells Katie to make a tin can bank to save money until she can buy land. The can is opened when Johnny dies to pay for his cemetery plot. When Francie and Neeley begin work, they form a new tin can bank.

Brooklyn Heights College: Francie attends Brooklyn Heights College in the summertime and falls in love with education and Ben Blake.

Piano: A piano is left for the Nolans in their Lorimer Street flat. They learn to play it and it brings music into their world when Johnny isn't singing. It is another bit of culture that helps them become educated along the way.



Grand Street: The house to which the Nolans move to the upstairs flat. It is the last home for Johnny Nolan.

Model Office Clipping Bureau: The office where Francie works as a city-paper reader and earns up to twenty dollars a week in Manhattan.

Communications Corporation: Francie's place of work after the bureau closes. She meets Lee Rhynor through a coworker here.



Quotes

Quote 1: "Everyone said it was a pity that a slight pretty woman like Katie Nolan had to go out scrubbing floors. But what else could she do considering the husband she had, they said." Chapter 1, pg. 10

Quote 2: "Francie knew that mama was a good woman. She knew. And papa said so. Then why did she like her father better than her mother? Why did she? Papa was no good. He said so himself. But she liked papa better." Chapter 1, pg. 33

Quote 3: "Before they went to bed, Francie and Neeley had to read a page of the Bible and a page from Shakespeare. That was a rule. Mama used to read the two pages to them each night until they were old enough to read for themselves. To save time, Neeley read the Bible page and Francie read from Shakespeare." Chapter 6, pg. 49

Quote 4: "Maybe that decision was her great mistake. She should have waited until some man came along who felt that way about her. Then her children would not have gone hungry; she would not have had to scrub floors for their living and her memory of him would have remained a tender shining thing. But she wanted Johnny Nolan and no one else and she set out to get him." Chapter 7, pg. 56

Quote 5: "Those were the Rommely women: Many, the mother, Evy, Sissy, and Katie, her daughters, and Francie, who would grow up to be a Rommely woman even though her name was Nolan. They were all slender, frail creatures with wondering eyes and soft fluttery voices...But they were made out of thin invisible steel." Chapter 7, pg. 68

Quote 6: "She was made up of all of these good and these bad things...She was the books she read in the library...Part of her life was made from the tree growing rankly in the yard. She was the bitter quarrels she had with her brother whom she loved dearly. She was Katie's secret, despairing weeping. She was the shame of her father staggering home drunk...She was all of these things and of something more...It was something that had been born into her and her only." Chapter 8, pg. 71

Quote 7: "Oh, God, don't send me any more children or I won't be able to look after Johnny and I've got to look after Johnny. He can't look after himself." Chapter 9, pg. 81

Quote 8: "I must watch myself very carefully...I am going to love this boy more than the girl but I mustn't ever let her know. It is wrong to love one child more than the other but this is something that I cannot help." Chapter 10, pg. 94

Quote 9: "Francie didn't notice that he said *my* last home instead of *our* last home." Chapter 14, pg. 122

Quote 10: "Francie sat on a chair and was surprised that it felt the same as it had in Lorimer Street. She felt different. Why didn't the chair feel different?" Chapter 15, pg. 131



Quote 11: "Besides, she said to her conscience, it's a hard and bitter world. They've got to live in it. Let them get hardened young to take care of themselves." Chapter 18, pg. 142

Quote 12: "She had become accustomed to being lonely. She was used to walking alone and to being considered 'different.' She did not suffer too much." Chapter 20, pg. 160

Quote 13: "From that time on, the world was hers for the reading. She would never be lonely again, never miss the lack of intimate friends. Books became her friends and there was one for every mood...On the day when she first knew she could read, she made a vow to read one book a day as long as she lived." Chapter 22, pg. 164

Quote 14: "In the future, when something comes up, you *tell* exactly how it happened but *write down for yourself* the way you think it should have happened. Tell the truth and write the story. Then you won't get mixed up. It was the best advice Francie every got." Chapter 26, pg. 196

Quote 15: "That's what Mary Rommely, her mother had been telling her all those years. Only her mother did not have the one clear word: education!" Chapter 27, pg. 204

Quote 16: "Growing up spoiled a lot of things." Chapter 28, pg. 214

Quote 17: "Most women had the one thing in common: they had great pain when they gave birth to their children. This should make a bond that held them all together; it should make them love and protect each other against the man-world. But it was not so. It seemed like their great birth pains shrank their hearts and their souls. They stuck together for only one thing: to trample on some other woman." Chapter 29, pg. 234

Quote 18: "She'll be my wife, someday, God and she willin." Chapter 33, pg. 259

Quote 19: "Frances stood numb. There was no feeling of surprise or grief. There was no feeling of anything. What mama just said had no meaning." Chapter 36, pg. 277

Quote 20: "From now on I am your mother and your father." Chapter 37, pg. 293

Quote 21: "Francie wished adults would stop telling her that. Already the load of thanks in the future was weighing her down. She figured she'd have to spend the best years of her womanhood hunting up people to tell them that they were right and to thank them." Chapter 39, pg. 318

Quote 22: "'Maybe,' thought Francie, 'she doesn't love me as much as she loves Neeley. But she needs me more than she needs him and I guess being needed is almost as good as being loved. Maybe better.'" Chapter 39, pg. 326

Quote 23: "And Francie, pausing in her sweeping to listen, tried to put everything together and tried to understand a world spinning in confusion. And it seemed to her



that the whole world changed in between the time that Laurie was born and graduation day." Chapter 41, pg. 342

Quote 24: "'This could be a whole life,' she thought. 'You work eight hours a day covering wires to earn money to buy food and to pay for a place to sleep that you can keep living to come back to cover more wires. Some people are born and kept living just to come to this...May be she'd never have more education than she had at that moment. Maybe all her life she'd have to cover wires.'" Chapter 43, pg. 358

Quote 25: "'We're too much alike to understand each other because we don't even understand our own selves. Papa and I were two different persons and we understood each other. Mama understands Neeley because he's different from her.'" Chapter 44, pg. 381

Quote 26: "Let me be something every minute of every hour of my life. Let me be gay; let me be sad. Let me be cold; let me be warm. Let me be hungry...have too much to eat. Let me be ragged or well dressed. Let me be sincere-be deceitful. Let me be truthful; let me be a liar. Let me be honorable and let me sin. Only let me be something every blessed minute. And when I sleep, let me dream all the time so that not one little piece of living is ever lost." Chapter 48, pg. 413

Quote 27: "And he asked for her whole life as simply as he'd ask for a date. And she promised away her whole life as simply as she'd offer a hand in greeting or farewell." Chapter 52, pg. 450

Quote 28: "It's come at least...the time when you can no longer stand between your children and heartache... they walk out in all innocence and they walk right into the grief that you'd give your life to spare them." Chapter 53, pg. 453

Quote 29: "But, then, so many things seemed like dreams to her. That man in the hallway that day: Surely that had been a dream! The way McShane had been waiting for mother all those years - a dream. Papa dead. For a long time that had been a dream but now papa was like someone who had never been. The way Laurie seemed to come out of a dream - born the living child of a father five months dead. Brooklyn was a dream. All the things that happened there just couldn't happen. It was all dream stuff. Or was it all real and true and was it that she, Francie, was the dreamer?" Chapter 55, pg. 467

Quote 30: "So like papa...so like papa, she thought. But he had more strength in his face than papa had had." Chapter 56, pg. 481

Quote 31: "A new tree had grown from the stump and its trunk had grown along the ground until it reached a place where there were no wash lines above it. Then it had started to grow towards the sky again. Annie, the fir tree, that the Nolans had cherished with waterings and manurings, had long since sickened and died. But this tree in the yard - this tree that men chopped down...this tree that they built a bonfire around, trying to burn up its stump - this tree had lived!" Chapter 56, pg. 483



Topic Tracking: Economics

Topic Tracking: Economics

Book 1, Chapters 1-6

Economics 1: The Tree of Heaven attracts poor people. Poor people are the subject of this novel. Francie's life, albeit economically poor and economically challenged, is rich with stories, tales, and adventure. She sees this tree as one who is rich, because it cares for poor people.

