

Number the Stars



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF LOIS LOWRY

Lois Lowry was born in Honolulu, Hawaii, the daughter of an Army dentist whose career necessitated the Lowry family's moving from place to place throughout the young Lois's childhood. Lois and her family lived in Japan, Brooklyn, and Pennsylvania. After two years of college at Brown University in Rhode Island, Lowry married a U.S. Naval officer in 1956. Again, Lowry found herself relocating frequently due to her husband's career, and eventually she and her family settled down in Maine, where Lowry completed a degree in English Literature and nursed her passions for photography and writing. Today, Lowry's novels for children are bestsellers all around the world—her book [The Giver](#) is one of the most lauded teen reads of all time, and *Number the Stars* has received the Newbery Medal and the National Jewish Book Award. Her "Anastasia" books, which follow middle schooler Anastasia Krupnik through a series of everyday trials and tribulations, have proven controversial but essential teen reading. Lowry currently lives and writes in Massachusetts.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Number the Stars takes place at the height of World War II, though it only ever obliquely references the machinations of the Holocaust—the genocide which systematically murdered over six million European Jews between 1941 and 1945. Annemarie's friend Ellen is Jewish, and she and her family come under threat of being "relocated" by the Nazi officers stationed all throughout Copenhagen—but what threats await them should they be captured are never fully explained to Annemarie, or to the reader. In reality, the Nazi party enacted a campaign in Germany and in each European country they occupied, beginning in 1933, to exclude Jews from civil society, segregate them in ghettos, and eventually ferry them to concentration and extermination camps where they were worked, starved, gassed, and burned to death. Other Nazi targets included Slavs, Roma, political dissenters and opponents of the Nazi party, gay men and women, and the mentally and physically disabled.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Other children's books which tackle the painful and emotional subject of World War II include Jane Yolen's 1988 novel *The Devil's Arithmetic*, in which a Jewish girl growing up in the 1980s, apathetic towards her family's religious traditions, is flung backwards in time and experiences the Holocaust.

Markus Zusak's 2005 novel [The Book Thief](#) also focuses on a young Gentile girl, Liesel, whose foster parents shelter and hide a young Jewish neighbor. *The Diary of a Young Girl* is one of the most famous pieces of literature of the Holocaust, a true story assembled from the writings of the young Anne Frank, whose family was hidden by neighbors during the Nazi Occupation of the Netherlands. Anne, however, was not as lucky as the fictional Ellen from *Number the Stars*—Anne's family was captured, and the young Anne died of typhus at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in 1945, shortly before the end of the war and the liberation of the prisoners held there.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Number the Stars*
- **When Written:** Late 1980s
- **When Published:** 1989
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Fiction; Children's literature; World War II fiction
- **Setting:** Copenhagen, Denmark
- **Climax:** Annemarie successfully delivers an important paper packet to her Uncle Henrik, despite being stopped by Nazi officers who threatened her ability to carry out the vital mission.
- **Antagonist:** Nazi soldiers
- **Point of View:** Third-person

EXTRA CREDIT

Bestseller. According to *Publishers Weekly*, *Number the Stars* has sold upwards of two million copies in the United States alone.



PLOT SUMMARY

Ten-year-old Annemarie Johansen is an active, excitable, and happy ten-year-old. Even though her hometown of Copenhagen is under a strained and fearful occupation by the Nazis, and food, electricity, and heat are scarce and rationed, Annemarie and her family cling to the fact that at least they have one another. Annemarie's best friend is her downstairs neighbor, Ellen Rosen. Ellen's family is Jewish, and Annemarie and her younger sister Kirsti often celebrate the Sabbath on Friday nights at the Rosens' apartment. The two families are very close, and draw strength from one another throughout the difficult, taxing occupation.

As things start growing more dangerous, and local Jewish businesses are shuttered by the Nazis, Annemarie's Mama and Papa receive a visit from the young Resistance fighter Peter

Neilsen. Peter was once betrothed to Annemarie's older sister Lise, who died recently in a mysterious hit-and-run accident. Now, Peter works with a group which attempts to destabilize and weaken the Nazis who patrol the streets. Annemarie doesn't believe her family, who are "ordinary people," will ever be called upon to do the kind of work Peter does—but little does she know that things are quickly changing in Copenhagen.

On the day of the Jewish New Year, Mrs. Rosen and Mr. Rosen come to the Johansens with a plea. Nazi officials have obtained a list of all the Jews of Copenhagen, and have begun rounding them up and arresting them so that they can be "relocated." Ellen's parents flee, sheltered by the Resistance—but leave Ellen in the care of the Johansens, who plan to pass her off as one of their own daughters, "Lise," should the need arise. That very evening, some Nazi officers come knocking at the Johansens' door. Annemarie instructs Ellen to remove the Star of David **necklace** she always wears, but when she cannot open the clasp, Annemarie is forced to tear the necklace off for her. The Nazis rouse Annemarie and Ellen from their beds and interrogate them along with Mama and Papa, pointing out Ellen's dark hair—all of the other Johansens are blonde. Papa pulls a baby picture of Lise from a family album—luckily, the real Lise had dark hair as a child.

The next morning, Mama and Papa tell Annemarie and Ellen it isn't safe for them to go to school—Mama takes the girls along with Kirsti on a "vacation" to visit her brother, Henrik, in the countryside. Annemarie hides Ellen's necklace away for safekeeping, and promises her distraught friend that she'll return it one day. The journey to the countryside is beautiful but fraught with fear, as Nazi officers are stationed even in the idyllic seaside town where Uncle Henrik works as a fisherman.

Things at Uncle Henrik's house are strange, and someone even brings a casket containing the body of Annemarie's "Great-aunt Birte." Annemarie is suspicious, as she knows that there is no Great-aunt Birte. When she confronts Henrik about the strange atmosphere, he confesses that the wake is a ruse, but doesn't tell her much more—he explains that it is "easier to be brave if you do not know everything." That evening, many mourners come to the house to sit with the casket—as the night grows late, Peter Neilsen arrives with Ellen's parents, and Annemarie realizes that all of the gathered mourners are also Jews being protected by the Resistance.

A group of Nazi officers shows up to ask why so many have gathered at Henrik's house, and though they threaten to open the casket and reveal the entire gathering to be a farce, Mama saves the operation by explaining that the corpse inside the casket may still be infected with typhus. The disgusted officers leave, and Peter opens the casket, which is full of blankets and warm garments, and begins preparing the gathered Jews for their long journey. It has become clear to Annemarie that Uncle Henrik is planning on smuggling them across the narrow sea to Sweden on his fishing boat.

Peter Neilsen takes one group down to the docks, and shortly thereafter Mama leads Ellen and Mrs. Rosen through the forest to the boat. Ellen and Annemarie embrace tearfully, promising to reunite someday. Annemarie, anxious for her mother to return, decides to wait up for her, but is overcome by exhaustion and falls asleep. She wakes in the early morning light to find that her mother has still not come home. When she looks out into the yard, she sees her mother collapsed at the edge of the forest, and runs out to meet her.

Mama is all right, but has sustained a broken ankle after tripping on her way back from the docks. As Annemarie helps Mama up to the house, they both notice something lying on the ground—Mama recognizes the small white packet as an important part of the smuggling operation and urges Annemarie to run as fast as she can with it down to the docks. If Henrik does not have the packet when his ship sets sail, Mama says, all may be lost. Annemarie packs the parcel into a basket along with bread and fruit and sets off into the woods, comforting herself by imagining herself as Little Red Riding-Hood. Indeed, she does run into a big bad wolf of sorts just as she's about to reach the docks—two Nazi officers and their large, snarling dogs impede her path. The Nazi officers taunt Annemarie and tear apart her basket, but when they rip the packet open they find it only contains a small white handkerchief, and they let her pass. Annemarie delivers the packet to Henrik down at the docks—he thanks her and sends her back up to the house, promising to come home soon.

That evening, Henrik returns for dinner. After the meal he takes Annemarie out on a walk and explains the truth to her: he has indeed been smuggling small groups of Jews out of Denmark and across the sea to Sweden, and the handkerchief—dipped in a specially-engineered solution which dulls the Nazi officers' dogs' sense of smell and allows whole boatloads of people, hidden beneath the deck of a boat, to remain undetected—is a vital part of each mission. Henrik thanks Annemarie for her bravery, and assures her that one day she and Ellen will be reunited.

Two years later, Annemarie is twelve, and the war has ended. As Annemarie's family gathers on their balcony to observe the celebrations happening throughout the streets of Copenhagen, Annemarie retreats back into her bedroom and opens a trunk which holds all of Lise's possessions—including her unworn wedding dress. Tucked into the folds of the skirt is Ellen's necklace. Annemarie brings it out to Papa and asks him to repair the clasp so that she can wear it and continue keeping it safe until Ellen and her family return home.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Annemarie Johansen – The protagonist of the novel, ten-year-

old Annemarie Johansen is an outgoing and ambitious young girl who maintains a cheerful outlook even as her Nazi-occupied hometown of Copenhagen becomes a dangerous place for her and her best friend Ellen Rosen, who is Jewish. Annemarie remembers the plentiful and carefree existence her family enjoyed before the war with longing—since the occupation and the death of her older sister, Lise, in a mysterious hit-and-run accident, nothing has been the same. Still, Annemarie believes that she and her family—“ordinary people”—will be able to wait out the war peacefully and safely by keeping their heads down, and will never be called upon to fight or act. However, when the Nazis begin shuttering local Jewish businesses and rounding up Jews for purposes of “relocating” them Annemarie and her family take in Ellen, who lives downstairs, while Ellen’s parents flee with members of the Resistance. Annemarie and Ellen’s friendship turns into something stronger as they pretend to be sisters in order to shelter Ellen from the Nazis. When it becomes clear that the officers are suspicious of Ellen’s presence in the Johansen household, however, Annemarie’s Mama and Papa decide to bring Ellen to the countryside to seek refuge. Annemarie, her younger sister Kirsti, her mother, and Ellen travel to Mama’s brother and Annemarie’s uncle Henrik’s house at the seaside, and there Annemarie learns that her family is not as ordinary as she thought. Henrik is a smuggler, deeply entrenched in the Resistance—he helps hide Jews in his fishing boat and ferries them across the sea to Sweden, and to freedom. As Annemarie’s ignorance lifts and she learns more and more about what’s truly at stake for her family, she is called upon to be brave in a way she never has before as she and her family work to ensure that Ellen, her parents, and several other Danish Jews can safely escape the country that has, in many ways, turned against them. As Annemarie learns important lessons about bravery, solidarity, sacrifice, and sisterhood, so too do Lowry’s readers.

Ellen Rosen – Ellen is Annemarie’s best friend and neighbor. The two girls live in the same apartment building and attend the same school, and though Ellen is Jewish and Annemarie is not, neither of them ever feel any tension or distance on the basis of religion. Ellen plays at Annemarie’s apartment on weekday afternoons, and Annemarie and her sister Kirsti attend Friday evening Sabbath dinners at the Rosens’ apartment. Even in Nazi-occupied Copenhagen, a time of fear and uncertainty, Ellen’s childhood is relatively peaceful—until the Nazis obtain a list of all Copenhagen’s Jews and systematically begin rounding them up and arresting them for purposes of “relocation.” The dramatic Ellen, with big dreams of life as an actress, is forced into her greatest “performance” yet—the Johansens take her in while her parents are hurried off with members of the Resistance, and Ellen must pretend to be Annemarie’s sister. Though full of fear for her parents’ well-being, Ellen is soothed by the Johansens’ kindness as they welcome her into their home and say they’re “proud” to have

her as a daughter—even if it’s just pretend. Nevertheless, Ellen finds strength and happiness in her newly-minted sisterhood with Annemarie, and as Annemarie’s Papa points out, the two have behaved like sisters practically all their lives already. Though Ellen is forced to hide who she is—and even surrenders her beloved Star of David **necklace** to Annemarie for safekeeping—she remains strong as her journey takes her from Copenhagen to the Danish countryside, where she’s reunited with her parents and smuggled out of Denmark with the help of Annemarie’s Uncle Henrik. Ellen is a steadfast friend, a strong young girl, and a true sister to Annemarie.

Kirsti Johansen – Kirsti is Annemarie’s five-year-old sister. A sassy, petulant, and fanciful child, Kirsti has never known life outside wartime—yet she dreams of the comforts of peace and plenty, fantasizing daily about decadent cupcakes and fancy shoes. Kirsti is naïve, and her family attempts to keep her sheltered from the truths of the violent world she lives in by telling her stories—explaining that the bombings in the harbor are fireworks launched specially for her birthday or lulling her to sleep with fairy tales. Kirsti provides a thread of comic relief throughout the novel, and her cuteness, resilience, and pure view of the world gives the other characters hope in a time of fear and confusion.

Mrs. Johansen/Mama – Annemarie’s mother is a kind, gentle, and yet fiercely brave woman committed to resisting the fascist regime which has occupied her city and threatened her closest friends. Mama is a nurturer to her core, and though she’s reeling from the pain of losing her eldest daughter Lise, she remains attentive and devoted to Annemarie and little Kirsti. At the same time, she understands that she has a responsibility to more than just her own family—and shoulders the burden of working alongside her brother Henrik to help smuggle Danish Jews across the sea to Sweden with grace, grit, and determination.

Uncle Henrik – Mama’s brother and Annemarie’s uncle, Henrik is a fisherman who lives in the countryside. Unmarried and slightly roguish, Henrik lives alone in his childhood home—and has, since the start of the war, used his fishing boats to regularly smuggle Danish Jews across the narrow sea to freedom in Sweden. Henrik is staunch, determined, and yet gentle and kind—he does everything he can to help those in need, and daily risks his own life and well-being in order to do what he knows is right.

Peter Neilsen – The stoic, rebellious, and generous Peter Neilsen is a dedicated member of the Resistance—a group of Danish people determined to undermine the Nazi occupation of their country no matter the cost. Peter was betrothed to Annemarie’s older sister Lise at the time of her death, and though Peter has grown sad and distant in the years since, Annemarie still cares for him and looks up to him as an older brother figure. Peter, sadly, is eventually executed for his work on behalf of the Resistance, though Annemarie and her family

never forget him or his dedication to the cause of righteousness.

