

# **Lily's Crossing Study Guide**

**Lily's Crossing by Patricia Reilly Giff**

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# Plot Summary

Lily's Crossing by Patricia Reilly Giff is the story of Lily Mollahan and what happens when she tells one lie too many.

Lily lives in St. Albans, Queens, with her father and her grandmother. Lily's mother died when Lily was a very small girl, but Lily is content to be who and where she is. Every summer, Lily, Poppy (her father) and Gram live in Gram's house on stilts in Rockaway, near the Atlantic ocean. To Lily, Rockaway is a world apart from the routine of St. Albans with its endless school days and interminable winters. At the beach, Lily can really relax and explore the world. She and her friend Margaret Dillon spend their time gossiping and going to the movies. But there are things that bother Lily about her ten-year-old life. The first thing is the matter of friends. Without Margaret, Lily would be completely without a confidante. Next on Lily's list of problems is lying. Lily does not mind telling lies on a regular basis. It is more exciting for Lily that Margaret believes Poppy is in the Secret Service or that Aunt Celia is a spy living all the way over in Berlin.

This particular summer, though, there is something different happening in the world. It is 1944 when the narrative begins, and World War II is being fought in Europe. Margaret's family is moving to Detroit, where her father will assemble airplanes. Eddie Dillon, Margaret's older brother and a soldier, goes missing on one of the most important days of the war and the small community begins to feel afraid. Meanwhile, Lily must accept the idea that she needs to find a friend to replace Margaret. With no possible friends on the horizon, Lily decides to follow Albert Orban. Albert is a recent refugee from Hungary who has no interest in being friends with Lily Mollahan at all, much to Lily's surprise. When a kitten is thrown into the ocean and left to drown, Lily and Albert join forces and later become wary friends.

When Poppy goes overseas, everything changes for Lily and Gram. Not knowing where Poppy is or when he will return gives Lily a new perspective on the war. Lily also comes to appreciate Albert's overwhelming desire to learn to swim. When Albert talks about his life in Hungary, Lily can hear the wistfulness in his voice. Albert will do anything he can to find his sister Ruth again, even if it means endangering his own life.

During the summer before going into sixth grade, Lily Mollahan loses her best summer friend, saves a life, cracks a code, and learns something truly valuable about truth, family, and war.



# Chapters 1 - 4

## Chapters 1 - 4 Summary

Lily's Crossing is the story of Lily Mollahan and her summer adventures at the beach in Rockaway, Queens. World War II is underway in Europe and Lily, her friends, and family are all affected. Lily has difficulty telling the truth sometimes and though it bothers her to lie, she cannot help herself. When Lily's father leaves to go overseas, things change for her and the uncertainty of war hits home. When Lily meets a boy with a strange accent, she learns about friendship, family and the damage lying can do.

Chapter one takes place in the Queens neighborhood of St. Albans in New York City. The year is 1944. Lily Mollahan lives with her father Jerry (who Lily calls Poppy) and her paternal grandmother, Gram. Lily's mother passed away when Lily was much younger. Lily is in the fifth grade. When the chapter opens, Lily is scraping stars off the walls and ceiling of her bedroom. Lily is supposed to be packing because she and Gram are going to stay in Rockaway for the summer.

Lily cannot wait to get to Rockaway and see the Atlantic Ocean and go to the movies with her best friend, Margaret Dillon. Lily's father comes home and tells Lily that he has arranged to have the family piano moved to Rockaway so that Lily can practice while she is on vacation. Although Lily is less than thrilled to learn that the piano will be in Rockaway, she does not let her father see her disappointment. Lily is a naturally curious person and Gram tells her that she is always minding other people's business.

World War II is underway in Europe. The Allies (England, France, and the United States) entered the war two weeks ago. Lily tells Poppy and Gram that Mr. Egan, one of their neighbors, is a spy.

In chapter two, Lily receives her report card and hands it to Gram when she gets home. Lily knows that Gram will be displeased because she has received a "D" in music. The truck arrives to take Lily, Gram, and the old upright piano to Rockaway. Lily is beside herself with excitement as she puts the last of her things into a cardboard carton. Lily is somewhat embarrassed at the thought of riding in the front of a moving van with Gram and the driver. On the way, Gram mentions the report card, but Lily pretends to be asleep. Lily knows that her mother would not have cared about the poor grade in music.

Chapter three takes place in Rockaway. The Monday after she and Gram arrive in Rockaway is Lily's birthday. She receives two books, a secret surprise present and a Milky Way candy bar from Margaret Dillon, her best friend in Rockaway. Margaret tells Lily that she could not help herself and that is why the candy bar has teeth marks in it. Lily follows Margaret and Margaret's two cats to the Dillon's "stand-up attic". Suddenly Margaret tells Lily that she has a secret to tell. Margaret makes Lily swear on her aunt Celia's life that she will not tell anyone. Margaret does not know that Lily lies about her



Aunt Celia being a spy for the Americans. Lily has not even seen her aunt Celia for four years.

Margaret shows Lily a bagful of candy that her mother purchased. The candy is for Margaret's brother Eddie, who is a soldier overseas. Margaret figures it would be alright if she and Lily had some of the candy. Lily remembers liking Eddie Dillon very much. Eddie would sometimes play along with Lily when Lily teased Margaret. Eddie never let on that Lily was lying. Lily also lies when she tells Margaret that one of her uncles is a naval officer. Lily worries about the lies she tells.

Margaret tells Lily that she and her parents are moving to Detroit. Margaret's father will be working in a factory where airplanes are assembled. Lily is unhappy to learn that her best Rockaway friend will soon be leaving. Lily does not welcome the idea of having to make new friends. Mrs. Dillon comes home and is unhappy to discover that the girls have been eating Eddie's candy. Margaret gives Lily a key to their house and tells Lily that after they have gone Lily will be able to drop by anytime she wishes.

Chapter four opens with a description of Gram's house. The house sits up on stilts. Lily's bedroom is really just a closed in porch. Lily likes sleeping so close to the water and she loves to look at the stars in the night sky.

One evening, Lily hears noise and voices coming from Mrs. Orban's house, four houses away. Lily notices that Mrs. Orban did not pull the blackout curtains closed. Lily sees Mr. Orban arrive home in his old Model A Ford. Lily decides to find out what all the commotion is about. She lowers herself into a rowboat and makes her way toward the Orban's house. Once there, Lily quietly lifts herself out of the rowboat and manages to peek inside the Orban's kitchen. She hears Mr. and Mrs. Orban talking to someone. At one point in the conversation, Lily hears Mrs. Orban mention her name.

Mrs. Orban and her husband are talking to a boy they call Albert. Albert tells the Orbans that he has to find someone by the name of Ruth, and that he is not interested in being friends with Lily. Lily thinks Albert has a "nice face" but she is somewhat hurt by Albert's unfriendly remark. Lily notices that Albert speaks with a strange accent. Lily decides that she does not want to be Albert's friend. She sneaks back to the house in the rowboat and quickly climbs into bed, wondering about Albert and Ruth and their connection to the Orbans.

## Chapters 1 - 4 Analysis

When the narrative opens, the three most important characters are introduced fairly quickly. Lily, Gram, and Poppy provide the center of the story. Leaving for Rockaway is always a significant endeavor for Lily Mollahan.

The significance of the stars that Lily peels off the ceiling is shown later in the story. Margaret is introduced in the second chapter. Margaret and Lily's friendship is one of complementary personalities. Lily is overly-conscious of the things she does, while Margaret is rather slapdash about the way she goes through life. The incident with the



Milky Way candy bar, which opens chapter three, proves that Margaret's heart is in the right place.

When Gram tells Lily that she is much too concerned with other people's lives, this foreshadows Lily's problem with lying. Lily tells lies that help her to feel superior to other people; specifically, Margaret Dillon and Albert Orban. Lily's active imagination proves to be at least partially responsible for the character's startling realization in the middle of the narrative.

