***Number the Stars***

***Chapter 17***

***Summary:***

### ***All This Long Time***

* Fast forward to after World War II has ended—a pretty big jump in time. In the previous chapter, Annemarie was 10. Now she's 12 and Kirsti is 7.
* With Kirsti and their parents, Annemarie joins the rest of the community in solemnly celebrating the end of the war and the new freedom of Denmark and other European countries.
* Her family has taken care of the Rosens' belongings for them while the Rosens have been in Sweden.
* The war has really changed them all, including Kirsti. She seems mature.
* Annemarie remembers Peter, who was captured by the Nazis and murdered for being a Resistance fighter. (Excuse us while we grab some tissues.)
* She thinks of a piece of writing that Peter had sent her family—he was so brave.
* Sadly, Peter's body was buried at the place where he was killed, which was against his wishes.
* Peter's death inspired Annemarie's parents to talk with her about her sister, Lise. They revealed that Lise was actually murdered by the Nazis—turns out, she was part of the Resistance. The Nazis had stormed a Resistance gathering, and in all the chaos, Lise was killed and Peter was wounded.
* Annemarie thinks of her sister and then goes to the box where her sister's trousseau is still kept. She removes the Star of David that belonged to Ellen—that's where she had hidden it two years before.
* Annemarie asks her father to repair the necklace and commits to "wear it [her]self" (17.26) in honor of Ellen. And of course, she promises to give it back to Ellen when they meet again.

***Brief Summary:***

Uncle Henrik was right. The war ends two years later when Annemarie is twelve. All of Denmark celebrates in the streets, at least those citizens who are still there. Many apartments in Annemarie's neighborhood are empty because their Jewish occupants have long since fled. The remaining citizens of Denmark had tended to the abandoned homes for two years, dusting the furniture and watering the plants, as Mama had done for the Rosens. Now these same neighbors enter the empty apartments to hang symbols of freedom in the windows.

The joy of this day is tempered with some painful memories, however. Peter is dead. He was captured and executed by the Germans. The night before he was shot, he had written a letter to the Johansens, telling them of his love for them, and that he was not afraid to die. Peter had written of his pride for helping his country. He had asked to be buried next to Lise, but the Germans who executed him along with many other members of the Resistance had buried them all in numbered graves in the public square. The Johansens had laid flowers on the numbered ground in honor of Peter, and that night, Annemarie's parents told her the truth about Lise's death.

Lise had been part of the Resistance. The Nazis had discovered the secret cellar where the Resistance held its meetings. She had been with Peter that night, but when the place was raided, everyone got separated as they desperately fled for safety. Peter had been shot in the arm, but Annemarie had been too sad at her sister's funeral to notice that he wore it in a sling. Lise had been run down by a German military car as she tried to escape.

Annemarie remembers Lise, in her yellow dress, dancing at her engagement party. She runs to her bedroom and opens the trunk full of Lise's possessions. In the pocket of the yellow dress is Ellen's Star of David necklace. Annemarie takes it to her father and asks him to fix it. He agrees, and tells her she can return it to Ellen when the Rosens come back. Until then, says Annemarie, she will wear it herself.

***Brief Analysis:***

Annemarie and her country have survived the war, but not without taking heavy losses. The Johansens have lost their daughter and the brave man who was to be their son-in-law. The empty apartments stand as monuments to their missing inhabitants. There is great hope that Denmark's Jews have survived the war, but no one knows their fate with any certainty, and if they have survived, it remains to be seen whether they will be able, or willing, to return.

Now with the war over, some things which had previously been kept secret finally can be revealed. Annemarie learns of her sister's courage in joining the Resistance and learns that the accident which killed her was no accident at all. The fact that her parents are now able to talk about Lise and the circumstances surrounding her death, however, end the book on a hopeful note that the family will be able to heal itself, and that perhaps Denmark and the rest of the world will find healing as well, one family at a time.

***Critical Study:***

Two years later, the war ends. As the Germans retreat, the Danes sing the national anthem and hang flags in their windows. Annemarie reveals that only a few months before, Peter was captured by the Nazis and shot in a public square. On the day of his execution, Mama and [Papa](https://www.gradesaver.com/number-the-stars/study-guide/character-list#papa) told Annemarie that the Nazis murdered [Lise](https://www.gradesaver.com/number-the-stars/study-guide/character-list#lise) as well. Lise and Peter had both been part of the Resistance. German soldiers raided one of their secret meetings and everyone scattered. The Germans purposefully mowed Lise down in a car as she tried to escape.

