Excerpt from *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry

'I'll race you to the corner, Ellen!' Annemarie adjusted the thick leather pack on her back so that her school books 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 Osterbrograde, 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 solider ordered in a stern voice. The German word was 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, Kirsti was plodding along, her face in a pout cause the girls hadn't waited for her.

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