

Among the Hidden



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MARGARET PETERSON HADDIX

Haddix grew up on a farm in rural Ohio with three siblings. Her father was a farmer and her mother was a nurse; both parents were book-lovers. Haddix read prolifically as a child and dreamed of being a writer herself, so she studied creative writing and journalism in college. She worked as a journalist for several years and finally decided to leave the profession when her husband, also a journalist, was promoted—he would’ve become her boss had she kept her job. Haddix began writing novels and short stories while also teaching writing at a community college. She sold her first two books while pregnant with her second child, and her career as a children’s and young adult author took off from there. She’s since written more than 40 books for young readers, several of which have been recognized with ALA awards or other honors. Haddix and her husband live in Columbus, Ohio.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

China’s one-child policy is perhaps the best-known attempt to curb population growth in the name of improving a country’s economy, and it inspired Haddix to write *Among the Hidden*. While the policy was in place from 1980 to 2015, the Chinese government levied huge fines on families who had more than one child. The policy was enforced sporadically, though, and some people were able to apply for exceptions to have a second child. The government also forcibly sterilized people, mostly women, and mandated contraceptive use once couples had the maximum number of children allowed. While some parents of illegal second children placed their children for adoption, had their children taken from them, or paid the government’s fines, others simply didn’t register to get their children government ID documents. Known as *heihazi* or “black children,” those children can’t access public services and don’t legally exist. While it’s worth noting that the novel’s protagonist, Luke, never figures out the truth about exactly why his government instituted a two-child policy, his friend Jen shares that they instituted the policy to avoid what’s known as a Malthusian catastrophe. Proposed by economist Thomas Robert Malthus in 1798, a Malthusian catastrophe is what would happen if the world’s population increased too fast for food production to keep up, and there wasn’t enough food to support the people on Earth. Though Malthusianism as it was originally proposed is sometimes considered overly pessimistic today (particularly because the idea was proposed before the Industrial Revolution and before advances in farming technology),

overpopulation was still a concern into the 20th century and still concerns many today.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

While *Among the Hidden* was initially intended to be a standalone novel, Haddix eventually wrote six more books that take place in the same world, some of which feature Luke. The series is known as the Shadow Children sequence. In addition to the Shadow Children sequence, Haddix has written more than 40 books for young readers of all ages. Within *Among the Hidden*, Haddix nods to George Orwell’s famous novel [1984](#) when she writes about Mother fearing that the government will be able to see Luke through their television. Luke also mentions reading Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. More broadly, *Among the Hidden* is part of a subgenre of young adult and children’s literature that explores dystopian futures, particularly ones where young people are victims of totalitarian or otherwise inhumane governments. Other novels in the genre include [Unwind](#) by Neal Shusterman (in which unwanted children can be “unwound,” or harvested for parts, when they become teenagers), [The Giver](#) by Lois Lowry (which is often considered the first novel in the subgenre), and even the *Hunger Games* series by Suzanne Collins, which focuses more on subverting a totalitarian government. *Among the Hidden* was inspired by China’s one-child policy (and its abolition in 2015), which has been the subject of a number of nonfiction books, such as *China’s Hidden Children* by Kay Ann Johnson and *One Child: The Past and Future of China’s Most Radical Experiment* by Mei Fong.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Among the Hidden
- **When Written:** 1997
- **Where Written:** Illinois
- **When Published:** 1998
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Speculative Fiction, Dystopian Fiction, Children’s Novel
- **Setting:** A farm and a nearby housing development, at an undetermined point in the future
- **Climax:** Luke meets Jen’s dad and discovers that Jen died at the protest.
- **Antagonist:** The Government and the Population Police
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Books vs. Naps. Haddix began to experience success as a fiction writer when her two children were very young; she sold her first two books when she was pregnant with her second child. She's said that since she could only write when her kids were napping, whatever she wrote had to be exciting enough to keep her from wanting to nap too.

Purposeful Ambiguity. In interviews, Haddix has said that she intentionally didn't specify when exactly *Among the Hidden* takes place. She believes that George Orwell's famous dystopian novel [1984](#) lost some of its punch after the year 1984 came and went, and she hoped to avoid the same thing happening to her book by being ambiguous about the time period.



PLOT SUMMARY

On the day that his dad sells his **woods**, 12-year-old Luke's life changes. Luke is the third child in his family, and per the Population Law, his existence is illegal—families can only have two children. Though Luke has never gone to school or met people aside from Mother, Dad, and his brothers Matthew and Mark, he's been able to play and work outside on Dad's farm a little bit, sheltered from sight by the woods. But with the woods coming down so the Government can build houses, Luke can't go outside anymore. Instead, he's confined to his windowless attic bedroom to play with toys that suddenly seem juvenile and read the same books over and over again.