The day the war ends, Annemarie opens Lise’s wedding trunk and finds her older sister’s engagement dress. She removes Ellen’s Star of David necklace from the pocket. Annemarie asks Papa to fix the necklace's chain, which broke when Annemarie ripped it off Ellen’s neck two years before. Annemarie decides to wear the necklace herself, keeping it safe for Ellen until she is able to return to Denmark.

Throughout *Number the Stars*, Lowry makes many symbolic connections between Ellen and Lise. Both girls had dark hair (although Lise's lightened as she grew older). Both girls suffered because of the German occupation and faced their trials heroically. When Ellen moves in with the Johansen family temporarily, Mr. Johansen states that their family feels complete because once again, they have three daughters. It is appropriate, then, that Annemarie hides Ellen’s necklace in Lise’s dress. This gesture once again ties these two girls together. Lise sacrificed her life in the fight against the Nazis, and even after her death, she is able to keep fighting for Ellen's safety.

Peter’s death is tragic, but true to life. Lowry based his character on the many young people who fought in the Danish Resistance and were killed by the Gestapo. In her afterword to the novel, Lowry explains that Peter’s letter to the Johansens is based on a similar letter written by Kim Malthe-Bruun. Like Peter, Kim was a young man who was murdered by the Gestapo because of his role in the Resistance. He wrote a letter to his mother on the eve of his execution urging his family to fight for “an ideal of human decency” (116). Although Annemarie is too young to join the Resistance at ten, it is entirely believable that she would have done so if she were slightly older during the war, like her sister. Regardless, she does everything in her power to support the cause, following in her older sister's footsteps.

***Critical Analysis:***

This final chapter takes place two years later. The war has ended. Annemarie is with her parents on their balcony in Copenhagen. The narrator explains: "For almost two years now, neighbors had tended the plants and dusted the furniture and polished the candlesticks for the Jews who had fled."

[Peter Neilsen](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Number-the-Stars/character-analysis/#Peter_Neilsen), Resistance fighter, has died, killed by Nazis. He had asked to be buried next to Lise, his former lover, but the Germans wouldn't return the bodies. Annemarie's parents have now told her that her older sister Lise was also murdered by the Nazis and that she had been part of the Resistance. The Nazis ran her down with a car. Annemarie got out Ellen's [Star of David](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Number-the-Stars/symbols/#Star_of_David) necklace and asked her father to fix the clasp. He says he will and she can give it back to Ellen when she returns. "Until then," Annemarie told him, "I will wear it myself."

The novel resolves several years after the main events of the story. Annemarie and her family are still waiting for the Rosens to return. Unlike the Jews in most countries in Europe, the Danish Jews almost all survived. Their non-Jewish neighbors stood up for them, helping them escape and waiting for their return.

This does not mean the novel removes all loss from the story. The reader learns that both Annemarie's sister, Lise, and [Peter Neilsen](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Number-the-Stars/character-analysis/#Peter_Neilsen) were Resistance fighters and both died at the hands of their Nazi enemies. War is not just about struggle and victory. There is always a cost, and in many cases, bravery results in loss. [Lowry](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Number-the-Stars/author/) has written a hopeful story of the war, but she did so respectfully; she rightly included the reality of war as the cause of great loss and death.

Symbolically, Annemarie shows her connection to Ellen by wearing the [Star of David](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Number-the-Stars/symbols/#Star_of_David) she has kept for her friend. This act is multifold in meaning. It informs the reader that Ellen survived and will return home. It also shows it is safe to wear a symbol of Judaism in Denmark. The fact that her parents allow Annemarie to do so says they believe she is safe in doing so, and they support her show of love for Ellen.

