

# LOIS LOWRY

## NUMBER THE STARS



YEARLING





# 1

## Why Are You Running?

"I'll race you to the corner, Ellen!" Annemarie adjusted the thick leather pack on her back so that her schoolbooks balanced evenly. "Ready?" She looked at her best friend.

Ellen made a face. "No," she said, laughing. "You know I can't beat you — my legs aren't as long. Can't we just walk, like civilized people?" She was a stocky ten-year-old, unlike lanky Annemarie.

"We have to practice for the athletic meet on Friday — I *know* I'm going to win the girls' race this week. I was second last week, but I've been practicing every day. Come on, Ellen," Annemarie pleaded, eyeing the distance to the next corner of the Copenhagen street. "Please?"

Ellen hesitated, then nodded and shifted her own rucksack of books against her shoulders. "Oh, all right. Ready," she said.

"Go!" shouted Annemarie, and the two girls were off, racing along the residential sidewalk. Annemarie's silvery blond hair flew behind her, and Ellen's dark pigtails bounced against her shoulders.

"Wait for me!" wailed little Kirsti, left behind, but the two older girls weren't listening.

Annemarie outdistanced her friend quickly, even though one of her shoes came untied as she sped along the street called Østerbrogade, past the small shops and cafés of her neighborhood here in northeast Copenhagen. Laughing, she skirted an elderly lady in black who carried a shopping bag made of string. A young woman pushing a baby in a carriage moved aside to make way. The corner was just ahead.

Annemarie looked up, panting, just as she reached the corner. Her laughter stopped. Her heart seemed to skip a beat.

"*Halte!*" the soldier ordered in a stern voice.

The German word was as familiar as it was frightening. Annemarie had heard it often enough before, but it had never been directed at her until now.

Behind her, Ellen also slowed and stopped. Far back, little Kirsti was plodding along, her face in a pout because the girls hadn't waited for her.

Annemarie stared up. There were two of them. That meant two helmets, two sets of cold eyes glaring at her, and four tall shiny boots planted firmly on the sidewalk, blocking her path to home.

And it meant two rifles, gripped in the hands of the soldiers. She stared at the rifles first. Then, finally, she looked into the face of the soldier who had ordered her to halt.



“Why are you running?” the harsh voice asked. His Danish was very poor. Three years, Annemarie thought with contempt. Three years they’ve been in our country, and still they can’t speak our language.

“I was racing with my friend,” she answered politely. “We have races at school every Friday, and I want to do well, so I —” Her voice trailed away, the sentence unfinished. Don’t talk so much, she told herself. Just answer them, that’s all.

She glanced back. Ellen was motionless on the sidewalk, a few yards behind her. Farther back, Kirsti was still sulking, and walking slowly toward the corner. Nearby, a woman had come to the doorway of a shop and was standing silently, watching.

One of the soldiers, the taller one, moved toward her. Annemarie recognized him as the one she and Ellen always called, in whispers, “the Giraffe” because of his height and the long neck that extended from his stiff collar. He and his partner were always on this corner.

He prodded the corner of her backpack with the stock of his rifle. Annemarie trembled. “What is in here?” he asked loudly. From the corner of her eye, she saw the shopkeeper move quietly back into the shadows of the doorway, out of sight.

“Schoolbooks,” she answered truthfully.

“Are you a good student?” the soldier asked. He seemed to be sneering.





Ten-year-old Annemarie Johansen and her best friend, Ellen Rosen, often think about life before the war. But it's now 1943, and their life in Copenhagen is filled with school, food shortages, and the Nazi soldiers marching in their town.

The Nazis won't stop. The Jews of Denmark are being "relocated," so Ellen moves in with the Johansens and pretends to be part of the family.

Then Annemarie is asked to go on a dangerous mission. Somehow she must find the strength and courage to save her best friend's life. There's no turning back now.

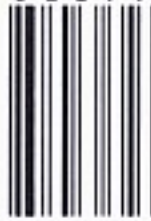
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