When Margaret tells Lily that her family will relocate to Detroit, this sets the stage for Lily finding a new friendship with Albert.

Also in chapter three, Eddie Dillon's character is introduced, by way of memory only since what is known about Eddie is based solely on what Margaret, Gram, and Lily remember about him. Margaret's departure for Detroit also furthers the subplot of her brother's disappearance. This provides foreshadowing for the event in chapter eighteen when Albert retrieves the money from his coat collar. However, Lily's friendship with Albert is slow to gel, and their first two encounters are less than positive. When Lily finally meets Albert in chapter four, it becomes clear that Lily is not nearly as interesting character as she might believe herself to be. Albert seems completely nonchalant about being friends with her and this fuels Lily's curiosity, prompting her to find out as much about the newcomer as she possibly can. Mr. and Mrs. Orban are also introduced in the first chapters of the narrative.



# Chapters 5 - 8

## Chapters 5 - 8 Summary

Lily spends two days looking for the mysterious Albert in chapter five. At one point, she even tries to disguise herself by wearing a sailor hat, sunglasses and lipstick. Lily spots Albert on a couple of different occasions but never manages to get close enough to Albert to have a conversation.

Lily rows the rowboat to the train station to meet her father. Poppy is coming to Rockaway for the weekend. Lily looks forward to her father's arrival. When Poppy arrives, he and Lily row back to Gram's house on the canal. Lily looks forward to spending the next day out on a boat fishing with Poppy. Poppy and Lily also have plans to see a movie together sometime over the weekend. Poppy says that he will be joining the Army to work as an engineer to help rebuild parts of Europe that have been damaged by the war. Lily is frightened at the prospect of Poppy being so far away. She expresses her disappointment with her father's decision. Lily worries that her father will not be able to get in touch with her once she is overseas. Lily is even more disappointed when she learns that Gram already knows Poppy is going away. She accuses Poppy and Gram of keeping secrets. Lily runs out of the house crying to discover that Albert is watching her from in front of the Orban's house.

In chapter six, Lily leaves the house early the next morning and goes to Margaret's house. She does not say goodbye to Poppy when he leaves for the station. Once inside the Dillon's house, Lily thinks the place looks dark and empty without Margaret and her family there.

Lily goes to the attic and opens the window to get a look outside. No one is on the boardwalk and the tide is rising. Lily sees Albert playing on the beach all by himself. Lily finds a note from Margaret telling her that she will come back soon. Taped to the note is a red LifeSaver - Lily's favorite.

Suddenly, Lily feels guilty for not seeing Poppy off at the station. She bolts out of the Dillon's house in an effort to catch up with Poppy's train but finds that she is too late.

In chapter seven, Lily decides to spy on Albert. Lily fantasizes that Albert is running from the police. She decides that Albert is a Nazi spy. She watches Albert from a safe distance and sees him carrying something onto the beach. Albert spreads a blanket on the sand and makes himself comfortable. He takes snacks and a pad of paper and a pencil out of his bag. Lily watches as Albert begins to write something. Moving closer, Lily can see that Albert is writing a letter to the Orbans. Lily thinks Albert is a terrible speller. Just then, a low-flying plane appears in the sky. Lily knows that it is a trainer plane sent out from the nearby naval base. Lily can see that Albert is afraid. Once the plane has passed, Lily approaches Albert and tries to reassure him. Albert appears not



to be listening and Lily returns home, promising herself that she will not try to speak to Albert again.

Lily still feels guilty for not saying goodbye to Poppy. She writes him a letter of apology and sends it to the address Poppy left before he went away.

In chapter eight, Lily enters the house to find Gram sitting on the couch listening to their favorite radio program. Lily is still upset with Gram for keeping Poppy's leaving a secret from her. She sits on the couch not wanting to miss the program. When Gram puts her arm around Lily's shoulders, Lily begins to cry. Gram tells Lily that the two of them have been invited to Mr. and Mrs. Orban's house for dinner. Gram also says that Mrs. Orban has a special surprise for Lily. Lily knows that the surprise is Albert. Lily dreads seeing Albert again. Usually, Lily would be overjoyed at the thought of having dinner with the Orbans, as Mrs. Orban is a wonderful cook. Maybe Mr. Orban has caught a fish for them all to enjoy. Lily knows it would be difficult to set a the same table with Albert.

When Lily and Gram arrive at the Orban's home, her fears are realized as soon as she sees Albert. Lily learns that Albert is Mr. Orban's nephew and that he comes from Budapest, Hungary. Albert and his eight-year-old sister Ruth escaped from their country. Albert has come a long way. Lily wonders where Ruth might be. Sitting across the table from Albert at dinner, Lily eats her food as quickly as possible because she does not want to talk in front of Albert. Lily notices that Albert does not have very good table manners.

Mrs. Orban tells Lily and Gram that Albert does not know the beach very well and that he cannot swim. Mrs. Orban thinks Lily is lucky to have someone to play with now that Margaret has moved to Detroit. Mrs. Orban also thinks it would be fun for Lily to teach Albert to swim. Lily does not like the idea of spending the rest of her summer with Albert. For dessert, Mrs. Orban serves a delicious homemade lemon cake. Lily watches Albert eat three pieces of the cake. Lily ignores Albert until it is time for her and Gram to go home.

## Chapters 5 - 8 Analysis

This second group of chapters furthers the plot in that more is revealed about Albert and how Lily perceives him. Of more importance, however, is Poppy's decision to enlist in the Army and go to Europe to help rebuild France. Until this point, Lily has been insulated against the war. She can feel empathy for Margaret and Eddie, but until Poppy tells Lily that he will be leaving, Lily's concept of separation is informed only by her mother's untimely death. Lily does not know where Poppy is going and she has no idea when (if ever) he will return. It is reasonable that Lily would be extremely upset at the thought of losing Poppy and her mother. Lily's choice not to say goodbye to Poppy in chapter six foreshadows Albert's story of how he and Ruth were separated in Paris.

Eddie's disappearance, Poppy's enlisting, and Albert's escape from Hungary and then France begin to bring the war home for Lily and those around her. Lily begins to learn





that even though the war is not being fought on her home soil, what happens half a world away is just as meaningful as what happens on the battlefield itself. The war takes on more local proportions for Lily.

The red LifeSaver taped to the back of Margaret's letter to Lily is a testament to their fond friendship.

By the time Lily actually interacts with Albert Orban in chapter seven, Lily's curiosity has begun to wane somewhat - especially when Lily sees how badly Albert spells. The incident with the trainer plane at the beach gives Lily an idea of what it must have been like to escape the war in Europe. When Lily and Gram go to the Orbans' house for dinner in chapter eight, Lily gets a closer glimpse of Albert and decides that she does not wish to be friends with him. Albert's "foreignness" is evident in Lily's observation of his table manners and his lack of social graces. This is short-lived, however, as in the next group of chapters, Lily and Albert manage to slowly become friends, one step at a time.

With the introduction of the Dillons and the Orbans, Lily's experience of Rockaway becomes one of belonging to a close community, and therefore something not to be taken lightly, even on vacation.



# Chapters 9 - 12

## Chapters 9 - 12 Summary

In chapter nine, Lily has been avoiding Albert for nearly a week. One morning, Lily waits for a letter from Poppy. A few days ago, Lily received a postcard from Poppy telling her that he had reached his destination safely. Lily does not know exactly where Poppy is, but knowing that he is safe makes her feel better.

After rushing through her breakfast of cold cereal, Lily decides to meet the postman. She takes a little money and goes to Sherman's Bakery to buy herself a treat. Lily is convinced that she will receive a letter from Poppy today. There is not much to choose from at the bakery, so Lily decides on a sugar cookie. Mrs. Sherman gives Lily two cookies for the price of one. Mrs. Sherman likes to talk quite a bit and Lily has no desire to stand in the hot bakery chatting as she has just caught sight of the postman. In a hurry, Lily lies and tells Mrs. Sherman that her aunt Celia has frostbite.

