

JUST A GIRL

LIA LEVI

Chapter 1

Lia introduces herself and the members of her family. We learn that she has a very small voice and that no one can hear what she has to say. Not even the teacher at school. While they're at the beach her mother and father send her to buy a newspaper so that she'll be forced to use her voice.

Chapter 2

Lia's mother tells her that she can't go to school any more because Mussolini doesn't want Jewish children in public schools. Lia finds it hard to believe her mother's words so she goes to her father. Her father uses a metaphor to explain to how sometimes people hold onto their power by targeting other people for their religion, for instance. Lia decides that she'll never say "Duce! Duce!" again at school. Her father becomes worried and tells her never to tell anyone about what he has just described to her. Two days later Lia's mother gives her some wonderful news: the Temple is opening a Jewish School right in Turin.

Chapter 3

Lia goes to the Jewish School. Her older cousin Annarosa goes there too and takes care of her. Lia continues to have a very soft voice that no one can hear. But one night during Passover her teacher chooses her to recite the Four Questions, and Lia's voice finally comes out. She will never have a voice that no one can hear again.

Chapter 4

Lia's father loses his job. Lia can't understand why Mussolini would want people to lose their jobs just because they're Jewish. Lia learns that people work to be able to pay their bills. Her mother tells her that they have some money in the bank.

Chapter 5

Lia tells us about the war, the Germans on one side, the English and the French on the other. Italy had at first chosen to remain neutral, but then Mussolini decided to side with Hitler and the Germans. While she and her sisters are at the park with their nanny, Maria, they hear a speech by Mussolini over the loudspeakers. That night, with her parents out of town, Lia and everyone else in the house wake up to hear bombs being dropped on the city of Turin by the French. The next day their parents come back, and when the French start bombing the city again that night, they all rush down to the basement for safety.

Chapter 6

The family's money is running out and they must move to Milan where Lia's father has found a job. At first Lia doesn't want to go, but when she gets to her new Jewish School in Milan she is pleased at the way she is welcomed by her classmates. Lia grows fond of Milan. But one day her mother tells her that Father's job has fallen through. They have to move to Rome.

Chapter 7

The family moves to Rome. Father has found an apartment for them in a building where other Jews live. Lia struggles at school because she has arrived in the middle of the year. Some of the kids make fun of Lia's accent, and the fact that her Italian is so perfect. The children are unruly. Many of them even dare to make fun of Mussolini. Sometimes the teacher laughs with them.

Chapter 8

Mussolini has ruled that Jews cannot go on vacation. One of Lia's grandmothers, Nonna Teresa, isn't Jewish. Nonna Teresa will rent a house so that Lia and her sisters can vacation there. They will spend three months with their grandmother. They eat wonderful things every day. Lia keeps a diary. In the meantime, their nanny, Maria, is forced to leave their home because she is a Christian, and Christians can't work for Jews. Maria goes to work for the family next door. Lia's family hopes that she will continue to spend time with them, but she becomes very attached to her new family, to Lia's and her sisters' dismay.

Chapter 9

The U.S. troops have landed in Italy. Mussolini's regime comes to an end when he is driven out by the King of Italy, who is even more powerful. But the war continues all the same. The Germans tell the Jewish elders in Rome that they won't hurt the Jews there if they give them 50 kg of gold. Every Jewish family looks for the gold they have in the house in the hope that they will keep their promise.

Chapter 10

Lia's parents accompany her to a Catholic boarding school where they hope she will be safe. They tell her that with the Germans you never know.

Chapter 11

Lia describes life at her boarding school. She lists everything that's good about it, and everything that's bad. One day her mother arrives. The Germans have started deporting the Jews. Her parents have decided that it would be safer if they each went their own way. Her mother will be staying at the boarding school too.

Chapter 12

Other children and adults arrive at the boarding school, where the nuns help them to hide from the Jews.

Chapter 13

Lia makes friends with a girl from Sicily named Pina. They become very close. Lia worries about not being able to tell her best friend that she's Jewish. A three-year-old Jewish girl also arrives and the nuns take her in too. Her mother can't stay and the little girl cries all the time. Lia comforts her and says that even though she's only twelve she knows what it means to be a mother now.

Chapter 14

The Americans are fighting the Germans and liberating Italy bit by bit. Mother and Father speak on the phone every day. They often meet in different places, but the children can never be with them. Lia acts in a school play.

Chapter 15

One day the girls see the Germans go by. They're in a very sad state now, not like before. The shooting ends, there are no more bombs in the sky. The Americans have arrived. Lia goes home.

Chapter 16

Lia is home again. Their house is destroyed and it looks much smaller to her now. But it is home, and she can listen to the radio again. There's a contest on the radio and all she has to do is write a letter with the correct answer. Lia's letter begins "Dear radio, I'm a Jewish girl..." When she shows the letter to her mother she tears it up, smiling, tossing the pieces in the air. You're not "a Jewish girl," Mother tells her. You're "a girl, and that is that." Of course, you're a Jewish girl, she tells her, that's a fact, like so many others. But it's a fact that you don't always need to display. You can if you want to, but you don't have to. The same goes for Chinese children, Swedish ones, children who live in a house with a balcony, children who have no house, children who like to study, and those who don't. "So I'm not the only one who's a child and that is that," Lia says. To which her mother replies, "You're *my* child. And that is that."