Over the next few weeks, Luke discovers that he can see out the roof vents at either end of the attic. From one he can watch Government workers tear down the woods. Watching out the vents becomes the best part of Luke's day, especially since Dad decides that it's too dangerous to allow Luke to eat meals at the table with the rest of the family (someone might see his shadow through the window shade and get suspicious). Over the next few weeks, things get progressively worse for Luke's family: the Government forces Dad to sell all his pigs, the tax bill that's three times the usual amount arrives, and Mother gets a job at a chicken factory. With Mother working outside the house, Luke is home alone all day. He watches the construction on the houses and watches wealthy Baron families move in.

One day, when Mother and Dad forget to raise the shades in the kitchen, Luke decides to bake and do some housekeeping as a nice surprise for Mother. Dad, though, discovers Luke midday and insists it's too dangerous for Luke to leave his attic room. When Luke looks out the vents that afternoon, he's shocked: he sees a child's face in a window of the nearest house. The family must have a third child.

Soon after, Luke decides to sneak over to the neighbor's house and meet the other third child. He has to break the neighbor's screen door, but he enters into a lavish home and finds a girl

typing on a computer. She tackles him, but she's thrilled to realize Luke is a "shadow child," like her. She introduces herself as Jen.

Before talking too much to Luke, Jen calls Jen's dad and tells him to disable the alarm system. Luke is terrified the Population Police will get him, but to his surprise, Jen says he's safe. The Government is inept, and all of what Mother and Dad believe about the Government being able to watch and identify shadow children through televisions, computers, and phones is just propaganda. She explains that as a Baron, she has to hide like Luke, but her parents can bribe people to keep her safer. Luke has never been more ashamed of his family's poverty, but he still wants to see Jen again. They come up with a signal so Luke can know it's safe to visit, and Jen makes it look like she broke the screen door so they can keep their secret.

When Luke visits a few days later, Jen introduces him to junk food like potato chips and soda, which is technically illegal. Then, she tells him junk food is only illegal because a few decades ago, the government ran out of food. That's why the Population Law exists: the Government believes if families only have two kids, there will always be enough food. But Jen says this is nonsense, and she's planning a rally for shadow kids outside the president's house. Jen goes on to show him the chat room she created for shadow kids. There are about 800 that log onto the password-protected site every day, and they all deserve to be free. Luke is anxious, afraid, and guilty that he even exists.

Jen sends Luke home with two massive books and several printed articles. From the books, Luke learns about the famine and the drought that killed people and decimated crops. The Government passed the Population Law in response, in addition to moving farmers to more fertile areas. Luke feels extremely guilty for taking food from hungry people, but he begins to feel better when he reads the articles, which insist that the way shadow children suffer is effectively genocide.

When Luke returns to Jen's and asks which side is right, Jen says the books are just government propaganda, so the articles are right. Luke isn't sure, but Jen says this is why her rally is important: shadow children don't deserve to live in hiding. She says she'd never accept a fake ID (which allow shadow children to assume legal identities), because she wants to live freely as herself. Luke, as well as the kids in the chat room, don't agree—Luke, at least, is too afraid of being killed to think the rally is a good idea.

Over the next few months, Luke only visits Jen a few times and feels increasingly guilty about his own existence. When he visits early in April, Jen is ecstatic—she thought she'd have to just pick Luke up on Thursday to go to the rally. She explains that she's stealing her parents' car, and that a thousand kids will be at the president's house to protest. They'll be safe, since the Population Police would never shoot that many kids, especially when so many of them are Government officials' children.

When Luke refuses to go, insisting only wealthy Barons like Jen can make change, Jen says she doesn't have time for Luke anymore. Luke is enraged and terrified for Jen. She might die.

On Thursday night, Luke wakes up to Jen shining a flashlight in his face. He says he's still not going to the rally, so Jen apologizes for being mean, says Luke was a good friend, and tells him goodbye. For the next week and a half, Luke listens to the radio every chance he gets for news of the rally. He flashes the signal to Jen's house and gets no answer. Finally, Luke decides to sneak over to see if Jen is okay. He has to break into Jen's house, and when he doesn't find her, he pulls up the chat room on the computer and asks where Jen is. Suddenly, a hulking man with a gun appears behind Luke.