Lily finally catches up with the postman and tells him that she is expecting a letter from Poppy. The postman is surprised to hear that Lily's father has enlisted in the military. Lily is on the verge of tears when the postman tells her that no letter from Poppy has arrived. Lily is disappointed to learn that the only mail for her is a letter from Margaret in Detroit. Lily heads for the wharf to eat her cookies and read Margaret's letter.

Sitting on a bench, Lily sees Albert running toward her. He is chasing a teenage boy on a bicycle. After she sees Albert duck into some reeds, Lily watches as the teenager gets off his bicycle and throws something into the water. Lily then sees Albert running toward her, waving his arms and shouting.

When Albert finally catches up to Lily in chapter ten, he tells her that there is a cat in the bag the teenage boy threw into the ocean. Without thinking, Lily jumps in and saves the cat. Lily and Albert take the orange striped kitten to Margaret Dillon's house and dry it off.

Lily and Albert agree that the kitten needs milk. Lily discovers that the tan purse she was carrying, and all the money she had saved over the winter, was lost when she jumped in to save the kitten. Albert goes for milk while Lily waits in the house. Albert returns with the milk and they make a cozy place for the kitten to sleep. Albert tells Lily not to worry, he will return to the house each day to feed the kitten. Lily is discouraged, as it seems that Albert still has no interest in being friends with her.

In chapter eleven, it is then end of July. One day, Lily takes a blanket to the beach and settles in to eat the supper Gram prepares for her. Suddenly, Lily sees someone thrashing about in the waves. Lily discovers that Albert is trying to teach himself how to swim. This annoys Lily, who would like to eat her meal in peace. Convinced that the boy will drown, Lily jumps into the water in an attempt to save Albert. When she is unable to



reach the boy, Lily manages to make it back to her blanket. Albert joins her shortly thereafter. Lily explains to Albert how sometimes at night, she sees military ships on their way to Europe to fight the Nazis.

Unable to stop herself, Lily lies again when she tells Albert that later that night she will take a rowboat out to one of the big ships and climb aboard. According to Lily, the ship will take her to Europe so she can look for Poppy. Albert tells Lily that he would like to go too and Lily agrees to meet Albert at eleven o'clock that night. Albert wants to go to France to look for his sister Ruth. Lily is not sure what makes her lie to Albert.

Because one of the neighbors had borrowed Gram's rowboat, Lily and Albert are unable to row out to the big ships in chapter twelve. Lily suggests that they sneak into a movie instead. After they climb the rickety back steps of the movie theater, Albert and Lily are able to watch Bugs Bunny cartoons. When the newsreel begins, Lily and Albert watch as ships explode in the water. Soon, Albert's eyes begin to fill with tears. It is at this moment that Lily realizes that Albert must have left Europe on a ship much like the one in the newsreel. When the two decide that they'd rather do something else, they are discovered and asked to leave the movie theater. They run all the way home. When Lily arrives, Gram seems pleased that Lily and Albert have made friends.

## Chapters 9 - 12 Analysis

The Rockaway community expands with the inclusion of Mrs. Sherman, who owns the local bakery. The reality of war presents itself again by way of Mrs. Sherman's gripe about not getting enough butter to bake her pastries. The incident in the bakery highlights Lily's tendency to lie when she tells Mrs. Sherman that Aunt Celia has the frostbite. Lily does not stay in the bakery long enough to backpedal and make up another lie. She simply leaves Mrs. Sherman standing there bewildered.

Lily's friendship with Albert is finally solidified in chapter ten when the two rescue the kitten from drowning and Lily takes Albert to Margaret's house. Rather than being drawn to one another, Lily and Albert are united in their effort to care for the kitten, who Albert later names Paprika.

Chapter eleven is a pivotal point in the story since this is the point at which Lily lies to Albert about swimming out to a troop ship and heading to Europe to find Poppy. Almost as soon as the lie escapes her mouth, Lily knows that she has done something wrong. She begins to worry about the lie almost immediately and this dilemma sets up the tension that resolves itself around chapter twenty-three. When Lily and Albert initially take the rowboat out onto the bay together, Lily has the first of many opportunities to stop the perpetuation of the lie, but she chooses against it.

In chapter twelve, when Lily convinces Albert to sneak into the movie theater without paying, Lily once again feels superior to Albert when she sees how pleased he is to be watching the show for free. This behavior later comes back to haunt Lily, however, and this episode foreshadows their argument, which is reported in chapter twenty-five.

Chapter twelve is also significant because of Albert's emotional reaction to the newsreel that he and Lily watch. Whereas Lily may or may not be mindful of the impact of the war on refugee populations at the time, Albert symbolizes the hundreds and thousands of Europeans whose only choice was to remain in their homes and perish or uproot themselves and try to start again in another part of the world.



# Chapters 13 - 16

## Chapters 13 - 16 Summary

In chapter thirteen, Lily and Albert sit on the rocks, eating lunch and talking. Lily tells Albert about the stars in her bedroom. When she was born, her mother pasted stars on the ceiling of her bedroom because she wanted to "make a world" for Lily. Each summer, Lily brings one of the stars to Rockaway with her, pretending it is a present from her mother.

Both of Albert's parents died in Hungary. His parents published a newspaper speaking out against the Nazis until one day the Nazis came and took Albert's parents away. Albert and his sister Ruth traveled across Europe with their neighbor, Mr. Kovacs. Once Kovacs, Albert and Ruth reached France, Ruth came down with the measles. Mr. Kovacs was to put Albert and Ruth on a ship bound for the United States. Shortly before their departure, Ruth was taken away by a nun because she was too sick to travel. Lily feels sad that Albert has lost so many people he loves.

Late one evening in chapter fourteen, Lily and Albert take the rowboat out onto the bay. Albert still believes Lily's lie that they are going to jump a troop ship to Europe. Albert brings the kitten along. He tells Lily about his family's home in Budapest and the Danube River. Lily does not know how to tell Albert that she lied about going to Europe. Lily promises to teach Albert to swim.

In chapter fifteen, Lily receives two letters the next day: one from Poppy and another from Margaret in Detroit. In his brief letter, Poppy tells Lily that he is leaving to go overseas soon. Poppy reminds Lily to finish reading the book *Madeline*, *The Three Musketeers*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*. Poppy also tells Lily to give Gram a hug, which Lily decides she does not want to do.

When Lily reads Margaret's letter, she learns that Margaret's brother Eddie is missing in action. Eddie disappeared in France on D-Day. Margaret instructs Lily to fetch Eddie's picture from the living room and mail it to Detroit as soon as she can. Margaret has all but forgotten what Eddie looks like.

Lily finds the picture and returns home. She knows she will have to ask Gram for the money since her tan purse was lost when she rescued Paprika the cat from drowning. Gram tells Lily that they are going to church to pray for Eddie Dillon's safe return home. Lily realizes that Gram will wonder how Lily got into the Dillon's house. Gram does not know that Lily has the key. Lily is afraid that Gram will scold her and take the key away from her.

In chapter sixteen, Gram arrives home to find Lily locked in the bathroom. Lily changes into an old bathing suit, wraps Eddie Dillon's picture in a towel and bolts out the door before Gram can catch her. Lily and Albert return to the dock to look for Lily's tan purse.



After a long explanation, Albert agrees to give Lily the money she needs to mail Eddie Dillon's picture to Detroit.

## Chapters 13 - 16 Analysis

The secret of the stars is finally revealed. Lily finds a way to keep her mother close to her. This episode foreshadows Lily giving Albert one of the stars in a later chapter. The idea of the star corresponds to the yellow stars Jews were required to wear in order to be easily identifiable to the Nazis in Europe. The revelation of Albert Orban's back-story lends weight to the character's wish to go back to Europe in order to find Ruth. Lily has no experience with persecution, as Albert does. Lily agrees to teach Albert to swim but she continues to hide the lie, hoping things will work themselves out without having to admit to any wrongdoing.

