I. Summary Of A Tree Grows In Brooklyn

Francie Nolan is eleven years old in 1912, living in a very poor section of Brooklyn called Williamsburg. But hold on, this is no gloomy tale of the hardships of poverty—in fact, the first sentence of the novel lets us know that Francie is a pretty person. To her, Williamsburg is serene, especially on easy breezy Saturdays in the summer. One of the first things the narrator writes about is the “Tree of Heaven,” a really tough tree that can grow in terrible conditions, even out of cement. One of these trees is growing in the yard behind Francie’s tenement apartment building. Its leaves surround her fire escape, and she loves to sit out there and feel like she is living in a tree. So right away, Francie and this tree are connected, see? Can we expect her to be one tough mama, like the tree? Maybe.

The novel is divided into five different books. In Book One, we go with Francie from place to place on a serene Saturday. Even though nothing extraordinary happens on this day, we learn many things about her, her family, and the culture she lives in. We meet Mama, Papa, a couple aunts, and walk through the streets with her.

Francie spends the day:

- Cashing in some scraps she and her brother collected at the junkie for some pennies
- Running errands for her mother
- Tagging along with her brother
• Visiting her favorite place, the library
• Ironing and chatting with Papa
• Talking with her favorite Aunt Sissy
• Going to Confession
• Seeing Aunt Evy and her mopey husband Uncle Willy
• Doing her required reading
• Listening to Papa sing Molly Malone as he comes up the stairs from work.
• Hanging out with her family in the middle of the night
• Falling asleep in the front room to the comforting sounds of Mama and Papa chatting all night. And there you have it, folks—A typical serene Saturday in the summer.

Book Two flashes back twelve years to when Johnny and Katie first meet and brings us up to when Francie is six years old. Here we get lot of background scoop about both sides of the family and how they influence who Francie is. As newlyweds, Katie and Johnny have a blissful first year, but things get tough soon enough. Our Francie has a tough first year, and many people don’t think she will live for very long because she is so small and sickly. Then Papa loses his job, and Mama is pregnant again by the time Francie is three months old. Yikes. The Nolans move a couple times because of scandals and embarrassments caused by Papa’s drinking and Aunt Sissy’s behavior. They have no money to afford a new place, but that doesn’t stop Mama. She finds a place where she can work as the janitress in exchange for paying rent because she knows that she can’t depend on Johnny. He spends a lot of time drinking these days.
Book Three, the lengthiest book, follows Francie’s life till she is fourteen years old. We learn a lot about Francie’s start in school, which is nothing close to the magical land where she gets to clap the teacher’s erasers outside like she expected. Instead, school is an overcrowded and mean place where the wealthier students are obviously preferred by their teachers. And thanks to Mama’s fear of sickness, Francie has no chance of making any friends—the girl reeks from getting her hair combed with kerosene and wearing a garlic necklace to ward off various ailments.

When Francie is thirteen, a sexual predator lurks in the shadows of Williamsburg. Several girls are molested, and one is even murdered on her same block. Just when things start to calm down, the predator strikes again. This time, his victim is Francie. Soon after this, things go downhill fast for Papa. In an attempt to sober up, he dies from pneumonia and alcoholism. It seems like all hope is lost, and Francie will have to drop out of school to work, but then Johnny saves the day. McGarrity, a saloon owner who misses Johnny, wants the kids to work for a few hours after school each day. This extra money helps them through the birth of the littlest Nolan, Annie Laurie.

Book Four focuses on Francie’s working life. In just the few months after graduating from grade school she worked in an artificial flower factory, was laid off, and found a new job at a clipping bureau as a reader. As September approaches, Mama decides only Neeley can go to high school this year. Francie is mad, but she has a plan—she is determined to study for an admissions test to bypass the high school requirement altogether. Katie gets a marriage proposal
from Sergeant McShane. This is a very good break for them all, as he is financially able to take care of Katie and her children. He wants to pay for them all to go to college and wants to adopt Laurie.

