***Number the Stars***

***Chapter 2***

***Brief Summary:***

Hans Christian Andersen, the famous storyteller, was a Dane, and fairy tales are a part of the Danish tradition. Tonight Annemarie makes up a bedtime story to please her little sister, who insists on hearing about kings and queens. Kirsti drifts off to sleep, leaving Annemarie to think about the real-life king of Denmark, Christian X. King Christian is well-loved by the people of Denmark. Every morning he rides out from his palace on his horse, Jubilee, to greet his people. He rides alone without a security escort. Shortly after the Germans occupied Denmark, one of the German soldiers had asked who this man was who the people greeted so warmly. When a little boy replied that the man was their king, the German asked, incredulously, why he would ride without a bodyguard. The little boy had answered simply that all of the people of Denmark were his bodyguard.

Annemarie's Papa once told her that both he and Mama would lay down their lives to save the king if necessary. Annemarie replies that she would, too. Then she asks her Papa why the king hadn't been able to protect Denmark from the Nazi soldiers. Papa tells her that the king is wise and knows that tiny Denmark would surely lose such a battle with the Nazi invaders and that many Danes would die unnecessarily. Annemarie reminds him that their neighboring country, Norway, had fought, but the Nazis had crushed Norway. Her mother reminds her that there were Nazi soldiers in Holland, Belgium and France, as well. Not in Sweden, though, replies Annemarie, proud of her knowledge of the world. She had seen Sweden once, looking across the water from her Uncle Henrik's house north of Copenhagen.

That conversation had taken place three years ago, in their apartment as Mama crocheted a pillow case which was part of Lise's trousseau. Lise was Annemarie's older sister; she had been engaged to Peter Neilsen, and Annemarie had looked forward to having Peter for a brother. King Christian, despite being thrown from his horse the previous fall, is still alive. But Annemarie's sister, Lise, is not. She died in an accident two weeks before her wedding. Now Mama and Papa never speak her name, but Annemarie often opens Lise's trunk, which contains the items prepared for her wedding, as well as the beautiful, yellow dress, which Lise had worn at her engagement party. Peter has not married in the three years since Lise's death. He still stops by the apartment often, but his formerly fun-loving manner has become more serious. Papa has become more serious, too; to Annemarie, he seems old, tired and defeated.

***Brief Analysis:***

The contrast between the happily-ever-after world of fairy tales and the actual world events transpiring in Denmark at the time in which this story is set helps the author to convey some harsh truths about life. Unlike fairy tales, in real life we don't always get our happily-ever-afters. Lise didn't get hers. Annemarie's vivacious sister, who had been just weeks from embarking into married life, had died in a tragic accident instead. In the three years since her death, Annemarie has watched her parents and Lise's fiancy transform into older, more somber versions of themselves.

Annemarie's perspective is that of a child's. She doesn't yet understand the greater context of the tragedy of Lise's death, but Annemarie is growing up fast, having lost the shelter of youthful innocence that still protects Kirsti. King Christian the Tenth represents the reality of monarchs and heads of state, as a counterpoint to the romantic kings and queens Kirsti loves to hear about in fairy tales. Although King Christian is well-loved, and from Annemarie's perspective, a good man and a good leader, he was still unable to protect his people from German occupation. As the second chapter closes, Annemarie realizes that happily-ever-after is a fairy-tale ideal, which does not always, or even usually, match the reality of life.

***Critical Study:***

Kirsti and Annemarie are snuggled into bed, and Kirsti wants to hear a story. As the narrator explains: "All Danish children grew up familiar with fairy tales." At her sister's request, Annemarie tells a story of a king and queen and their daughter, who lived in a palace. When Kirsti sleeps, Annemarie thinks about the Danish king, Christian X, who is beloved by his people. He rides through the street alone on his horse, and Annemarie remembers seeing him when she was with her older sister, Lise. Thinking of the king makes her think of her sister, who has died, and of a story their father told about a German soldier asking why the king had no bodyguards. Her father said the answer to the Nazi soldier was: "All of Denmark is his bodyguard."