Economics 2: Francie and Neeley exchange their junk for shiny pennies. A single penny is regarded as wealth amongst the poor youngsters of Brooklyn in 1911. They can use it for candy or games.

Economics 3: Katie Nolan, a beautiful young woman and mother, must scrub floors as a janitress in order to make enough money to put food on the table for her two young children and her husband. Johnny works occasionally and does not bring in enough money to sustain the family. The Nolan family is not strong economically; this weakness is not due to laziness, and the kids develop the strong work ethic needed to make ends meet.

Economics 4: Katie puts extra money and collects change in an old tin can bank. The bank lives throughout the novel in many forms. Since the family is poor, they do not use a real bank, and instead create their own from an old can.

Book 2, Chapters 7-14

Economics 5: The young married couple, Johnny and Katie, make money initially by taking care of a school. When Johnny loses the job on the grounds of recklessness, he worries about money for his new family. Lack of money is a constant stress on this family.

Economics 6: When the Nolans move to Lorimer Street, they still do not have enough money to pay rent. The only way they can live there is if Katie cleans the houses and works as the janitress in exchange for rent. Katie is always doing physical labor in order to allow her family to continue to survive despite their lack of funds.

Book 3, Chapters 15-42

Economics 7: Katie realizes that money is not the key to prosperity, success, and richness. Education is the key. She knows that her children will have better lives if they are educated. Education will lead to economic well being.



Economics 8: Francie's teacher at school is cruel to the poor kids and does not allow them to go to the bathroom. Francie believes her negative treatment is a result of her poverty, of which she does not think she should be ashamed.

Economics 9: Johnny's death reminds the family of their dire economics problems. Katie buys an insurance package that gives the family \$200. However, they do not see the money because it is used on the expensive funeral and burial costs and mourning clothes. Katie opens the tin can bank that is partially full and saved to buy land. They now own Johnny's lot and no longer need the money saved in the tin can bank; she spends it to cover the rest of the funeral cost.

Economics 10: Although Johnny never brought in a steady income, he did bring in enough small change to help the family through the tough times. The Nolan family is feeling the need for money, or the kids cannot return to school. McGarrity knowingly offers the children after-school jobs to help them until Katie's new baby arrives. He knows she will never accept charity, so he hires the kids for a generous wage.

Book 4, Chapters 43-54

Economics 11: Both Francie and Neeley work. They bring home their first paychecks and present them to Katie in a proud celebration. In Nolan custom, Neeley keeps his tips for spending money (as did his father) and Francie gets a fifty-cent allowance per week.

Economics 12: Neeley and Francie open up their own tin can bank in the Nolan tradition. They also take Katie shopping for a new non-mourning hat. They are able to enjoy what money they have with their family. They also have learned how to save and value money. Katie sets up a bank account for Francie's future college education.

Economics 13: The Nolan family has enough money, for once, to celebrate Christmas well. They even give some money to the musical Tynmore girls because they know how hard Christmas is without money.

Book 5, Chapters 55-56

Economics 14: With Katie's marriage to McShane, the family has enough money to relax, pursue their dreams, and allow Laurie to grow up in comfort. Katie gives \$200 of her \$1000 wedding present to Evy, because that is the sum of the insurance money she would have collected from Willie Flittman's death. Now that she has money, she still understands the importance of generosity and family.



Topic Tracking: Education

Topic Tracking: Education

Book 1, Chapters 1-6

Education 1: Francie and Neeley begin their education at the advice of Mary Rommely and the orders of Katie. They read a page of Shakespeare and a page of the Bible before they go to bed each night. This nightly habitual lesson is their first form of education and it helps them throughout their lives.

Book 2, Chapters 7-14

Education 2: Katie and Johnny's first job together is taking care of a school. They play make believe in it at night and daydream of education. They are both uneducated, and they fail with tending to the icon of education: a school.

Education 3: Mary Rommely tells Katie that her child's life won't be bad as long as she has education and imagination. This advice fuels Katie's life in terms of her children's upbringing.

Book 3, Chapters 15-42

Education 4: Francie sees a girl slapping erasers outside the school by their new house. She learns about teacher's pets and the politics of school and education before she even enters that world. Nonetheless, she is still excited about educating herself in school since her mother has continually told her how important it is to a person.

Education 5: Katie learns how to play piano and teaches her children how to do so, as well. This type of cultural education, she feels, is vital to their upbringing. She wants them to hold special places in society and knows that music will enrich their lives and help them develop.

Education 6: Francie's first school does not live up to the high expectations that she originally held. She does get her own notebook, but must be immunized and share a desk. Furthermore, her teacher is unkind to her because of her poverty.

Education 7: Francie convinces Johnny to help her move to a school out of her district. She walks forty-eight blocks everyday in order to attend the school of her dreams. She learns so much and enjoys the companionship of the other girls and the sympathies of the kind teachers.

Education 8: Francie discovers her future as a writer. Her teacher tells her to write down the lies she makes up so that she won't mix them up with the truth she tells. She learns how to distinguish the truth from lies. This lesson, learned partially outside of the classroom, affects Francie more than any facts she learns in school.



Education 9: Katie finally realizes the crux of her mother's advice. She discovers that all the importance and future of her children lies in their education. She knows at this moment that her children must graduate in order to live well in this country. Her mother simply lacked the word "education," in giving her advice to Katie.

Education 10: Because McGarrity gives the children after school jobs, Francie can stay in school. She is so happy because school is the place where Francie feels the most successful. She is one of the best writers in her class.

Book 4, Chapters 43-54

Education 11: Katie can only afford to send one child to high school and selects Neeley because he does not want to go. She knows that, although Francie is dying to go to high school, if she does not attend this year, she will find a way to educate herself no matter what the circumstances may be. Francie is devastated by her mother's actions, even though she knows deep down that they are right.

Education 12: Francie educates herself on life through her jobs. She feels too old to go back to high school because of what she has been able to learn on her own. She decides to enroll in summer courses at Brooklyn Heights College. Katie supports her fully.

Education 13: Francie falls in love with college and works very hard to make good grades. She plans to study hard in order to take the placement exam to begin actual college courses in the fall. She fails the first one, but knows what to do for the following year.

Book 5, Chapters 55-56

Education 14: With the advice of Ben Blake, Francie decides to attend the University of Michigan. She is nervous and excited about her education, and knows that her youthful education of the world has been priceless.



Topic Tracking: Growing Up

Book 1, Chapters 1-6

Growing Up 1: Francie and Neeley learn about the rules of the street as they grow up in the poor section of Brooklyn, lugging their junk in exchange for pennies. They also learn about small facts of life, such as the fact that Jesus, their Catholic savior, was a Jew.

Growing Up 2: Francie encounters the idea of death and disease when her friend's brother, Henny Gaddis, is dying of consumption.

