***The Secret Life of Bees***

## Study Guide - Student’s Copy

### Chapter One

chrome – silver

seep – to leak

paradise – heaven

insomniac – a person who has problems

sleeping

orneriness – bad temper

pulsating – throbbing

herringbone – a pattern like fish bones

conjure – to create

disjointed – unconnected

impersonating – pretending to be

tailspin – a spinning crash

dollops – small piles

imbecile – an idiot

carousing – partying

magnitude – large size

smirking – smiling smugly

gouged – cut out

abdomen – the stomach

grits – a type of grain

pining – longing

lure – to entice

snuff – powdered tobacco

scalded – burned

agitation – worry; excitement

motes – spots

sashaying – walking with style

unperturbed – unworried

recoil – to draw back

1. What is happening in the exposition of the story?
2. Who is the narrator of the story?
3. The narrator makes an allusion about the bees on page 2. What does she allude to and why?
4. Lily says that the bees could have stung her until she died, and it would not have been the worst thing to happen. What do you learn about her from this?
5. What does Lily hope would happen in Paradise?
6. Lily describes her mother’s death on pages 6, 7, and 8. She does not directly say so, but she implies that she caused her mother’s death. How did that happen?
7. Why does Lily “smell every perfume bottle they had”? (Pg. 6)
8. Why does Lily pick scabs and feel that she is “impersonating a girl”? (Pg. 9)
9. When Rosaleen stands up to T. Ray about the chick, Lily says, “his boots whispered *uncle* all the way down the hall.” (Pg. 12) What does she mean? What literary term is used in the quote?
10. What does her teacher tell Lily about her goal of going to beauty school?
11. Why does T. Ray tell Lilly about her mother before she starts school?
12. Lily alludes to Mr. Khrushchev and fallout shelters. People were afraid at that time that the Communists in Russia would drop atomic bombs. Why does Lily think a bomb may have been dropped?
13. What has actually claimed Rosaleen’s attention?
14. How does T. Ray punish Lily?
15. On page 26, Lily says that she “understood that a new rooftop would do wonders” for her. What does she mean?
16. What does Rosaleen plan to do?
17. Why has Lily captured a jar of bees?
18. What else is special about the day Rosaleen is going to register to vote?
19. Lily hints at things to come. What sentence foreshadows the action?
20. What does Rosaleen steal from the church?
21. Why does Lily say that Rosaleen “had less sense than I’d dreamed”? (Pg. 31)
22. What does Rosaleen do that causes the men to beat her?
23. What are Lily and Rosaleen arrested for?
24. Identify a simile from the chapter.
25. NOTES:

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### Chapter Two

vapor – steam

decapitate – to cut off the head

brazen – shameless

tremor – a shaking

beseeching – begging

mangy – like the disease that causes hair to

 fall out

hysterical – wildly upset

accommodate – to make room for

levee – a dam

1. Lily says to Rosaleen, “What can they do to you with a policeman right here?” (Pg. 35) What happened immediately afterward?
2. Why does Lily say “nearly did me in”? (Pg. 37)
3. What two things does the conversation between Lily and T. Ray on pages 37, 38, and 39 reveal?
4. What does Lily believe will “sink [her] forever”? (Pg. 40)
5. Lily alludes to Thomas Edison when she talks about her father’s ability to think of punishments. What does she mean?
6. What is the meaning of the metaphor of the jar: “Lily Melissa Owens, your jar is open”? (Pg. 41)
7. What gives Lily the idea to go to Tiburon?
8. Discuss what this quote reveals about Lily and about the author: “Pious people have always gotten on my nerves.” (Pg. 44)
9. Consider the description of the hospital on page 45. What does it reveal about the town of Sylvan?
10. Why is Lily angry with Rosaleen?
11. Lily says that she belongs in a reform school or juvenile detention. Why does she think so?
12. What do Rosaleen and Lily eat for supper?
13. On page 52, Rosaleen says, “I guess I can go to my grave now, because I’ve seen it all.” What does she mean?
14. Why does Rosaleen get angry with Lily?
15. Why does Lily call Rosaleen “dumb”? (Pg. 54)
16. Consider the description of Rosaleen on page 55 and Lily’s thought: “Mother, forgive.” What does this tell you about Lily’s relationship with Rosaleen?
17. Explain the importance of Lily’s ability to lie.
18. Identify two similes from the chapter.
19. NOTES:

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### Chapter Three

elusive – hard to find

iridescent – sparkling

salvation – an act of saving, usually from sin

anointed – holy

biding – waiting

pesticides – bug killers

situated – placed

barricade – a wall

speculating – thinking about

Madonna – Mary, the mother of Jesus

consternation – alarmed amazement

1. Lily alludes to Thoreau’s *Walden Pond*, in which Henry David Thoreau chose to live alone, as simply as he could. What about this appeals to Lily?
2. Lily describes her church’s attitude toward Catholics. Why do you think the author chose to include this information?
3. What do you think is the significance of Rosaleen’s odd dream?
4. What does Lily’s question and Rosaleen’s answer about the Civil Rights Act reveal about them?
5. Why does Lily look to the crop duster for a sign? What does she hope to see?
6. How does Lily explain her presence in town to the storekeeper?
7. What does Lily steal, and why?
8. Lily realizes “there is nothing but mystery in the world....” (Pg. 63) Why does she think so?
9. Why does Rosaleen say Lily’s life has “gone straight to hell”? (Pg. 64) Does she mean it?
10. Lily looks for wanted posters and news stories about Rosaleen’s jailbreak. What is funny about her thanking God for the “poor news reporting” when she does not find any news about them? (Pg. 66)
11. NOTES:

**YOU WILL TURN IN CHAPTERS 1 – 3 WHEN YOU TAKE THE VOCAB TEST OVER CHAPTERS 1 - 3**

### Chapter Four

mute – unable to speak

portal – a doorway

feeble – weak

simultaneously – at the same time

precisely – exactly

corrugated – ridged

pathetic – sad

flounced – walk angrily

cultured –polite and civilized

kin – relatives

sweltering – very hot

paranoid – crazy

meander – wander

1. Lily believes her “body knows things.” (Pg. 69) What does she think her body knows?
2. Why is Lily’s thought about the black Mary, “...she could straighten you out if
necessary,” both wonderful and terrifying? (Pg. 70)
3. Why does May begin to sing “Oh! Susanna”?
4. How does Rosaleen’s behavior as they walk across the rainy lawn contrast with her behavior when she talked about the *Civil Rights Act* in Chapter 3?
5. What does Lily say is the secret of a good lie?
6. Why does Lily say “...my skin had never felt so white to me”? (Pg.78)
7. Why does May have a piece of paper in her wailing wall which says, “Birmingham, Sept 15, four little angels dead?” (Pg. 80)
8. NOTES:

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### Chapter Five

consolation – comfort

dabs – puts, places

swabbed – cleaned

bona fide – genuine

ambrosia – a drink of the gods

serenade – to sing a song for

bristled – angry

revelation – a sudden knowledge, usually from a spiritual source

righteous indignation – anger in a good

 cause

integration – combining white and black

vigilante – self-appointed police

orthodox – traditional

eclectic – many and different

outlandish – strange

etiquette – proper manners

immunity – could not be hurt

sedative – a sleeping pill

wailing – crying

willies – shivers

ricocheted – echoed

inkblot – a type of psychiatric test

1. Why does May begin to sing “Oh! Susanna” again?
2. How does the “honey song” say “everything” about living in the pink house? (Pg. 83)
3. What does August say to her that delights Lily?
4. Why does Rosaleen say May is “a bona fide candidate for the nuthouse”? (Pg. 85)
5. How does Lily describe June?
6. What does June say that is a “revelation” to Lily? What does Lily allude to in her reaction when she says she has “righteous indignation”? (Pg. 87)
7. What does Lily conclude about color when she goes outside? How is her expression of her thought indicative of the author’s sense of humor?
8. Why does Lily feel uncomfortable when they are watching TV?
9. Why does Lily think August told her the story of Beatrix the nun?
10. What is the most important bee yard rule, according to August?
11. Why is Lily happy to have made August laugh?
12. Explain the significance of Lily’s wondering about May’s sensitivity: “Would it divide the hurt in two, make it lighter to bear, the way feeling someone’s joy seemed to double it?” (Pg. 95)
13. What happened to April?
14. Lily says that she knew the world was not fair long before she turned eleven. What does she mean?
15. What is the Wailing Wall?
16. Why is Rosaleen jealous?
17. What does Lily put into the Wailing Wall?
18. NOTES:

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### Chapter Six

percolator – a coffee maker

jilted – rejected by a lover

ingenious – clever

deliverance – rescue

constant – reliable

hibernate – a long sleep

1. Why will June not get married?
2. What is the number one question in South Carolina, and why is it asked?
3. Who are the “Daughters of Mary?”
4. August reads the Bible verses attributed to Mary Why are these verses especially appropriate for black people?
5. What is the miracle of “Our Lady of Chains”? How did she get her name?
6. Why does Lily not touch Mary’s heart?
7. According to the book, “you can never underestimate the power of cutthroat competition.” (Pg. 113) What does this mean?
8. Why is August sad at the thought of a rocket landing on the moon?
9. NOTES:

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### Chapter Seven

cloister – a convent

bordello – a whorehouse

intrusion – an interruption

horde – a crowd

incessantly – non-stop

fidgeted – nervously moved around

hightailed – ran

excursion – a trip

hilarious – extremely funny

keel over – fall down

deciduous – trees that lose their leaves in

 fall

membrane – a thin covering

crystallizing – becoming crusty

remnants – the remains

1. “At my school they made fun of colored people’s lips and noses. I myself had laughed at these jokes, hoping to fit in.” (Pg. 116) Describe what you think about Lily’s thoughts in this passage. Does it surprise you that she laughed?
2. Why does Lily think she is headed for beauty school now?
3. Why do you think June is still so resentful of Lily?
4. Why does Zach get upset when Lily suggests he could be a professional player?
5. Zach says: “You gotta imagine what’s never been.” (Pg. 121) What does he mean?
6. What does Lily feel she needs to do before she can tell August the truth about herself? What is she afraid of?
7. What shocks Lily when she is riding with Zach? Why is this thought such a shock to Lily?
8. “Danger, I realized, was a thing you got used to.” (Pg. 126) What two dangers is Lily
facing when she says this?
9. Why does Lily cry?
10. Why does Zach tell her to go back to her side of the truck?
11. Where is Rosaleen going?
12. What makes Lily think for a minute that August might know who she is?
13. What do June and Neil argue about?
14. What is the metaphor Lily uses at the end of Pg. 133, and what does she mean?
15. What does Zach give to Lily?
16. “...[T]here are people who would kill boys like me for even looking at girls like you.” (Pg.135) Is Zach exaggerating?
17. NOTES:

**YOU WILL TURN IN CHAPTERS 4 – 7 WHEN YOU TAKE THE VOCAB TEST OVER CHAPTERS 4 – 7**

### Chapter Eight

isolate – separate

high-caliber – high quality

peculiar – strange

groggy – sleepy

mortician – one who takes car of dead

 bodies

caress – pet

plagues – horrible inflictions

pigment – color

gawky – awkward

intrude – break in on

intensity – close attention

1. What did August most want to do during her special month?
2. What does Lily want to say to the bees?
3. Why had Lily kept the Coca-Cola bottle from Massachusetts?
4. Why does August tell Lily about the thirty-two words for love in the Eskimo language?
5. August says, “You see, everybody needs a God who looks like them, Lily.” (Pg.141) Why is it a little ironic for her to say this to Lily?
6. Explain what August means when she says, “I swear, if you listen to my chest with a stethoscope, what you’d hear is that story going on and on in my Big Mama’s voice.” (Pg. 142)
7. Contrast August’s story with Lily’s. Why does Lily say her story “sort of” ends her life?
(Pg. 142)
8. What does Big Mama say about lady beekeepers and what does it reveal about her?
9. August describes Big Mama’s story of hearing the bees sing on Christmas Eve. Does August mean the story literally? How does this relate to the title of the book?
10. When August could not get a teaching job, she became a housekeeper for a white family, but she says of June “you wouldn’t catch her keeping house for white people.” (Pg. 145) How does this help explain June’s resentment of Lily?
11. Why did August choose not to get married?
12. “The hardest thing on earth is choosing what matters.” (Pg. 147) Explain the importance of August’s statement as it applies to Lily.
13. Lily states, “...I loved the idea of bees having a secret life, just like the one I was living.” (Pg. 148) What is the major difference between the secret life of bees and the secret life of Lily?
14. What happens when Lily lets the bees cover her?
15. Lily makes a Biblical allusion when the bees cover her. What does she allude to?
16. Lily notices that the black Mary label she had stuck on herself is coming “unglued.“ (Pg. 152) How is this a metaphor for Lily’s situation?
17. What does May want to celebrate?
18. What are the people in town stirred up about?
19. Why is Lily sick of “skin pigment”? (Pg. 155)
20. Why does August knock over her tea?
21. What does Lily do while Mr. Forrest and Zach are out of the room?
22. What does Lily ask her father? Why does she ask this?
23. What are the magic words Lily says will get her into and out of places easily?
24. Why does Lily write a letter to her father only to tear it all up when she is done?
25. What does Lily finally do at the end of chapter eight?
26. NOTES:

### Chapter Nine

initiated – started

miniscule – tiny

berserk – crazy

nymphs – fairies

inferno – a big fire

geyser – water spouts

convulsions – fits

unraveling – coming apart

excruciating – extreme

oblivious – unaware

limbo – a waiting place

crevice – a deep crack

moping – feeling sorry for oneself

1. Why does August wake Lily on July 28th?
2. Lily thinks she knows why August turns off the radio. What does Lily think about it?
3. What does the following quote reveal about Lily? “After you get stung, you can’t get unstung no matter how much you whine about it.” (Pg. 167)
4. What do May and Rosaleen do on this sweltering day?
5. What simile does Lily use to explain why she keeps the hose turned on June, even though June is plainly angry?
6. How does Rosaleen’s wisdom end the hostilities?
7. What does June do that astonishes Lily?
8. When does Lily say, “the real troubles in life happen”? (Pg. 170) What does she mean?
9. Who does Lily say is behind her hidden doors?
10. What does Lily say she cannot stop wearing?
11. What is May doing, and why is it so significant to Lily?
12. What does May do after she acknowledges that she knew Lily’s mother?
13. Why do you think Lily dreams of her mother as a roach “with her worst nature exposed?” (Pg. 175)
14. What is the significance of the simile Lily uses to describe her life at this point?
15. What had Lily been about to do when Zach talks her into going with him?
16. When the boy provokes the white man, Lily says she sees a look on his face she had seen on T. Ray’s “a thousand times.” (Pg. 178) What is that look?
17. August, on page 147, says, “The hardest thing on earth is choosing what matters.” Does Zach make a choice that matters?
18. What metaphor does Lily use to describe August’s eyes?
19. What kind of fire is Rosaleen?
20. When they finally get to see Zach, what does August talk about? Why do you think she does this?
21. What does Lily say everyone wants?
22. There is another example of foreshadowing on page 185. What is it? Why do you think the author chose to “warn” the reader on these occasions?
23. Why does Lily think the rocks should be thanked?
24. NOTES:

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### Chapter Ten

saturated – soaked through

concoct – to create

vigil – time to watch

evaporated – dried up

ritual – ceremony

mourning – to miss someone who has died

ensure – to make certain

carcass – dead body

catacombs – caves where people hid

resurrected – raised from the dead

spectacular – amazing

manna – food from heaven

contemplating – thinking

disoriented – confused

1. When they are searching for May, Lily begins to say the “Hail Mary” prayer. What does Lily say about her reasons for doing so?
2. Where do they find May?
3. To what does Lily compare finding May’s body?
4. Interpret this sentence: “This had been the thing they’d been waiting for half their lives
without even realizing it.” (Pg. 194)
5. Why does the policeman ask Lily so many questions?
6. Why does Lily pray for somebody to stop her?
7. What was the side of May that Lily wants never to forget?
8. What is a vigil, and why does August say they are going to hold one?
9. Lily says that it “would be selfish to pour this into her cup.” (Pg. 201) What does she
mean?
10. How does Lily say June’s music helps the vigil-keepers?
11. What does Lily pray for May to do for her?
12. What sentence describes the change Lily sees in Zach?
13. Interpret Lily’s description of blame: “...the blame would find a way to stick to them. That’s how blame was.” (Pg. 204)
14. What do August and Zach and Lily do to the hives and why?
15. What is the secret thing that causes Lily’s gladness?
16. What does Lily think is “a better plan” for blacks and whites to get along? (Pg. 209) How is this somewhat contradictory to her next observation?
17. What does August say May meant for June to do when she said, “Don’t mess it up”? (Pg. 210)
18. What does Lily say is the “oldest sound”? (Pg. 213)
19. NOTES:

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### Chapter Eleven

scallops – decorative curves

wafted – drifted

assumption – Mary’s rise to heaven

sauntered – strolled

exceptional – far above average

pulsed – appeared and disappeared

meditating – thinking

shackled – chained

reenactment – to act out a drama from

 history

1. Why can Lily not tell August about herself now that May’s funeral is over?
2. Why is Lily walking in the woods, counting how long it takes her to see a bird land in a tree?
3. What does June say the wind does for her when she goes out with Neil?
4. Why does Zach tell Lily they have to think about changing the world?
5. How has Zach changed?
6. What does August choose to have for dessert and why?
7. Interpret the meaning of August’s putting May’s suicide note into a deep crevice in the
black Mary.
8. What has Lily decided that causes her to fear ending up in a prison camp in the Everglades? Do you think she really believes in this possibility?
9. What postpones Lily’s revelation to August yet again?
10. What does June finally agree to?
11. List the Mary Day preparations.
12. What part of the Mary Day ceremony makes Lily “feel better about the world”? (Pg. 226)
13. August says that “remembering is everything” and that is why they reenact the chaining of Mary. (Pg. 228) Why does this bother Lily?
14. What is the fish necklace that the boys put on Lily? What upsets her the most about the incident?
15. What is the new necklace that Zach gives to Lily, and what does he promise?
16. NOTES:

**YOU WILL TURN IN CHAPTERS 8 – 1 WHEN YOU TAKE THE VOCAB TEST OVER CHAPTERS 8 – 11**

### Chapter Twelve

bolstered – propped

monogrammed – sewn on initials

taunting – hassling

despite – in spite of

genuinely – truly

amnesiac – unable to remember

cooed – baby talked

unruffled – unbothered

specimen – example

institution – hospital for mentally ill

1. Why is Lily waiting in August’s room?
2. What does Lily say is a “big shock” when she looks at the pictures of Mary?
3. Why had August not told Lily that she knew who Lily was when she arrived?
4. How did August first get to know Deborah?
5. What causes the “wall of glass” to break in Lily’s chest? (Pg. 238)
6. How is August “like a sponge”? (Pg. 238)
7. Lily thinks that if August still loves her, what will she be able to look in a mirror and see?
8. What does Lily say happens one or two moments in your life?
9. When Lily hears that secret, what does she hear? What does August say about it?
10. How does August explain June’s resentment of Lily?
11. Interpret this quote: “June always said that most people bit off more than they could chew, but August chewed more than she bit off.” (Pg. 244
12. How does August describe Deborah as a little girl?
13. How does August’s description of T. Ray clash with Lily’s knowledge of him?
14. Why did Deborah get married, and why does the knowledge upset Lily?
15. What does Lily say she wants to be when she grows up? What does she mean? *She wants to be a “amnesiac.” (Pg. 249)*
16. What is the final bit of information August gives Lily that causes Lily to say she hates her mother?
17. What does August say to excuse Deborah?
18. When she thinks she has disappointed August, Lily says, “Some of my pridefulness drained out.” (Pg. 253) How was it prideful of her to criticize her mother?
19. Why was Deborah back in Sylvan when she was killed?
20. What does August remind Lily before she leaves?
21. How does the quote at the beginning of the chapter relate to Lily’s anguish?