Lise Johansen – Though Lise is not physically present as a character in the novel, her emotional presence lingers on every page. Her loss in a seemingly random hit-and-run accident has dealt a severe blow to her family’s morale, and Annemarie, Kirsti, their parents, and Lise’s betrothed at the time of her death, Peter Neilsen, all mourn her each day. It is eventually revealed that Lise was, alongside Peter, a member of the Resistance, and died at the hands of Nazi soldiers determined to bring the faction down.

King Christian – The King of Denmark. Christian is a leader beloved by all his people, and rather than shutting himself away in his palace in trying times, he shows that he is as devoted to his subjects as they are to him by taking daily rides through the streets of Copenhagen on his horse.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Mr. Johansen/Papa – Annemarie’s father. A warm and kind man devoted to his family, to his community, and to doing what’s right no matter the risk.

Mrs. Rosen – Ellen’s mother and Mrs. Johansen’s closest friend in Copenhagen. A kind, generous woman.

Mr. Rosen – Ellen’s father.

Copenhagen—but compared to their Jewish neighbors, they move through the city with much less fear and trepidation. At the start of the novel, Annemarie believes that she and her family are “ordinary people” who will never be called upon to act heroically or risk their own safety for others. On the day of the Jewish New Year, though, when Nazis begin actively hunting down the Jews in the community, the Johansens know they must do whatever they can to help their neighbors, even if it means risking their anonymity, their safety, and the little social privilege they still wield.

When the Nazis stationed throughout Copenhagen begin the process of “relocating” the city’s Jews, the Johansens take in Ellen Rosen, the daughter of the Jewish family downstairs from them, and pass her off as one of their own while Ellen’s parents are hidden away by the Resistance—a secret group of Danish people “determined to bring harm to the Nazis” by any means necessary. Though Annemarie and her parents are taking a risk in opening their home to Ellen, they know that they are the girl’s only chance at survival. They are thus willing to put their lives on the line to do what’s right. Annemarie’s Papa even says he is “proud” to shelter Ellen and to welcome her into his home as his daughter; Annemarie, who’d been naïve as to what would soon be asked of her and her family, embraces Ellen as her new “sister” without a second thought. The Johansens prove themselves to be a selfless family willing to risk their safety and stand in solidarity with their neighbors. When Nazis come knocking at the Johansens’ door, suspicious as to why they have one dark-haired daughter when all of the rest of them are blonde, the Johansens do not waver in defending Ellen as one of their own. Though one false word could bring their whole lives tumbling down, the Johansens know that it is more important to act in the interest of the greater good, and to use their privilege to defend the defenseless.

After the encounter with the Nazis, the Johansens realize that simply putting themselves between Ellen and the soldiers and hoping for the best is not enough—they know that they must risk even more so that Ellen and her family can be safe. Annemarie, her younger sister Kirsti, and Ellen go with Annemarie’s Mama to the seaside home of her brother Henrik, a fisherman who regularly smuggles Jews across the narrow sea to the free, unoccupied country of Sweden. Though Henrik risks his life daily for the greater good, it is Annemarie and her mother’s first time playing a role in one of his rescue missions. In spite their increasing fear, they all know that they must see Ellen’s journey through, and help her to reunite with her parents and escape to safety—even though down at the seashore, in the placid countryside, there are many Nazi soldiers stationed and ready to stop smugglers in their tracks. At Henrik’s house, the stakes are higher than ever—an operation to smuggle the Rosens and several other Jews out of the country is in full swing, and yet the presence of Nazi soldiers threatens to undermine the effort at every turn.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don’t have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



PRIVILEGE, SACRIFICE, AND SOLIDARITY

At the heart of Lois Lowry’s *Number the Stars* is a story of what it means to wield social power and privilege. As her Nazi-occupied hometown of

Copenhagen, Denmark, grows more and more hostile towards its Jewish residents, ten-year-old Annemarie Johansen and her non-Jewish family step up and sacrifice their own safety in order to help their Jewish friends and neighbors escape.

Annemarie summons the courage to risk her own safety—and indeed her social privilege—to stand in solidarity with her Jewish friend, Ellen Rosen, and eventually deliver the girl to safety. Through Annemarie’s story, Lowry argues that those with social privilege in any society must use their power to stand alongside—and make sacrifices for—those who are underprivileged or persecuted.

Annemarie and her family, the Johansens, are struggling emotionally and economically under the Nazi occupation of

Annemarie, her mother, and her uncle risk their very lives to make sure that their plans are kept under wraps. Even as Annemarie's mother faces violence from soldiers who arrive at Henrik's house to search it and Annemarie herself is forced to lie to the soldiers, risking her own well-being should she be caught, everyone working on behalf of the Danish Jews knows that their escape will only be possible through the support, solidarity, and sacrifice of non-Jewish allies.

Through Annemarie's journey, Lowry shows time and time again how essential it is for "ordinary people" to look out for one another in the face of encroaching danger, oppression, and cruelty. Lowry uses the sacrifices that Annemarie and her family make to show how, more broadly, society's most privileged members must protect its weakest ones. Even if it means risking everything, the privileged must help the persecuted and the less-fortunate; only through sacrifice and solidarity, Lowry argues, can righteousness and justice flourish.



BRAVERY

Despite being a children's novel, Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars* makes a complicated argument about what it means to be brave. Throughout the

novel, Lowry creates tension between the idea that bravery comes from knowing the risk at hand and doing the hard thing anyway, and the opposing idea that one is able to act more bravely when ignorant of what's at stake. She ultimately argues that true bravery is not based on whether one knows what he or she is risking in being brave: true bravery is motivated by selflessness.

At the start of the novel, Annemarie Johansen is naïve about much of the violence happening right in her own hometown. The dramatic tension of the novel begins developing as Annemarie learns more about the world around her—and about her parents' plans to help get the Rosens out of Denmark. As Annemarie is forced into situations that demand greater and greater bravery, she finds that people around her attempt to help her be brave by either supplying her with information or intentionally withholding it. In the end, Annemarie discovers that it doesn't matter whether she knows what she's getting into or not—in moments that require bravery, she is able to face both violence and fear because of her desire to do what's right.

The first time Annemarie's bravery is put to the test is the night the Johansens shelter Ellen Rosen. Nazis arrive at the apartment looking for the Rosens, and ask questions about why Ellen is dark-haired despite being the "daughter" of the fair-haired Johansens. Annemarie staunchly defends Ellen as her sister, and through her and her parents' combined bravery, they are able to stand up to the Nazis, convince them that Ellen is truly one of their own and send the soldiers away. Annemarie knows exactly what is going on and exactly what is at stake during this encounter with the Nazis. Despite knowing the

truth, she is still able to lie—her bravery is not contingent upon her ignorance. However, as the novel progresses and the fight to save Ellen and her family grows more dire, many of the adults attempt to shield Ellen and Annemarie from the truth, believing that doing so will help the girls act bravely and lie easily.

Out in the countryside, Annemarie is placed in several situations where she must risk everything for the Resistance's mission of smuggling the Rosens and several other Jews across the sea to Sweden by way of Uncle Henrik's boat. The adults around Annemarie often try to hide from her the truth of what's going on, believing that if details of the mission are kept from Annemarie, it will be easier for her to be brave. Yet through two major plot points, Lowry shows that it doesn't matter whether Annemarie knows what's happening to or around her—her bravery comes from a self-sacrificing desire to secure the safety of her friends and neighbors.

When a casket is wheeled into the middle of Uncle Henrik's living room, he and Mama tell Annemarie that there has been a death in the family—their Great-Aunt Birte has passed. Annemarie is immediately suspicious. When Annemarie confronts her uncle about the phony death, he tells her that it is "much easier to be brave if you do not know everything," and yet reveals to her the truth: there is no Great-Aunt Birte and never was. When Nazis descend on the "mourners" gathered around the casket that evening, they threaten to open it—but through some quick thinking, Mama manages to distract the soldiers and redirect their attention. The casket is eventually revealed, after the Nazis leave, to be full of supplies for the Rosens and their fellow Jews. Knowing what was going on increased Annemarie's fear that the farce of Great-Aunt Birte's wake would be discovered—but did not stop her from being brave and keeping quiet when it mattered most.

The relationship between bravery and ignorance is once again put to the test when Annemarie must deliver a mysterious packet to Uncle Henrik's ship before he leaves the harbor with the Rosens and the other Jews. Though Annemarie does not know what's inside the packet, she has been told that all may be lost without it. As Annemarie hurries through the woods to deliver the packet, she is stopped by two Nazis who demand to rifle through her basket—and who feed the cheese and bread inside of it to their snarling, intimidating dogs. When they find the packet and open it—after repeatedly questioning the ignorant Annemarie as to its contents—they see that it is nothing more than a handkerchief and, after their dogs smell it and don't react, allow her to pass. Later, when Annemarie learns that the handkerchief actually contained a solution which served to dull the Nazis' search dogs' sense of smell, thus preventing them from picking up the scent of the people hiding beneath the deck of Henrik's ship, she sees just how vital her role in delivering the package was after all. She wonders if she would have been able to keep calm and complete her mission as

skillfully if she had known what the packet contained—but the answer is ultimately irrelevant. Annemarie was determined to get the packet to Henrik and to secure the safety of her friends and neighbors no matter the cost.

Only at the very end of the novel does Annemarie fully understand the truth of her family's story—and her own. In the book's final pages, Annemarie learns that her sister Lise died not in a random car accident, but an attack orchestrated by Nazis in an attempt to decimate members of the Resistance effort of which Lise was a part. The fact that so much of Annemarie's own personal history has been obscured from her by those trying to protect her from the truth doesn't anger or upset her—but she concedes that it's impossible to say whether knowing the truth about Lise would have helped or hampered her ability to be brave for those who needed her. In the end, Annemarie's bravery stems from her personal commitment to helping Ellen at any cost, and her belief in the equality, dignity, and sacredness of the lives of those she was protecting.



REALITY VS. FANTASY

Stories and fairy tales play an important role throughout Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars*.

Annemarie Johansen tells her younger sister Kirsti fairy tales to lull her to sleep each night—and even comforts herself in times of fear or danger by comparing herself to figures of fantasy such as Little Red Riding-Hood or distant, storied figures from real life, such as the Danish king, Christian. By weaving in and out of real life and fantasy throughout the novel, Lowry suggests that stories have the power to sustain an individual's hope, courage, and sense of purpose in moments when their “real” lives become places full of darkness, fear, and uncertainty.

Throughout the novel, Lowry shows how blurring the lines between fact and fiction often proves to be a saving grace not just for her characters, but for anyone struggling to make sense of frightening or dangerous circumstances. This is especially evident through the character of Annemarie's five-year-old sister Kirsti, a daydreamer and the youngest character in the novel. She is also the most playful, yet her desire to immerse herself in fantasies full of big pink cupcakes and fairy-tales about far-off places shows just how deeply Kirsti is affected by the turmoil happening all around her. Stories are a way for Kirsti to shield herself from the violence of Nazi-occupied Copenhagen—and for others to help shield her, too. When a bombing in the harbor interrupts Kirsti's birthday, Mama tells her that the city has put on a fireworks spectacle just for her. Months later, Kirsti clings to the story of her amazing birthday celebration—though whether she earnestly believes it to be true or knows it to be a farce is never revealed.

Kirsti also demands bedtime stories each night from Annemarie, and loves to hear not just about Little Red Riding-Hood and the characters of Hans Christian Andersen but also

the real-life figure of the Danish monarch, King Christian, who bravely rides his horse unguarded through the Copenhagen streets each morning. The stories Kirsti's family tells her are a way for her to both understand the world and to escape it—to confront fearful situations and prepare herself to face the worst while also surrendering to the respite of a fanciful fairy tale about good conquering evil.

Annemarie is often the arbiter of stories in her family—she is the one who lulls Kirsti to sleep each night with tales both fanciful and practical, and through her games of imagination with Ellen, she helps her persecuted friend also find respite in the face of uncertainty and danger. At the same time, Annemarie finds herself dipping into fantasy more than once as a way of coaching herself through a difficult situation. While in her parents' apartment in Copenhagen, Annemarie often opens up her dead sister Lise's trunk of possessions and bridal linens, reminiscing about her sister and playing with her beautiful things. Though not telling herself a tale in a narrative sense, in going through Lise's possessions, Annemarie is continuing her sister's story and considering what might have been had Lise lived to marry Peter Neilsen and enjoy a happy life. This ritual is a balm for Annemarie as much as it is a reminder of how dangerous things are in Copenhagen—and how anyone, even good and just people like Lise, could lose their life at any minute.

Annemarie's second major detour into fantasy occurs when, towards the end of the novel, she must deliver an important packet to Uncle Henrik's ship—a packet without which his mission to smuggle the Rosens and several other Danish Jews to freedom in Sweden may be doomed. As Annemarie weaves her way through the dark forest between Henrik's house and the harbor, she jumps at every sound and startles at every root her foot grazes on the twisting path. To comfort herself, Annemarie reminds herself of the story of Little Red Riding-Hood—a story she has often told to Kirsti. Because the story is so familiar to Annemarie, in telling it to herself, she is able to convince herself that she knows what's coming next and is prepared to face it. Because of the story, even when she does indeed confront some big bad wolves—in the form of two Nazis and their large dogs—she is prepared to face them, drawing strength and courage from the intrepid figure of Little Red herself.

Through the stories within the story of *Number the Stars*, Lois Lowry demonstrates the power of storytelling to provide both an escape from and a roadmap to life's most difficult problems. As her characters dip in and out of stories and fantasies, these “escapes” actually nourish them and help them carry on in the face of fear, desperation, and sadness.



SISTERHOOD

Annemarie Johansen and her best friend Ellen Rosen are thick as thieves, and have been all throughout their childhoods. Their mothers, too, are close friends who get together every day for an afternoon coffee—and keep up with the tradition even when the closest thing to coffee left in Copenhagen is hot water steeped with herbs. Even though Annemarie has a younger sister, Kirsti, she still feels a void in her life when it comes to sisters, having recently lost her older sister, Lise, in a fatal hit-and-run. Complicated notions of sisterhood are rife throughout the pages of *Number the Stars*, and as the novel progresses, Lois Lowry uses the relationship forged between Annemarie and Ellen to show that sometimes sisters are bound together by more than blood—shared experience, mutual devotion, and respect for the other’s individuality are what sisterhood is made of.