Book 2, Chapters 7-14

Growing Up 3: Johnny and Katie learn the hardships of growing up as they marry young. Katie loses her best friend and Johnny loses his girlfriend. They get married and try to make a life together, despite their young ages.

Growing Up 4: Katie is worried about raising a child and looking after Johnny. She doesn't know how Francie will grow up normally under the poor circumstances. She still has her mother give her advice and help her grow into a mother. Katie is still growing up as she helps Francie grow up. They enter the whirlwind experience together.

Growing Up 5: Johnny officially grows up as he celebrates his 21st birthday. He is already married and a father and still has no idea how to support them. He gets drunk and loud. He grows up into a drunk, despite his large heart and his strong love for his family.

Book 3, Chapters 15-42

Growing Up 6: Francie starts to notice changes in her surroundings and herself. She sees herself changing and growing and first notices these changes with the furniture of the house. She wonders why those things don't seem any different even though she does.

Growing Up 7: The immunizations necessary to attend school are a stepping-stone into the next stage of growth. Francie and Neeley attend school and begin the road of education and development. They do so together in order to support one another.

Growing Up 8: Francie discovers her future as a writer. She not only learns about education, but she realizes what she wants to do when she grows up. This realization helps her through the rest of her development, for she writes down most things that happen to her in journals or stories. Instead of growing up to become a liar, she will grow up to become a writer.

Growing Up 9: Francie is upset with her growth. She sees how much of the world is now spoiled because she sees it for what it really is, instead of through innocent, young eyes. Old friends of hers are blossoming into young women and she discovers men at



the theater. She also decides how she would end plays and does not accept the simple conclusions that she sees. She wants to map out her own future.

Growing Up 10: Francie learns about love and the dangers it can pose when a girl grows up into a woman. Francie begins her period and now is grown up enough to get into trouble. She also vows never to become friends with women when she grows up.

Growing Up 11: Francie begins to keep a diary in order to document her growth. She enters adolescence, becomes a woman, and becomes interested in sex.

Growing Up 12: Francie, Neeley, and Katie are all forced to grow quickly and bypass many stages of childhood and parenthood when Johnny dies. They must learn to take care of themselves and Katie must learn how to become both a mother and a father. Francie and Neeley are confronted early on with death and grow quickly on the ways of the world after their father's death.

Growing Up 13: Francie is sick of grown-ups telling her that she will thank them for the advice they give her...when she grows up. She is constantly hearing about truths of the world meant for when she grows up. She feels like she is growing up and she doesn't want to spend her adulthood thanking everyone who once gave her advice. Francie also shows great maturity when she talks with her mother about her decision to have only Neeley attend high school.

Book 4, Chapters 43-54

Growing Up 14: Francie gets a taste of the grown-up world in the factory. She finds it a mundane and unpleasant way of life. She has greater aspirations than working in the factory. Nonetheless, she puts all of her attention into her work, and excels.

Growing Up 15: Francie attends college. She knows that she is the first of her family to do so and cannot believe that she has grown into a woman who can pursue higher education. Not only is she older and more educated, but she is also entering womanhood. She knows she is in this new "grown" world and welcomes it grandly.

Growing Up 16: Francie experiences heartbreak for the first time as a grown-up. She falls for Lee and he leaves her stranded and broken. As when she was forced to grow up quickly with her father's death, she is forced to grow up quickly with love. She will be wary of trust with other men in the future because her experience with Lee.

Growing Up 17: McShane proposes to Katie (and her family). Francie and Neeley remember their upbringing and all of its harsh circumstances and troubles. Nonetheless, they treasure their times and have bittersweet feelings for Laurie. They know that she will grow up without the worry of economic strain, yet she will also miss the important lessons learned by growing up poor in Brooklyn.

Book 5, Chapters 55-56



Growing Up 18: Francie sees herself in Florry Wendy, a young Brooklyn girl who looks through the windows at girls getting ready for dates. She has grown up now and knows that this young girl will also grow up and experience similar things. The novel is about growing up and all of the little experiences, both troublesome and joyous, that a young girl or boy may encounter. Although Francie has now grown into a young, educated woman, she still has a ways to go...and welcomes the future open-heartedly.



Topic Tracking: Love

Topic Tracking: Love

Book 1, Chapters 1-6

Love 1: Francie loves her father dearly. Johnny knows how to show Francie his love, as well, as opposed to her mother. Katie does not know how to show Francie her love. Francie overhears how her parents met. This little eavesdropping gives Francie a taste of adult romance.

Book 2, Chapters 7-14

Love 2: Katie Rommely and Johnny Nolan got married very young. Katie stole Johnny from her best friend, Hildy O'Dair, because she wanted him and thought he was cute. Because of their young love and their quickly growing family, Katie works every day of her life.

Love 3: Katie admits that she will love her baby boy more than the baby girl she already has. She knows it is not right, but she plans to live her life accordingly. This love for children is different than the young love between two people of the opposite sex.

Love 4: Sissy's sexual and romantic scandals breed their way into the Nolan family, much to Katie's dismay. People think that Sissy is "bad," because she has many lovers and expresses her love openly. Although Sissy shows her love romantically to many people, she also has so much love to give to her family.

Book 3, Chapters 15-42

Love 5: Upon his first glance at Katie, Sergeant Michael McShane falls in love. He asks Francie about her and keeps communication strong with the Nolan family throughout the novel.

Love 6: Francie learns about the dangers of "love." She sees Joanna's trouble after loving a man before marriage. She also sees the cruelty of women because of it. She doesn't see Joanna's trouble from love (an illegitimate child) as being so wrong.

Love 7: Francie becomes a teenager and starts to think about sex. She is curious about the physicality behind love and wants to know more. She realizes that sex is part of love.

Love 8: McShane sees Katie Nolan again and vows that one day she will become his wife. He still loves her throughout the years, even though she does not necessarily love him in return. They have a cordial and respectful relationship over the years, while he secretly loves her.



Love 9: A young Italian girl named Lucia gets into trouble because of love and is left pregnant. Sissy feigns a pregnancy and plans to keep Lucia's baby as her own. Sissy loves children and wants one of her own so dearly. The love she has for a baby is so strong that it overcomes all other odds.

Love 10: Francie gets her first touch of romance as young Albie Seedmore asks her out on a date. Nothing happens with him; however, Francie is transforming into a young woman who yearns for love. Francie also receives roses from her deceased father, remembering how much she loved him and how much he loved her. He cared enough to give Sissy money years in advance to make sure that Francie felt loved and special at her graduation, in case he couldn't be there. The bond that Francie and Johnny share is a strong father-daughter bond of love that cannot be broken, even in death.

Book 4, Chapters 43-54

Love 11: Francie feels lonely with Johnny gone and also wishes for male companionship. Sissy falls in love with her husband of five years after the marriage catastrophe splattered all over the papers. Love is re-explored in this section of the book: Sissy finds it again and Francie wants to find it.

Love 12: Francie meets Ben Blake and immediately falls for him. He seems perfect in every department. The two get along well as great friends and educated colleagues.

Love 13: Francie falls desperately in love with Lee Rhynor and promises her life to him, only to find out later that he played a joke on her and marries his fiancée soon after he leaves New York. This encounter with love damages Francie for future relationships. She knows she will move on, but she also knows she will never forget the pain.

Love 14: McShane proposes marriage to Katie and offers financial security for her family. His long-lived love is finally returned. He plans to start a new life with Katie and love her.