In chapter fourteen, the narrative tension builds with Lily's thoughts on undoing the lie she tells Albert. Knowing what Albert has been through, Lily now realizes that for Albert, getting to Europe is a real concern, not simply a fantasy scenario.

Chapter fifteen provides the first clue to where Poppy Mollahan is. When he tells Lily which books to read and reread, Lily is confused. This happening foreshadows the moment when Lily deciphers Poppy's code and learns exactly where Poppy is overseas. This chapter also presents Lily's first opportunity to become closer to Gram. When she chooses not to give Gram a hug as Poppy instructs, Lily prolongs the inevitable; preferring instead to wait for another time to connect more solidly with Gram.

D-Day, the day Eddie Dillon disappears in France, is significant in World War II history. D-Day is another name for June 6, 1944, the day on which American, Canadian, Free French and British troops stormed the beach at Normandy, France, in order to liberate the country from Hitler and the Nazis.

The situation with Gram, Lily, and the money to mail Eddie Dillon's picture begins in chapter sixteen and continues through the narrative for several chapters. Lily's conscience begins to bother her and she is convinced that Gram will not understand that Lily came by the key to the Dillon's home honestly. Rather than explain the situation to Gram, Lily allows her fear to compel her to conceal one more thing from someone in her life.



# Chapters 17 - 20

## Chapters 17 - 20 Summary

On the way to mail Eddie's picture in chapter seventeen, Gram tells Lily that she must practice the piano for thirty minutes. Lily sits down to practice but ends up daydreaming about Poppy and Ruth Orban, who is in a convent in Paris. Lily pulls Gram's atlas off the shelf and tries to find Budapest, Hungary, where Albert is from. A short while later, Lily begins picking out "The Blue Danube" on the piano. Gram invites Albert in to wait for Lily while she practices. At the end of the thirty minutes, Lily and Albert leave Gram's house and head for the post office.

In chapter eighteen, Lily and Albert go to Margaret's house in order to retrieve the money which is sewn into Albert's collar. Albert tells Lily that he used to play the violin at his grandmother's restaurant in Hungary every Sunday. Albert remembers the delicious Hungarian food he ate at the restaurant. Albert finds \$50 in his coat collar and offers it to Lily so she can mail Eddie's picture to Margaret. Lily thinks that the people at the post office will be suspicious if she uses a \$50 bill and that Gram will find out about it. Lily puts Eddie's picture back where she found it and resolves to find another way to raise the money.

Albert tells Lily that he wants to learn to swim in the ocean rather than in the bay. Lily still cannot imagine how she will tell Albert that she lied about going to Europe.

In chapter nineteen, Lily has a dream she does not remember. She knows Margaret was in the dream, and Albert's sister Ruth. Lily remembers Poppy and something about Paris. When Lily wakes up crying, Gram is sitting on her bed. Gram comforts Lily and they talk about the war and how difficult things have become for the people around them. Gram says that if the soldiers can "liberate" Paris, they might be able to save Ruth as well.

Before Lily can tell Gram about the lost tan purse, Gram leaves to go fishing and Lily and Albert go to the Dillon house. Mrs. Orban gives Albert enough money to send Eddie's picture to Margaret in Detroit. At Margaret's house, Lily and Albert wrap the picture carefully. Lily and Albert agree that they will not return to Margaret's house. Albert says he will take Paprika home with him.

Later that day, Lily tries to teach Albert to swim. Albert is stiff and afraid of the water. Lily suggests that she and Albert forget about Europe. After all, the war may be over within a year. Albert thinks a year is a long time. Lily cannot bring herself to look Albert in the eye.

In chapter twenty, Lily again receives letters from Poppy and Margaret. Lily is surprised to learn that Gram sent Margaret a picture of Eddie as well. Margaret tells Lily that Gram misses Poppy very much. Lily never thought that Gram might miss Poppy as well.



When Lily reads Poppy's letter, she is confused by his suggestion that she re-read *The Story of Roland* and another book called *The Promise*. Poppy tells Lily to talk to Mrs. Hailey at the library about the books.

Later, Gram and Lily remember the day a hurricane struck Rockaway and how happy and relieved they both were when Poppy finally arrived home.

Lily and Albert row out onto the bay for another swimming lesson. Lily anchors the boat. Albert is very nervous at first but he jumps into the water. Albert reminds Lily of a turtle in the water. Soon enough, Albert begins kicking his legs. Lily has finally taught Albert how to swim.

## Chapters 17 - 20 Analysis

In chapter seventeen, Lily educates herself when she consults Gram's atlas. The character is interested in finally associating the war with an actual point on the map. Lily finds Hungary, where Albert is from, and France, which is where her father and Ruth Orban are. Again, though, Lily gives in to her tendency to daydream. It works out rather well, however, since Lily tries to play "The Blue Danube" on the family's upright piano.

In chapter eighteen, Lily and Albert find the money sewn into the collar of Albert's coat. When they find the money, it reinforces the idea that people who love one another will go to any length to provide for the people who mean the most to them. The money that Nagymamma gives Albert is a testament to his grandmother's care for Albert and his sister. Certainly, \$50 is more actual money than Lily has ever seen in her life, and the significance is not lost on her. The additional fact that Nagymamma sent Albert on his way with three different kinds of currency is proof that Nagymamma was a character of wisdom and foresight. A refugee never really knows where he/she will finally settle. To this end, Nagymamma made sure that Albert would have at least some funds, no matter where he landed. When Lily refuses to let Albert help her with the postage to send Eddie's picture, the character is revealed as self-absorbed and suspicious of those around her. Lily Mollahan is prideful.

Gram's assertion that the soldiers who liberate France could have a chance of finding Ruth is a foreshadowing to what takes place in chapters twenty-seven and twenty-eight when Poppy brings Ruth back to the United States at the end of the war. Lily's effort to talk Albert out of the plan to go to Europe falls short of the mark and Albert continues to believe the lie.

Lily is redeemed when Albert receives enough money from Mrs. Orban to mail Eddie's picture to Detroit in chapter nineteen. Their agreement not to enter the Dillon's house again shows that the relationship between Lily and Albert has strengthened in spite of the lie.

Chapter twenty signals another installment of Poppy's mysterious code. Mrs. Hailey, the town librarian, is introduced in these chapters. This mention of Mrs. Hailey foreshadows an impending incident with Lily when the character stops Lily from telling another lie.





Remembering the day of the hurricane, Gram and Lily manage to develop a hopeful attitude about Poppy coming home from the war safely.

Lily's success in teaching Albert to swim brings the character closer to telling him the truth. Another opportunity to be honest with Albert is let slip by and Lily's anxiety builds as Albert's resolve to carry out their plan grows stronger each day.



# Chapters 21 - 24

## Chapters 21 - 24 Summary

In chapter twenty-one, Lily thinks back on the day so far. When she and Albert went to the library earlier, Mrs. Hailey scolded them for tracking sand into the library. Lily remembers that she left *The Three Musketeers* on the boat. Lily ends up only checking out *The Story of Roland*, a book she has already read.

In the rowboat, Albert is excited that he knows how to swim now and he begins talking about going to Europe to look for his sister. Finally, Lily admits to Albert that she lied and begins to cry. She tells Albert that she lied about Poppy being in the Secret Service and about Aunt Celia being a spy. Albert does not seem upset when Lily tells him about her lies. Albert tells Lily that he, too, is a liar.

In chapter twenty-two, Lily catches up to the mailman, who has another letter from Poppy for her. Poppy tells Lily that the book called *The Promise* is "the key to it all". Lily finds the library copy of *The Three Musketeers* on the beach. Mrs. Hailey apologizes to Lily for being cranky the other day.