When the Johansens take Ellen into their home, they tell her and Annemarie that if any soldiers come, they will need to pretend to be sisters. Annemarie’s Papa insists it will be “easy” for them to pretend, as they’re together so much already. As Annemarie and Ellen, who have been the best of friends for years, perform the relationship of sisters in order to shelter Ellen from being captured by Nazis, the pretense becomes real—by the end of the novel, Annemarie and Ellen really do see themselves as sisters, bound together by the love, solidarity, and support they have shown one another. At the same time, Annemarie must contend with her feelings of obligation towards and contempt for her younger sister Kirsti, and the pain of having lost her older sister Lise.

At the start of the novel, Annemarie does indeed treat her friend Ellen as something of a sister. They are together nearly all the time, and they play and study together every day. Annemarie even attends Ellen’s family’s religious ceremonies on the Sabbath each Friday. Their lives are deeply intertwined. Unable to forge a real relationship with her five-year-old sister Kirsti, but desperate for a sense of sisterhood in the wake of having recently lost Lise in a mysterious accident, Annemarie longs for a sisterly relationship, and finds it in her friendship with Ellen.

After the Nazis begin arresting the Jews of Copenhagen, the Johansens take Ellen in and decide to hide her while her parents seek shelter with the Resistance. Ellen is frightened to be separated from her family, but Annemarie’s Mama and Papa assure Ellen that they are “proud” to call her their daughter—even if it’s just pretend. When Nazis storm into the Johansens’ apartment, however, the ruse is put to the test—Annemarie swears to the soldiers’ faces that Ellen is her sister, and Mama and Papa swear the same. Realizing the city is not safe for Ellen, Annemarie, Kirsti, and Mrs. Johansen take her to the countryside, where on the train Nazis again question the relationship between Ellen and the rest of the family. As

Annemarie is made to declare over and over that she and Ellen are sisters, the pretense becomes more of a truth. The frightening and life-threatening experiences they share bond them close together in a profound way, and by the time Ellen is taken from Uncle Henrik’s countryside house to be smuggled to Sweden alongside her parents, she is devastated to leave Annemarie’s company.

At the end of the novel, after the Nazis have been expunged from Denmark and the Allies have won the war, Annemarie asks her Papa to repair Ellen’s broken Star of David **necklace**, so that it will be ready for her to wear when she returns. Annemarie decides that in the meantime, she will wear the necklace. This moment is symbolic of Annemarie’s strong feelings not just of solidarity but of sisterhood—she knows that there is no difference between her and Ellen, and that they are bound together forever by the experiences they’ve shared and the sisterly devotion they feel for one another.

The act of pretending to be “real” sisters, sisters by blood, actually serves to show Ellen and Annemarie the ways in which they have effectively been sisters all along. Though not related to one another, Ellen and Annemarie provide one another with the love, support, empathy, and comfort that sisterly relationships often yield. When Annemarie, towards the novel’s end, reveals that she has hidden Ellen’s Star of David necklace for years inside the folds of Lise’s yellowing, never-worn wedding dress, Lois symbolically acknowledges that sisters can be found outside of one’s blood family. Though Lise’s loss can never be replaced, in her absence Annemarie has found yet another sister—one whose beauty, bravery, and kindness she admires just as much as she did Lise’s.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



ELLEN’S NECKLACE

The most potent symbol found within the pages of Lois Lowry’s *Number the Stars* is Ellen Rosen’s Star of David necklace, a dainty gold chain from which dangles the universal symbol of Judaism. The necklace is a symbol of the sisterhood and shared identity between Ellen and Annemarie. Though they are not sisters by blood, the mutual respect, devotion, and sacrifice they show one another makes them sisters, perhaps, in an even more profound way. Ellen is never seen without her necklace—and indeed, when Annemarie Johansen urges her to hurriedly take it off after Nazi soldiers arrive at the Johansen’s apartment to search for Ellen and her parents, Ellen confesses that she hasn’t taken the necklace off in so long that she “can’t even remember how to open” its clasp. As the Nazi soldiers approach the bedroom where Annemarie

and Ellen are sleeping together in bed, pretending to be sisters so that Ellen won't be "relocated," Annemarie reaches over and forcefully yanks the necklace from Ellen's neck. She holds the necklace tightly in her palm all throughout the confrontation with and interrogation by the soldiers, and by the time they leave, the Star of David symbol has been imprinted onto Annemarie's palm—signaling her deep connection to her friend, for whom she has already taken a dangerous risk. Annemarie hides the necklace away, promising Ellen that she'll keep it for her until it's safe for Ellen to wear the necklace again.

The necklace is not mentioned again until the closing pages of the novel. As Annemarie and her family stand on their apartment's balcony, celebrating the news that the war is over, Annemarie slips away to her bedroom to retrieve the necklace from where she's hidden it—in the folds of her dead older sister Lise's wedding dress, deep inside a large blue trunk which houses all of Lise's things. Annemarie brings the necklace out to Papa and asks if he'll repair it. He agrees, and Annemarie states that she'll proudly wear the necklace until Ellen and her family, smuggled to Sweden just as the Nazis began rounding up Copenhagen's Jews, return to the city. The repair of the necklace signals not only Ellen's eventual return to her home, but that of other Jews forced to flee during the war.

Beyond representing the bond between Annemarie and Ellen, then, the necklace also symbolizes the sameness between all people, regardless of class, color, or creed. When Annemarie decides to wear Ellen's necklace as if it's her own, she's showing that she—like a true sister—is willing to shoulder the burdens Ellen has had to bear, and to align herself with her at any cost. Annemarie knows the inherent worth of all life, and even in the face of fear, destruction, and rampant anti-Semitism throughout Europe, she has risked and sacrificed for Ellen and for her Jewish neighbors.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Houghton Mifflin edition of *Number the Stars* published in 1989.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☞☞ "Mama, is there anything to eat?" Annemarie asked, hoping to take her mother's mind away from the soldiers.

"Take some bread. And give a piece to your sister."

"With butter?" Kirsti asked hopefully.

"No butter," her mother replied. "You know that."

Kirsti sighed as Annemarie went to the breadbox in the kitchen. "I wish I could have a cupcake," she said. "A big yellow cupcake, with pink frosting."

Her mother laughed. "For a little girl, you have a long memory," she told Kirsti. "There hasn't been any butter, or sugar for cupcakes, for a long time. A year, at least."

"When will there be cupcakes again?"

"When the war ends," Mrs. Johansen said. She glanced through the window, down to the street corner where the soldiers stood, their faces impassive beneath the metal helmets. "When the soldiers leave."

Related Characters: Kirsti Johansen, Mrs. Johansen/Mama, Annemarie Johansen (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 9-10

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the five-year-old Kirsti Johansen—who is too young to remember a time in her life before the Nazi occupation of Copenhagen—dreams of eating delicious treats. The citizens of Copenhagen have been subsisting on bread and potatoes instead of meat, and water with herbs in place of coffee for years. Kirsti has never known the luxury of peacetime, but the stories her family has told her about life before the war has filled her with desire for things very far out of her reach. Though poignant, Kirsti's ability to dream of cupcakes also reflects her resilient sense of hope and imagination that survives even amidst the horror of war. Kirsti's Mama, meanwhile, puts on a brave face for her daughter as she remains hopeful that soon the war will end, and the Nazi soldiers will leave Denmark for good.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☛☛ Redheaded Peter, her sister's fiancé, had not married anyone in the years since Lise's death. He had changed a great deal. Once he had been like a fun-loving older brother to Annemarie and Kirsti, teasing and tickling, always a source of foolishness and pranks. Now he still stopped by the apartment often, and his greetings to the girls were warm and smiling, but he was usually in a hurry, talking quickly to Mama and Papa about things Annemarie didn't understand. He no longer sang the nonsense songs that had once made Annemarie and Kirsti shriek with laughter. And he never lingered anymore.

Papa had changed, too. He seemed much older and very tired, defeated.

The whole world had changed. Only the fairy tales remained the same.

"And they lived happily ever after," Annemarie recited, whispering into the dark, completing the tale for her sister, who slept beside her, one thumb in her mouth.

Related Characters: Annemarie Johansen (speaker), Kirsti Johansen, Mr. Johansen/Papa, Mrs. Johansen/Mama, Lise Johansen, Peter Neilsen

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

This passage, in which Annemarie reflects on the ways in which her family has changed since the start of the Nazi occupation, shows just how heavily war is weighing not just on the Johansens and their extended family, but the whole of Copenhagen and even Europe. The world is different than it was when Annemarie was very small, and the only refuge she and her sister Kirsti have from the pain of their sister's loss, the omnipresent threat of the Nazis stationed at every street corner, and the crushing anxiety of rationed food, heat, and electricity are the stories they tell one another for comfort and escape.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☛☛ Now she was ten, with long legs and no more silly dreams of pink-frosted cupcakes. And now she—and all the Danes—were to be bodyguard for Ellen, and Ellen's parents, and all of Denmark's Jews.

Would she die to protect them? *Truly?* Annemarie was honest enough to admit, there in the darkness, to herself, that she wasn't sure.

For a moment she felt frightened. But she pulled the blanket up higher around her neck and relaxed. It was all imaginary, anyway—not real. It was only in the fairy tales that people were called upon to be so brave, to die for one another. Not in real-life Denmark. Oh, there were the soldiers; that was true. And the courageous Resistance leaders, who sometimes lost their lives; that was true, too.

But ordinary people like the Rosens and the Johansens? Annemarie admitted to herself, snuggling there in the quiet dark, that she was glad to be an ordinary person who would never be called upon for courage.

Related Characters: Mrs. Rosen, Mr. Rosen, Ellen Rosen, Mrs. Johansen/Mama, King Christian, Mr. Johansen/Papa, Annemarie Johansen

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 25-26

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Annemarie's parents have just pulled her from bed in order to tell her a little bit more about what's going on. Earlier in the afternoon, Annemarie, Ellen, and Kirsti discovered that a local Jewish business had been forcibly closed by Nazis, and now, Annemarie's parents, together with Peter Neilsen, have warned her that more injustice and violence may be coming—and their family may be called upon to stand up and do what's right in the name of their Jewish friends and neighbors. As she heads back to bed, though, Annemarie dismisses her parents' warnings as the stuff of fairy tales—she doesn't believe such heroic or serious measures will ever be required of her or her parents. As the events of the coming days will show, however, even "ordinary" people must behave extraordinarily in certain times.

Chapter 4 Quotes

●● Alone in the apartment while Mama was out shopping with Kirsti, Annemarie and Ellen were sprawled on the living room floor playing with paper dolls. They had cut the dolls from Mama's magazines, old ones she had saved from past years. The paper ladies had old-fashioned hair styles and clothes, and the girls had given them names from Mama's very favorite book. Mama had told Annemarie and Ellen the entire story of *Gone With the Wind*, and the girls thought it much more interesting and romantic than the king-and-queen tales that Kirsti loved.

"Come, Melanie," Annemarie said, walking her doll across the edge of the rug. "Let's dress for the ball."

"All right, Scarlett, I'm coming," Ellen replied in a sophisticated voice. She was a talented performer; she often played the leading roles in school dramatics. Games of the imagination were always fun when Ellen played.

Related Characters: Ellen Rosen, Annemarie Johansen (speaker), Kirsti Johansen, Mrs. Johansen/Mama

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Ellen and Annemarie enjoy a simple game of paper dolls. As they play, Annemarie reflects on Ellen's talent as an actress. This passage foreshadows the great "role" Ellen will soon have to play. Soon, Ellen will be required to forfeit her identity and inhabit the role of Annemarie's sister. Though neither girl knows this now, Annemarie's envy of and respect for Ellen's talents as a performer precipitate a time when both girls will have to put the skills they've developed in play to use in earnest. The girls' innocence is being slowly stripped away by the encroachment of the Nazi regime, and even the things that once seemed fun and fanciful will soon become matters of life and death.

●● Annemarie grinned and walked her Scarlett toward the chair that Ellen had designated as Tivoli. She loved Tivoli Gardens, in the heart of Copenhagen; her parents had taken her there, often, when she was a little girl. She remembered the music and the brightly colored lights, the carousel and ice cream and especially the magnificent fireworks in the evenings: the huge colored splashes and bursts of lights in the evening sky.

"I remember the fireworks best of all," she commented to Ellen. "Me too," Kirsti said. "I remember the fireworks."

"Silly," Annemarie scoffed. "You never saw the fireworks." Tivoli Gardens was closed now. The German occupation forces had burned part of it, perhaps as a way of punishing the fun-loving Danes for their lighthearted pleasures.

Kirsti drew herself up, her small shoulders stiff. "I did too," she said belligerently. "It was my birthday. I woke up in the night and I could hear the booms. And there were lights in the sky. Mama said it was fireworks for my birthday!"

Then Annemarie remembered. Kirsti's birthday was late in August. And that night, only a month before, she, too, had been awakened and frightened by the sound of explosions. Kirsti was right—the sky in the southeast had been ablaze, and Mama had comforted her by calling it a birthday celebration.

Related Characters: Kirsti Johansen, Annemarie Johansen (speaker), Mrs. Johansen/Mama, Ellen Rosen

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 30-31

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, a conversation about fireworks reminds Annemarie and Kirsti of the same moment—perceived, however, through very different lenses. When a tragic bombing lit up the Copenhagen sky several months ago, Annemarie knew that the sights and sounds were those of war and terror. In an attempt to comfort Kirsti, Mama assured the little girl that the "fireworks" were meant just for her. This passage shows the ways in which the Johansens try to comfort and sustain one another through lies, secrets, and "stories"—stories meant to allow both Kirsti and Annemarie to feel and act bravely because of their ignorance. As the novel progresses, Annemarie will catch wise to the ways in which her parents try to shelter her—and resist the comforting "fairy tales," demanding the truth despite the risk it might pose.