Book 5, Chapters 55-56

Love 15: As Francie gets ready to attend the University of Michigan, Ben tells her that he wants to marry her in the future. She knows he will not betray her like Lee; however, she is not sure. She does love him, but she wants him to need her. She has years to decide whether or not she will marry Ben.



Book 1, Chapter 1

Brooklyn is serene in 1912. A tree grows in front of the house of Francie Nolan and her little brother, Neeley. This tree attracts her attention and she calls it the Tree of Heaven because it likes poor people. She also talks about the beauty and relaxation of Sunday.

Topic Tracking: Economics 1

On Saturday afternoons the kids bring all their junk to the junkyard and collect pennies from Cheap Charlie's. Other kids laugh at them, but they continue to bring in their copper and have Carney exchange it for shiny pennies. Cheap Charlie's is the store next to Carney that caters to this junk trade for young children. It is only for boys, so Francie must wait outside. Francie and Neeley go across the street to Gimpy's candy store afterwards. When they get home, Francie speaks with her mom and is shocked to learn that Jesus was a Jew. She learns many small facts about life and religion in this conversation.

Topic Tracking: Economics 2

Topic Tracking: Growing Up 1

Francie's mother, Katie Nolan, is a beautiful 29-year-old woman who works as a janitor to make money to raise her children. Francie's father, Johnny Nolan, is a singing waiter, the most handsome man in town, and a drunk. "Everyone said it was a pity that a slight pretty woman like Katie Nolan had to go out scrubbing floors. But what else could she do considering the husband she had, they said." Chapter 1, pg. 10

Topic Tracking: Economics 3

Francie gives her money to Katie, who habitually puts it in a tin can. Katie tells Francie to go to the store to get food for lunch. On her way to the store, a small gang of youngsters teases the two Nolan children. They won't let Francie play ball because she is a girl. Francie and Neeley fight with them and then run home with the bread they bought. Johnny does not come home to eat, typically, and Francie is allowed to throw away part of her meal so that she doesn't always feel poor. Katie lets the kids throw away food and coffee on occasion so that they know what it's like to feel rich.

Topic Tracking: Economics 4

Chapter 2 and 3

Francie loves the library and reads a book a week. She plans to read all the books in the library from A to Z, and at age eleven, is still on the Bs. The library is her freedom and her exploration; she thinks that all the books in the world are in her local branch. She reads the books on the stoop of her house and observes all the people in the neighborhood, including the very flirtatious, young Flossie Gaddis.

Chapter 3

As Francie finishes her book, Johnny comes home excited to see her and is curious as to the whereabouts of Katie. He is singing "Molly Malone" as usual while Katie is at a show with her sister, Sissy. Francie adores her father and remembers visiting him at work. He shows off his proud sticker for the Waiters' Union and tells Francie about work and how he is not cut out for it. He is a singing waiter with no regular job. He makes most of his money from tips. Everyone seems to love Johnny, although everyone also knows (as well as Johnny himself) that his wife and children are too good for him.

"Francie knew that mama was a good woman. She knew. And papa said so. Then why did she like her father better than her mother? Why did she? Papa was no good. He said so himself. But she liked papa better." Chapter 1, pg. 33

Johnny tells Francie that if it weren't Katie Rommely, her mother, then it would have been Hildy O'Dair, her good friend, who made Johnny settle down. They got married young and now he has children. He never even wanted a family. He knows he is not a good father. He calls Francie his *Prima Donna* and gets ready in his white dickey and pearl studs for work. Francie beams with pride.

Topic Tracking: Love 1



Chapter 4 - 6

Francie drops by Flossie Gaddis' to look at the costumes that she wears once a week to cover up her damaged arm. She works in a kid glove factory to make money for her family; her brother Henny, who is dying of consumption, is in special need of help.

Topic Tracking: Growing Up 2

Chapter 5

Katie (mama) comes home with Aunt Sissy from the show. Sissy has magazines for Francie that she got from her factory. Sissy is her favorite aunt and very glamorous. She has been married three times and has had ten babies, all who have died. Sissy and Francie have a very special bond. Sissy works in a rubber factory and often brings presents for the children from work.

The Nolans live on all the different foods that Katie makes from stale bread. In the winter, sometimes they buy a pickle from the old Jew down the block. This special treat is always something to which Francie looks forward.

Chapter 6

Francie and Neeley visit the butcher on an errand for mama. They have specific instructions for round meat and slowly tell the butcher their mama's instructions, fearing a mistake. After Sunday dinner, Neeley plays outside with the neighborhood boys and Francie goes to confession with her orphan friend Maudie Donovan. When she comes home, Katie's sister, Aunt Evy, is sitting in the room with her husband Willie Flittman. Everyone has a fun time and Willie gets a little drunk. Johnny arrives home and stays up all night talking and reminiscing with Katie. Before they go to bed, Francie and Neeley read their habitual dose of literature. "Before they went to bed, Francie and Neeley had to read a page of the Bible and a page from Shakespeare. That was a rule. Mama used to read the two pages to them each night until they were old enough to read for themselves. To save time, Neeley read the Bible page and Francie read from Shakespeare." Chapter 6, pg. 49.

Topic Tracking: Education 1



Book 2, Chapter 7

In a flashback, the narrator tells the story of Katie and Johnny's courtship. Katie Rommely, who is of Austrian descent, works in a factory with her best friend Hildy O'Dair, who is of Irish descent and dating Johnny Nolan at the time. They go on a double date and Katie thinks Johnny is handsome and attractive. Katie realizes when she first dances with Johnny that she wants to be with him, and she chases after him until she gets him.

"Maybe that decision was her great mistake. She should have waited until some man came along who felt that way about her. Then her children would not have gone hungry; she would not have had to scrub floors for their living and her memory of him would have remained a tender shining thing. But she wanted Johnny Nolan and no one else and she set out to get him." Chapter 7, pg. 56

Topic Tracking: Love 2

In a tearful goodbye for the three, Johnny and Katie tell Hildy to go her way and that they will go their way together. Katie (age seventeen) loses her best friend and Johnny breaks up with his girlfriend. The two are married on New Year's Day of 1901 after knowing each other for only four months.

Topic Tracking: Growing Up 3

Katie's father, Thomas Rommely, never forgives her for marrying. He fled Austria to avoid the army, and refused to speak English once he moved to America. He expects his daughters to work for him. Consequently, they hate him. Katie's mother, Mary Rommely, is a strong, religious woman with a melodious voice and a mouthful of stories to tell. Despite this passion for communication, she cannot read or write. She is the strength in Katie's family. Katie's oldest sister, Sissy, is very flirtatious, sensual, and fun loving. She constantly seeks love in men, is on her third marriage, desperately wants children, but has lost ten babies to stillbirth. Eliza is the second daughter and the only one who lacks the fire and beauty of the other girls. She enters a convent while Francie is young and does not re-enter the novel. Evy is the third girl who also marries young. She wants children and loves music. All four women have a profound affect on Francie and she looks to each of them for guidance.

"Those were the Rommely women: Mary, the mother, Evy, Sissy, and Katie, her daughters, and Francie, who would grow up to be a Rommely woman even though her name was Nolan. They were all slender, frail creatures with wondering eyes and soft fluttery voices...But they were made out of thin invisible steel." Chapter 7, pg. 68



Chapter 8

The Nolan family comes from Ireland. Ruthie Nolan took care of her four sons after her husband died. All of them leave school early to make money; all are handsome and musical; all seem to duck out of marriage; all are singing waiters. The Nolan name is dying out because of the reckless behavior of the men. Everyone leaves Ruthie; her three other sons, Andy, Georgie, and Frankie, die before the age of 35, and Johnny gets married to Katie.

