

# The secret life of bees by: sue monk kidd

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The secret life of bees by: Sue Monk Kidd SUMMARY: The story in The Secret Life of Bees is that of Lily Melissa Owens, a young girl who reaches puberty in rural South Carolina in 1964. Lily's mother dies when Lily is 4 years old. That day, her mother had been packing a suitcase when her father, T. Ray, raged into the house, and a big argument ensued. Her mother took a pistol off the shelf, but sometime after it fell to the floor, her mother was shot. Lily remembers the loud blast, but she can't remember who was holding the gun. Her father tells everyone Lily accidentally shot her mother. T.

Ray has a short fuse which leads to lots of verbal abuse and some physical abuse. Lily and her father are opposites. She loves reading and writing, he belittles her for reading. He's a racist and critical of others, she's tolerant and respectful of everyone. After her mother dies, T. Ray hires a black nanny, Rosaleen, to care for her and do the household chores. Lily loves Rosaleen although she thinks since Rosaleen has never had children of her own, Lily is her guinea pig. Rosaleen, who represents the stereotypical black figure of that time period, loves Lily and treats her as if she is her own.

One day Rosaleen and Lily go to town so Rosaleen can register to vote. In town a group of white men taunt Rosaleen and she spills her snuff jar on their feet. The men beat Rosaleen until the police come and take Rosaleen to jail. At the jail, the men beat her some more. T. Ray comes to the jail to take Lily home. Back on the farm, Lily and T. Ray get into an argument, in which he tells Lily that Deborah her mother was going to leave her when she died. Lily gets so angry and she runs away. Lily frees Rosaleen from the hospital, where she was sent after her second beating.

Rosaleen and Lily go to Tiburon, South Carolina because Deborah had a picture of a black Madonna on the back of which she wrote " Tiburon, SC. " Lily figures this town must have been important to Deborah. In a store, Lily sees jars of honey with pictures of the same black Madonna as their labels. Lily asks the storekeeper where the honey comes from. He tells her that a woman named August Boatwright makes the honey and that she lives in a bright pink house. Lily and Rosaleen find the pink house and knock on the door. Inside, they find three African-American sisters--August, June and May. Lily tells them that she is passing through town on the way to her aunt's house. She tells the sisters that she is an orphan. August tells Lily and Rosaleen that they are welcome to stay for now. She says that Lily can help her with the honey business and Rosaleen can help May with the house work. May is very emotional and often cries so hard that she must go to her wailing wall in the backyard, a wall in which she places prayers for all the things that sadden her. June is not happy about having Lily stay with them because she is white. When Lily overhears June saying that she dislikes her because of her skin color, Lily realizes how absurd racism is.

The sisters practice a religion they have created themselves and share with a group called The Daughters of Mary. The women pray to a statue of a black Mary that they call Our Lady of Chains. During her time in the pink house, Lily comes to practice this religion with the women. She loves these women and life in the pink house. Lily comes to feel accepted by the black women. Even June befriends her, eventually. She falls in love with August's helper, Zach. Zach is an African-American boy, which complicates Lily's feelings for him. One day, one of Zach's friends throws a bottle at a white man.

Because none of the boys will admit who threw the bottle, they all go to jail. The women try to keep Zach's imprisonment a secret from May, because it would be too much for her to handle. However, May finds out from a phone call that Zach is in jail and is unable to deal with it. May commits suicide by drowning herself in the river. May's friends and family are devastated by her death. Some good things come out of it, however. June decides to marry Neil, a man she has dated for years but always refused to marry because she was hurt once by someone else.

Eventually life returns to normal in the pink house and Lily thinks about how she will have to tell August the truth soon. In the meantime, Lily and Zach kiss and he promises they will be together one day. Eventually Lily tells August who she really is. It turns out that August already knew, because she knew Lily's mother. August worked for Deborah's family when Deborah was a child. Years later, after Lily was born, Deborah left T. Ray and came to stay with August. August said Deborah was going back to get Lily and then she was going to divorce T. Ray. When she went home, she died.

Lily is outraged and saddened to learn that Deborah left her with T. Ray. August tries to explain that Deborah was depressed not thinking clearly, but Lily cannot forgive her. One day, Lily is home alone and T. Ray comes to the door. He found out where she was because she called him collect once. T. Ray went to the place she called from and a woman told him where she was. T. Ray demands that Lily comes home with him. When T. Ray notices the pin Lily is wearing, a pin he gave Deborah, Lily explains that Deborah came to the pink house when she left him. T.

Ray goes into a rage and beats Lily, all the while calling her Deborah, August and Rosaleen return to the house. August tells T. Ray that Lily can stay. Ray agrees and leaves. Lily chases his car and asks him if she was responsible for her mother's death. T. Ray says it was an accident, but Lily killed her. Lily finally learns to forgive her mother and herself. She is happy living with August. She goes to school with Zach. Lily learns the importance of female communities and that women can be mothers to each other. RELEVANCE: Memory is something that Lily has lost of her mother and is trying to gain back throughout the story.

There is one specific incident that she can't forget and it's the day her mother tried to leave home and Lily ends up killing her by shooting her with a gun. Lily goes through a lot of up's and down's trying to find out what happened to her mother and since her guardian T. Ray is just bad mouthing Lily's mother and trying to prevent her, she goes to great lengths to get her answers and runs away with Rosaleen. A lot of emotional damage has already been done to Lily by T. Ray but she is strong and wants to know about her mother and in the story she stops at nothing to get her answers.

Lily and Rosaleen end up at a pink house with three African-American women and ask if they can stay with them, over time they all start getting to know each other. Lily starts to experience emotions that she never knew she could have besides the emotions that she has for Rosaleen. The mistreatment from T. Ray didn't really allow her to have any space in her heart for better emotions. Lily starts falling in love with the helper but because of his race it complicates things but that emotion for a boy is more

than what she expected to find on the adventure of finding out things about her mother.

Lily wasn't just searching for information about her mother or emotions that were better than the ones T. Ray was giving her but also some sense of identity. Lily feels that there's a big part of her missing because she doesn't know anything about her mom. According to the text in child development by John W. Santrock "identity moratorium is a status of individuals who are in the midst of a crisis" and in the story Lily is in one. She is trying to get information about someone she cares about but barely knows.

Lily does eventually find out the truth about her mother and even though she can't get her mother back she did gain mother-like figures. CRITIQUE: I personally like this book because of the depth in the story. Also the lesson learned throughout. The time the story takes place was a very hard time for African-Americans because of the racism and discrimination against them. Lily went through a hard time without her parents and I say in plural parents because T. Ray may have tried to play the father figure but didn't prevail because of his over controlling and demanding ways.

Also, the grief and grudge he still holds against Deborah doesn't allow him to move on. Lily spent most of her life feeling guilty when she gained recognition of what did to her mom. She went out searching for information about her mom and gained mothers. The topic of racism and discrimination has always a touchy topic for me because of how bad emotionally wise African-Americans besides physical ways there have been tormented and traumatized and just the details of it in a book affect me deeply as the actions were occurring to me.

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