***Number the Stars***

***Chapter 3***

***Brief Summary:***

September passes with no more unusual events, although Annemarie, Ellen, and Kirsti always take the longer route home from school now to avoid "the Giraffe" and his partner. Their mothers still take coffee together every afternoon, although, coffee, like every other luxury food item, is in short supply. Mostly, the mothers drink weak tea concocted from whatever herbs are available. Electricity has been rationed by the Germans, and so the families of Denmark must go without heat and light, relying on candles, extra blankets, and coal stoves, if they can find coal. Annemarie thinks she and Kirsti are lucky to have each other for warmth at night, and thinks of poor Ellen, who has no sisters.

One morning, as they prepare for school, Mrs. Johansen notices that a button has broken on Kirsti's jacket. She instructs the girls to stop by Mrs. Hirsch's sewing shop to buy a replacement button on their way home from school, but when the girls arrive, the shop is boarded up. There is a sign on the door, but it is written in German, and they don't know what it says.

The girls wonder where the Hirsch family has gone; Ellen had seen Mrs. Hirsch only the previous Saturday, and everything seemed fine. Kirsti reassures them that the Hirsch's have probably just gone to the seashore for vacation, but Ellen and Annemarie know that nobody in Copenhagen has taken a vacation to the seashore since the soldiers arrived. When they get home, Mama is very concerned by the news, particularly that the sign on the door was in German. She leaves to talk to Mrs. Rosen while Annemarie peels the potatoes, which have become the mainstay of their family dinners.

Mama awakens Annemarie later that night. Papa and Peter are in the living room, which alarms Annemarie. She knows that Peter has broken the German curfew in order to visit them this evening. He has brought her and Kirsti each a seashell and a bottle of beer for each of her parents. Peter has brought the news that the Germans are closing businesses owned by Jews. Annemarie asks if Mrs. Hirsch is Jewish and how she's supposed to earn a living if she can't sell buttons. Her parents assure her that her friends will take care of her. "'That's what friends do' (p. 24). "

Suddenly Annemarie remembers that the Rosens are Jewish, too. Annemarie tells her father that if all of Denmark is King Christian's bodyguard, then all of Denmark should also be bodyguards for the Jews as well. Her father agrees and promises her they will be. Back in bed a few minutes later, Annemarie wonders if she truly would have the courage to die to protect her friends. She snuggles under the blankets, thankful that she is just an ordinary person, who will never be called upon to perform heroic acts.

***Brief Analysis:***

Despite Annemarie's growing maturity, she is still a child and has not yet fully grasped the terrifying situation in which Denmark finds itself. To Annemarie, courage in the face of adversity and protecting Denmark's Jews from the Germans are still just theoretical ideals. Danger has not yet been placed directly in her path. With the closing of Mrs. Hirsch's sewing shop, there is now an omen of worse things to come. Annemarie, despite her youth, cannot fail to realize that the Hirsch family is not merely on vacation at the seashore, as Kirsti assumes. Annemarie has overheard pieces of gossip and information her parents have discussed. She has put those bits and pieces together with their somber tones and the tension that underlies every conversation and comes to the conclusion that her friends are in danger.

Chapter three is the first time we're explicitly told that her best friend, Ellen, is Jewish. Since the tale is told from a child's perspective, it had not seemed important for Annemarie to mention it previously. Prejudice is not inherent to children; they must be taught it. Annemarie has not been taught prejudice by her parents, and, thus, gives little thought to the religious and cultural differences between her and her friend. Only when she realizes her friend is at risk because she's Jewish does it occur to her that the nation's tensions could invade her very own apartment building. She reveals her napvety at the end of the chapter when she comforts herself with the thought that only the grown-ups and the soldiers be involved in protecting Ellen. Annemarie still believes she is safely out of the line of fire.

***Critical Study:***

September passes, and the mothers are knitting mittens. They have no fuel, and the nights in Copenhagen will be cold. They have a little stove for heat and sometimes for cooking if they can find coal. They use candles for light because electricity is rationed. As the girls are getting ready for school, their mother notices that Kirsti has a broken button.

When the girls stop after school, they learn that Mrs. Hirsch's store is closed. There is a sign, in German, and a swastika. The Hirsch family had gone. [Mrs. Johansen](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Number-the-Stars/character-analysis/#Mrs._Johansen) leaves Annemarie and Kirsti and goes to see Mrs. Rosen.

Late that night, [Peter Neilsen](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Number-the-Stars/character-analysis/#Peter_Neilsen) arrives. He brings word that the Germans are closing shops owned by Jews, and Annemarie worries the Jews will have no way to make a living. Her mother assures her that "friends will take care of them."

After Peter leaves Annemarie worries about the Rosens, about the war, and comforts herself by thinking that while the Resistance fighters had to be brave, "an ordinary person would never be called on for courage."

