***Number the Stars***

***Chapter 10***

***Summary:***

* Henrik heads out, but everyone else is quiet and subdued.
* Annemarie stays up even though she doesn't have to, and they all wait quietly. She and Ellen are exhausted.
* The group is interrupted by the arrival of Nazi soldiers. They saw that the lights were on and too many people were in the house, which made them suspicious. Not good.
* Mrs. Johansen explains that they're having a pre-funeral gathering—there's nothing wrong with that.
* Man, the soldiers are scary.
* One of them makes Annemarie say who's in the casket. She knows what to do: she says Birte.
* The officer asks why the coffin isn't open, and Mrs. Johansen lies and says that it's because Birte had typhus and so she's full of germs.
* The officer hits Mrs. Johansen on the face, tells everyone they should "open it after [they] leave" (10.27), and then takes off with the rest of the soldiers. (Take a sec and think about how terrible that scene was.)
* Everyone's stunned, but they have to act normal so they don't draw any further attention to themselves.
* To buy some time, Peter reads from the Bible—pretty common at a funeral. In particular, he reads the psalm that talks about numbering the stars. (Sound familiar? Yeah, that's where the title of the book comes from. For more on that, check out what we have to say in "[**What's Up With the Title?**](https://www.shmoop.com/number-the-stars/title.html)")
* The reading really makes Annemarie think. She worries that "[t]he whole world was too cold, too big. And too cruel" (10.38).
* Peter reads aloud for a long time, and then finally goes to reveal what's in the coffin.

***Brief Summary:***

Once everyone is assembled, Henrik leaves for his boat. Annemarie looks at the group assembled in her living room. Among them there is a young mother nursing a baby with her husband at her side, and an old man who dozes alone on the couch. Mama tells her she can go to bed, but Annemarie chooses to stay downstairs with the Rosens and the others. She dozes off in the rocking chair, only to be woken by a familiar, loud pounding at the door. It is a German soldier, demanding to know why so many people are gathered at the house this night. Mama explains that everyone has gathered for the death of Great Aunt Birte.

Suspicious, the soldiers push their way into the house. One of them addresses Annemarie, asking who has died. Annemarie lies in a firm voice. The soldier is not convinced. He approaches the coffin and asks Mama why it is closed. Mama moves towards the coffin as if she intended to open it, telling the soldier he's right, they should be able to look upon dear Birte's face one last time, even if the doctor said her body might still carry the contagious typhus fever, which killed her. The soldier backs away quickly, ordering her not to open the diseased woman's coffin until after they leave.

In the candle-lit living room, after the soldiers have gone, Peter opens a Bible and reads a psalm for the group. The psalm praises God, "*he who numbers the stars one by one...*" (p. 87). The prayer begins to relax the group, but Annemarie is not comforted. How could God number the stars one by one when there are so many? The world tonight seems like a vast, cruel place to Annemarie. When Peter finishes reading, he announces that it is time; he opens the lid of the casket.

***Brief Analysis:***

Peter's reading of the psalm on this dark night is an act of courage, but it is an act that Annemarie is still too young to appreciate. She, who has just learned what a large and sometimes cruel place the world can be, has not yet come to terms with this new knowledge. She wonders how the adults can possibly be comforted and go on in the face of such cruelty and danger. What she is too young to realize is that the adults have always known of the cruelties of the world. She doesn't yet understand that every day lived in peace is not a guarantee; it is a gift.

Annemarie will eventually come to appreciate the tremendous courage it takes to be an adult and to face, every day, a world that is fraught with known and unknown dangers. In time, she will appreciate her parents' courage even more, as she realizes that they have been living with everyday perils, and the greater perils of the Holocaust, with the full awareness of the potential repercussions. In short, she is learning the courage to face the world as an adult. When her uncle explains to her in chapter eight that it's easier to be brave when we don't know all the facts, Annemarie will, in time, come to have a greater understanding of his talk.

***Critical Study:***

Uncle Henrik is about to depart for his boat, leaving the people gathered with the coffin. Present are an old man, a couple with a young baby, the Rosens, Peter Neilsen, Annemarie, and Mrs. Johansen. As Henrik walks out, the old man says, "God keep you safe." Henrik returns the blessing, modifying it to include everyone in the room. Annemarie looks at Ellen sitting between the Rosens and feels sad that they are in different worlds now. Ellen is headed for something Annemarie will not be able to share with her. Annemarie dozes in a chair and is awoken by headlights. Officers approach and pound on the door. They want to know why there are so many people in the house. Mrs. Johansen tells them a family member has died. The officers storm in and turn to Annemarie, asking her who died. As Annemarie answers she thinks how right Uncle Henrik was: the more you know, the harder it is to be brave. She lies and says Great-aunt Birte died. The officer is not satisfied. He wants to know why they have not kept the custom of leaving the casket open. He demands that it be opened. Mrs. Johansen goes to the casket and says they are right, Great-aunt Birte's face should be seen even if she did die of typhus. The officer slaps Mrs. Johansen for her stupidity, puts out the candles, and leaves.