Francie is the product of the two families: Rommely and Nolan. She has the passion and weaknesses of her father's side and the strength and love of life of her mother's side. "She was made up of all of these good and these bad things...She was the books she read in the library...Part of her life was made from the tree growing rankly in the yard. She was the bitter quarrels she had with her brother whom she loved dearly. She was Katie's secret, despairing weeping. She was the shame of her father staggering home drunk...She was all of these things and of something more...It was something that had been born into her and her only" Chapter 8, pg. 71.



Chapter 9

After they are married, Katie and Johnny get a job taking care of a public school. They have fun pretending they are teachers. Katie marries Johnny because he can sing and she likes the way he looks. Once married, she sets out to change other things about him. Katie becomes pregnant and gives birth to Francie in a night of severe pain. In the same week of Francie's birth, Johnny finds out that he is fired from the school job because of neglect. He does not tell Katie the bad news, but is secretly terrified about supporting a family without an income. He asks Sissy about getting a job at the rubber factory in which she works.

Topic Tracking: Economics 5

Topic Tracking: Education 2

Mary speaks with her frightened daughter. Katie is worried about having a baby and looking after Johnny at the same time. "Oh, God, don't send me any more children or I won't be able to look after Johnny and I've got to look after Johnny. He can't look after himself" Chapter 9, pg. 81. She doesn't want her child to go through all the suffering she has and knows she will face in her future. Mary tells her that the baby's life won't be bad as long as she has education and imagination. She tells Katie to make a tin can bank and put five cents in it every day. She also tells Katie to read from Shakespeare and the Protestant Bible every day as well. Sissy gets both books for Katie. She takes one from the public library and the other from a hotel where she is sleeping with a lover.

Topic Tracking: Education 3

Topic Tracking: Growing Up 4



Chapter 10 and 11

People look at the baby, Francie, with pity because she looks unhealthy and skinny. As soon as Katie forces herself to make sure that her baby will have a better life than she does, she discovers that she is pregnant again. Johnny accepts this news as defeat and gets drunk. The baby's name is Cornelius, after a noble stage actor, and soon becomes known as Neeley. Katie's love is not shared equally.

"I must watch myself very carefully...I am going to love this boy more than the girl but I mustn't ever let her know. It is wrong to love one child more than the other but this is something that I cannot help." Chapter 10, pg. 94

Topic Tracking: Love 3

Katie starts to become independent and stoic, while Johnny drinks more and goes downhill. She is only eighteen and he is only twenty.

Chapter 11

Johnny celebrates his 21st birthday by drinking too much. Katie locks him in the bedroom to sober him up, but he only screams and throws a massive tantrum that gets the family thrown out of the apartment and neighborhood. Sissy comes over with whiskey between her breasts. She knows tenderness and more alcohol will soothe him. He falls asleep on her naked breast, like a baby with his mother. He is the child that she never had. Katie argues with Sissy about how she treats him like both a lover and a child. However, Sissy can never appear wrong in an argument, so Katie lets her continue to help Johnny.

Topic Tracking: Growing Up 5



Chapter 12 - 14

The Nolan family moves to Lorimer Street, which is still in Williamsburg, Brooklyn where they used to live. Although many of the husbands in the area are just as badly behaved as Johnny, Katie wants her family to be better. They move to a house where they get free rent in return for Katie's work as a janitress.

Topic Tracking: Economics 6

Chapter 13

The Nolans get used to their new, nicer surroundings. Francie continues to read Shakespeare and the Bible, but she still has no friends. She knows that the neighbors tease her because of her bizarre family, so she makes up imaginary friends. She watches the kids play games in the street, hearing them shun her. She likes music and thinks of becoming a street organ player or a tambourine player. She realizes that she won't get anywhere in life doing that and changes her focus.

Chapter 14

Sissy's sex scandals begin to weave into the Nolan's lives, causing them trouble and forcing them to move again. She first borrows a tricycle to give the kids a ride, only to be reprimanded by the owner. The police officer finds her attractive, so they chat and she is safe from the law. Then she leaves her special box with the kids. They get curious and open it. They tie together the condoms that were inside and hang them out the window. Johnny and Katie are ashamed when they see it and ban Sissy from entering their house. Although everyone says that she is bad, Katie insists that she has so much good within her.

Topic Tracking: Love 4

They move to Grand Street to a flat on the upstairs floor, where they have privilege to the roof. Francie tells Johnny that she's six going on seven and will start school the next year. She waits a year to attend so that she and Neeley can go together and support one another. Johnny remembers that he has been married for seven years and has had three homes. He says this will be his last. "Francie didn't notice that he said *my* last home instead of *our* last home" Chapter 14, pg. 122.



Book 3, Chapters 15 - 19

Nolan's new house is described in minute detail, from the bathtub to the airshaft. Francie notices these details and compares them to stories she has learned from the Bible and Shakespeare. The house is four feet from a school, where Francie is taunted by a girl who is slapping erasers. She is the teacher's pet and Francie learns about favoritism in education. The nicest room in the house is the parlor. There is a piano for the Nolans in the parlor because the previous owners had trouble moving it and asked Katie if she would watch it for them. Katie decides that Francie and Neeley will learn how to play. Johnny sings along with them. Francie gets used to the new place, but begins to feel different and older. "Francie sat on a chair and was surprised that it felt the same as it had in Lorimer Street. She felt different. Why didn't the chair feel different?" Chapter 15, pg. 131.

Topic Tracking: Education 4

Topic Tracking: Growing Up 6

Francie explores her new neighborhood and enjoys the stores. She especially likes the exotic store that sells spices, teas, and coffees, and is amazed at the Chinaman's dry-cleaning store. She discovers the concept of infinity as she looks through a magnifying glass.

Katie answers a card in a window for piano lessons. Katie convinces the teacher, Miss Lizzie Tynmore, to teach her for one hour in exchange for one hour of cleaning. She abides and teaches Katie piano as Francie and Neeley look on. After Miss Tynmore leaves, Katie teaches her children what she learns. All three learn to play piano for the price of one. Johnny tries to accomplish the same task for voice lessons with Miss Maggie Tynmore for Francie, but he fails in his exchange and the deal falls through.

Topic Tracking: Education 5

School-time rolls around and the kids need to be immunized by law. Many of the poor immigrants fear this routine. Katie works so she cannot take Francie and Neeley to the clinic. Katie feels bad, but knows this is the way it has to be. "Besides, she said to her conscience, it's a hard and bitter world. They've got to live in it. Let them get hardened young to take care of themselves." Chapter 18, pg. 142. They go alone to the clinic terrified of the needle. The doctor and nurse giving the shots are snobby and look down upon Francie because she is poor and dirty. She tells them what she thinks of them and leaves with more pain in her heart than in her arm. Katie explains her vision of vaccinations to them and scares them with horror stories of what might happen to them if they touched the wound. Johnny sings to Francie until she's calm.