***Significance:***

The war ends two years later; Annemarie is now twelve years old. The Johansens watch the celebrations from their apartment. Below, people are waving the flag of Denmark in the streets. Annemarie thinks of all the empty apartments where Jewish families lived; they will soon be filled again. Mrs. Johansen has taken care of the Rosens' home in their absence. Kirsti has grown up a lot and now looks like the photos of Lise. She is more quiet and serious then before. Peter Neilsen has been killed. He was caught and jailed by the Nazis, then shot in a public square. The night before he died, Peter wrote to the Johansens saying he was proud, and not afraid. Peter asked to be buried with Lise, but the Nazis would not return his body.

When Annemarie went to visit Peter's grave with her parents, they told her the truth about how Lise died. Lise was also part of the Resistance. Her parents had not known this; Peter told them after her death. Annemarie fears that the Nazis also shot her sister. Mr. Johansen tells her that Lise and other Resistance members were being chased. Some were shot (Peter was wounded in the arm), but not Lise. The soldiers saw her and "simply ran her down." In a way, Annemarie had been told the truth. Lise was hit by a car, but it was not an accident.

Standing on the balcony, Annemarie thinks of her older sister. The celebration makes her think of Lise's engagement party, when Lise danced all night. Annemarie goes into her bedroom and opens the trunk that holds Lise's trousseau. From the skirt of the dress Lise wore that night, Annemarie pulls out Ellen's Star of David necklace. She asks Mr. Johansen if he can fix the broken chain. He says he can and then she will be able to give it to Ellen when she comes back. Annemarie says she will wear it herself until Ellen returns.

Annemarie continues to take on adult responsibility, without even thinking about it, when she goes to milk the cow. Though the assignment of responsibilities has returned to normal, she has progressed. Her progression is evident in the way her actions are contrasted with Kirsti's. Kirsti does not understand why Ellen is gone. Annemarie, on the other hand, is included with the adults. Uncle Henrik takes her for a milking lesson because she is grown up enough now to learn how to do it. Annemarie is also allowed to know some of the things that were hidden from her before. The danger has subsided for the moment, so Annemarie can be told more. This is in keeping with the idea that too much knowledge is not a good thing when you must be brave. Now that the immediate danger is passed, more knowledge is acceptable. Uncle Henrik also helps Annemarie see her own bravery. She thinks that because she did not concentrate on the danger of the situation, she was not being brave and that because she was afraid in the first place, her actions were not courageous. But Henrik sets her straight. He acknowledges that she risked her life. To be brave you cannot think about how dangerous your actions are. When she realizes that Peter was a Resistance member, Annemarie finally understands that bravery is not something you can categorize so easily. Peter's bravery was not visible to her, but he was brave nonetheless. Annemarie's talk with Uncle Henrik reveals exactly what happened on the boat. Along with Annemarie, we have known that the Rosens and the others were hidden and protected. Like Annemarie herself, however, we have been kept from knowledge that might have made earlier scenes more obviously dangerous.

Two years elapse between the day Henrik takes his passengers to Sweden and the day the occupation ends. Circles are completed. The novel begins and ends in Copenhagen. Lise is dead, but Kirsti has started to look more and more like her. Ellen's necklace is brought back out and the implication is that its owner will return, too. The war has left absences and changes in its wake. Some Jewish families will return to Copenhagen and their apartments, but not all of them will. The loss of Peter and Lise is irreversible and devastating. With the end of the war, the secret of Lise's death can be revealed. The Germans robbed Lise's youth from her. Although Annemarie was spared, in one way the Germans took her youth from her, too. Even little Kirsti has grown serious.

Annemarie decides to wear Ellen's necklace. Because the war is over, she can wear it without fear. This action is symbolic of Annemarie's belief that she and Ellen will again be able to live the same life. The Star of David is an echo of Annemarie's earlier fears. When she heard the psalm on the night of Ellen's departure, she was overcome by the bigness of the world. Annemarie felt that the stars could never be named. Perhaps she still feels this way, but now Annemarie has a star she can claim as her own.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

Two long years later, [Annemarie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/annemarie-johansen) 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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/mrs-johansen-mama) is crying happy tears, while [Kirsti](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/kirsti-johansen)—“taller, more serious, and very thin”—happily waves a Danish flag. [Papa](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters) is happy, too, but there is a sadness in the air—[Peter Neilsen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/peter-neilsen) is dead, recently executed for his work on behalf of the Resistance.

***Analysis Part 1:***

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.