The man is Jen's dad. When he learns that Luke is a shadow child and a friend of Jen's, he lowers the gun and reveals that all 40 protesters, including Jen, were killed. The Government is suppressing news of the rally. He says that by logging into the chat room, Luke set off an alarm at the Population Police. Jen's dad has been able to keep his bosses from realizing he's Jen's dad, but he works for the Population Police—and they'll be on their way now. Luke snatches the gun, terrified, but Jen's dad calms Luke down and explains that he works to sabotage the Population Police from within. He doesn't think it's true that there's not enough food for everyone, and he doesn't believe the Government had to take people's rights away (such as by passing the Population Law) in order to fix things when the famines hit. He offers to get Luke a fake ID just as the Population Police knock on the front door.

Jen's dad tells Luke to hide in the closet and tries to ward off the Population Police, but they insist on searching the house anyway. They only search the closet where Luke is hiding and then leave. When they're gone, Jen's dad writes on a piece of paper that he and the house have been bugged, so he can't speak. In writing, he explains that he bribed the officers with fur coats, but the Population Police will be after him. If Luke wants a fake ID, he needs to say so now. Luke realizes he can only help other shadow children if he has a legal identity, so he says yes.

Luke tells his parents everything when he gets home that night, and a few days later, Jen's dad drives up. Luke is now Lee Garner, a Baron boy who ran away from home, and his punishment is to go to a boarding school. Luke is sad to leave his family, and he's afraid—but he gets in the car and drives away with Jen's dad, excited for the future.

outside near the house, work in the garden, and help out in the barn, and he and his older brothers Matthew and Mark sometimes play outside. Luke understands he has to hide, but he thinks this makes him special because he gets to spend a lot of time with Mother, who's a homemaker. But this changes when Dad is forced to sell his **woods** to the Government, who build houses on the land. Confined to his windowless attic bedroom, Luke yearns for independence and freedom. It's difficult for him to not even be allowed to look out the windows, and there's nothing for him to do but nap, read, and play with his toys—which seem increasingly juvenile. One day, Luke discovers that there's another third child living in the new neighborhood, Jen, and he befriends her. Jen is a wealthy Baron, which makes Luke aware for the first time of how poor his family is. Jen is also more knowledgeable about the Government and the wider world, so she encourages Luke to see that Mother and Dad are being overly paranoid about protecting Luke. She gives Luke books and independent articles offering differing views on shadow children, which at first make Luke think it's morally wrong that he exists—but ultimately, he decides his existence is just illegal, not immoral. Luke keeps his friendship with Jen a secret, and his loyalty to his parents means that he refuses to accompany Jen to her rally to protest for shadow children's rights. Though he refuses in part because he doesn't believe poor people like him can successfully change things, he changes his mind when he meets Jen's dad, discovers Jen was killed at the protest, and is offered a fake ID. Luke realizes assuming a new identity will allow him to become educated and help other shadow kids, so he ultimately assumes the identity of Lee Grant and leaves his family for a boys' boarding school.

Jen Talbot/The Girl – Jen is Luke's neighbor and a fellow shadow child. Though she has to live in hiding for her safety, like Luke, her life differs greatly from his because her family are wealthy Barons. So, Jen has met other third children at play groups, she has a computer and access to the internet, and her parents have set up mirrors in the house so she can see outside without having to go to the window and look out. Jen's mom loves shopping, so she has a forged shopping pass for Jen so she can take Jen along into public spaces with her (something Jen detests, as she's not into "prissy" activities like shopping). Jen is extremely independent and she wants nothing more than to live freely, with all the rights that first and second children enjoy. To further this goal, Jen has created a password-protected chat room for shadow children that has about 800 daily users, and she spends much of the novel planning a protest rally. When she meets Luke, she also takes on the responsibility of educating him about why the Population Law exists, and why it's immoral. Jen believes that if a bunch of shadow children join the protest and demand the same rights as other people, there's no way they'll fail. Secure in her privilege, she's certain the Population Police won't kill children, particularly not when those children have parents in the



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Luke Garner – The protagonist of the novel, Luke is a 12-year-old shadow child, or illegal third child. For his safety, it's essential that Luke hide from anyone outside his immediate family. But since Dad is a rural farmer, Luke is able to play

Government. She's so committed to her vision that when Luke refuses to go to the rally, Jen ends their friendship and insists that active protest is the only way to change things. She later makes up with Luke just before she leaves for the rally. Soon after, Luke learns that Jen and the other protesters were shot and killed at the rally. Luke suspects Jen might have known she'd die, but he takes comfort in his knowledge that Jen wanted to help and serve others—and her sacrifice *does* help others. It inspires Luke to accept a fake ID from Jen's dad so he can receive an education and create positive change for shadow children in smaller ways, so that Jen's death won't be in vain.