Annemarie thinks back to her confusion about why the Danes had not fought the Germans when they invaded Denmark. [Mr. Johansen](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Number-the-Stars/character-analysis/#Mr._Johansen) tells her that "they fought very fiercely in Norway." However, it was futile there. Her father explained Denmark had a small army and many Danes would have died fighting the Nazis in a fight they could never win. There are now German soldiers in Norway, Holland, Belgium, and France. The exception is Sweden. That had been the case three years ago, and it is still the case. Thinking about all of that makes Annemarie think more of her sister, Lise, who was to be married only two weeks after the day she died. Lise's intended fiancé, [Peter Neilsen](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Number-the-Stars/character-analysis/#Peter_Neilsen), has changed since then, as has Annemarie's father. The narrator explains that "the whole world changed. Only the fairy tales remained the same."

This chapter further establishes the setting. Denmark, unlike other nations, quickly surrendered to the Germans. The result of this was that the Germans allowed the Danes to continue on as before occupation in numerous ways. Their king—an example of strength and a unifying point for the country—stands still. Annemarie's confusion is understandable, however. Why not fight? Why surrender to the Nazis? Her father's explanation is as much for the reader as it is for her. Understanding why a nation would accept the rules of the Nazis is difficult for a young reader. [Lowry](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Number-the-Stars/author/) provides the historical context for her novel, addressing any confusion her readers might experience.

Also in this chapter the reader sees the first reference to fairy tales. These tales are part of the setting and context of the novel. This novel occurs in the homeland of one of the world's most renowned fairy-tale creators, Hans Christian Andersen. Further, fairy tales are, at their core, about disparities such as fear and hope and about the consequences of action. The story of the Danish king offers hope. Even in the darkest of times, there are ways to find hope. *Number the Stars* not only highlights this truth, but it is the story of such an event in history. The Holocaust was a horrific event and exceedingly difficult to address, even for adults. To navigate this terrain, Lowry selects a hopeful historical event to use in the center of her story. The Danes may have surrendered, but they constantly resisted. As the novel progresses, readers will learn the Danish Resistance included rescuing Jewish Danes who were marked for death as part of the Nazis' "final solution."

***Critical Analysis:***

As they go to bed, Annemarie tells Kirsti a story. Kirsti wants to hear about kings and queens, but she falls asleep as soon as Annemarie begins. Annemarie thinks about the real king of Denmark, Christian X. He is different from fairy tale kings, but the people love him. Annemarie remembers the days when her older sister Lise would take her to see King Christian go through the streets on his horse, greeting people. Thinking of Lise saddens Annemarie. Lise died several years ago. Annemarie thinks of a story her father told her about running an errand not long after the occupation had begun. A German soldier saw King Christina coming on his horse, and asked a young man near him who it was. Upon hearing that it was the king, the soldier asked where his protection was, and the young man answered, "All of Denmark is his bodyguard." Annemarie remembers how her father told her he would die to protect the king and so would Mrs. Johansen. Annemarie said she would die for him, too. She had asked why the king wasn't able to protect them from the Nazis. Her father explained that Denmark is a very small country, and other countries that fought were crushed. Annemarie replied that Sweden was not occupied. She remembered seeing Sweden from the shore at her Uncle Henrik's house.

In bed, Annemarie considers how things have changed since the time when her father told the story of the soldier and the young man. Sweden is still free and King Christian is still alive, but her sister Lise is dead. Lise had died in an accident two weeks before she was to marry Peter Neilsen. Annemarie looks at the blue trunk in the corner of her room. It is filled with Lise's trousseau, the linens and goods she was to use as a married woman. Mr. and Mrs. Johansen do not speak of Lise. Peter has not married anyone, and has become serious despite his youth. When Peter comes to the apartment, he talks to Mr. and Mrs. Johansen about things Annemarie does not understand. Annemarie thinks about how her father has changed, too. The only thing that has stayed the same, she concludes, is fairy tales.