“You said that we would hide her. How can we do that? Where can she hide?”

Papa smiled. “That part is easy. It will be as your mama said: you two will sleep together in your bed, and you may giggle and talk and tell secrets to each other. And if anyone comes—”

Ellen interrupted him. “Who might come? Will it be soldiers? Like the ones on the corners?” Annemarie remembered how terrified Ellen had looked the day when the soldier had questioned them on the corner.

“I really don’t think anyone will. But it never hurts to be prepared. If anyone should come, even soldiers, you two will be sisters. You are together so much, it will be easy for you to pretend that you are sisters.”

[...]

Annemarie and Ellen got to their feet. Papa suddenly crossed the room and put his arms around them both. He kissed the top of each head: Annemarie’s blond one, which reached to his shoulder, and Ellen’s dark hair, the thick curls braided as always into pigtails.

“Don’t be frightened,” he said to them softly. “Once I had three daughters. Tonight I am proud to have three daughters again.”

Related Characters: Ellen Rosen, Mr. Johansen/Papa, Annemarie Johansen (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 37-38

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the Nazi soldiers have begun hunting down and arresting the Jews of Copenhagen after obtaining a list of names and addresses from a local synagogue. The miserable violence is occurring on one of the holiest days of the year for Jews—the Jewish New Year. Ellen’s parents have fled, hidden away by the Resistance, but the Johansens have offered to take Ellen in, pass her off as their own child, and keep her safe in spite of the personal risk to their own family. As Mama and Papa prepare the girls for the worst, there is fear and tension in the air—but when Papa tells the girls how easy it will be for them to “pretend” to be sisters and expresses that he is proud to once again have three “daughters,” Ellen and Annemarie feel their spirits bolstered by the sisterhood between them. Their feelings of mutual devotion are not just pretend—the girls love and care for one another, and are determined to protect one another no matter the risk or cost.

Chapter 5 Quotes

“Ellen,” [Annemarie] whispered urgently, “take your necklace off!”

Ellen’s hands flew to her neck. Desperately she began trying to unhook the tiny clasp. Outside the bedroom door, the harsh voices and heavy footsteps continued.

“I can’t get it open!” Ellen said frantically. “I never take it off—I can’t even remember how to open it!”

Annemarie heard a voice just outside the door. “What is here?” “Shhh,” her mother replied. “My daughters’ bedroom. They are sound asleep.”

“Hold still,” Annemarie commanded. “This will hurt.” She grabbed the little gold chain, yanked with all her strength, and broke it. As the door opened and light flooded into the bedroom, she crumpled it into her hand and closed her fingers tightly.

Terrified, both girls looked up at the three Nazi officers who entered the room.

Related Characters: Mrs. Johansen/Mama, Ellen Rosen, Annemarie Johansen (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

When Nazi soldiers come into the Johansen apartment looking for the Rosens, who have abandoned their own flat one floor down, Annemarie knows that they will soon come knocking at the door of the bedroom she and Ellen are sharing as they pretend to be sisters. Annemarie knows that Ellen’s Star of David necklace will give her away as a Jew, and as such she urges her to take it off. The necklace, though—a symbol of Ellen’s identity—is so much a part of her that she can’t remember how to undo it. Annemarie yanks the necklace off her friend’s neck, causing her a little bit of pain and breaking the chain, but ensuring that Ellen will live through this encounter. The necklace will come to symbolize the bond between Ellen and Annemarie, the latter of whom is already taking risks to protect her friend.

Chapter 6 Quotes

“So, Henrik, is the weather good for fishing?” Papa asked cheerfully, and listened briefly.

Then he continued, “I’m sending Inge to you today with the children, and she will be bringing you a carton of cigarettes.

“Yes, just one,” he said, after a moment. Annemarie couldn’t hear Uncle Henrik’s words. “But there are a lot of cigarettes available in Copenhagen now, if you know where to look,” he went on, “and so there will be others coming to you as well, I’m sure.”

But it wasn’t true. Annemarie was quite certain it wasn’t true. Cigarettes were the thing that Papa missed, the way Mama missed coffee. He complained often—he had complained only yesterday—that there were no cigarettes in the stores. The men in his office, he said, making a face, smoked almost anything: sometimes dried weeds rolled in paper, and the smell was terrible.

Why was Papa speaking that way, almost as if he were speaking in code? What was Mama really taking to Uncle Henrik?

Then she knew. It was Ellen.

Related Characters: Mr. Johansen/Papa (speaker), Mrs. Johansen/Mama, Ellen Rosen, Uncle Henrik, Annemarie Johansen

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 53

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Annemarie overhears her father making a phone call to Mama’s brother, Uncle Henrik, a fisherman who lives in the Danish countryside. As Annemarie eavesdrops, she is puzzled by the conversation—much of which, she soon realizes, is in code. She is confused by what’s going on, as her mother told her and Ellen they’d be taking a short “vacation” to the countryside while the Nazis were in the process of arresting Jews—but now, Annemarie knows that some larger plot is going on, and that it concerns the attempt to shelter and hide Ellen and her family from those who would harm them.

Chapter 7 Quotes

Ellen touched her neck after she had put on Annemarie’s flower-sprigged nightgown, which Mama had packed.

“Where is my necklace?” she asked. “What did you do with it?” “I hid it in a safe place,” Annemarie told her. “A very secret place where no one will ever find it. And I will keep it there for you until it is safe for you to wear it again.”

Ellen nodded. “Papa gave it to me when I was very small,” she explained.

She sat down on the edge of the old bed and ran her fingers along the handmade quilt that covered it. The flowers and birds, faded now, had been stitched onto the quilt by Annemarie’s great-grandmother many years before.

“I wish I knew where my parents are,” Ellen said in a small voice as she outlined one of the appliqued birds with her finger.

Annemarie didn’t have an answer for her. She patted Ellen’s hand and they sat together silently.

Related Characters: Annemarie Johansen, Ellen Rosen (speaker), Mr. Rosen, Mrs. Johansen/Mama

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 64-65

Explanation and Analysis

At Uncle Henrik’s house in the countryside, Ellen and Annemarie enjoy a pleasant day of frolicking in the meadow and looking out at the sea. When it is time for bed, though, the mood turns somber, as Ellen laments being separated both from her necklace—a symbol of her Jewish identity—and her parents. Annemarie assures Ellen that her necklace will be safe, but can make no such promise about Ellen’s parents. As the two girls begin to grasp the gravity of what is happening two and around them, they turn to one another for comfort in a show of solidarity, sisterhood, and mutual devotion.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☛☛ “How brave are you, little Annemarie?” [Uncle Henrik] asked suddenly. She was startled. And dismayed. It was a question she did not want to be asked. When she asked it of herself, she didn’t like her own answer.

“Not very,” she confessed, looking at the floor of the barn.

Tall Uncle Henrik knelt before her so that his face was level with hers. Behind him, Blossom lowered her head, grasped a mouthful of hay in her mouth, and drew it in with her tongue. The kitten cocked its head, waiting, still hoping for spilled milk.

“I think that is not true,” Uncle Henrik said. “I think you are like your mama, and like your papa, and like me. Frightened, but determined, and if the time came to be brave, I am quite sure you would be very, very brave.

“But,” he added, “it is much easier to be brave if you do not know everything. And so your mama does not know everything. Neither do I. We know only what we need to know.

“Do you understand what I am saying?” he asked, looking into her eyes.

Annemarie frowned. She wasn’t sure. What did bravery mean?

Related Characters: Annemarie Johansen, Uncle Henrik (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 75-76

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Annemarie confronts her Uncle Henrik about the strange goings-on at his house—namely, the arrival of a casket containing, allegedly, the corpse of her recently-deceased great aunt Birte. Annemarie, however, suspects that there is no great aunt Birte, and never was. As she demands to know the truth, Henrik warns her that sometimes the truth prevents one from being brave—sometimes when one doesn’t know the truth of what’s at stake, they are able to compartmentalize their feelings and focus on the tasks in front of them. Annemarie, though, doesn’t necessarily agree with this view of bravery, and begins for the first time seriously considering what it truly means to be brave.

Chapter 10 Quotes

☛☛ [Peter’s] eyes turned to the page he had opened at random, and he began to read in a strong voice.

O praise the Lord.

How good it is to sing psalms to our God!

How pleasant to praise him!

The Lord is rebuilding Jerusalem;

he gathers in the scattered sons of Israel.

It is he who heals the broken in spirit

and binds up their wounds,

he who numbers the stars one by one . . .

[...]

The words were unfamiliar to her, and she tried to listen, tried to understand, tried to forget the war and the Nazis, tried not to cry, tried to be brave. The night breeze moved the dark curtains at the open windows. Outside, she knew, the sky was speckled with stars. How could anyone number them one by one, as the psalm said? There were too many. The sky was too big.

Ellen had said that her mother was frightened of the ocean, that it was too cold and too big.

The sky was, too, thought Annemarie. The whole world was: too cold, too big. And too cruel.

Related Characters: Peter Neilsen (speaker), Mrs. Rosen, Ellen Rosen, Mrs. Johansen/Mama, Annemarie Johansen

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 86-87

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, after a narrow run-in with a group of Nazi officers who barged into the Johansens’ “wake” on behalf of “Great-aunt Birte”—ultimately a ruse meant to disguise the arrival of Danish Jews at their home so that Henrik can smuggle them to freedom in the morning—Peter Neilsen attempts to calm the gathered “mourners” with a psalm from the Bible which praises God’s ability to heal the wounded, bring together the scattered and lost, and “number the stars.” This is, of course, the psalm from which the novel gets its title, and this moment reflects a tension and confusion Annemarie feels between a supposedly caring god and the suffering she is starting to perceive all around her. As Annemarie listens to the words, though, she feels frightened, angry, and indignant about the Nazi’s cruelty, the Jews’ suffering, and the ways in which the war has affected her own family. Annemarie briefly becomes overwhelmed by the cruelty and vastness of the world for the first time in the novel, experiencing her first true

moment of existential doubt and despair.

Chapter 11 Quotes

☞ “The old man stumbled. But Peter helped him up. He didn’t seem to be hurt. Maybe just his pride,” she added, smiling a bit.

It was an odd word: *pride*. Annemarie looked at the Rosens, sitting there, wearing the misshapen, ill-fitting clothing, holding ragged blankets folded in their arms, their faces drawn and tired. She remembered the earlier, happier times: Mrs. Rosen, her hair neatly combed and covered, lighting the Sabbath candles, saying the ancient prayer. And Mr. Rosen, sitting in the big chair in their living room, studying his thick books, correcting papers, adjusting his glasses, looking up now and then to complain good-naturedly about the lack of decent light. She remembered Ellen in the school play, moving confidently across the stage, her gestures sure, her voice clear.

All of those things, those sources of pride—the candlesticks, the books, the daydreams of theater—had been left behind in Copenhagen. They had nothing with them now; there was only the clothing of unknown people for warmth, the food from Henrik’s farm for survival, and the dark path ahead, through the woods, to freedom.

[...]

But their shoulders were as straight as they had been in the past: in the classroom, on the stage, at the Sabbath table. So there were other sources, too, of pride, and they had not left everything behind.

Related Characters: Mrs. Johansen/Mama (speaker), Uncle Henrik, Ellen Rosen, Mrs. Rosen, Mr. Rosen, Annemarie Johansen

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 93-94

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Annemarie sits watching her neighbors as they prepare to follow Mama down to the docks, where they’ll be boarded onto a ship and smuggled to freedom in Sweden. The Rosens and all the other Jews of Denmark are being persecuted by the Nazi regime occupying the country, and in fleeing their homes and hometowns, they appear to Annemarie to have lost everything that gave them their “pride.” As Annemarie considers the nature of pride, she thinks of the solidarity and friendship her family and others like them have offered to their Jewish neighbors, and realizes that there are “other sources” of pride which are not related to material possessions or even beloved

pursuits. Pride can be the knowledge that one is appreciated, protected, and has had others make sacrifices on their behalf, and the determination to make that sacrifice worthwhile.

Chapter 14 Quotes

☞ “So little Red Riding-Hood carried the basket of food and hurried along through the woods. It was a lovely morning, and birds were singing. Little Red Riding-Hood sang, too, as she walked.”

Sometimes she changed that part of the story, telling it to Kirsti. Sometimes it was raining, or even snowing, in the woods. Sometimes it was evening, with long, frightening shadows, so that Kirsti, listening, would snuggle closer and wrap her arms around Annemarie. But now, telling it to herself, she wanted sunlight and bird song.

Related Characters: Annemarie Johansen (speaker), Kirsti Johansen

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

As Annemarie heads through the deep, dark woods on the way to deliver an important packet to her Uncle Henrik down at the docks—just as he is about to set off on a journey to deliver a number of Danish Jews to freedom in Sweden—she is frightened by the dark and by the strange noises she hears in the forest all around her. Annemarie knows how important getting the packet to Henrik is, and is as afraid of failure as she is of the unknown entities which may be hiding behind every tree. As she walks through the woods she tells herself the story of Little Red Riding-Hood—a story which she has often told to her little sister Kirsti to comfort and distract the little girl, and which she now tells the happiest, sunniest version of to herself in an attempt to make herself feel braver. This again points to the novel’s broader theme about the power of storytelling and imagination to instill hope in dark times.

Chapter 15 Quotes

●● Annemarie's mind raced. She remembered what her mother had said. "If anyone stops you, you must pretend to be nothing more than a silly little girl."

She stared at the soldiers. She remembered how she had stared at the others, frightened, when they had stopped her on the street.

Kirsti hadn't been frightened. Kirsti had been—well, nothing more than a silly little girl, angered because the soldier had touched her hair that afternoon. She had known nothing of danger, and the soldier had been amused by her.

Annemarie willed herself, with all her being, to behave as Kirsti would.

"Good morning," she said carefully to the soldiers.