Topic Tracking: Growing Up 7

School is not the dream that Francie imagines. It is overcrowded and gives special privileges to the wealthier children. Francie tries to make the best of this school. She



has wanted to go to school for so long. One day the teacher doesn't let Francie go to the bathroom and she ends up urinating right on the floor in the middle of class, only to be humiliated by everyone. Katie still won't let Sissy see the children, so she secretly surprises Francie after school with a soda. They talk and Francie tells Sissy what happened in school that day. The next morning Sissy pretends to be Francie's mother and tells the teacher, Miss Briggs, a story of lies that force her be kind to Francie and respectful of her needs. Sissy gives birth to another dead baby and Katie decides not to be as harsh on her as she has been in the past.

Topic Tracking: Education 6

Topic Tracking: Economics 7

Chapters 20 - 25

Epidemics of lice and mumps break out in the schools and Katie battles them fiercely. She scrubs the kids' hair and douses their heads with kerosene, forcing them to carry a horrid stench, while ignoring the teacher's orders to stop. Although Francie is shunned, she never gets sick. "She had become accustomed to being lonely. She was used to walking alone and to being considered 'different.' She did not suffer too much." Chapter 20, pg. 160. No matter how poorly she is being treated, Francie truly enjoys school because she likes being a part of a community and likes feeling safe. She loves the visiting music and art teachers, Mr. Morton and Miss Bernstone. She also learns to read and devise numbers. This discovery changes her view on life.

"From that time on, the world was hers for the reading. She would never be lonely again, never miss the lack of intimate friends. Books became her friends and there was one for every mood...On the day when she first knew she could read, she made a vow to read one book a day as long as she lived." Chapter 22, pg. 164

Francie explores a nicer neighborhood made up of mostly American born families, as opposed to her neighborhood of Irish, Welch, and English born families. She is the only American born child in her school. She decides she wants to attend this nicer school and Johnny writes a "white lie" letter to the principal saying that they are moving and she will need a transfer. Katie is upset with the danger it can put the family in, but she transfers schools nonetheless. People are much nicer there and she adores the beloved janitor, Mr. Jenson. She walks forty-eight blocks everyday to get there, but this school shows her that there are other attainable worlds out there aside from the one in which she is born. Everywhere Francie lives, she sees a tree growing in the yard with strong branches and soft leaves.

Topic Tracking: Education 7

Francie counts the years passing by the holidays instead of the seasons. She especially loves Halloween and Election Day, on which Katie and Johnny consistently argue about politics. Johnny loves the Democrats. The family attends a city social where Sergeant Michael McShane spots Katie and finds her attractive. Katie hates politicians, especially with the Democrats back in the office.

Topic Tracking: Love 5

Johnny takes Francie to Bushwick Avenue in Brooklyn, the mecca of politics and new wealth. They get excited about Democracy and are proud to live in Brooklyn.



Chapters 26 - 30

During Thanksgiving, Francie discovers her future as a writer. Her teacher in school is giving away a pie for charity and Francie raises her hand to say that she knows a poor family who wants it. Francie secretly knows how much Katie hates charity, but takes the cake nonetheless. On the way home, she eats it. The next day, she embellishes the story to the teacher about what happened to the pie. She admits in tears that she is lying; yet her teacher tells her that it is just imagination. She gives her advice: "In the future, when something comes up, you *tell* exactly how it happened but *write down for yourself* the way you think it should have happened. Tell the truth and write the story. Then you won't get mixed up. It was the best advice Francie every got." Chapter 26, pg. 196.

Topic Tracking: Education 8

Topic Tracking: Growing Up 8

At Christmas, there is a store that gives away the unsold Christmas trees to anyone who can catch one when thrown in the air by the owner. Francie and Neeley step out to catch a massive tree. Everyone laughs at them because of their small sizes and young ages. When the tree is thrown, they get hit and scraped. The owner bitterly lets them keep it because of their effort. They carry it home, happily surprising a sober Johnny and worrying a realistic Katie. She wants her children to be better than poor and be better than their surroundings. She realizes that education is the key, not necessarily money. "That's what Mary Rommely, her mother had been telling her all those years. Only her mother did not have the one clear word: education!" Chapter 27, pg. 204. She thinks that Francie will grow away from her. She reiterates that she does love Neeley more because he will not leave her. He also looks just like Johnny, who she knows will not be around much longer. The family has a nice Christmas together and exchange homemade presents.

Topic Tracking: Education 9

Topic Tracking: Economics 8

Aunt Evy gives Francie tickets to a Protestant Christmas show, where she sees a little girl named Mary onstage who wants to give away a pretty doll to a poor girl named Mary in the audience. Francie loses her pride and takes the doll, even though her name is not Mary. She plans to make truth of her lie by being confirmed and taking the name, Mary, as a middle name. Katie tells her that she is already christened 'Mary Frances Nolan.'

The neighborhood changes and Francie becomes interested in different things. Henny Gaddis dies and Maudie Donovan blossoms into a pubescent woman. Nothing is really changing except Francie. "Growing up spoiled a lot of things" Chapter 28, pg. 214. Growing up especially spoils the theater because Francie falls in love with lead actors and is disappointed in the endings of plays. She rewrites her own endings and decides to become a playwright instead of an actress.



Topic Tracking: Growing Up 9

Johnny decides to take the kids on a fishing trip to Canarsie with Little Tilly, the "forgotten" sister of Gussie, a four-year-old boy who still breastfeeds. Everything goes wrong and the kids are severely sunburned, malnourished, and dripping wet from the overturned boat. On the trip home, all three vomit on Johnny and his only suit is ruined. Katie is furious and tells him that he is unfit to raise children.

Francie is thirteen years old when she publishes her first story, "Winter Time," in her school's magazine. She has one copy and plans to show it to everyone in her family until she sees Joanna walking through the streets with her baby. Joanna is unmarried and therefore everyone shuns her by throwing stones at her, hitting her baby. Francie cannot understand the taunting from the women. She recalls her mother telling her to remember Joanna and to let her story be a lesson to her. She puts her one magazine in the baby carriage for Joanna and always remembers what she saw. Joanna is not really a bad girl; she just wasn't smart enough to get her man to the altar. She thinks about women and decides she will never have a woman as a friend, aside from her aunts.

"Most women had the one thing in common: they had great pain when they gave birth to their children. This should make a bond that held them all together; it should make them love and protect each other against the man-world. But it was not so. It seemed like their great birth pains shrank their hearts and their souls. They stuck together for only one thing: to trample on some other woman." Chapter 29, pg. 234

Topic Tracking: Love 6

Topic Tracking: Growing Up 10



Chapters 31 - 36

In Francie's thirteenth year, war breaks out in Europe and a horse named Drummer falls in love with Aunt Evy, shoeing her husband, Willie Flittman. Francie also begins a diary by attempting to document everything that happens in the news by creating fictional heroines. She becomes curious about sex, for now she is a teenager.

Topic Tracking: Love 7

Topic Tracking: Growing Up 11

A young girl is found murdered by a pervert, so Johnny gets worried and borrows a gun from his watchman friend at the bank. The family keeps it under his pillow. Francie walks home from school and is stopped in the stairway by the pervert with his pants open. He touches her leg and tries to do more with her, but before he can harm her, Katie grabs the gun and shoots him. Everyone is physically safe, although Francie wants her leg cut off where the pervert's privates touched her. Katie gets a pat on the back by the police. Sergeant McShane returns to her house to give her a reward for catching the man. He has had bad luck in marriage, too, and wants Katie. He says, "She'll be my wife, someday, God and she willin." Chapter 33, pg. 259.