***Summary Part 2:***

[Annemarie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/annemarie-johansen) has, in the last two years, learned the truth about her sister [Lise](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/mrs-johansen-mama)’s death. [Papa](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters) revealed to Annemarie that Lise, too, was part of the Resistance, though neither he nor [Mama](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/mrs-johansen-mama) knew until after Lise’s death, a hit-and-run orchestrated by Nazi soldiers.

***Analysis Part 2:***

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.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Annemarie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/annemarie-johansen) leaves the balcony and goes into her room, where she opens [Lise](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/mrs-johansen-mama)’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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/symbols/ellen-s-necklace) she hid there for [Ellen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/ellen-rosen) so long ago. Annemarie brings the necklace out to the balcony where she shows it to [Papa](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters) 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.

***Analysis part 3:***

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.

***Quotations***

***Quotation 1:***

For nearly two years, now, neighbors had tended the plants and dusted the furniture and polished the candlesticks for the Jews who had fled. Her mother had done so for the Rosens.

"It is what friends do," Mama had said. (17.3-4)

***Explanation 1:***

The kind of pure, loyal friendship that Ellen and Annemarie have isn't just for little girls. It's for grown-ups and even entire communities, too. Annemarie's and Ellen's mothers have a similar bond, and it turns out that the Christians in Denmark feel the same way about the Jews. They all look out for each other.

***Quotation 2:***

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." (17.25-26)

***Explanation 2:***

This is more than just your average you-wear-my-clothes-I'll-wear-yours kind of friendship. This necklace is more than just a necklace—it's Ellen. (Intrigued? Check out more in our discussion of the ["Star of David"](https://www.shmoop.com/number-the-stars/star-of-david-necklace-symbol.html) in "Symbols, Imagery, Allegory.")

***Quotation 3:***

"Do you remember that Peter's arm was bandaged, and in a sling, at Lise's funeral? He wore a coat over it so that no one would notice. And a hat, to hide his red hair. The Nazis were looking for him." (17.15)

***Explanation 3:***

Peter is a redhead in a city full of blondes, and that's no picnic when you're a wanted criminal. Even if we don't let our physical appearances define us, they might define us to the people around us. That's why [Stacy and Clinton](http://tlc.howstuffworks.com/tv/what-not-to-wear) are so set on making us all look our best.

***Quotation 4:***

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." (17.25-26)

***Explanation 4:***

You know that lucky penny you carry around, or the friendship bracelet that's so worn its almost falling off your wrist? Well, like these items, the Star of David necklace is an important part of Ellen's identity. It reminds her of her Jewish faith and her relationship with her father who gave her the necklace. In order to make it safely through the war, Ellen had to leave the necklace behind. But by wearing the necklace in Ellen's place, Annemarie is making a statement: it's okay for her friend to stop hiding and honor those parts of her identity.

***Quotation 5:***

But even that was not to be for Peter. The Nazis refused to return the bodies of the young men they shot at Ryvangen. They simply buried them there where they were killed, and marked the graves only with numbers. (17.9)

***Explanation 5:***

War takes away so many basic human kindnesses and courtesies. As a Resistance fighter, Peter saved countless lives. But when the Nazis execute him, he just becomes a number.

***Quotation 6:***

He had written a letter to them from prison the night before he was shot. It had said simply that he loved them, that he was not afraid, and that he was proud to have done what he could for his country and for the sake of all free people. (17.8)

***Explanation 6:***

If anyone ever had reason to be scared, it's Peter—after all, he knows death is headed his way. Instead, Peter emphasizes that "he [i]s not afraid." He stands by his own actions, giving him courage and allowing him to face any fear.

***Quotation 7:***

Peter Neilsen was dead. It was a painful fact to recall on this day when there was so much joy in Denmark. But Annemarie forced herself to think of her redheaded almost-brother, and how devastating the day was when they received the news that Peter had been captured and executed by the Germans in the public square at Ryvangen, in Copenhagen. (17.7)

***Explanation 7:***

Peter is a hero to so many people (including us readers!), but the Nazis saw him as a dangerous criminal who needed to be destroyed. His public execution serves as a reminder to others like him what their fate might be. But something tells us that anyone even resembling Peter would go right on fighting anyway.