Lily remembers what Albert said about his lie and how he left his sister in Paris. Albert feels guilty that Ruth had to stay in Paris by herself. Lily and Albert promise each other that they will be honest with one another from now on and that they will both be brave.

By the time Lily reaches home, it is pouring rain. Through flashes of lightning, Lily sees Albert in a rowboat near the edge of the bay.

In chapter twenty-three, Lily rows out toward the marshes in order to save Albert. Paprika the cat is in the rowboat with Lily. When Lily finally catches sight of Albert, the swells are tossing Albert's boat around like a toy and Lily becomes afraid. She is relieved to see that Albert is wearing his bright orange life vest. Albert is rowing toward a ship further out in the bay. Lily calls out to Albert, but he does not hear her. Lily watches as Albert is thrown out of the rowboat and into the turbulent water. Lily rows out and manages to save Albert. When they reach home, Gram is happy to see that Lily, Albert, and Paprika are all safe and sound.

In chapter twenty-four, Gram reminds Lily and Albert about the things others have done to keep them safe. Albert's mother and father started the newspaper to fight the Nazis and Poppy went overseas for Lily's sake. Gram reminds Albert that Nagymamma sent Albert and Ruth away so that the two of them could be happy and free.

Gram gives Albert the violin that was in the window at the As Good As New Shoppe. Albert begins to play beautiful Hungarian music on his new/used violin.

Lily then remembers that she left her library book in the rowboat. She and Albert retrieve the book and Lily realizes what Poppy has been trying to tell her in his letters.



## Chapters 21 - 24 Analysis

Chapter twenty-one brings Lily face to face with the lie she tells Albert about going to Europe. The character could not longer stand the strain of knowing she had no intention of carrying out such a plan. Lily's admission that she also lied about Poppy and Aunt Celia frees her from having to keep track of the lies she told. When Lily notices that Albert's reaction is different than she expected, she learns that Albert has a secret as well. Albert's admission that he, too, has lied softens the blow for Lily. She learns that she is not the only one who stretches the truth or makes up outright fibs. The particulars of Albert's lie are revealed in chapter twenty-two.

Chapter twenty-two is also a chapter which features a turning point in Albert and Lily's friendship. Even after each of them admit to not being entirely truthful, Albert stubbornly decides to carry out the plan without Lily's help. Albert broke a promise to Lily. Lily learns that breaking a promise is the same as telling a lie. When Poppy tells Lily that The Promise is "the key to it all," he is hinting to Lily that all the books Poppy mentions have to do with France. Poppy is trying to tell Lily that he is in France.

The narrative tension comes to a head in chapter twenty-three when Lily saves Albert's life for a second time. Once they arrive safely at Gram's place, Lily and Albert have both relinquished the idea of jumping a troop ship to Europe. It is fortunate that they abandon this plan, because the incident foreshadows Poppy's eventual rescue of Ruth Orban.

When Gram gives Albert the violin in chapter twenty-four, Albert truly becomes Lily's counterpart. Both of the friends play classical instruments and they can share their musical talents and knowledge with one another and their respective families. When she hears Albert play, Lily becomes aware of the importance of continuing her piano lessons.

The existence of the As Good As New Shoppe is established as a valuable place to rekindle dreams and begin the process of building new lives. With a violin to play, Albert can do something which reminds him of Nagymamma and home. Gram gives Albert a way to re-connect with his life in Hungary and to call up memories that make him happy.



# Chapters 25 - 28

## Chapters 25 - 28 Summary

As chapter twenty-five begins, it is almost time for Lily to return home to St. Albans. This fall, she will be in Sister Benedicta's sixth grade class. It is almost time for Lily to say goodbye to Rockaway and to Albert. Lily and Albert write a letter to Poppy and give Poppy the address where Ruth can be found in Paris.

Lily and Albert begin paying attention to the war in Europe. Mrs. Hailey the librarian gives them a map of France and they keep track of how long it will take Poppy and the other soldiers to reach Paris.

One day, Lily and Albert argue when Albert refuses to sneak into the Cross Bay Theatre to see a movie. Albert insists on paying his own way. Lily will not allow Albert to pay her way. They do not speak to each other for three days. Finally, Lily agrees and the two go to the movie theater. While watching "The Eyes and Ears of the World" newsreel, they watch as the American soldiers arrive in Paris. Lily gives Albert one of her stars to give to his sister Ruth.

In chapter twenty-six, it is winter and Lily is about to be late for school. She has been writing all winter — to Poppy and Albert and even Margaret in Detroit. Mostly, though, Lily has been writing in her journal. Sr. Benedicta says that Lily shows great promise as a writer. On her way downstairs, Lily hears the familiar sound of a lock in the door. All of a sudden, Poppy walks into the house. Lily and Gram are overjoyed to have Poppy home. He tells them about being in Paris and then he shows Gram and Lily a picture of Ruth Orban. When Ruth told Poppy that she felt guilty about not saying goodbye to Albert, Poppy told Ruth that more important than saying goodbye is remembering "all the days you were together".

In chapter twenty-seven, summer comes again and Lily, Poppy and Gram return to the house in Rockaway.

Lily feels sad because Margaret will not be in Rockaway this summer. Margaret's brother Eddie is still missing in action and Gram says that Mrs. Dillon cannot stand the thought of being in Rockaway without Eddie.

Lily takes off her shoes and socks and rushes into the ocean. Feeling the old water lapping at her ankles, Lily remembers the first time she and Albert rowed out onto the bay to look for the ships heading for Europe. On the way back to the house, Lily meets up with Paprika the cat.

In chapter twenty-eight, Lily pastes another star behind her bed on the porch. Gram tells Lily that the Orbans have invited them all to dinner. On the way, Lily hears Poppy and Mr. Orban talking and laughing. She can smell the wonderful fish Mrs. Orban is



preparing. Gram tells Lily that sometimes something beautiful comes from something terrible like the war.

Lily looks up and sees Albert and Ruth coming down the stairs. Albert tells Ruth that Lily is his best friend.

## Chapters 25 - 28 Analysis

The novel progresses and the summer comes to an end in chapter twenty-five. Lily looks forward to the sixth grade and has a sense of excitement about the transition.

The story of the stars comes full circle when Lily gives one to Albert. In this way, Lily establishes that she, Albert, and Ruth are family in a way. Albert and Lily are connected through their time in Rockaway and by Poppy's bringing Ruth home. Their shared experience proves that people from different walks of life are just people and that at certain times, understanding similarities is more important than paying attention to the differences. This assertion is also borne out when Lily and Albert receive the map from Mrs. Hailey the librarian. Actually seeing the area involved on a map reinforces the reality that war is very much about place, about specific geography. Lily and Albert do what many people were doing at that time — looking at maps, wondering about the people in those faraway places.

The point in chapter twenty-five at which Lily lets Albert pay her way into the movie is also a significant part in the story. It shows that Albert bears no ill will toward Lily for her lie and that his generous spirit overrides any petty feelings or grudges. Thus, Lily's relationship with Albert becomes a vehicle for inner growth and enlightenment. Lily learns about caring and camaraderie from Albert.

When winter arrives, Lily's life in St. Albans is in full swing and summer is still a world away. By this time, Lily and Gram have settled into their routine and missing Poppy becomes just another thing to do each day — until Poppy finally arrives home. Poppy's arrival in St. Albans and his news about finding Ruth Orban bring the narrative action full circle. When Poppy reveals that Ruth also felt guilty about not saying goodbye, the issue of speaking one's truth in the moment is reinforced. Albert has no idea that he and his sister were feeling the same way. When brother and sister are finally together again, everything is resolved.

In chapter twenty-seven, Lily learns that Margaret will not be returning to Rockaway. Eddie's status as missing in action is common during times of armed conflict. The uncertainty of Eddie's location and well-being remains until the end of the novel.