Topic Tracking: Love 8

A young Italian girl named Lucia gets into trouble. Sissy finds out that her parents are locking her in a dark room and only feeding her bread and water with hopes of the baby's death. Sissy feigns a pregnancy and takes the baby from Lucia as soon as she is born. Sissy's husband doesn't believe that Sissy is truly pregnant, but she holds to her story so well that everyone has to accept Sissy's story. She finally gets the child that she has yearned for so long. She names her Sarah, but everyone calls her Sissy.

Topic Tracking: Love 9

Johnny keeps disappearing from the family, coming home late, and to their surprise, sober. He stops singing "Molly Malone" and loses his physical vigor and strength at age thirty-four. One evening, the family reminisces about Christmas pasts. Johnny comes home miserable because the Waiters Union fires him for being a drunk and a bum. The entire family grows worried, for he has been trying to stay sober for some time now. Three days later, Johnny dies. He leaves the house and is found unconscious and sick of pneumonia by Sergeant McShane. Katie stays with him at the hospital until he passes and then goes home to tell her children. "Frances stood numb. There was no feeling of surprise or grief. There was no feeling of anything. What mama just said had no meaning" Chapter 36, pg. 277. Katie buys an insurance package of \$200 which all goes to funeral costs, mourning clothes, and the burial lot of land. She pries open the tin can to get the money to pay for the rest of it. The family now owns a bit of land, which was the purpose of the bank in the first place. Francie goes to the barbershop to collect her father's cup and Aunt Evy and Aunt Sissy comfort Katie. Katie is pregnant with a third child.

Topic Tracking: Economics 10



Chapters 37 - 42

Francie and Neeley struggle with their father's death and wonder if he deserved to die. Francie tells Neeley that she doesn't believe in God anymore and the family skips over Christmas and Neeley's thirteenth birthday. Neeley gets his own room and Katie and Francie share a room. She tells them, "From now on I am your mother and your father." Chapter 37, pg. 293.

Topic Tracking: Growing Up 12

Katie cashes in the children's insurance policies for money to get them through another few months. She is very pregnant and cannot work, so the family's financial situation is grave. She does not want to take Francie out of school to work because she wants her to be the first Nolan to graduate. McGarrity, the salon owner who allowed Johnny to drink himself to death, wants to help Katie. He misses Johnny as well, and has money with little happiness. His wife Mae, is not the homely type, and he is envious of Johnny's family. He offers both the children jobs after school with a generous salary. Now, the family will have enough money to feed and clothe themselves *and* Francie will get to stay in school.

Topic Tracking: Education 10

Topic Tracking: Economics 11

Sissy seems different to Francie. She realizes that Sissy has changed because she now has a baby and is satisfied. Sissy sews confirmation clothes for Neeley and Francie. They appear in their first photograph and Francie is worried that she is not as attractive as Neeley. Her compositions also have also become more morose since her father died and her teacher, Miss Garnder, reprimands Francie for the themes of poverty, drunkenness, and death. Francie feels resentful because she looks down upon her. Miss Garnder thinks that she is talking to Francie for her own good and that some day she will thank her for her advice. "Francie wished adults would stop telling her that. Already the load of thanks in the future was weighing her down. She figured she'd have to spend the best years of her womanhood hunting up people to tell them that they were right and to thank them." Chapter 39, pg. 318. Francie speaks with her mother and for once they become close. Katie asks Francie to stay close to her in this important time before the birth of the baby. "'Maybe,' thought Francie, 'she doesn't love me as much as she loves Neeley. But she needs me more than she needs him and I guess being needed is almost as good as being loved. Maybe better.'" Chapter 39, pg. 326.

Topic Tracking: Growing Up 13

Katie gives birth to baby Laurie, named after a song Johnny used to sing under harsh, painful circumstances. Francie is by her side the entire time, helping her through the pain. Evy and Sissy assist in the birth because she does not have enough money for a midwife. Laurie is a good baby who sleeps most of the time. Katie works such bizarre hours to take care of the baby, that Francie never sees her. She and Neeley continue to



work at McGarrity's. She overhears all the talk about possible prohibition, women's suffrage, automobiles, name changes, and more. "And Francie, pausing in her sweeping to listen, tried to put everything together and tried to understand a world spinning in confusion. And it seemed to her that the whole world changed in between the time that Laurie was born and graduation day." Chapter 41, pg. 342. Katie goes to Neeley's graduation, while Sissy goes to Francie's, and Evy stays with Laurie. Francie surprisingly receives two dozen red roses on her desk, like every other girl, from her father. He had told Sissy two years earlier to do so. They all celebrated in an ice cream store and felt like millionaires after letting the waiter keep the change. Albie Seedmore asks Francie out on her first date to see a movie.

Topic Tracking: Love 10



Book 4, Chapters 43 - 45

Francie works in a factory with other girls her age wrapping wires around flowers. They tease her until she laughs at another boy and fits in.

"This could be a whole life,' she thought. 'You work eight hours a day covering wires to earn money to buy food and to pay for a place to sleep that you can keep living to come back to cover more wires. Some people are born and kept living just to come to this...Maybe she'd never have more education than she had at that moment. Maybe all her life she'd have to cover wires.'" Chapter 43, pg. 358

Topic Tracking: Growing Up 14

Neeley works in Manhattan as an errand boy for a broker friend of Sissy's, John. They present Katie their first week's pay of ten dollars total in a glorious and proud celebration. Francie gets a fifty-cent a week allowance, while Neeley gets to keep his tips just like his father. He looks more and more like Johnny each day.

Topic Tracking: Economics 12

Francie applies to be a clerk in the Model Office Clipping Bureau office in New York because she was laid off with everyone else from the factory for seasonal work. She lies about her age by saying that she is sixteen (when she is only fourteen), goes on the interview in her new mature clothes and hair pinned up, and wins the job. She becomes the fastest newspaper reader, and the most underpaid, despite her decent salary. She is divided between the class system; she is both an educated reader and a common worker. She is disappointed in New York and desires to go to high school, even though she is offered Miss Armstrong's coveted position of city paper reader with a raise of twenty dollars a week. Katie can only afford to send one child back to school and she chooses Neeley because he doesn't want to go. She knows Francie will find a way to return to her education, even though it hurts her now. Both Francie and Neeley are furious because Francie wants to go to school and Neeley wants to continue working. Francie feels so old because she has to be sixteen, although she is only fourteen and thinks she'll be too old to go back to high school any time later than now. Katie and Francie fight and try to make up as they analyze themselves. "And that's where the whole trouble is,' thought Francie. 'We're too much alike to understand each other because we don't even understand our own selves. Papa and I were too different persons and we understood each other. Mama understands Neeley because he's different from her.'" Chapter 44, pg. 381. Katie sets up a bank account for Francie and puts five dollars a week in it for her future college education.

Topic Tracking: Education 11

The Nolans open their new tin can bank that Neeley and Francie established when they began working, to go Christmas shopping and to buy Katie a new non-mourning hat.

They reminisce about past holidays and wonder if they are forgetting Johnny. They go to church, think about Catholicism, and pray for Johnny.



Chapters 46 - 48

The family brings in the new year, 1917, happily, with a little drink for everyone. Katie is worried that they will have their father's take of the bottle, but they dislike alcohol and she is relieved. Francie misses Johnny, but sees so much of him in Neeley that she is happy. She wishes for male companionship. Sissy falls in love with her husband John, whose actual name is Steve, after five years of marriage because the newspapers printed a story that her first husband was just killed in a fire. They were never officially divorced, so Sissy and Steve get a divorce from her other husbands immediately and remarry in the Church. Sissy also discovers that her baby, the one she feigned pregnancy and took from Lucia, looks just like Steve. She thinks it really is his baby, but still wants to try to have another one of her own despite her growing age.