Related Characters: Annemarie Johansen (speaker), Kirsti Johansen, Mrs. Johansen/Mama

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 113

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Annemarie has just come face-to-face with two Nazi soldiers and their large, snarling dogs. Annemarie, who is in the process of delivering an important packet to her Uncle Henrik, a smuggler about to take a ship full of Danish Jews to freedom in Sweden, is terrified. Rather than run, cry, or give in, however, Annemarie chooses to be brave—and to pretend she's ignorant of what's inside her basket, of what's truly at stake if she's caught, and of the power, hatred, and cruelty the Nazis wield against anyone who opposes their evil regime. This moment shows that there are many different kinds of bravery. Annemarie has also questioned in the past whether she would be able to act courageously when called upon—and here she proves that she can.

Chapter 16 Quotes

●● "Uncle Henrik," [Annemarie] asked, "where are the Rosens and the others? I thought you were taking them to Sweden on your boat. But they weren't there."

"They were there," he told her, leaning forward against the cow's broad side. "You shouldn't know this. You remember that I told you it was safer not to know."

"But," he went on, as his hands moved with their sure and practiced motion, "I will tell you just a little, because you were so very brave."

"Brave?" Annemarie asked, surprised. "No, I wasn't. I was very frightened."

"You risked your life."

"But I didn't even think about that! I was only thinking of—"

He interrupted her, smiling. "That's all that brave means—not thinking about the dangers. Just thinking about what you must do. Of course you were frightened. I was too, today. But you kept your mind on what you had to do. So did I. Now let me tell you about the Rosens."

Related Characters: Uncle Henrik, Annemarie Johansen (speaker), Mr. Rosen, Mrs. Rosen, Ellen Rosen

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 122-23

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Annemarie and her Uncle Henrik debate the nature of bravery. Henrik admires the bravery and defiance Annemarie displayed earlier in the day, during her fearful encounter with two Nazi soldiers and their dogs on the way to deliver an important packet to Henrik on his boat—but Annemarie doesn't believe that she was brave after all, as she was so frightened by the incident. Henrik attempts to impress upon Annemarie that acting staunchly and carrying out one's mission—even if it means risking everything—in the face of fear is exactly what constitutes bravery. In the end, Henrik seems to have overturned his own belief that "not knowing" can make one braver. True bravery is the selflessness and sacrifice that comes from knowing what's at stake, and staying true to what's right anyway.

Chapter 17 Quotes

☞☞ That night, Annemarie's parents told her the truth about Lise's death at the beginning of the war.

"She was part of the Resistance, too," Papa had explained. "Part of the group that fought for our country in whatever ways they could."

"We didn't know," Mama added. "She didn't tell us. Peter told us after she died."

"Oh, Papa!" Annemarie cried. "Mama!"

Related Characters: Annemarie Johansen, Mrs. Johansen/Mama, Mr. Johansen/Papa (speaker), Peter Neilsen, Lise Johansen

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 129-130

Explanation and Analysis

For much of the novel, Annemarie has been locked in an ideological battle about the nature of bravery. She has had several discussions with her Uncle Henrik about whether it is easier for one to be brave when one doesn't fully know or understand the details of what's at risk. Annemarie has demanded to know the truth, though, at every turn during the complicated journey to get Ellen and the Rosens to freedom. In this passage, as Annemarie learns a truth her parents have held from her for a long time—that her sister Lise was in fact a member of the Resistance and was murdered by Nazi soldiers for her association with the rebel group—she is overwhelmed with emotion. Her parents didn't know the truth, either—a fact that sheds some light on their passionate involvement with the Resistance themselves, and calls into question what it truly means to be brave, to take a risk, and to sacrifice oneself for the greater good.

☞☞ [Annemarie] turned and went to her bedroom, where the blue trunk still stood in the corner, as it had all these years. Opening it, Annemarie saw that the yellow dress had begun to fade; it was discolored at the edges where it had lain so long in folds.

Carefully she spread open the skirt of the dress and found the place where Ellen's necklace lay hidden in the pocket. The little Star of David still gleamed gold.

"Papa?" she said, returning to the balcony, where her father was standing with the others, watching the rejoicing crowd. She opened her hand and showed him the necklace. "Can you fix this? I have kept it all this long time. It was Ellen's."

Her father took it from her and examined the broken clasp. "Yes," he said. "I can fix it. When the Rosens come home, you can give it back to Ellen."

"Until then," Annemarie told him, "I will wear it myself."

Related Characters: Mr. Johansen/Papa, Annemarie Johansen (speaker), Ellen Rosen, Lise Johansen

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 131-132

Explanation and Analysis

In the final lines of the novel, Annemarie, amidst the citywide celebrations of the end of the war, retreats into her family's apartment to uncover something hidden away long ago. As she pulls Ellen's Star of David necklace from the hiding place she selected for it, a profound and symbolic moment is captured. She has kept the necklace belonging to her "pretend" sister Ellen, for all these years, in the folds of her deceased sister Lise's wedding dress. This moment shows that there are many different types of sisterhood—and not all sisters are connected by blood. As Annemarie asks her father to repair Ellen's necklace, she declares that she will wear it herself until Ellen returns—another symbolic moment showing that Annemarie feels truly and deeply connected to Ellen, and sees Ellen as her sister. She does not sense any difference between them; despite the physical distance and the differences in their religion, Annemarie knows that she and Ellen are the same in their hearts, and intimately connected by the experiences they've shared.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1: WHY ARE YOU RUNNING?

Ten-year-old Annemarie Johansen wants to race her best friend Ellen Rosen home from school through the streets of their Copenhagen neighborhood, but Ellen wants to walk. When Annemarie pleads, though, insisting she needs to practice for an upcoming race at school, Ellen acquiesces, and the two take off down the sidewalk. Annemarie's little sister Kirsti, who has been walking with them, asks them to wait up, but the older girls don't even hear her.

As Annemarie and Ellen arrive at the corner, they run smack into two German soldiers who are stationed at the end of the block wearing shiny boots and holding rifles. The soldiers demand to know why the girls are running and ask what they're carrying in their backpacks. Both Ellen and Annemarie insist that they are just schoolgirls having fun on their way home. One of the soldiers tries to touch Kirsti's blonde hair, stating that she reminds him of his own daughter back in Germany, but Kirsti pulls away from him. After a tense moment, the soldiers send the girls home—but warn them not to run the rest of the way there.

Annemarie, Ellen, and Kirsti arrive back at the apartment building where they all live. Ellen tells Annemarie how scared she was, face-to-face with the soldiers, and Annemarie admits that she, too, was frightened. Kirsti, though, seems to have forgotten about the incident already, and chatters about school and homework. To the five-year-old Kirsti, the soldiers are “simply part of the landscape.”

Ellen and Annemarie agree not to tell their mothers about the incident, for fear of upsetting them. Ellen goes into her apartment on the second floor, and Annemarie and Kirsti head up to their apartment on the third floor. Kirsti bursts in the door and begins telling her mother all about their encounter with the soldier—Annemarie's mother Mrs. Johansen is sitting with Mrs. Rosen at the kitchen table. The women are having “coffee,” as they do most afternoons, though there hasn't been coffee in Copenhagen “since the beginning of the Nazi occupation.” The women drink hot water and herbs now, but still enjoy one another's company.

This passage establishes just how close Ellen and Annemarie are. Even though Annemarie's little sister Kirsti is with them, Annemarie is much more interested in Ellen's attention and company.



The fun, carefree energy of the opening passage is dashed here as the truth of the girls' lives is thrown into relief—they live in Nazi-occupied Copenhagen, and the threat of soldiers stationed on every street corner harassing them—or worse—is omnipresent.



The Nazis have been in power in Copenhagen so long that Kirsti is used to them—but for Ellen and Annemarie, they represent the upheaval of the happy, peaceful lives they once knew.



As Annemarie and Kirsti return home, Lowry uses Mrs. Johansen and Mrs. Rosen's afternoon routines alongside their daughters' to show that the adults, just like the children, are still trying to cling to normalcy and old comforts even in the face of fear and danger.



Hearing Kirsti's story, Mrs. Rosen becomes frightened, and asks where Ellen is—Annemarie assures her that Ellen is safe downstairs. As Kirsti continues talking about the encounter, Mama goes over to the window and looks down at the quiet street. She comments that the soldiers may be “edgy because of the latest Resistance incidents,” and cites an article she's read in an illegal Resistance newspaper about nearby bombings. Annemarie knows that her parents support—but are not directly involved in—the Resistance, a group of “very secret” Danes who are “determined to bring harm to the Nazis” by any means possible, even at the risk of their own lives.

Mrs. Rosen heads downstairs to talk to Ellen, urging Annemarie to walk to school a “different way” tomorrow—she says it's important for the German soldiers to never learn the girls' faces, and for one to always be “one of the crowd.”

Annemarie asks if there's anything to eat for a snack, and Mama tells her there's some bread, though they can't spare any butter. Kirsti sighs and says she wants a “big yellow cupcake with pink frosting,” but Mama laughs at her daughter's fancy. Kirsti asks if there will ever be cupcakes in Copenhagen again—Mama tells her there will be, but only after the war is over and all the soldiers leave.

CHAPTER 2: WHO IS THE MAN WHO RIDES PAST?

That night, in the bed they share, Kirsti begs Annemarie to tell her a story. Stories, and fairy tales especially, are important to the Danes—the most famous storyteller of all, Hans Christian Andersen, was Danish himself. Kirsti begs for a story about a king and a queen, and Annemarie obliges, spinning a tale about a castle full of royalty—including a beautiful princess named Kirsten, Kirsti's full name. As she tells the story, Annemarie thinks of Denmark's real king, King Christian. Beloved by his people, he is “not like fairy tale kings”—he takes morning rides on his horse alone through the streets of Copenhagen to greet his people.

Sometimes, when Annemarie was little, she and her older sister Lise would go out to see King Christian ride by. As Lise enters Annemarie's thoughts, though, she grows sad, and tries to push her sister from her mind and focus on King Christian—who is still alive, though Lise is not. Annemarie remembers another story her Papa told her about witnessing the German soldiers' confusion at the sight of the king riding through the city unattended by bodyguards. A young boy on the street turned to the soldiers and told them that “all of Denmark” was the king's bodyguard.

Annemarie's knowledge of the existence of the Resistance—but her ignorance as to many of the details of their operations—shows that she is just on the cusp of being old enough to know certain things.



Mrs. Rosen knows that anonymity is an important tool, and that hiding in plain sight is the surest way to avoid trouble with the Nazis. As a Jewish woman, she cannot risk confrontation or provocation, and neither can her daughter.



Though the harsh reality of the present is all around her, Kirsti continues to dream of luxuries she can only barely remember.



Fantasy, stories, and fairy tales are an important cultural tradition in Denmark—but in this moment, they are important to Kirsti and indeed to Annemarie because they let the girls escape the fear and pain of their uncertain times.



The Danish people are proud, resourceful, and loyal. Annemarie stands to inherit a tradition of solidarity and sacrifice—these values will be tested in her even sooner than she thinks.



When the occupation first began many years ago, Annemarie struggled to understand why King Christian didn't put up a fight against the Nazis and keep them out of Denmark. Papa explained to her that the tiny Denmark stood no chance against their "enormous" German enemy, who had occupied the neighboring nations of Norway, Holland, Belgium, and France, as well. Denmark's only unoccupied neighbor was Sweden—a place Annemarie had never been, but had seen many times across the narrow North Sea at her Uncle Henrik's seaside home.

Annemarie turns her thoughts away from war and back to Lise, though it is painful to think of her "tall, beautiful sister" who died in an accident just two weeks before her wedding to the Resistance rebel Peter Neilsen. Annemarie often looks through a blue carved trunk in the corner of the bedroom which holds all of Lise's treasured possessions and fine linens, including her unworn wedding gown. Everything has changed since Lise's death—Peter, once an ebullient older brother figure and a constant in the Johansen household, has become secretive and serious, while Annemarie's Mama and Papa have grown tired and "defeated." Annemarie's whole world has changed—only the fairy tales she and Kirsti tell have "remained the same."

The strategic details of the war are often a mystery to the young Annemarie. This passage makes it clear that she has only recently begun to understand just what's at stake in the war, and how total the Germans' power really is.



Annemarie's home life is painful and shrouded by loss. Everything has changed since Lise's death, and the worsening of the Nazi occupation has only compounded how bleak things really are. This passage makes it clear that Annemarie fears for her family's emotional well-being as much as for their physical well-being, and yet can't keep up with the pressure to put on a brave and happy face all the time.



CHAPTER 3: WHERE IS MRS. HIRSCH?

As the month of September passes by, Annemarie, Ellen, and Kirsti are careful to take the long way to school and back, avoiding the two soldiers who accosted them. As the nights grow colder, Mama and Mrs. Rosen sit up together knitting—there is no fuel or heat in the homes of Copenhagen, and the bitter fall chill is setting in. The Johansens can sometimes find some coal to burn in their little stove, but electricity, too is soon rationed, and the family must make their way around the apartment at night using only the light from candles.

One morning, while getting the girls ready for school, Mama notices that a button on one of Kirsti's sweater has broken. She tells Annemarie to stop by the button shop around the corner after school—the shop is run by a woman named Mrs. Hirsch. When Annemarie and Kirsti—along with Ellen—stop by the shop, though, they find that it is closed. There is a padlock on the door, and a sign posted to it, but the girls cannot read the German words. When Annemarie and Kirsti return home and tell their mother about the closure of Mrs. Hirsch's shop, Mama grows worried. She tells Annemarie to watch Kirsti, and hastily heads out the door to talk to Mrs. Rosen.

The encroaching fall chill symbolizes the ways in which the Johansens and the Rosens both are losing hope and faith. Fear is creeping deeper and deeper into their day-to-day lives as conditions become more dire.



Though the girls don't know what the sign on Mrs. Hirsch's button shop means, Lowry's readers very well may. The Nazis are stepping up their control over Copenhagen—and targeting its Jewish citizens.



That night, Annemarie is nearly asleep when her mother knocks on the bedroom door and pulls her out of bed. Mama leads Annemarie into the living room, where Papa and Peter Neilsen are sitting. Annemarie is excited to see Peter, but knows something strange is going on, as there is a strict curfew imposed over all of Copenhagen. Nevertheless, Annemarie runs to Peter to give him hugs and kisses—his presence reminds her of happier times.