Annemarie moves to comfort her mother, but realizes that she must not touch her since the departing officers might see them. Peter begins to read a psalm that praises the Lord "who numbered the stars one by one." They all sit and listen; the old man knows it by heart. Annemarie is on the brink of tears, but she does not want to cry. The sky is too big to number the stars, Annemarie thinks. She feels that the sky is big and cold and cruel, and so is the world. When he finishes reading, Peter opens the casket.

***Critical Analysis:***

[Uncle Henrik](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Number-the-Stars/character-analysis/#Uncle_Henrik) departs, and Annemarie's mother tells her she may go to bed. She refuses and not long afterward, soldiers arrive. They say they have noticed that an "unusual number of people have gathered at this house tonight." Annemarie's mother tells them that it is because of the death of Great-Aunt Birte. The soldiers point out that they know that the custom is to look at the face of the dead. The German officer says, "Let us open it up and take one last look at Great-Aunt Birte!"

Annemarie's mother agrees and goes toward the soldier and the casket. She tells him he's right, but the doctor had said not to because Great-Aunt Birte died of typhus. She continues on, exclaiming that she would prefer to open it. "Surely typhus germs wouldn't linger in a dead person!" The officer responds by slapping her and suggesting she open it after the soldiers leave.

After they leave [Peter Neilsen](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Number-the-Stars/character-analysis/#Peter_Neilsen) opens the Bible and reads a Psalm. "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." Moments pass, as Annemarie thinks about the words, about how Ellen's mother thought the sea was too big and cold. She thinks the "whole world was: too cold, too big. And too cruel."

Then Peter opens the casket lid.

The risk of exposure is not for typhus, but for Resistance activities. Typhus, however, is a valid reason not to open the casket. Typhus was fatal in 40% of cases at the time, and it is transmitted by lice, fleas, and chiggers. The excuse to not open the casket is believable enough; the soldiers are not willing to test it. They strike [Mrs. Johansen](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Number-the-Stars/character-analysis/#Mrs._Johansen), emphasizing their vile nature. The officer also shows his character by his parting words: "Open it after we leave." He doesn't care if the Johansens contract typhus.

The quote [Peter Neilsen](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Number-the-Stars/character-analysis/#Peter_Neilsen) reads to the assembled crowd is selected from Tehillim, more commonly known to American and non-Jewish readers as Psalms in the Old Testament of the Bible. In the context of the novel it is significant because it is read before they begin their flight from Denmark to Sweden. Readers ought to note that, at this point, Jews were in hiding, pursued during Rosh Hashanah and on Shabbat as well. These days of celebration, community, and rest are the days the Nazis chose to target the Jews for transport. Peter reads to them a passage from the Torah to remind them to have hope.

***Significance:***

Once everyone has arrived, Uncle Henrik says that it is time for him to leave. He leaves through the front door. Shortly after that, a German soldier knocks and demands to know why so many people have gathered at the house. Mama explains that they are holding a vigil for her Great-Aunt Birte. The officer notices that the casket is closed, even though it is Danish custom to keep the casket open to allow mourners to say good-bye to their loved one. The soldier asks why the casket is closed, and Mama explains Great-Aunt Birte died of typhus and the doctors have warned them that the corpse could still be contagious. However, she offers to open it anyway if the officer wants to have a look. He slaps Mama and the soldiers leave.

Peter and Mama worry that the soldiers are listening even after they have left the house. To keep up the pretense a funeral, Peter picks a random psalm from the Bible and reads it aloud. It is about the Lord reuniting the people of Israel and healing their wounds. Everyone listens solemnly. After a few minutes, Peter closes the Bible and tells everyone it is time to leave.

The title of [Number the Stars](https://www.gradesaver.com/number-the-stars) comes from Psalm 147:4, which Peter reads aloud in this chapter. In the psalm, God can number the stars one by one—which shows that he knows everything. The psalm is intended to comfort people in times of trouble by showing them that God is always watching and they are not alone. The psalm also describes how God reunited the people of Israel—that is, the Jews—after they were persecuted and helped them to rebuild. This parallels the way that the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust had to rebuild their lives after World War II.

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part:***

***Summary Part 1:***

[Uncle Henrik](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/annemarie-johansen) looks around the room. Though so many people have been reunited, the atmosphere is still tense and anxious. [Peter](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/peter-neilsen) sits alone, deep in thought, while [Ellen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/ellen-rosen), 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.”

***Analysis Part 1:***

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.

***Summary Part 2:***

[Mama](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/mrs-johansen-mama) comes over to [Annemarie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/annemarie-johansen) 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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/ellen-rosen), [Peter](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/peter-neilsen), 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.

***Analysis Part 2:***

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.

***Summary Part 3:***

Several Nazi officers walk into the room and ask why so many people have gathered at this house tonight. [Mama](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/mrs-johansen-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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/annemarie-johansen) 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.”

***Analysis Part 3:***

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.

***Summary Part 4:***

[Annemarie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/annemarie-johansen) feels a panic come over her, but [Mama](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/mrs-johansen-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.

***Analysis Part 4:***

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.

***Summary Part 5:***

[Annemarie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/annemarie-johansen) runs to [Mama](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/mrs-johansen-mama) and embraces her, while [Peter](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/peter-neilsen) 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.

***Analysis Part 5:***

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.