Book five, Mama gets married, and Francie, who passes her entrance exam, is off to start at the University of Michigan. The boy from the summer college classes, Ben, gives Francie a promise ring. He wants to marry her in five years. She is not so sure. Maybe she will, but she has a while to think about it. She looks out the window as she prepares for her date with him and notices that her favorite tree that was cut down has started to grow a new tree from its stump. She also notices a little girl watching her get ready just like she used to do when she was little. She whispers “Good-bye, Francie” and closes the window (56.152).
II. Biography Of Betty Smith

Elisabeth Lillian Wehner

Born : December 15, 1896
      Brooklyn, New York, United States
Died : January 17, 1972 (aged 75)
      Shelton, Connecticut, United States
Pen name : Betty Smith
Occupation : Writer
Education : University of Michigan
Notable Works : A Tree Grows In Brooklyn

Betty Smith, the daughter of German immigrants, grew up poor in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn. After stints writing features for newspapers, reading plays for the Federal Theater Project, and acting in summer stock, Smith moved to Chapel Hill, North Carolina under the auspices of the W.P.A. While there in 1943, she published A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, her first novel. Smith's other novels include Tomorrow Will be Better (1947), Maggie-Now, (1958) and Joy in the Morning (1963). She also had a long career as a dramatist, writing one-act and full-length plays for which she received both the Rockefeller Fellowship and the Dramatist Guild Fellowship. She died in 1972. (From the publisher.)
Betty Smith was an American author, born in Brooklyn, New York to German immigrants. She grew up poor in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. These experiences served as the framework to her first novel, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, which was published in 1943. Having married early George H. E. Smith, a fellow Brooklynite, she moved with him to Ann Arbor, Michigan, while he pursued his law degree at the University of Michigan. At this time, she gave birth to two girls and waited until they were in school so she could complete her higher education. Although Smith had not finished high school, the university allowed her to enroll in classes anyway. There she honed her skills in journalism, literature, writing, and drama, winning a prestigious Hopwood Award. She was a student in the classes of Professor Kenneth Thorpe Rowe.

In 1938 she divorced her George Smith and moved to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where she married Joseph Jones in 1943. It was at this time that *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* was published. She teamed with George Abbott to write the book for the 1951 musical adaptation of the same name. Throughout her life, Smith worked as a dramatist, receiving many awards and fellowships including the Rockefeller Fellowship, the Dramatists Guild Fellowship, and the Hopwood Award for her work in drama. *(From Wikipedia.)* Elizabeth Lillian Wehner is born December 15, 1896, in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, New York, and christened at Holy Trinity Church. She is the daughter of John and Catherine Wehner, German immigrants, who married February 16, 1896. Her parents call her Lizzie or Littie, and her friends refer to her as Elizabeth or Beth. She begins calling herself Betty in 1938. Completes eighth grade at P.S. 23 in the Greenpoint
neighborhood of Brooklyn in 1910 and leaves school at age 14 to work. Works at a succession of jobs from 1910 to 1915, including at a factory making tissue flowers and at a clipping bureau, where she reads 200 newspapers a day. Attends Girl's High School, 1915 to 1917. She is editor of the school newspaper. Elizabeth's mother marries Michael Keogh in 1918. Elizabeth takes her mother's new husband's last name, becoming Elizabeth Keogh. Elopes with George Smith, June 6, 1919, moving to Ann Arbor, Michigan.

From 1927 to 1930, Elizabeth enrolls at the University of Michigan. She also takes playwriting classes and begins writing plays, including *Wives-in-Law* and *A Day's Work*. In 1930, Elizabeth is awarded the Avery Hopwood Award, for her play *Jonica Starrs*. Attends Yale University Drama School from 1931 to 1934. Elizabeth has two one-act plays produced, *Mannequin's Maid* and *Blind Alley* in 1932. In 1933, Elizabeth and George Smith legally separate. She falls in love with Bob Finch, a fellow playwriting student at Yale. In 1937, Elizabeth wins a Berkeley Playmakers award for her play *So Gracious in the Time*. She wins the same award in 1938 for *Three Comments on a Martyr*. Elizabeth and George divorce in 1938, and she begins calling herself Betty Smith.

In 1939, Betty receives a $1,200 Rockefeller Fellowship. In 1940, she receives a $1,000 Rockefeller & Dramatist Guild Award. Betty begins writing an autobiographical novel in the late 1930s, which will eventually become *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, published in 1943. Twentieth Century Fox purchases the film rights, with half the money going to the publisher, Harper & Brothers. Finch drinks to excess and is jealous of Betty's success. Their relationship ends, and he