

Which path should you choose?

In this book, you, the reader, are the main character — and you make the decisions. You are a Jewish girl during World War II who escaped to England with your little sister. Now, you have just been told that your whole school must flee to the countryside, **but your sister is nowhere to be found.**

What do you do?

You get to choose.

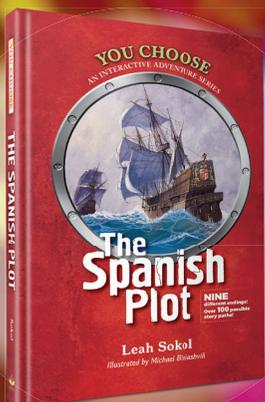
Your choices might lead you into the kindly care of a village family or leave you stuck in war-torn London. You might uncover an enemy plot and save the day ... or you might end up captive in a mysterious army base!

The choice is yours.

The story is yours.



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The British Escape

Leah Sokol

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YOU ARE WORKING ON your math problems when you hear a whisper.

It comes from the group of students sitting next to you. They are chattering in English, which is still a hard language for you. You've only lived in London for six months. You're from Austria, where everyone speaks German. The British children are talking so fast in English that there's no way you can understand them, so you're trying to ignore them.

Then you hear it.

"Pied Piper tomorrow."

You look up. So does everybody else. All around the room, children's eyes are round with terror.

"Is it true?"

"Did they really say—"

“But when—”

“Oh, come on,” one girl scoffs. “We’ve been preparing for this for days! I’m not scared.”

Someone drops a book on the floor. You scream and duck, and everyone looks at you.

Where is Ruthie? you think. *I need to find Ruthie!*

Classes finished a while ago, which is why all the children who still need to finish their homework are gathered in the same room. But you always stay late to do your work, and your sister Ruthie always waits for you. She must be here somewhere.

You get to your feet and look around the room. You don’t see Ruthie anywhere. Around you, some of the other children—especially the ones from Germany and Austria—are also standing. But most of the British children are still sitting, watching the foreigners panic. A girl named Franny raises her hand to her mouth and giggles.

You’ve never liked Franny. Most of the British children are kind and welcoming to new immigrants like you, but there are some who laugh at your broken English and what they call your “strange manners.” Franny is the leader of that group. She’s ten years old, just like you, but she likes to act as if you’re a child who doesn’t understand anything.

Right now, you don’t care about her. The British children don’t understand how you feel. They don’t know what it’s like to be taken from their homes.

They have no idea what’s about to happen to all of you.

“Children. Silence, please!” The sharp, clear voice cuts through the room.

Dr. Judith Grunfeld, the school headmistress, stands in the doorway. As always, she looks composed and elegant. Her eyes are worried, but that’s the only sign of her concern. Her voice is crisp and commanding.

“The order has come over the radio,” she says. “Tomorrow morning, all schoolchildren are being evacuated from London to the countryside.”

She speaks English, then repeats herself in German for the sake of the refugee children who don’t understand English yet.

Dr. Grunfeld, like you and Ruthie, is not from England. She left Germany because the Nazis were coming to power there, the same reason you had to leave Austria. Your parents sent you and Ruthie to London by yourselves because they thought it would be safer for you here.

But nobody ever makes fun of Dr. Grunfeld. She is so wise and elegant, and she cares about each child in the school. All the students, even Franny, respect her. The room is completely silent as everyone waits for her to continue.

Dr. Grunfeld clears her throat. “We will leave at six o’clock in the morning. Then we will travel by train to the countryside. It will be like a school outing! Hopefully we will be back in London before long. I trust you all to remember what to do.”

You have all been practicing for weeks—lining up with

your groups, bringing your packs with your belongings, and making sure your identification tags are around your necks.

And all of you have been listening to the radio, waiting for the announcement. You know the code words: *Pied Piper*.

It means England is going to war with Germany. The government thinks that once England declares war, German planes will begin bombing London. They are arranging for all children to be evacuated to the countryside, where they will be safer.

“Now,” Dr. Grunfeld says, “everyone should go home. We will see you back here tomorrow.”

Children jump up and head for the door. There is a lot of noise and stamping feet—exactly the sort of thing that frightens Ruthie. You need to find her! Where *is* she? You didn’t see her a few minutes ago, so maybe she’s outside. But the last time she was scared, you found her hiding under a table.