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### Chapter Thirteen

lacquer – shiny coating

commode – toilet

linoleum – flooring

dumbfounded – amazed

spatula – cooking utensil with a flat blade

uncoiled – unwound

contemptible – worthless

muck – mess

preservative – substance which prevents harm

intimacy – close personal contact

churned – stirred

excessive – far too much

rhinestone – artificial jewel

mercantile – store

configuration – shape

tarnished – discolored

gorgeous – beautiful

1. What does Lily want from Mary?
2. What does Lily say is the “really terrible thing?” (Pg. 258)
3. How does Lily act out her anger?
4. What does Lily want the statue to do?
5. Lily says that she could lock the bitter tone in her voice forever. What does she mean?
6. Rosaleen is not surprised when Lily tells her that her mother left her. Why did Rosaleen not tell Lily that she had suspected as much?
7. What does Rosaleen help Lily to do?
8. What does Lily ask August to do for her?
9. “Comic relief” is a phrase used to describe something in a drama that helps to lighten
the mood, especially after something tense. How does Sugar Girl provide comic relief at this point?
10. What does August do with the honey during the Mary ceremony? Why is Lily a little annoyed by it?
11. Why does Lily want to be the last to clean her hands?
12. What does August bring to Lily in the hatbox?
13. What does August say about the mirror? What does she mean?
14. What does Lily find on the brush?
15. How does Lily interpret the poem by William Blake that her mother had underlined?
16. Describe the picture in the frame.
17. What does Lily conclude when she sees this picture?
18. Identify a few of the similes in this chapter.
19. How does the description of the worker bee at the beginning of the chapter fit Lily?

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### Chapter Fourteen

tended – took care of

griddle – stove top

sizzled – baked

stupefied – immobilized

psychiatric – mental

peculiar – very strange

commissioned – given the job

plaited – braided

full-blown – complete

eighth wonder – one of the amazing things

demoralized – spiritless

melancholy – very sad

lamenting – mourning

unfertilized – unable to reproduce

drone – worker

ho-hum – casual

immobilized – motionless

skittish – uneasy

nauseating – sickening

voodoo – magic

involuntarily – unintentionally

trolling – fishing

apprentice – assistant learning the job

forfeited – given up

absurdities – strange things

French Provincial – style of furniture

crocheted – made with needlework

ignoramuses – idiots

1. What is the simile Lily uses to describe her heart?
2. What does Lily believe people would rather die than do?
3. What does Lily find under her cot?
4. Why does Lily think she must have loved her “little collection of hurts and wounds”? (Pg. 278)
5. What is the “peculiar nature of the world?” (Pg. 279)
6. How does the mention of the wedding hat and wedding cake provide some comic relief?
7. What does August say to June while looking at Lily?
8. Where is Rosaleen going?
9. Why does Lily think both she and Zach are “doomed to misery?” (Pg. 283)
10. Why does Lily run up the stairs after Rosaleen?
11. When Lily cleans out the honey house that night, she finally figures out why she has been carrying around the mouse bones. What does she think?
12. What is Lily’s last thought as she drifts off to sleep?
13. What does August show to Lily?
14. August explains why she told the Beatrix story to Lily, and her reason is not what Lily thought. What was August trying to say?
15. What does August tell Lily that she wants Lily always to remember?
16. Who comes to the door at 2:00 P.M.?
17. What is the metaphor Lily uses to describe T. Ray’s smile?
18. How did T. Ray find Lily?
19. Why is it a shock to T. Ray to see the pin on her shoulder?
20. What does Lily suddenly understand when T. Ray realizes that he is in the house where Deborah was?
21. On page 264, Lily “heard the bitter tone” in her own voice and realized that she could “slip off into a cold place where meanness took over.” How does that parallel her realization about T. Ray?
22. Is T. Ray seeing Lily when he hits her? Explain.
23. How does Lily bring T. Ray back and make him see only her?
24. Why does Lily feel that T. Ray said “everything” when he says, “You look like her”? (P. 296)
25. How does Lily’s interpretation of Queenie’s expression provide comic relief at this tense moment?
26. What does August say about what to do when you need something? How does she act on her words with T. Ray?
27. Lily asks her father once more about her mother’s death. Do you think T. Ray is telling the truth?
28. Lily believes in the “goodness of imagination.” (Pg. 300) What is she imagining?
29. Who becomes Lily’s first girl friend?
30. What is high school like for Lily?
31. Where does August say Mary goes when she rises?
32. Who are the moons shining over Lily?

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**YOU WILL TURN IN CHAPTERS 12 – 14 WHEN YOU TAKE THE VOCAB TEST OVER CHAPTERS 12 - 14**