Papa, growing serious, tells Annemarie that the Germans have begun to issue orders closing any Copenhagen stores owned by Jews. Annemarie is surprised to learn that Mrs. Hirsch is Jewish, and wonders why the soldiers would close a harmless button shop belonging to a “nice lady.” Annemarie what will happen to Mrs. Hirsch and her family now that the shop is closed, and Mama tells her that their friends will take care of them—“that’s what friends do” for one another, she says.

Annemarie grows nervous—she points out that the Rosens are Jewish, too. Mama and Papa nod solemnly and ask her to take special care in keeping an eye out for Ellen at school and helping her stay away from the soldiers on the street. Annemarie tells her parents that just as all of Denmark serves as bodyguard to the king, they must now “be bodyguard[s] for the Jews, as well.” As Peter bids the family goodbye and takes his leave, Annemarie wonders whether she and her family will truly be called upon to die for Denmark’s Jews—she is nervous and frightened, but as she returns to bed, she tells herself that “only in the fairy tales” are people “called upon to [...] die for one another.”

CHAPTER 4: IT WILL BE A LONG NIGHT

Annemarie and Ellen sit on the floor of the Johansen apartment, playing with paper dolls. They act out parts of *Gone With the Wind*, a story they love but see as more sophisticated than the “king-and-queen tales” Kirsti loves. Ellen is a talented actress, always featured in school productions, and dreams of making acting into a career one day. Mama and Kirsti come in from shopping, and Kirsti is in a bad mood. Mama has bought the little girl “fish shoes”—because there is no leather to spare in Copenhagen, people have begun wearing shoes made from fish skins. Ellen and Annemarie look at the shoes, which are odd but not necessarily ugly. Kirsti is irate, though, and Ellen kindly offers to paint the greenish shoes black so that they are pretty and shiny.

Annemarie’s parents have decided that she is old enough to see and know certain things, and in pulling her out of bed to talk with them and with Peter, they are showing her that they trust her with the burden of knowing the truth about what’s happening in her community.



Mama and Papa are trying, in this passage, to teach Annemarie that as friends and neighbors of Jewish people, they must use their privilege to look out for the individuals they love who will soon become open targets of the Nazi soldiers.



Even though Annemarie’s parents have told her a difficult truth and warned her of the sacrifices that may need to be made, Annemarie still believes that things will never get so bad for her, her family, or their close friends. Annemarie sees the kind of sacrifice and bravery her parents have told her might be necessary as the stuff only of fairy tales—this demonstrates how privileged Annemarie’s life has been so far, and how distant from her mind any true peril is.



This passage shows how close Annemarie, Ellen, and even Kirsti really are with one another. They love each other and do favors for one another constantly, trying to lessen the pain and indignity of the world around them.



Her mood lifted, Kirsti excitedly joins the game of paper dolls, and the game's imaginary story transitions from America to Copenhagen's own Tivoli gardens, where the girls take their dolls for a "party." As Annemarie and Ellen reminisce about the fireworks they saw in Tivoli Gardens as children, Kirsti jumps in to say that she remembers seeing fireworks there, too—but Annemarie and Ellen know that the source of the lights in the sky and loud noises Kirsti claims to remember was really an incident many months ago in which King Christian ordered the bombing of the entire Danish naval fleet to keep the ships from being captured by the Nazis.

Now feeling sad, Annemarie says she doesn't want to play anymore. Ellen says it's okay—she has to go home anyway and help her mother with preparations for the upcoming Jewish New Year on Thursday. Ellen invites Annemarie and Kirsti over to celebrate and light candles for the New Year—the girls often spend Friday nights at the Rosens' lighting Sabbath candles and enjoying a meal. Kirsti accepts the invitation, and looks forward to wearing her "new black shoes" to the party.

Thursday afternoon, though, Mrs. Rosen knocks at the door and speaks hushed and hurriedly with Mama. Mama comes back into the apartment and tells Annemarie and Kirsti that Ellen is going to come stay with them for a few days. Annemarie points out that it's the Jewish New Year, but Mama says only that the Rosens' plans have changed—Mrs. and Mr. Rosen have been called away to visit relatives, and Ellen is coming to stay.

That night, as Ellen joins the Johansens at their table for dinner, the meal is a quiet and anxious one. Ellen looks frightened, and even though Annemarie's Mama and Papa try to lighten the mood, Annemarie can tell that they, too, are worried. After dinner, Mama and Papa send Kirsti to bed, and sit Annemarie and Ellen down so that Annemarie can learn the truth. Annemarie's parents tell her that this morning, at the synagogue, the rabbi revealed that the Nazis have managed to get lists of the names and addresses of all the Jews in Copenhagen. The Nazis are planning to arrest all of the Jews tonight and "relocate" them.

This passage shows that Kirsti is naïve as to the gravity of what's happening all around her. Her family is attempting to shelter her from the truth and help her maintain her innocence, but Annemarie knows a day will come when Kirsti can no longer be protected from the truth.



Ellen and her family often extend their hospitality to the Johansens, who happily celebrate religious and non-religious special occasions alike in the company of their friends and neighbors.



Though Mama is trying her best to shield Annemarie and Kirsti from the truth, Annemarie knows that something frightening is happening to her friends and neighbors.



After once again sheltering Kirsti from the painful truth of what's happening in Copenhagen, Mama and Papa at last tell Annemarie what's really happening. Annemarie understands that something major has shifted—and that she and her family have at last been called upon to make a sacrifice to help ensure the survival of their friends and neighbors.



Annemarie’s parents tell her that Ellen’s parents have gone to hide with other friends, because to hide three people would be impossible—but to hide just Ellen is doable, as they plan to pass Ellen off as one of their own children. Ellen cries, terrified for her parents and herself. Annemarie’s parents try to prepare both Annemarie and Ellen for the possibility that soldiers will come to the apartment looking for Ellen later on this evening—they tell the girls that it will be a “long night,” but that they should have no problem pretending to be sisters, as they are already such good friends. Annemarie’s Papa kisses both girls goodnight, and as he sends them off to bed, he tells them that tonight he is proud to have “three daughters” once more.

Ellen, who dreams of being an actress, is about to inhabit a new kind of “performance.” Annemarie’s Papa knows that the girls are close enough that they are already sisters in a way—and even though he and Mama are still reeling from the loss of Lise, he makes it clear that he is happy and even “proud” to have another “daughter” in his home.



CHAPTER 5: WHO IS THE DARK-HAIRED ONE?

Annemarie and Ellen get ready for bed, and, as they do, Ellen expresses how nervous she is at the idea of a soldier coming to the house. At the same time, she reveals that she has a plan—if anyone asks who she is, she would “just pretend to be Lise.”

Ellen’s choice to inhabit the “role” of Lise blurs the line between fantasy and reality, and both deepens and complicates the sisterly bond between her and Annemarie.



As the girls brush their hair, Ellen asks Annemarie how Lise died—she says that though she remembers the funeral, she never knew what happened to Lise. Annemarie confesses that she doesn’t know “exactly” what happened to Lise either—she knows only that Lise was struck by a car while out with Peter one night. As Ellen solemnly reflects on the day of Lise’s funeral, Annemarie notices a gold and gleaming Star of David **necklace** around her neck.

Annemarie doesn’t know all the details of her sister’s death, cluing readers in to the fact that she, like the little Kirsti, may have been shielded from the truth in order to remain safe, innocent, and untroubled.



Together the girls get into bed and continue talking about Lise—about her terrible fate, her secret trunk of things, and how beautiful she was. The girls talk about Lise until the girls fall asleep. Hours later, a pounding on the door shakes them from their sleep. Annemarie opens the door to see what’s happening while the terrified Ellen remains in bed. Out in the hall, Annemarie can see her Mama and Papa, holding candlesticks, greeting three Nazis. The soldiers ask them about the whereabouts of the Rosen family—their apartment is empty. The Johansens insist that no one is home but the members of their own family, but the Nazis insist on looking around the apartment.

Annemarie has never fully allowed herself to believe that she and her family would be targeted by Nazis—but now, as her worst fears come true, it is clear that she and her family are not the ones who will suffer most if their ruse is discovered.



Annemarie quietly shuts the bedroom door and flies back to the bed, urging Ellen to take her **necklace** off. Ellen cannot undo the clasp, and so Annemarie grabs the chain and yanks it free. She folds the necklace into her hand just as the Nazis enter the bedroom and aim a flashlight at the two of them. The soldiers sweep the room but find nothing suspicious. They order the girls to get out of bed and follow them to the living room—Ellen and Annemarie, frightened, follow them.

Annemarie helps Ellen get her necklace—a dead giveaway of her Judaism—off just in time. Ellen is forced to sacrifice the truth of who she is and inhabit a fantasy in order to save her life.



In the living room the Nazis demand to know the girls' names. Annemarie gives them her own name, while Ellen tells them her name is Lise Johansen. Mama, distraught, urges the officers to let the innocent children go back to bed. One officer, though, grabs a handful of Ellen's dark hair, and asks why everyone else in the family is blonde. He asks if the Johansens got the dark-haired girl "from the Rosens." Papa strides over to a nearby bookcase and pulls out a family photograph album, then tears out three pictures. He hands them to the German officer and points out the names written at the bottom of each—they are of Annemarie, Kirsti, and the real Lise, who had dark hair as a baby.

The Nazis come dangerously close to discovering the truth—but when Papa presents them with old baby pictures of Lise, they are stopped in their tracks. Fantasy and reality blur as the lucky coincidence of Lise having had dark hair as a child "proves" that Ellen is one of the Johansens.



The officer tears the pictures into pieces and leaves the apartment, taking his cronies with him. Annemarie relaxes her right hand—she has been clutching Ellen's **necklace** inside it the whole time. As she opens her palm, she sees that she has "imprinted the Star of David" into the soft flesh there.

In this passage, Annemarie finds that having nervously pressed Ellen's necklace onto her palm has left an impression upon her. The symbolic moment shows how deeply Annemarie is affected by her friend's close brush with capture—and points to the sameness and sisterhood between the two girls despite the differences in their lives.



CHAPTER 6: IS THE WEATHER GOOD FOR FISHING?

After the soldier leaves, Papa grows worried. He knows that the soldiers are now suspicious of their family. As the sky begins to lighten, Annemarie worries aloud about how tired she and Ellen will be in school after a sleepless night—but Papa suggests the girls stay home from school, as the Nazis may go there looking for Jewish children, too. He calls Mama into the room and tells her that it might be time to take the girls on a "vacation" to her brother Henrik's home by the sea. Mama agrees, but says that she alone should be the one to take the girls so as not to arouse additional suspicion.

Though Annemarie sees the incident with the Nazis as the end of their family's struggle with the soldiers and begins looking ahead to how to move on, Papa knows that it is just the beginning—as does Mama. They decide to remove the girls from the city in order to protect them. Already, things are more serious than Annemarie ever dreamed they'd be.



While Papa goes to the phone to call Uncle Henrik, Annemarie explains to Ellen that her uncle is a fisherman who lives out at the coast. He goes out on his boat early every morning, and from the edge of the meadow near his house, one can look out across the water all the way to Sweden. Annemarie overhears her father's phone conversation, in which he tells Henrik that Mama will be bringing "a carton of cigarettes" to him later on in the day. Annemarie knows that there are no cigarettes to be found anywhere in Copenhagen, though, and realizes that her Papa is speaking about Ellen in code.

Though Annemarie originally believes that they really are simply going on a vacation, it soon becomes clear from the coded way Papa speaks about Ellen that there is a larger scheme going on, and that even in the countryside, the family will have to be careful to keep the truth of Ellen's identity hidden.



Annemarie, Ellen, Kirsti, and Mama make their way by train north along the Danish coast. The trip is beautiful, and Ellen is enchanted by the sights of nature and the many small villages they pass. The joy of the trip is hampered, though, when Nazis enter the train car and begin interrogating passengers. One officer asks Mama where she's going, and when she says she's visiting her brother at the coast, he asks if she's going to celebrate the New Year. Mama plays dumb, and says it's only October—too early for the New Year. When the excited Kirsti shows the soldier her new black shoes, he laughs and moves on.

Even the peaceful train journey is interrupted by the presence of Nazi soldiers, signaling to both Annemarie and to the reader that things in Denmark are growing more and more dire for Jews—or for anyone who dares to oppose the occupying regime.



As the women step off the train and into the fresh seaside air, they feel relieved to be away from the soldiers—but still anxious. Mama, Ellen, Kirsti, and Annemarie begin the walk to Uncle Henrik's house, and Mrs. Johansen remarks on how the neighborhood has changed. As Kirsti and Annemarie recognize more and more of the landscape and realize they are getting close to Henrik's house, Kirsti asks to run ahead. Mama allows her to go, and, as she puts her arms around Ellen, instructs Kirsti to tell Henrik that they've brought along "a friend."

Though Annemarie's Mama knows more than anyone how much is at stake in the act of merely sheltering Ellen, she never sees the girl's presence as a burden, and is instead happy to call Ellen a "friend" for whom she is making a conscious, willing sacrifice.



CHAPTER 7: THE HOUSE BY THE SEA

As Ellen, Annemarie, and Mama approach Uncle Henrik's house, Ellen is stunned by how beautiful the farmhouse and surrounding meadow are. Mama and Kirsti go in to rest, but Annemarie and Ellen enjoy a run through the meadow and a walk down to the shore. Ellen says she's never been so close to the "real" ocean before, as her mother is afraid of the sea. Annemarie points out across the water at the "misty shoreline" of Sweden. Soon, Mama calls them both into the house, and asks Annemarie if she or Ellen saw or talked to anybody. Annemarie says they did not. Mama warns them that while they're here, they must stay away from people, even though the neighborhood is small and quiet. Ellen asks if there are soldiers here, and Mama replies sadly that there are soldiers "everywhere."

Even in the idyllic and beautiful countryside, far away from the busy streets of Copenhagen, Mama knows that there is danger lurking in the shadows—and tries to impress this sad fact upon the girls so that they don't act recklessly and risk Ellen's safety.