Now that the setting has been well established, the driving conflict of the novel is starting to take shape. Even if readers are not aware of Jewish history in Denmark, they see well before the protagonist that the situation in Denmark is about to become untenable. The Hirsch family has vanished. The reader does not know their fate, but the presence of the swastika—a symbol of the Nazi party—and their disappearance adds tension. As a backdrop for the action [Lowry](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Number-the-Stars/author/) references the increasing systematic oppression of the Jews. Their shops are being closed. Lowry has already established that this is a time of hunger and privation for all Danes. Removing the ability to earn a living cruelly adds to this difficulty.

However, the novel also makes clear that in spite of the privations and growing dangers for the Jewish population, the Danes still resist and come together. It seems it's not only the Resistance fighters who exhibit bravery in such times. Annemarie's thought that "ordinary people would never be called on for courage" is a bit of dramatic irony in that readers may already be sensing there may be a larger role for Annemarie as the story unfolds.

***Critical Analysis:***

September goes by and the girls have no more trouble with soldiers, though they are careful not to pass the two who stopped them. The mothers start to prepare for the hard winter ahead. Because there is no fuel, the winters are very cold. Annemarie remarks to her mother that she is lucky to share a bed with her sister since it is warmer that way. Annemarie tells her mother she remembers when Kirsti slept in her parent's bed. Annemarie worries that the comment will upset her mother because Kirsti slept with them while Lise was still alive. But her mother is not upset, and laughs remembering that Kirsti would sometimes wet the bed.

Mrs. Johansen notices that Kirsti's jacket is missing a button. She sends the girls to Mrs. Hirsch's shop. When Annemarie, Kirsti and Ellen get there, however, the shop is closed. On the door hangs a sign written in German and labeled with a swastika. Kirsti suggests that maybe the Hirsch family went on a picnic. Mrs. Johansen is upset when Annemarie tells her that the shop is closed. Annemarie thinks her mother is concerned because Kirsti's coat will still be missing a button. Mrs. Johansen goes to talk with Mrs. Rosen.

Later, when Annemarie is almost asleep, her mother comes to get her. Peter Neilsen has come for a visit. Annemarie is happy to see him, though she knows that it is past curfew and dangerous for him to be there. Peter has brought a seashell for Annemarie and beer for her parents. Mr. Johansen seems serious and tells Annemarie that the Germans are closing many shops owned by Jews. Peter explains that this is the Germans' way of "tormenting" and that it has already happened in other countries. Annemarie is perplexed; she wants to know why they would close a harmless button shop. She asks how the Hirsch family will earn a living. Mrs. Johansen says that their friends will take care of them. Suddenly, Annemarie remembers that the Rosens are Jewish. She is worried about them, but feels better once she remembers that Mr. Rosen is a teacher, not a shop owner. She reminds father of his story about the soldier and young man and says that now "all of Denmark must be the bodyguard for the Jews." Peter leaves and they go back to bed.

As she falls asleep, Annemarie wonders if, now that she is older, she would have the courage to die protecting Denmark's Jews. The thought frightens her, but she reassures herself that people are only called on to die in fairy tales, not in real life. Annemarie goes to sleep glad that she "would never be called upon for courage."

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

***Summary Part 1:***

As the month of September passes by, [Annemarie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/annemarie-johansen), [Ellen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/ellen-rosen), and [Kirsti](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/kirsti-johansen) are careful to take the long way to school and back, avoiding the two soldiers who accosted them. As the nights grow colder, [Mama](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/mrs-johansen-mama) and [Mrs. Rosen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters) 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.

***Analysis Part 1:***

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.

***Summary Part 2:***

One morning, while getting the girls ready for school, [Mama](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/mrs-johansen-mama) notices that a button on one of [Kirsti](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/kirsti-johansen)’s sweater has broken. She tells [Annemarie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/annemarie-johansen) 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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/ellen-rosen)—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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters).

***Analysis Part 2:***

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.

***Summary Part 3:***

That night, [Annemarie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/annemarie-johansen) is nearly asleep when her mother knocks on the bedroom door and pulls her out of bed. [Mama](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/mrs-johansen-mama) leads Annemarie into the living room, where [Papa](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters) and [Peter Neilsen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/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.

***Analysis Part 3:***

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.

***Summary Part 4:***

[Papa](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters), growing serious, tells [Annemarie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/annemarie-johansen) 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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/mrs-johansen-mama) tells her that their friends will take care of them—“that’s what friends do” for one another, she says.

***Analysis Part 4:***

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.

***Summary Part 5:***

[Annemarie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/annemarie-johansen) grows nervous—she points out that the Rosens are Jewish, too. [Mama](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/mrs-johansen-mama) and [Papa](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters) nod solemnly and ask her to take special care in keeping an eye out for [Ellen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/ellen-rosen) 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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/king-christian), they must now “be bodyguard[s] for the Jews, as well.” As [Peter](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/peter-neilsen) 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.”

***Analysis Part 6:***

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.