In chapter twenty-eight, Lily remembers her mother again. In this instance, however, Lily can be assured that her father will not be leaving again anytime soon. The Rockaway community has returned to normalcy and Lily finds the ocean to be the same. Familiar faces return to the neighborhood as Lily and Albert pick up where they left off last summer and Ruth becomes a part of the story.



# Characters

## Elizabeth Mary (Lily) Mollahan

Lily Mollahan is ten years old when the narrative begins. Lily is a fifth grader in Sister Eileen's class. Lily lives with her father and grandmother, Poppy and Gram. Lily's mother passed away when Lily was a very small girl. Lily doesn't remember much about her mother, but she has the paper stars to remind her of her mother's love. Lily is proud of her father for the sacrifice he makes by joining the war effort, and she is especially proud when Poppy brings Ruth home.

Lily is a naturally curious girl with a vivid imagination. At one point, it is revealed that Lily has written more than thirty books. Lily writes well, according to Sister Benedicta, Lily's sixth grade teacher. Along with Lily's talent, however, comes an inability to tell the truth at all times. Lily tells lies even though she knows it is wrong to stretch the truth like she does. And while Lily is conscious of her lying habit, she feels powerless to stop. Eventually, Lily learns her lesson when one of her lies almost costs Albert his life.

Lily does not have many friends in St. Albans. Her best friend is Margaret Dillon. Lily and Margaret only see one another when they are on vacation in Rockaway. Lily's next best friend is Albert Orban, a young Hungarian refugee. Lily is especially close to her father throughout the story, but Lily comes to appreciate her grandmother more when she gains new perspective over the summer.

Lily loves to read and she often sneaks into the movies. Lily also likes to learn new things. Her friendship with Albert enables Lily to discover something about life and customs in Hungary.

Most of all, Lily enjoys being at the beach. Rockaway is Lily's refuge. By the ocean, she can explore and wonder. Lily's yearly visits to Rockaway mark meaningful times of growth and transformation in the character's life.

## Jerry (Poppy) Mollahan

Poppy Mollahan is Lily Mollahan's father. Poppy is an affectionate, sincere parent who does his best to protect and care for Lily and Gram after his wife dies. Poppy is Gram's only son. Lily and Gram are the two most important people in Poppy's life. Poppy works as an engineer and he joins the Army to help with the reconstruction of Europe. He understands that enlisting could be dangerous, but Poppy is also committed to helping others.

Poppy's decision to go overseas is a result of the character's desire to contribute to making the world a better place in the face of destruction. Poppy does not seem to be concerned with the ideology of being at war. He merely refuses to stand on the sidelines and watch others fight and die.



Poppy shares a love of literature with Lily. He has a somewhat serious personality, but he is able to laugh at himself as well. When Poppy manages to find Ruth and reunite her with Albert, he becomes a protective force in the refugee's lives.

## Albert Orban

Albert Orban is the nephew of Emery and Eva Orban, Rockaway neighbors of the Mollahans. Albert is originally from Hungary, where he once lived with his parents, sister, and grandmother. When Albert is orphaned, he and his sister escape and are later separated in France. Also, after his parents are killed by the Nazis, Albert becomes even closer to his grandmother, Nagymamma. Following his escape from Europe, Albert goes first to Canada and then to the United States, to live with his uncle and aunt. Albert is around the same age as Lily and Margaret. He is approximately four years older than his sister Ruth.

Albert plays the violin and often talks about life in Hungary with Nagymamma. Albert misses his home and family but his friendship with Lily provides some respite from his more intense emotions. Albert learns to swim with Lily's help. Gram Mollahan and Albert strike up a friendship also.

Physically, Albert is rather pale and skinny. He has very knobby knees. Lily thinks Albert is "the skinniest kid she had ever seen in her life". Albert also has beautiful blue eyes and thick, curly hair that looks as if it has not been combed in a hundred years. Albert adopts an abandoned cat and names it Paprika, like the spice used in Hungarian cooking. Albert is very intelligent and he sometimes has to remind Lily of this fact.

## Margaret Dillon

Margaret Dillon is Lily Mollahan's best friend in Rockaway. Margaret is ten years old, the same age as Lily. Margaret lives with her parents and older brother Eddie, in the Jamaica section of Queens in New York City. Margaret Dillon has a serious sweet tooth and a heart of gold. This is evident when Margaret gives Lily a half-eaten Milky Way bar for her birthday. In her defense, though, Margaret does share a huge stash of candy with Lily, much to Lily's pleasure.

Since Margaret and Lily only see each other when they are on summer vacation, the girls often have a lot of catching up to do. Margaret's family is an amiable bunch, even though Mrs. Dillon tells Margaret that Lily Mollahan is nothing but trouble.

When Margaret's family leaves Rockaway, Eddie is in the army and fighting in France. Margaret sees great possibility in the family's relocation to Detroit. Working in a defense plant ensures that Margaret's father will have some job security. When Eddie goes missing, though, the absence tears a huge gash in the fabric of the Dillon family.

Margaret is not as literary as Lily. Her concerns mostly extend to the next snack or some juicy morsel of gossip. She is rather messy and can be thoughtless at times, but



not out of spite. For all her brass, Margaret is distraught at the thought of losing her brother Eddie forever, which prompts her to ask Lily to send the picture to Detroit. Margaret does not like the thought of forgetting what Eddie looks like. It is clear that Margaret misses Rockaway deeply, but her mother's grief cannot be contained so they never return.

## **Gram Mollahan**

Gram is Lily's grandmother. Gram is Poppy's mother. Gram is associated with warmth and comfort. Gram wonders sometimes what goes on in Lily's mind, but she knows her granddaughter is high-spirited sometimes. Gram feels things more deeply than Lily gives her credit for. Gram enjoys fishing and is not much of a housekeeper, according to Lily. Gram enjoys Rockaway just as much as Lily does. Gram is not very strict with Lily and usually lets her granddaughter go her own way. Gram is Lily's version of Nagymamma in terms of emotional attachment.

## **Eddie Dillon**

Eddie Dillon is Margaret Dillon's older brother. Eddie has buck teeth and a wide smile. Eddie also has a good sense of humor. Eddie is in the army and he has disappeared in action somewhere in France. Eddie has been missing since D-Day. Eddie and Lily liked each other very much. Eddie was much like the big brother Lily never had. Like his sister, Eddie Dillon loved candy. By the end of the novel, Eddie Dillon has still not been found. Lily is astonished when the entire community attends a prayer vigil for Eddie. He was well-loved in their small Rockaway neighborhood.

## **Mr. and Mrs. Orban**

Emery and Eva Orban are neighbors of the Mollahans. A friendly couple, Mrs. Orban is known in the small Rockaway community (certainly by Lily) as a wonderful cook. Mr. Orban is an affable older gentleman who is one of Lily's favorite people. Mr. and Mrs. Orban are also Albert and Ruth's uncle and aunt. It is assumed that the Orbans are from Hungary like Albert and Ruth.

## **Ruth Orban**

Ruth Orban is the younger sister of Albert. She is the niece of Mr. and Mrs. Orban. Ruth is roughly four years younger than Albert. When Albert and Ruth were about to leave Paris, a nun noticed that Ruth was ill and took her to a convent somewhere in or around Paris. Albert left France without Ruth. Miraculously, Poppy finds Ruth and brings her to the United States after the war ends. Ruth is reunited with her family at Rockaway.

Ruth looks a lot like Albert. She has the same curly, dark hair, and the same lovely blue eyes as her brother.





## **Nagymamma**

Nagymamma is Albert and Ruth's grandmother. "Nagymamma" is comparable to saying "big mother" in English. Nagymamma owned a restaurant at one time and Albert remembers her as an accomplished cook. Nagymamma is Gram Mollahan's Hungarian counterpart. Nagymamma also represents warmth and comfort, safety and familiarity to Albert.