After dinner that evening, Ellen and Annemarie head up to the bedroom they're sharing—the same bedroom that once belonged to Mama when she was a girl. Ellen asks where Annemarie has put her **necklace**. Annemarie assures her that it is hidden in a secret place—and will stay there until it is safe for Ellen to wear it once again. Ellen sits down on the edge of the bed and laments that she doesn't know where her parents are, or how they're doing. Annemarie comforts Ellen, and as the girls get into bed, Annemarie listens to the sounds of her mother's conversation with Uncle Henrik wafting up from downstairs. Normally, when the two are together, they are constantly laughing and joking. Tonight, though, there is "no laughter at all."

Annemarie attempts to comfort Ellen by assuring her that her necklace is safe, but Ellen is distraught about everything happening to her in the present moment. Ellen's necklace is a symbol of her identity, and in missing her necklace Ellen is also missing the days when she could freely be herself, without the threat of imprisonment or even death hanging over her head at all times.



CHAPTER 8: THERE HAS BEEN A DEATH

Annemarie sleeps fitfully and wakes briefly at dawn when Uncle Henrik leaves the house at daybreak to milk the cows and head out on the boat. When she wakes in earnest, mid-morning, Ellen is still asleep, and Annemarie dresses quietly so as not to rouse her friend. Downstairs, Kirsti is feeding a stray kitten she's brought in from the meadow from a bowl of milk. Kirsti announces that she has named the cat Thor, after the Norse god of thunder. Mama has made oatmeal and set out a pitcher of cream on the table—Annemarie is overjoyed, as it's been a very long time since she's had anything other than bread and tea for breakfast. Soon, Ellen comes downstairs, and is similarly excited and amazed by the bounty of food.

Despite the somewhat somber end to the previous evening, the morning is full of happiness, comfort, surprises, and delights. There is plentiful and luxurious food, and happiness fills the house as Kirsti plays with her new pet and the whole family enjoys a veritable feast.



Annemarie, Ellen, and Kirsti play outside together all day long. They spend time petting the cow, Blossom, and romp around with Thor. Inside, Mama cleans the house top to bottom, rearranges the furniture in the living room, and has the girls pick wildflowers to put all around the house. Late that afternoon, Uncle Henrik comes home. Mama chides him for falling behind on his housekeeping, and the two joke and banter happily for a while before Henrik announces that tomorrow is “a day for fishing.” The room grows tense, and Annemarie is suspicious of the curious phrasing her uncle has used—Danish fisherman go fishing “every day, rain or shine.”

Despite the happy, carefree start to the day, as the afternoon progresses onward, it becomes clear that there is something happening underneath the calm façade. Annemarie grows suspicious of what her mother and Henrik are planning, and becomes aware that the truth is still being kept from her and from Ellen.



As Mama and Uncle Henrik begin discussing “preparations” for something, Annemarie grows curious about what's happening. Henrik turns to Annemarie, Kirsti, and Ellen and tells her that there has been a death in the family. Great-aunt Birte, he says, will be resting in her casket in the living room tonight before being buried tomorrow. Kirsti is fascinated, but Annemarie is confused. She has never heard of a Great-aunt Birte, and no one in the family seems particularly sad about her “death.”

As more and more details of the strange happenings around the house emerge, Annemarie's suspicion grows—even though Ellen and Kirsti, her sisters, remain naïve and in the dark.



CHAPTER 9: WHY ARE YOU LYING?

After supper, Annemarie goes out to the meadow alone. She visits Uncle Henrik in the barn, where he is milking Blossom, and asks him why he and Mama are both lying to her. She says she knows that there is no Great-aunt Birte. Uncle Henrik sighs and finishes milking Blossom before turning to Annemarie and asking her how brave she is. Annemarie, startled by the question, says she's “not very” brave at all. Uncle Henrik, though, says he believes Annemarie is very brave—but he also knows that it is “much easier to be brave if you do not know everything.”

Annemarie is hungry for the truth. She does not like being left out. When Henrik calls her bravery into question, Annemarie is forced to confront how brave she really is—and how much of what little bravery she feels she has is owed to all that she doesn't know about the truth of what's going on in her family and in her country more largely.



Uncle Henrik asks Annemarie if she understands what he's saying, but Annemarie isn't sure that she does. At the same time, as she reflects on the last several days—the Rosens' flight, the Nazis' searching of the Johansen apartment—she does concede that not knowing what was coming next did allow her to be brave, to think quickly on her feet, and to pretend that Ellen really was her sister.

Uncle Henrik reveals that there is no Great-aunt Brite—he and Mama have lied to Annemarie, Kirsti, and Ellen to “help [them] to be brave.” He tells Annemarie that for this reason, he's not going to tell her anything else. Annemarie nods, understanding, and then the two of them head back up to the house together to begin the “night of mourning.”

Two solemn-faced men driving a hearse bring a large, gleaming casket into the house and set it in the middle of the living room. Kirsti is asleep upstairs, but Ellen and Annemarie sit up in the living room with Mama and Uncle Henrik. Ellen doesn't know the truth of what's going on, and tells Annemarie and the others that she's sorry for their loss. Annemarie doesn't tell her the truth, now understanding that sometimes not knowing helps make someone braver. As the night grows darker, many people from the village come through the house to pay their respects, but Mama's knowing glances at Annemarie let Annemarie know that it is all a farce.

Uncle Henrik soon announces that it is getting late, and he needs to get to the boat—he plans on sleeping on it. He blows out the candles in the house so that the place is totally dark and opens the front door. He whispers for Ellen to come with him, and Mama urges Ellen to follow Henrik's lead. The two go out into the dark, and soon Annemarie can hear the sound of voices on the lawn. After a moment, Henrik returns—with Peter Neilsen at his side. Peter greets Annemarie and Mama happily but anxiously, and a few moments later, Ellen is carried into the house—in the arms of her joyous mother and father.

CHAPTER 10: LET US OPEN THE CASKET

Uncle Henrik, relieved that everyone has made it to his house—the rendezvous point—leaves to go out to the boat and get things ready. Annemarie looks around the room. Though so many people have been reunited, the atmosphere is still tense and anxious. Peter sits alone, deep in thought, while Ellen, sandwiched between her parents, holds their hands tightly but does not smile. Looking at Ellen, Annemarie feels the strange sensation that Ellen has “moved now into a different world, the world of her own family and whatever lay ahead for them.”

Annemarie thinks a lot about what has happened to her and her family over the last several days, and wonders what role ignorance and naivete has played not just in her own capacity to be brave, but in Ellen's and Kirsti's, too.



Uncle Henrik is constructing a fantasy—or a fib—meant to shield not just Annemarie, Ellen, and Kirsti from the truth, but to shield their entire family from something deeply sinister.



Annemarie has resisted Uncle Henrik's belief that staying in the dark makes one braver—but at the same time, she acknowledges that there is perhaps something real in it. She chooses not to tell Ellen what's really going on, thus aligning herself with Henrik's philosophy even as she herself stews in the knowledge that things are being kept from her, too.



At last, part of the truth emerges—the wake for “Great-aunt Birte” is a clever ruse meant to make a large gathering seem inconspicuous, thus allowing for the Rosens—and several other Jews disguised as mourners—to make their way safely to Henrik's house.



As Annemarie looks at the frightened Elle, reunited with her parents but still uncertain of what lies in store for all of them, she understands that despite the love and sisterly bond between them, there is still a whole world of unknowable experience which separates them from one another.



Mama comes over to Annemarie and points out how late it is. Though Annemarie is tired, she doesn't want to go upstairs to bed. She climbs into a rocking chair and dozes, wanting to stay with Ellen, Peter, and the others. A short while later, Annemarie is pulled out of her dreams by the sweep of headlights across the living room, and the sound of a car door opening and then slamming shut outside. Annemarie hears the familiar approach of heavy boots, and angry pounding on the door.

Several Nazi officers walk into the room and ask why so many people have gathered at this house tonight. Mama explains that there has been a death, and it is "custom" to gather together to pray the night before the funeral. The officers ask the room who died, but no one answers. Only Annemarie speaks up, explaining that her Great-aunt Birte has passed away. One of the officers says he is aware of Danish customs, and wants to know why the casket isn't open—traditionally, Danes "pay one's respect by looking [their] loved one[s] in the face."

Annemarie feels a panic come over her, but Mama quickly answers that Great-aunt Birte died of typhus, and her doctor suggested the casket remain closed to prevent the spread of the disease. Mama hurriedly states, though, that the stupid "country doctor" didn't know what he was talking about, and goes over to the casket to open it. One of the Nazi officers slaps Mama and urges the "foolish woman" to keep the "diseased" body locked away. The officers leave the house quickly, and soon everyone hears the sound of their car driving away.

Annemarie runs to Mama and embraces her, while Peter calms everyone down by reading a psalm from the Bible which praises "He who numbers the stars one by one." Slowly, everyone begins to relax—except the shaken Annemarie. She tries to focus on the words and forget about the Nazis, but as the night breeze ruffles the curtains, she thinks that it is impossible for anyone, even God, to number the stars. The world, Annemarie thinks, is "too cold, too big. And too cruel." After finishing the psalm, Peter announces that "it is time." He goes over to the casket and opens up the lid.

CHAPTER 11: WILL WE SEE YOU AGAIN SOON, PETER?

Annemarie and Ellen peer inside the casket together—there is no one in it, and instead it is stuffed with folded blankets and clothing. Peter begins quickly passing the contents of the casket around to the people in the room, warning them that their journey will be cold. Ellen and her family pull shabby, patched coats and jackets around their shoulders, and Mama begins getting together even more spare clothes for the other "mourners"—Danish Jews about to make their escape.

Annemarie is determined to know exactly what is happening, and is willing to sacrifice her well-being and comfort in pursuit of knowledge and truth.



Though Mama, Uncle Henrik, and the others have devised a cunning cover for the start of their mission, the Nazis threaten to undermine the entire operation. The soldiers are so suspicious and so determined to find and stamp out freedom and resistance that they would even wreck a mourning family's gathering.



Mama's quick thinking distracts the Nazis, and as she plays dumb and attempts to acquiesce to their requests they grow tired of her "foolishness." Mama's sacrifice allows the group to evade the Nazis' careful eyes—for now.



In this passage, from which the novel takes its title, Annemarie realizes just how dangerous the fight for freedom is—and just how cruel the world can be. She is overwhelmed by the hatred and brutality she has seen in the Nazis, and questions whether anyone, even God, can understand the world and the people in it.



As the full details of what's happening around her become clear to Annemarie, she realizes just how much was—and is—at stake. Had the Nazis opened the casket, the entire operation would have been blown, and countless lives would have been destroyed.



One of the “mourners” is a woman with a baby, and Peter gives her child a few drops of tasteless liquid that will put it to sleep—the group “can’t take a chance” that the baby will cry. Mama passes out food, and then Peter removes a paper-wrapped packet from his own coat and hands it to Mr. Rosen. He tells him to deliver it to Henrik “without fail.” Mr. Rosen accepts the packet with a puzzled look. Though he doesn’t seem to know what it contains, he doesn’t ask about it. Annemarie realizes that the members of their group are “protect[ing] one another by not telling” each other things that will frighten them, distract them, or keep them from being brave.

Peter heads out with the first group, and instructs Mrs. Johansen to set out with the Ellen and Mrs. Rosen and follow him after twenty minutes have passed so that there is less of a chance they’ll all be seen. Peter tells Annemarie that he won’t see her again tonight—after he drops his group at the boat, he has “other work” to do tonight. He hugs Annemarie and Mrs. Johansen, too, and then heads out with his group.

Just a few moments after they all set out, a noise comes from outside. Mama looks out the window and says that Mr. Rosen has simply stumbled—he is not hurt, she says, though she jokes that perhaps his pride has taken a hit. As Annemarie looks at the frightened Ellen and Mrs. Rosen, huddled together on the sofa and bundled up in rags, she wonders what “sources of pride” the Rosens, and the other Jews, have left. They have nothing of their own with them.

Annemarie has intuited what is going to happen to Mr. Rosen and Mrs. Rosen, though no one has explicitly told her: Henrik is going to smuggle them across the narrow sea to Sweden. Though the Rosens seem frightened, as she looks at her neighbors, she is surprised to see that their shoulders are straight despite all the fear that lies ahead of them. Annemarie realizes that they have “other sources, too, of pride, and [have] not left everything behind” after all.

CHAPTER 12: WHERE WAS MAMA?

Mama prepares to set out in the dark with Ellen and Mrs. Rosen down the path to the docks. They cannot use any candles or other kinds of light, and Mama leads the way as she knows the paths well. As the Rosens follow Mama out into the yard, Ellen pauses. She hugs Annemarie and promises to come back some day. The girls have a hard time letting one another go, and after Ellen departs, Annemarie begins to cry.

Peter is serious and methodical as he prepares the group of Jews for their long journey. He knows that any small slip-up could result in the ruin of the entire operation, and is determined to safeguard the group as well as possible in order to ensure the success not just of their escape, but the escape of groups still to come.



Peter is brave, but also skillful. It’s clear that this is not his first journey, or his last. His determination, bravery, and willingness to use his privilege to help innocent Jews survive the war are evident, and make a strong impression on Annemarie, who is desperate to be brave and helpful too.



Annemarie realizes for the first time just how much the Rosens are losing, and how persecuted they are their fellow Jews really are. Annemarie wonders how they can be brave or hopeful in such a miserable time.



Annemarie at last realizes that perhaps the Rosens’ hope comes from the fact that so many people in their extended community are committed to helping them see freedom. Pride comes from more than material wealth or even personal bravery—the love and support of others can help one feel pride and hope even in the darkest of moments.



Annemarie knows that Ellen and her family have no choice but to flee Copenhagen—but the separation from the girl who has been her best friend and sister for years is painful.



Alone in the empty living room, Annemarie visualizes the path her mother and the Rosens are taking and “walk[s it] with them in her mind.” She knows that the journey takes about half an hour, and feels that on her way back, Mama will be able to complete it in even less time than that. Annemarie looks at the clock and sees that it is two-thirty in the morning. She believes her mother will be home in about an hour, and decides to sit up in a chair and wait for her to get back. As she thinks of her Papa, all alone back in Copenhagen, she wonders if his fear is worse even though he is in “less danger.”

