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BOOKS BY LOIS LOWRY

NUMBER THE STARS

The Giver Quartet

THE GIVER

GATHERING BLUE

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NUMBER
the STARS

LOIS LOWRY



HarperCollins *Children's Books*

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WHY YOU'LL LOVE THIS BOOK

by John Boyne

Lois Lowry is a writer who isn't afraid to explore the darker side of human nature, and in *Number the Stars* she tells a story centered around the darkest moments of the last century: the Holocaust, the hatred the Nazis had for the Jewish people and their efforts to eradicate an entire culture from the earth.

Annemarie Johansen is a brilliant heroine. She displays all the traits that we hope we have ourselves. She's smart; for when the German soldiers break into her home she has the presence of mind to rip the Star of David necklace from her friend's neck before it is discovered. She's loyal; for she stands by the people she cares about throughout the story. She's filled with love; for her younger sister, her parents, and Lise, the older sister whose memory hovers over the novel until her loss is finally explained.

And she's brave.

Bravery, in fact, lies at the very heart of this book. There can be few more chilling sights than the iconography of the Nazi soldiers. The swastikas, the uniforms and the salutes all combine to produce the stuff of nightmares and yet Annemarie, at only ten years of age, manages to stand before the soldiers time and time again, look them in the eye, and never lose sight of the fact that she must remain courageous or lives will be lost.

The gradual uncovering of secrets is one of the many pleasures of *Number the Stars*. What really happened to Lise? If Great-aunt Birte never existed, then who – or what – is lying inside Great-aunt Birte’s coffin? What does Peter do during the day that is so dangerous?

Survivors of those terrible days remind us that the stories of that time, the memories of the people who died, must never be forgotten. In seeking to remember, novels such as *Number the Stars* serve a valuable purpose. They introduce young readers – like you – to the subject matter of the Holocaust and show us that alongside the innocents who suffered and died, there were also a great many brave heroes, like Peter and Lise, who were willing to sacrifice their own lives in an effort to prevent the terrible atrocities and crimes from continuing.

Less well-known stories of heroism also feature here. Until I read this novel I knew little of Denmark’s history

of resistance during the Second World War or of King Christian X’s insistence on riding among his people every day, offering them hope and courage, showing in his own actions that if they could survive another day, and another after that, and another after that, then one day the war would surely come to an end. ‘All wars do,’ as Uncle Henrik says.

He’s right about that but sadly, when one war ends, another is often getting ready to take its place. How we survive in those times, whether we choose to fight through words or actions for what we believe in, for what will make the world a better place, is the choice that each one of us makes.

Annemarie makes that choice. And through her actions the readers of this moving and important novel are faced with a challenging question: if we were in the same position as her, would we have the courage to do the same thing?

John Boyne

John Boyne was born in Ireland in 1971. The winner of two Irish Book Awards, he is the author of seven novels for adults and two for children, including the international bestseller *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, which was made

into a Miramax feature film and has sold more than five million copies worldwide. His novels are published in over forty languages. He lives in Dublin.

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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 civilised people?' She was a stocky ten-year-old, unlike lanky Annemarie.

'We have to practise 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 practising 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 blonde hair flew behind her, and Ellen's dark pigtailed 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 neighbourhood 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. Further back, Kirsti was still sulking, and walking slowly towards 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 towards her. Annemarie recognised 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.

'Yes.'

'What is your name?'

'Annemarie Johansen.'

'Your friend – is she a good student, too?' He was looking beyond her, at Ellen, who hadn't moved.

Annemarie looked back, too, and saw that Ellen's face, usually rosy-cheeked, was pale, and her dark eyes were wide.

She nodded at the soldier. 'Better than me,' she said.

'What is her name?'

'Ellen.'

'And who is this?' he asked, looking to Annemarie's side. Kirsti had appeared there suddenly, scowling at everyone.

'My little sister.' She reached down for Kirsti's hand, but Kirsti, always stubborn, refused it and put her hands on her hips defiantly.

The soldier reached down and stroked her little sister's short, tangled curls. Stand still, Kirsti, Annemarie ordered silently, praying that somehow the obstinate five-year-old would receive the message.

But Kirsti reached up and pushed the soldier's hand away. 'Don't,' she said loudly. Both soldiers began to laugh. They spoke to each other in rapid German that Annemarie couldn't understand.

'She is pretty, like my own little girl,' the tall one said in a more pleasant voice.

Annemarie tried to smile politely.

'Go home, all of you. Go study your schoolbooks. And don't run. You look like hoodlums when you run.'

The two soldiers turned away. Quickly Annemarie reached down again and grabbed her sister's hand before Kirsti could resist. Hurrying the little girl along, she rounded the corner. In a moment Ellen was beside her. They walked quickly, not speaking, with Kirsti between them, towards the large apartment building where both families lived.

When they were almost home, Ellen whispered suddenly, 'I was so scared.'

'Me too,' Annemarie whispered back.

As they turned to enter their building, both girls looked straight ahead, towards the door. They did it purposely so