.....

**To wait for the other children to leave
the room, turn to page 10.**

To look for your sister outside, turn to page 11.



YOU SIT IN YOUR chair, hands clasped together, as the other children stream out.

Franny is the last to go. She stops in the doorway.

“Didn’t you hear Dr. Grunfeld?” she says. “We need to go home and get ready for tomorrow.”

“I heard,” you reply. You concentrate on saying it without an accent, so Franny won’t make fun of the way you speak English. “I’ll leave soon.”

“What are you waiting for?”

You don’t want to say. The last thing Ruthie needs is to have children making fun of her for hiding under tables. Especially when she may not even be here!

You glance around the room. No sign of Ruthie. But you can’t see under all the tables from where you’re sitting.

“Well?” Franny folds her arms over her chest. “Are you coming outside?”

.....
To follow Franny outside, turn to page 11.

To search for Ruthie with Franny watching, turn to page 12.

OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL BUILDING, you still don't see Ruthie. Franny, instead of going home, stares at you. You brace yourself for whatever insults she's preparing.

"Franny!" a girl calls. She comes over, weaving between the other children, holding her gas mask under one arm. All the children have been issued gas masks in case the Germans drop bombs with chemical weapons in them. This girl's gas mask is designed to look like Mickey Mouse. You wish you had one like that. "Do you want to come over? My mother made a cake for my baby brother's birthday."

She doesn't glance at you. Neither does Franny as she squeals in delight. It's as if you don't exist.

Good, you think. Now you can look for Ruthie.

But as Franny and her friend walk away, you don't see Ruthie anywhere. Surely she wouldn't still be in the building! But does she know how to get to Rabbi Schonfeld's house, where the two of you now live, on her own? She's only five!

Maybe you should wait here and see if she'll come find you. Or maybe you should walk around the building and look for her.

.....
To wait, turn to page 57.

To look for her, turn to page 72.

“I’LL COME SOON,” you say. “I have to—” In your nervousness, you forget the English word for *search*. You struggle for a moment, then say, “To see about if my sister is being here.”

Oh, great. You can tell that wasn’t right.

“Why would she be here?” Franny demands.

“She gets scared and hides sometimes.” You ball your hands into fists. “She’s only five years old!”

Turning your back on Franny, you get down on your hands and knees and begin looking under the tables. You can feel Franny staring at you, but you grit your teeth and keep looking, crawling from one table to another.

You find Ruthie under the last table you check. She is curled up with her hands over her ears. Gently, you take her wrists and pull her arms away.

“It’s all right,” you say.

“I want Mama,” Ruthie whispers in German.

Your mind flashes back to the last time you saw your mother, standing on the platform in her dark gray coat, getting smaller and smaller as the train pulled away.

“Me, too,” you say.

Ruthie starts sobbing when you pull her out from under the table. Her face is a blotchy, tear-streaked mess. And Franny is still standing there, watching.

Doing your best to ignore your unwanted audience, you search for Ruthie’s handkerchief. You can’t find it, so you give up and wipe her face with your handkerchief. As soon as you’re finished,



she lets out another sob, and tears stream down her face.

You give up.

“Let’s go home,” you say. You turn around, holding her hand.

But Franny is still in the doorway, her arms folded over her chest.

“You live in Rabbi Schonfeld’s house, don’t you?” she says.

The answer is *yes*. There’s no reason not to say yes. Except something in Franny’s tone makes you feel like you would be admitting to something embarrassing.

“Yes,” Ruthie squeaks.

Franny opens her mouth, but another voice interrupts her.

“Come *on*, Fran! I’ve been waiting for you for ages!”

An older boy walks into the room. You’ve seen him before. Edward is sixteen or seventeen, and he’s also a refugee from Germany. But he came over long before you did. He lives with Franny’s family in their posh house, he speaks perfect English, and he’s very good at playing cricket. He’s almost more British than the British boys. Nobody ever makes fun of him.

He glances at you and Ruthie, and speaks to Franny. “Who are your friends?”

“They’re not my friends,” Franny says, turning on her heel. “They’re some of those refugees who live in Rabbi Schonfeld’s house.”

“What’s the matter?” Edward asks.

It takes you a moment to realize that he’s talking to you. Before you can speak, Ruthie pipes up again.

“I don’t want to go to Rabbi Schonfeld. I want my mama!”