Topic Tracking: Love 12

War is declared and it changes everyone's lives. Prices go up, Francie loses her job, but soon gets another one in a Communications Corporation as a typist and operator. She plans to live every day to its fullest since the war started. "Let me be something every minute of every hour of my life. Let me be gay; let me be sad. Let me be cold; let me be warm. Let me be hungry...have too much to eat. Let me be ragged or well dressed. Let me be sincere-be deceitful. Let me be truthful; let me be a liar. Let me be honorable and let me sin. Only let me be something every blessed minute. And when I sleep, let me dream all the time so that not one little piece of living is ever lost." Chapter 48, pg. 413. Since Francie works at night, Katie wants her to go to high school during the day. She refuses to do so by saying that she has already learned so much from reading newspapers everyday, that high school would be too simple. She want to go to Brooklyn Heights College for summer school, so Katie takes some of her money from the bank and gets an application for her saying that she has been privately-educated. Francie can hardly believe that she is in college when her grandparents could not even read or write.

Topic Tracking: Growing Up 15

Topic Tracking: Education 13



Chapters 49 - 51

Francie adores college and falls in love with Ben Blake, a good-looking, intelligent, nineteen-year-old boy (also a writer and an athlete) who works in a law firm. He is prepping for his future as a lawyer and politician, although his heart lies with the stage. The two study together and become great friends. He leaves when school is over and tells her that he will be there for her if she ever needs him. She wants to enroll immediately in college, but doesn't have the money and doesn't have the high school diploma to enroll for free. She is put on the day shift as an operator and plans to study hard to pass the entrance examinations for the following year. She is very lonely and misses Ben.

Topic Tracking: Love 12

Topic Tracking: Education 12

Sissy gives birth to her eleventh baby. This time, Steve insists on going to a hospital and using a Jewish doctor. He believes they are kinder and smarter. The baby is born blue and still, but Dr. Aaronstein revives it and it lives. Its name is Steven Aaron and has a big sister Sarah (Sissy) to have as companionship, just like Neeley and Francie. Willie Flittman, Evy's husband, tries to enroll in the army, but is rejected. He believes himself a failure and tries to become a one-man band. Steve gets him a job at his munitions factory. The family has enough money to celebrate Christmas in style and still give some money to the Tynmore girls for helping them with music all these years. Francie wants to send Ben a Christmas card and Katie tells her to do so.

Topic Tracking: Economics 13



Chapters 52 - 54

Francie helps out a female acquaintance from work by going on a date with her fiancée's friend. His name is Lee Rhynor and he is tall and gangly. The two hit it off and talk for hours about how Brooklyn is magical, their hopes, dreams, fears, and future. He says he is engaged, but continues doting on Francie. They see each other for days until he tells her he must leave for war. He tells her he loves her, wants to marry her, does not love the woman to whom he is engaged, and that he wants to sleep with her before he goes to war where he might die. She tells him she loves him and would sleep with him, but not now. They embrace and Francie is kissed for the first time. She tells him she will wait until he returns to marry him. "And he asked for her whole life as simply as he'd ask for a date. And she promised away her whole life as simply as she'd offer a hand in greeting or farewell." Chapter 52, pg. 450. Francie works hard all week, but writes him daily as she promised. She finally gets a letter; however, it is a letter from his wife. He had played a trick on her by pretending to be in love with her and married his fiancée when he returned to Pennsylvania. Francie is heartbroken and cries to her mother. She tells her everything that happened, including the fact that she thinks she should have slept with him. Katie is mortified of the cruelty enacted to her now grown daughter. "It's come at least...the time when you can no longer stand between your children and heartache...they walk out in all innocence and they walk right into the grief that you'd give your life to spare them." Chapter 53, pg. 453. Francie starts to write a letter to Ben telling him that she needs him, but crumples it up wanting someone to need *her* instead.

Topic Tracking: Love 13

Topic Tracking: Growing Up 16

Katie tells the children that Sergeant McShane is visiting them in a week and that she has a feeling that he wants to marry her. She wants to get their opinions on him as a father beforehand. He comes over and reminds them that his wife died a year ago and Johnny died two and a half years ago and that he wants to marry Katie. He very respectfully and graciously tells them that has over ten thousand a year in income and will happily put the children through college and wants to legally adopt Laurie. He doesn't expect Francie and Neeley to call him father at all. Katie accepts because she thinks he is a good man and also misses having the love of a man. She will never forget Johnny and neither will Francie and Neeley. And although Laurie will have a much easier life than they did, Francie and Neeley pity her for missing out on the fun and the strength that they built struggling in their youth.

Topic Tracking: Love 14

Topic Tracking: Growing Up 17



Book 5, Chapters 55 - 56

Francie works for the last time as an operator and gets ready to start college at the University of Michigan in the Fall. Grandma Rommely has died and Willie Flittman has run away from Aunt Evy to work on his one-man band. Francie thinks about the past years:

"But, then, so many things seemed like dreams to her. That man in the hallway that day: Surely that had been a dream! The way McShane had been waiting for mother all those years - a dream. Papa dead. For a long time that had been a dream but now papa was like someone who had never been. The way Laurie seemed to come out of a dream - born the living child of a father five months dead. Brooklyn was a dream. All the things that happened there just couldn't happen. It was all dream stuff. Or was it all real and true and was it that she, Francie, was the dreamer?" Chapter 55, pg. 467

Ben tells her that the Midwest is a good place for her to explore her intellect. Katie agrees. However, Francie loves that she belongs somewhere: Brooklyn. Ben also tells Francie that in five years he wants to marry her if she is willing. He is amazing, but he is not Lee. Francie wonders about him, whether he is alive or dead. She knows that Ben is the one for her despite her passionate feelings about Lee. She wants him to need her above all else.

Topic Tracking: Love 15

Topic Tracking: Education 14

Katie gets ready for her wedding. She gives Evy \$200 of the \$1000 McShane gives to her for her wedding present, because that is the sum Evy would have collected from Willie's life insurance. They believe him to be dead. Francie visits all the places of her youth: the library, Carney's junk store, her old school, the closed McGarrity's pub. She put all her belongings in a box: *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, one diploma, four stories, Johnny's barber shop cup, the photograph from her confirmation, and her library card. She plans to reopen them in 1967, fifty years from that date. Neeley runs home to say goodbye to Francie before she leaves for college. He teases her about her looks, knowing secretly that he is extremely handsome and talented. "So like papa...so like papa, she thought. But he had more strength in his face than papa had had." Chapter 56, pg. 481. She and Ben go to a play on their last night together before he leaves for college. She gets ready in front of the window and looks out at a ten year old girl named Florry Wendy. Florry reminds Francie of herself when she was a little girl. The tree that grew in the yard has been cut down. A new tree grows in its place.

Topic Tracking: Economics 14

Topic Tracking: Growing Up 18

"A new tree had grown from the stump and its trunk had grown along the ground until it reached a place where there were no wash lines above it. Then it had started to grow



towards the sky again. Annie, the fir tree, that the Nolans had cherished with waterings and manurings, had long since sickened and died. But this tree in the yard - this tree that men chopped down...this tree that they built a bonfire around, trying to burn up its stump - this tree had lived!" Chapter 56, pg. 483