From the first moments of Number the Stars, Lowry explores the difficulty of understanding war when you are a child. Even Annemarie's most prosaic experiences—running down the street, for example—are colored by the Second World War. Though Annemarie is not the narrator of the novel, Number the Stars is told from her point of view. Much of the novel is filled with her thoughts and feelings about the events surrounding her. It becomes clear that Annemarie is a particularly pensive child, made more so by the environment she is growing up in.

The ubiquity of soldiers in "tall shiny boots" conveys the physical aspect of the German occupation. Copenhagen is visually transformed by the war. So are the lives of the children. Though the girls are stopped by the soldiers, they do not yet realize that they are in danger. Annemarie and Ellen both feel frightened, but they do not understand what there is to fear. In the early part of the novel, the adults have told their children little or nothing about the war. Annemarie is still largely oblivious about the state of her country. The mothers whisper about the illegal paper. The girls are innocent; they ask for fancy food despite the fact that there have been rations made. Kirsti in particular desires things that have not been available for a long time. The process that Annemarie and her sister are still going through is one of adaptation. They must come to terms with the new life the war has brought about. Annemarie tries to make sense of a world in constant flux. Her family, the county she lives in—elements that are, ideally, stable for a child—have changed. The loss of her older sister, in particular, is difficult for Annemarie to deal with. To avoid feeling sad, she tries to avoid thinking of Lise too much. However, as Annemarie lies in bed with her little sister, thoughts of Lise keep returning to her. Annemarie compares the past and the present, and the past emerges as an ideal time. The memories that Annemarie has of Lise and Peter Neilsen are representative of better fortune. The changes she sees in the people close to her, especially her father and Peter, trouble Annemarie. She cannot enjoy a feeling of stability from the adults around her. The recognition that grown-ups are affected by the events of life, an unusual recognition for a child, adds to Annemarie's sense of instability.

As Annemarie lies sleepless in bed, her thoughts shift directly from her fairy tale to the unreal events of the last years. A parallel is established between the world of made-up stories and the strange feeling of unreality the war has cast over Annemarie's life. The story Mr. Johansen tells Annemarie is like a fairy tale, but it contains a strong message about allegiance, and introduces one of central themes in Number the Stars: the importance of bravery. Mr. Johansen says he would die for his country and that his wife would, too. Because of the respect and admiration Annemarie has for her parents, she begins to ask herself questions about her own bravery. For a young girl, this is a battle between admitting to the existence of fear and wanting to be brave. The introduction of fairy tales into the novel also connects to Annemarie's search for a balance between her bravery and her fears. The presence of fairy tales is symbolic of the contrast between the usually carefree world of childhood and the sobering world of adulthood and war.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

That night, in the bed they share, [Kirsti](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/kirsti-johansen) begs [Annemarie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/annemarie-johansen) 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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/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.

***Analysis Part 1:***

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.

***Summary Part 2:***

Sometimes, when [Annemarie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/annemarie-johansen) was little, she and her older sister [Lise](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/mrs-johansen-mama) would go out to see [King Christian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters) 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.

***Analysis Part 2:***

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.

***Summary Part 3:***

When the occupation first began many years ago, [Annemarie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/annemarie-johansen) struggled to understand why [King Christian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/king-christian) didn’t put up a fight against the Nazis and keep them out of Denmark. [Papa](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters) 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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/uncle-henrik)’s seaside home.

***Analysis Part 3:***

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.

***Summary Part 4:***

[Annemarie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/annemarie-johansen) turns her thoughts away from war and back to [Lise](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/mrs-johansen-mama), 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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/mrs-johansen-mama) and [Papa](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters) have grown tired and “defeated.” Annemarie’s whole world has changed—only the fairy tales she and [Kirsti](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/kirsti-johansen) tell have “remained the same.”

***Analysis Part 4:***

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.