## **Mrs. Sherman**

Mrs. Sherman owns and operates the bakery in Rockaway. Mrs. Sherman is a kind woman who enjoys a nice long chat. Mrs. Sherman complains to Lily about the butter shortage caused by the war.

## **Sister Eileen**

Sister Eileen is a Catholic nun and Lily Mollahan's fifth grade teacher at St. Pascal's school. Lily says that Sister Eileen is more concerned about rosaries and clean handkerchiefs in everyone's pockets than the war.

## **Sister Benedicta**

Sister Benedicta is also a Catholic nun. She is Lily Mollahan's sixth grade teacher. Sister Benedicta thinks Lily has a great deal of talent as a creative writer.

## **Aunt Celia**

Celia is Lily Mollahan's aunt. Lily tells Margaret that Celia is a spy for the Allies in the war and that she lives in Berlin, Germany. Later, Lily tells Mrs. Sherman that Aunt Celia has frostbite. In reality, Lily has not seen her aunt in four years.

## **Mrs. Hailey**

Mrs. Hailey is the local librarian.



# Objects/Places

## St. Albans

St. Albans is a neighborhood in the New York City borough of Queens.

## Berlin

Berlin is a large city located in Germany. Berlin is the capital city of Germany.

## Detroit

Detroit is the largest city in the state of Michigan.

## Budapest

Budapest is the capital of Hungary.

## Normandy

Normandy is a region in the north of France.

## Paris

Paris is the capital of France. It is also the largest city in France.

## Cassiopeia

Cassiopeia is the name of a constellation of stars.

## The Danube River

The Danube is a river that runs through Hungary and several other countries located in Europe.

## Paprika

Paprika is a spice made from ground peppers. Many Hungarian recipes use paprika.

## **Pearl Harbor**

Pearl Harbor is a harbor located on the Hawaiian island of Oahu.

# Themes

## The Truth Sets Lily Free

Lily Mollahan is a liar. Lily knows this, but no one else in her life is aware of the extent to which Lily is given to stretching the truth when it is convenient for her. Lily does not lie for malicious reasons. She simply cannot stop herself from making things up. In the beginning, her lies are fairly innocuous — she tells Gram and Poppy that Mr. Egan is an enemy spy. At another time, she tells Margaret Dillon that her Aunt Celia is a spy for the Allies living in Berlin. In chapter nine, Lily tells Mrs. Sherman at the bakery that Aunt Celia has frostbite so she can get out of the bakery in a hurry.

Lily is an imaginative girl. She is a creative soul who has a talent for writing stories. When she is in school, Lily writes several of her own books and Sister Benedicta tells Lily that her writing shows great promise. Lily lives in a fantasy world that is made more interesting when she manages to stretch the truth or totally fabricate things which take the sting out of everyday life. Evidence of Lily's lying to take the sting out of a situation is found in chapter twenty-one, when Lily tries to lie to Mrs. Hailey about an overdue library book. It is obvious that Mrs. Hailey is familiar with Lily's habit of lying when she stops Lily before the girl has a chance to spout yet another falsehood.

Lily understands that lying is wrong and that it can lead her into situations she may not be able to get out of. Lily is not entirely comfortable with the lies she tells, but while there is nothing at stake, she does not take the habit seriously. However, when Lily tells Albert about rowing out onto the ocean to catch a troop ship heading for Europe, Lily soon finds out that lying can do great damage. Albert is somewhat naive and Lily unwittingly takes advantage of this when she promises her new friend that they can go to Europe together to find Poppy and Ruth. What Lily does not know, however, is that Albert feels intense guilt over leaving Ruth in Paris. Until this point, no one is harmed by Lily's truth-stretching habit. But when she realizes that Albert is sincere about getting to Europe, Lily's lie comes back to haunt her. For Lily, part of growing up and being a true friend means admitting that she has told a lie. In addition, Lily learns that lying to make oneself feel important or better than someone else keeps people from really getting to know her true self.

## The Paradox of War

The Second World War provides the historical backdrop for Lily's Crossing. And although it is well established that there is a war going on in Europe, the particulars of the war are never mentioned in the narrative. It is clear that Poppy, Eddie Dillon, and thousands of men and women are fighting for something important. The narrative does, however, reveal that war - regardless of the specifics of the conflict - is complicated and no guarantee of physical or emotional safety is ever made. What is guaranteed about the war experience is that everyone in the community is affected in one way or another.



Food shortages cause Mrs. Sherman at the bakery to complain that it is difficult to get butter to make pastries. Lily has difficulty guessing where Poppy might be because Poppy is not allowed to tell her exactly where he is. Ruth Orban is taken to a Parisian convent after being deemed too ill to travel to the United States with her brother Albert. And Eddie Dillon, Margaret's beloved older brother, goes missing in France on D-Day.

The novel clearly depicts the power of war to turn anyone's life upside down. Each of the families are at the mercy of the war. In the case of the Dillons, Eddie's disappearance and the resulting fallout are devastating to Margaret, her parents, and the Rockaway community at large. Another example of the unpredictability of war is the murder of Albert Orban's mother and father. When his parents are killed, Albert and his sister Ruth are forced flee their home for their own safety, leaving their grandmother behind. Albert is tormented when Ruth stays in Paris. What happens to the Dillon and Orban families stands in direct contrast to what happens to Lily Mollahan's family, though. Compared to Margaret and Albert's experience, Lily is impacted by the war in a much different way. One example of this impact is Poppy Mollahan's library book code that tells Lily exactly where Poppy is on the European continent. And unlike Eddie Dillon, Poppy comes home from the war uninjured. When Poppy manages to find Ruth alive and well, Albert's guilt is assuaged. For Albert and Ruth, then, World War II provides moments of great sadness and great relief as well. What is most significant in this narrative is the portrayal of war as formidable and often shockingly painful.

## A Touch of the Classics

It is clear that Lily shares a love of the written word with her father. Lily is an avid reader and a budding talented writer. Several of the books mentioned in Lily's Crossing are works of literature that are included in the current canon of great books. The main objective for Poppy's mentioning these particular books is to give Lily a clue to where Poppy is. The books themselves are important in terms of their geography in Lily's Crossing, but each work is significant on its own merits.

The Three Musketeers, Madeline, and The Story of Roland are all equally important in the literary world. And the fact that Lily Mollahan has read them all is a testament to the character's openness to learning and engaging the boundless literary universe available to everyone.

The Three Musketeers by Alexandre Dumas (pere) is one of the most exciting adventure stories ever told. The Three Musketeers was first published in the mid-nineteenth century. The Musketeers were actual historical figures. Those in Dumas' book are freewheeling swordsmen who defend Louis XIV, the French monarch. In the series, D'Artagnan, the main character in the story, joins forces with his friends in wild adventures while defending the king's honor, shouting, "All for one and one for all!"

A second popular and widely-known work which takes place in France is Ludwig Bemelman's childrens' book Madeline. Madeline was originally published in 1939, the year Hitler invaded Poland and WWII began. Madeline tells the story of a young girl

living in Paris under the care of a Catholic nun. Madeline and her friends get into all sorts of interesting situations both in and around the capital city Paris. Even today, the Madeline books continue to be a favorite of children all over the world.

Finally, The Story of Roland is mentioned in the narrative. In the French literary tradition, there is a famous epic poem titled *Le Chanson de Roland* (in English, *Song of Roland*). The *Song of Roland* first appeared in France, somewhere between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. It is likely that Lily read a version of *The Song of Roland* refashioned for young readers by James Baldwin, an American children's author who was interested in mythology and legend. Although Roland was a genuine figure in French history, his fictionalized persona has become larger than life. Baldwin's version, published in 1930, is full of tales surrounding the harrowing exploits of a famous medieval soldier.

Two other titles Poppy Mollahan mentions in the narrative are a book entitled *The Promise*, which Lily is unable to find at the library, and *A Tale of Two Cities* by English author Charles Dickens. *A Tale of Two Cities* is a lengthy, intricate by a master storyteller. The novel takes place in London and Paris during the years leading up to the French Revolution.