Annemarie wakes up at the first light of dawn, not having even realized she’d fallen asleep. Annemarie looks around, surprised by the light, and wonders where her mother could be. She runs upstairs to see if her mother has already returned and gone straight to bed, but Mama’s room is empty. She then checks Kirsti’s room, but her sister is fast asleep alone in her bed. Annemarie goes to the window and looks out at the meadow—she sees a “dark shape” out at the edge of the woods, and as it moves slowly, Annemarie realizes that the shape is Mama.

CHAPTER 13: RUN! AS FAST AS YOU CAN!

Annemarie dashes out of the house and runs through the meadow to the edge of the woods, calling for her Mama. When she gets to her mother’s side, she is relieved to see that she’s all right. Mama says that everyone is safe with Uncle Henrik—on the way back from the docks, though, she tripped and hurt her ankle. She continued to drag herself through the woods, determined to make it home by morning. Annemarie helps her mother stand and supports her as she hobbles all the way back up to the house. As they walk together, Mama is visibly in pain but also happy to have made it home. She asks Annemarie what time it is, and when Annemarie says it’s about four-thirty, Mama says happily that Henrik, Mr. Rosen and Mrs. Rosen, and the other Jews will soon be setting sail for Sweden.

At the steps leading up to the house, Annemarie spots something in the grass. She bends to pick it up—it is the packet Peter gave to Mr. Rosen. Seeing what it is, Mama nearly swoons—she worries that their work will “all have been for nothing” without the packet. Annemarie tells Mama that she will take the packet down to the docks. Inside, Mama tells Annemarie to go into the house, put some apples, bread, and cheese into a basket, and bury the packet at the bottom of it. As Annemarie heads out the door, her mother urges her to act like a “silly, empty-headed little girl, taking lunch to a fisherman” if a soldier stops her on the road. Annemarie kisses her mother and goes, as her Mama calls out for her to run as fast as she can.

In this passage, Annemarie thinks about bravery and fear. She wonders if her father’s inability to know what, exactly, is transpiring at the countryside, is increasing the fear he feels all alone back in Copenhagen. As bravery and ignorance are major thematic parts of this section of the novel, it makes sense that Annemarie is wondering if even the adults in her life have trouble being brave whenever they know too much—or too little.



Something has gone wrong, and Mama has not returned in the time frame Annemarie believed she would. When Annemarie spots Mama’s form on the lawn, she fears the worst, and worries that there has been some kind of complication in the group’s plans.



Annemarie is terrified that something awful has befallen her mother, and is relieved to see that even though Mama has sustained a minor injury, her spirit is intact. Annemarie believes that the worst is over—Mama is safe, their family is intact, and the Rosens will soon be on their way to freedom.



Annemarie’s happiness is shattered as she realizes that a crucial piece of the mission to save the Rosens has been left behind. Without hesitation, Annemarie accepts that she must be the one to deliver it—the Rosens’ freedom rests entirely on her shoulders, and she is at last being called upon to act bravely, and alone, in pursuit of the freedom of her friends, neighbors, and indeed her “sister” Ellen.



CHAPTER 14: ON THE DARK PATH

As Annemarie walks through the woods with the basket over her arm, she shivers in the gray, chilly October morning. The path curves deeper into the forest, and Annemarie picks up speed. She runs through the woods, imagining herself as Little Red Riding-Hood—a story she has often told to Kirsti at bedtime. At the same time, walking the familiar road, she remembers the story Mama has told her of her own childhood, walking through the woods to school each day. Annemarie tries not to worry about her mother, though she can't help thinking of the poor woman with her hurt ankle back at the house.

As Annemarie gets deeper and deeper into the woods, she keeps hearing noises, and thinks of how, when telling the story of Little Red Riding-Hood to Kirsti, she always makes sure to draw out the part where Little Red runs into the wolf and make it as scary as possible. Annemarie tries to tell herself that the noises she's hearing are just rustling trees and snapping twigs, but just as she rounds the bend that empties out into the harbor, she finds herself face to face with four Nazi soldiers—and two large dogs.

Annemarie has always been the one who comforts her younger sister with fanciful stories and fairy tales. Now that she is in the dark woods on her own, in pursuit of completing a mission whose failure could pose danger not just to herself but to many people she loves, Annemarie is the one in need of comfort, and she turns to familiar tales of bravery and intrepidity to bolster her spirit.



Annemarie's worst fears come true—just like Little Red Riding-Hood, she encounters her own “big bad wolf” deep in the heart of the forest. Annemarie's courage, bravery, and ability to blur the line between fantasy and reality is about to be put to the ultimate test.



CHAPTER 15: MY DOGS SMELL MEAT!

Annemarie remembers her mother's advice to act like a “silly little girl” should she run into any Nazis. She tries to imagine herself as Kirsti on the day the two of them and Ellen ran into soldiers on the street—a silly little girl who knows “nothing of danger.” Annemarie politely greets the soldiers, and when they ask her what she's doing in the woods, she tells them she's bringing lunch to her uncle, a fisherman.

Annemarie notices that the soldiers' dogs are looking at her basket and growling with hunger. She tries to think of how Kirsti would respond to the fear and danger of the moment, and decides to chatter on and on, attempting to bore the soldiers. One of them, however, reaches into her basket, takes the loaf of bread, and breaks it apart. After inspecting it, he tosses the halves onto the ground for the dogs, amidst Annemarie's protests.

Annemarie has been longing to know more and more of the truth of what's going on around her—but in this moment, she tries her best to emulate Kirsti's oblivious naivete, inhabiting a “fantasy” of who she really is and what she really knows.



Annemarie is channeling Kirsti as best she can. She wants to convince the soldiers that she is nothing more than an ignorant little girl—she knows that there is more than just her own life at stake, and is determined not to fall apart and expose what's really going on.



The soldiers continue rifling through Annemarie’s basket, laughing at the brown spots on the apple and the meager piece of cheese. They taunt her for not bringing her uncle any meat—Annemarie, thinking like Kirsti, petulantly responds that the German army “eats all of Denmark’s meat.” Annemarie’s sassiness is just a front, though—internally, she is praying that the soldiers won’t lift the napkin, the only thing left in the basket. The dogs sniff the bottom of the basket hungrily, and the soldier tells Annemarie that his dogs can smell meat inside. The soldier reaches in and lifts up the napkin to Annemarie’s horror.

The soldier, seeing the paper packet at the bottom, asks Annemarie what it is. She insists she doesn’t know, and even scolds the soldier for making her late and ruining her uncle’s lunch. The soldier lifts the packet from the basket and tears it open, asking what’s inside, but Annemarie insists she doesn’t know. She finds herself thinking of how grateful she is for her ignorance—she genuinely doesn’t know what’s inside. The soldier pulls a simple handkerchief out of the package, and throws it to the ground. The dogs sniff at it, but leave it alone. Having found nothing, the soldiers push past Annemarie into the woods, urging her to “go on to [her] uncle and tell him the German dogs enjoyed his bread.”

Annemarie collects the apple and the handkerchief, the only things left intact, and puts them back into the basket. She rushes down to the dock, and is relieved to find that Uncle Henrik’s boat is still there. She rushes aboard and delivers the basket to him, telling him briefly of her encounter with the soldier. Uncle Henrik, visibly relieved, thanks Annemarie for bringing the handkerchief to him, though he doesn’t explain what it is, or why it’s important. He tells her to return home, and assures her he’ll be back later that evening. As she turns to go, she overhears Uncle Henrik saying that he hopes the German soldiers “choke” on the bread they stole.

The more frightened Annemarie grows, paradoxically, the more bravely and brashly she is able to behave in front of the soldiers. Even as they verge on exposing her mission’s secret, she is able to keep her cool and maintain her naïve, petulant front.



This is the first time in the novel when Annemarie considers that perhaps being ignorant of what’s really going on is indeed helping to make her braver. If she knew what the packet contained, she would not be able to keep up her petulant, childish façade in front of the Nazis so well. Luckily, the object in the packet is something quotidian and uninteresting, even to Annemarie, and she is able to escape with her freedom.



Annemarie has faced the “big bad wolf” and emerged triumphant. She is able to complete the dangerous task set to her, and returns to Henrik’s house knowing that she has contributed something—though she doesn’t know what—very important to her uncle’s mission.



CHAPTER 16: I WILL TELL YOU JUST A LITTLE

That night at dinner, Annemarie, Mama, and Uncle Henrik laugh as Mama tells Henrik all about Annemarie’s attempts at milking Blossom the cow. The doctor has been to see Mama, and her broken ankle is wrapped up in a cast. Little Kirsti, uninterested in the story about the cow, speaks up to ask when Ellen will be coming back. Mama tells her that Ellen has gone to be with her parents, and Kirsti is indignant that Ellen didn’t wake her up to say goodbye.

The tension, fear, and danger of the previous night gone, everyone enjoys a happy and carefree meal. Only Kirsti is in the dark as to all that has transpired around her, and the others make sure that she stays innocent and naïve as to the true events of the last several days.



After dinner, Uncle Henrik takes Annemarie out to the barn to show her how to milk Blossom properly, but as the lesson begins, Annemarie's mind is on other things. She asks Uncle Henrik where Ellen and the others are, and points out that earlier, she didn't see where they were hiding on the boat. Henrik reminds Annemarie of his earlier assertion that it is "safer not to know" some things, but then acquiesces and agrees to tell her just a little because of how brave she was earlier. Annemarie insists she wasn't brave—she was terrified—but Henrik tells her that putting others before herself even in difficult situations is the very definition of bravery.

Uncle Henrik reveals that many fishermen, himself included, have built secret hiding spots underneath the decks of their boats. Peter Neilsen brings groups of Jews to the fishermen, who ferry them over to Sweden. Annemarie, realizing that Peter is in the Resistance, chides herself for not having figured it out earlier. Uncle Henrik explains that though Ellen and the others had to be silent for many hours, they could hear Annemarie when she was on the boat—as well as the soldiers who came to search it shortly after Annemarie left.

Annemarie is horrified that soldiers searched the boats, but Uncle Henrik tells her that there is a system in place for making sure the Jews stay well hidden. The hiding places are very carefully concealed, and when fishermen pile dead fish on the deck, the soldiers do not want to dirty their shiny boots mucking around in the refuse and leave the boats quickly. Annemarie thanks Uncle Henrik for telling her so much about the Resistance and their schemes—but begs to know what the handkerchief was and why it was important.

Uncle Henrik explains that the handkerchiefs have been dipped in a special solution created by scientists working on behalf of the Resistance—solutions that ruin the soldiers' dogs' senses of smell and keep them from finding the hidden Jews on Resistance boats bound for Sweden. Uncle Henrik tells Annemarie that the soldiers who searched his boat earlier had dogs—if Annemarie hadn't rushed the packet to him, all might have been lost. Uncle Henrik assures her that Ellen and all of the others made it safely to Sweden—and will remain safe there—thanks to her. Annemarie sadly wonders aloud if she'll ever see Ellen again, and Henrik assures her that she will. "Someday the war will end," he tells her; "all wars do."

Though Kirsti is shielded from the truth, Annemarie demands to know what is going on. As Henrik provides her with some of the details of his role in smuggling Jews out of Denmark, the two of them have an earnest discussion about what constitutes bravery—and decide that true bravery comes from self-sacrifice.



As Annemarie learns more and more about the truth of what her family, friends, and neighbors risk and sacrifice daily in the name of resisting the Nazi occupation, she feels naïve for not having put together the obvious clues sooner. At the same time, she realizes just how carefully the people she loves have been trying to shield her from the burdensome truth.



Now that Annemarie has learned the bare bones of what's going on all around her, she is desperate for more knowledge. She knows that she can be brave even in the face of the truth, and so hungers for it rabidly.



Henrik has tried to shield Annemarie from the scarier, more dangerous aspects of the truth of what he and the Resistance do in order to fight the Nazis and their torment of Danish Jews, but now he tells her the whole truth. He knows that Annemarie is growing older, and will soon learn the truth whether it comes from him or someone else. Henrik's weathered prediction about the end of the war shows how much he's been through, and how heavy it's weighed on him—and implies that Annemarie will soon bear these same scars and burdens.



CHAPTER 17: ALL THIS LONG TIME

Two long years later, Annemarie is twelve, and the war has indeed come to an end. As the news spreads throughout Copenhagen, the Danish flag is raised high everywhere, church bells ring, and people sing the national anthem of Denmark proudly in the streets. Annemarie, standing on the balcony of her family's apartment, looks around at those she loves. Mama is crying happy tears, while Kirsti—"taller, more serious, and very thin"—happily waves a Danish flag. Papa is happy, too, but there is a sadness in the air—Peter Neilsen is dead, recently executed for his work on behalf of the Resistance.

Annemarie has, in the last two years, learned the truth about her sister Lise's death. Papa revealed to Annemarie that Lise, too, was part of the Resistance, though neither he nor Mama knew until after Lise's death, a hit-and-run orchestrated by Nazi soldiers.

Annemarie leaves the balcony and goes into her room, where she opens Lise's special blue trunk. She takes out the wedding gown and sees that it has begun to turn yellow. She spreads the dress on the bed, reaches into the folds of the skirt, and finds the Star of David **necklace** she hid there for Ellen so long ago. Annemarie brings the necklace out to the balcony where she shows it to Papa and asks if he can fix it, so that when the Rosens return, she can give it back to Ellen. Papa says he'll fix it right away, and Annemarie tells him that until Ellen gets back, she will wear the necklace herself.

This passage, which takes place in a moment of intense joy and relief, nonetheless shows that the years have not been entirely kind to the Johansens. They have suffered more losses, and though their country has emerged victorious from the war, the occupation has left indelible marks on all of them.



Annemarie at last knows the full truth about her family—but the fact that things were kept from her for so long shows the Johansens' belief that ignorance can be bliss.



This moment is rife with symbolic significance, as Annemarie pulls Ellen's necklace from the folds of Lise's dress and makes plans to wear it until her new "sister" returns. From the ashes of loss can come new love and strange comforts—though Annemarie lost her blood sister Lise, she has found perhaps an even truer sisterhood in Ellen despite the distances between them.





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