By including such well-known and well-respected titles, Patricia Reilly Giff also furnishes clues that could help fuel the imagination of her readers. France becomes more than a place where war happens in *Lily's Crossing*. It takes on the texture of a real location, with real people who have lives that warrant exploration and connection to the larger global community.

# Style

## Point of View

The entire novel is told from the point of view of an omniscient narrator. The neutral narrator knows all and sees all. And since the overriding theme of the novel is Lily Mollahan's journey of discovery during a time of international conflict, the omniscient narrator is able to alert the reader to situations of which Lily is unaware. Additionally, since the novel is told from the perspective of an omniscient narrator, the reader is given an opportunity to consider broader questions which underlie the narrative proper; including questions of truth, displacement, armed conflict and the general importance of home and family. And while it is true that the novel's action primarily revolves around Lily, it is the omniscient narrator's voice which provides the thread that runs through the story.

In this novel, there is a fair amount of dialogue, with minimal space devoted to lengthy descriptive passages. For instance, no physical descriptions of Lily, Poppy, or Gram are given. It can be said that the narrative is more concerned with what happens and to whom, than tangentially drawing the reader into matters of sight-and-sound. This technique is well-suited to younger readers, as it provides an uncomplicated, unobstructed story that is easy to track.

## Setting

The majority of the novel takes place in Rockaway Beach, New York. Rockaway is the place where Lily spends her summer vacations with Gram and Poppy. For Lily, Margaret and later for Albert, Rockaway is a place of discovery and freedom from the mundane. While Lily is at the beach, she is free to read books and explore to her heart's content. Also, Lily's friendship with Margaret is most active when the girls are on vacation, even though they live relatively close to one another in the city. There is something magical about Rockaway. The community is small and fairly close-knit. Also, the people Lily knows in Rockaway seem to be more colorful than those from her St. Albans neighborhood, with the exception of the Catholic sisters at Lily's school.

For Lily, St. Albans means schoolwork, Sister Eileen or Sister Benedicta and piano lessons. St. Albans is a residential section of Queens, New York City. St. Albans is also closely associated with Lily's mother, who passed when Lily was a much younger child. It is obvious from the narrative that Lily still grieves her mother's passing and Lily's transfer of the stars on her wall from St. Albans to Rockaway is emblematic of Lily's effort to merge the two worlds she inhabits during the year.

Albert Orban is from Hungary. As a young refugee, Albert's view of Hungary is most closely associated with his grandmother, Nagymamma, his parents and his younger sister Ruth. In the novel, Hungary is represented as somewhat mysterious for Lily. For



Albert, though, Hungary is home; its cuisine, music and geography are forever frozen in his memory. After Albert leaves Hungary, he experiences a certain amount of nostalgia which borders on homesickness.

Paris, France also figures prominently in the narrative. Poppy drops clues to Lily that lead her to deduce that Poppy is in Paris helping the engineers rebuild the country when it is ravaged by war. Great works of literature such as *The Three Musketeers* (by Alexandre Dumas) and *A Tale of Two Cities* (by Charles Dickens) take place in France. By referencing these two novels, the author provides young audiences with possible future reading.

## Language and Meaning

Lily's Crossing is written in standard English and will be easily accessible to young readers ages ten and up. Additionally, the novel contains a wide variety of vocabulary words that will challenge and interest the audience. A good many words used in the narrative are specific to the period of time covered in the narrative. Since Lily's family is of the Catholic faith, there are also words in the narrative which pertain to Catholicism. For instance, readers who are not Catholic may have questions as to why Lily's teachers are referred to as "Sister". Also, the words "rosary," "missal," and "kneelers" may be unfamiliar to those who are not Catholic.

Secondly, Lily's time at the beach yields vocabulary words that are germane to that milieu. Lily talks about "jetties," and her "tackle box," as well as types of fish, including "flounder," and "killies".

Albert's first language is Hungarian, not English. As such, he uses words that seem strange to Lily like "goulash" and "paprika."

Words that are common in military usage occur frequently in the novel; such as "destroyer" and "freighter." Margaret Dillon tells Lily that her father will work at an airplane assembly in Detroit, building B-24 bombers. It was not uncommon for children like Lily and Margaret to be familiar with different types of military conveyance, as the war was a source of both fascination and fear for everyone at the time.

## Structure

Lily's Crossing is 180 pages long and is divided into twenty-eight chapters. The narrative progresses in a linear manner. That is to say, the story progresses through time from the summer of 1944 to the summer of 1945. The narrative tension builds steadily until chapter twenty-three, when Lily rescues Albert from drowning in the bay. The narrative arc reaches its apex in this chapter, with the revelation that Albert and Lily have both told lies. The narrative resolves itself in chapter twenty-eight. The exception to this statement is that by the end of the story, Eddie Dillon has still not been found.





The plot of the novel is straightforward and easy to follow. Since this is a book written for younger readers, it does not feature any complicated twists or turns. World War II (which lasted from 1939 until 1945) serves as the historic backdrop of the novel. The main plot centers around the changes that war brings to Lily's family and those around them. Lily, Margaret and Albert all have singular experiences of the war. Lily and Margaret both have relatives who are directly involved in the war. Poppy and Margaret's brother Eddie are both soldiers. Eddie's disappearance and its impact on the Dillon family impacts Lily's reaction to her father's decision to enlist. Albert, on the other hand, is a European refugee. Albert's perspective on the war is affected by his parents' deaths at the hands of the Nazis and his sister's uncertain fate after being left in a French convent. And while it can be said that the novel has a somewhat satisfactory ending, the reality is that the impact of war is anything but neat and tidy.



## Quotes

"Sister Eileen was much more interested in whether the class had rosaries and clean handkerchiefs in their pockets than in who was going to win the war."

Chap. 1, p. 3

"[Lily] didn't want to look at the neighbors, who were waving at them and the piano and the rusty truck, probably thinking they were crazy."

Chap. 2, p. 10

"Lily received three and a half presents for her birthday that Monday. Two were books, one was a secret, and the last was a half-eaten candy bar."

Chap. 3, p. 12

"Gram's house was built up over the water on stilts, without an attic, or a cellar, or even a bathroom with a real tub."

Chap. 3, p. 13

"[Lily] looked at the winter shutters tight over the windows, and breathed in, trying not to cry over the cat, or her father, or Margaret's being gone."

Chap. 10, p. 66

"[Lily] felt good to let [Albert] know she knew something, knew more than he did."

Chap. 11, p. 76

"It was so nice to tell someone about the stars. It was so nice to talk about her mother as if she, Lily, were like everyone else, like everyone who had a mother."

Chap. 13, p. 87

"Lily wanted to stretch out this moment with two letters to read. it would be like sucking on a red LifeSaver until it melted into a thin little circle."

Chap. 15, p. 99

"[Albert] sounded the way [Lily] did over practicing the piano. 'I have no time to fool around.'"

Chap. 19, p. 131

"Lily and Gram were having hot tuna fish in tomato sauce. it was horrible, but Gram hadn't caught a fish all week, and Lily hadn't even tried."

Chap. 20, p. 133



## Topics for Discussion

What is Lily's real name and what are her nicknames?

Why does Margaret Dillon's family move to Detroit? What reason does Mrs. Dillon give for never returning to Rockaway again?

Why does Albert feel guilty about not saying goodbye to his sister Ruth? What does Albert plan to do in order to save Ruth?

What causes Lily and Albert not to talk to each other for three days?

Why does Margaret want Lily to send the picture of Eddie to her in Detroit?

What are the things that appear on Lily's "problem list" most often?

How does Poppy let Lily know where he is overseas?

Why are the stars behind Lily's bed significant?

What reason does Poppy give Lily for going overseas?

How did Albert escape the Nazis?