Mother – Luke, Matthew, and Mark's mother and Dad's wife is a homemaker on the farm at the beginning of the novel. She's kind and compassionate, and she fiercely loves her children, especially Luke. When she was younger, she desperately wanted to have four sons and to name her final son John. However, she was never able to have a fourth child, and since she implies that she underwent the Government's sterilization procedure after Mark's birth, she describes Luke's unexpected birth as a "miracle." When Luke was little, Mother went out of her way to protect him from the truth (that he must stay hidden forever or risk his life), and she still works hard to try to make him feel loved, secure, and not too worried about the danger he's in. This means that she treats him like a much younger child than he actually is, reading him bedtime stories, tucking him in, and kissing him long past when she stopped doing the same for her older sons. Mother's days consist of cooking, cleaning, and managing bills and other household matters, in addition to spending time with Luke and keeping him company. However, her lifestyle changes when Dad is forced to sell his pigs, and Mother has to get a job at a chicken factory. Though she continues to spend as much of her spare time with Luke as possible, she's too exhausted to give him her full attention. When Mother finally learns of Luke's visits to Jen and that Luke plans to accept a fake ID and leave the farm, she's distraught—she wants Luke to stay and remain in the attic, at least until he's an adult. But she's overruled and allows Luke to leave the farm.

Dad – Matthew, Mark, and Luke's dad and Mother's husband is a rural farmer. Dad is often stressed, a little bit angry, and short with his family members. This is mostly because life is hard for Dad: he and Mother worry constantly about money, and Dad has to do whatever the Government tells him to do when it comes to his farming work. It's extremely stressful for Dad when the Government tells him to sell all his pigs, or to stop researching hydroponics. Dad's short temper also seems partially rooted in his desire to protect Luke. He's extremely cautious and is willing to go to extreme lengths to make sure nobody finds out about Luke, such as forcing Luke to stay in his attic bedroom; refusing to let him into the kitchen; and forbidding him from using the television, phone, or computer.

(Dad believes the Government will identify and track Luke down if he uses technology.) Mother is unwilling to stand up to Dad and advocate for any more freedom for Luke, though she seems to find Dad's paranoia somewhat extreme. However, when Luke finally tells his parents about Jen and shares that he's getting a fake ID, Dad becomes an unexpected ally. Dad reveals that he's been asking around to see if third children in their area can ever live normal lives—and his informal research suggests they can't. For this reason, Dad supports Luke accepting the fake ID and leaving the farm.

George Talbot/Jen's Dad – Jen's dad is actually her stepdad, but she considers him her father. He's a large, imposing man who works in Government for the Population Police. However, he doesn't agree with their goals—instead, he uses his position to sabotage the Population Police. To do this, he helps Jen set up a secret chat room for shadow children, and he also works to secure fake IDs for shadow children. Luke doesn't learn much about Jen's dad, except that he's a lawyer in the Government and Jen's mom's third husband. He learns more after Jen's death, when Jen's dad comes home to discover that Luke broke into his house. Their meeting starts off rocky—Jen's dad has a gun—but once they realize they can trust each other, Jen's dad clarifies a number of things for Luke. For instance, he explains that he believes the Population Law is morally wrong, in addition to unnecessary. In his opinion, if people hadn't panicked when the famines hit, he believes their country could've gotten through the difficult period without taking people's rights away. This helps Luke see that his existence is just illegal, not immoral. Jen's dad also accepts responsibility for Jen's death, as he was the one to give her articles insisting that forcing shadow children to hide is a major crime—he wanted to give her hope and had no idea she'd plan a rally that would lead to her death. Jen's dad protects Luke from the Population Police who come to his house, and though the officers fit him with a listening device, he still gets Luke a fake ID. He's the one to drive Luke, posing as Lee Grant, away to Luke's new life.

Jen's Mom – Jen's mom never appears in the novel, but Jen speaks about her often. Jen is constantly exasperated by her mom, because her mom's greatest love is shopping—she even got Jen a forged shopping pass so she can take Jen shopping, even though this is extremely dangerous for shadow children like Jen. She's been married three times, each time to a lawyer, and her second husband is Jen's biological dad. As Barons, they had the money to use assisted reproductive technology to conceive Jen and select her sex; Jen's mom wanted a girl after having two boys.

Mark Garner – Mark is Luke's older brother; he's 14, a few years younger than Matthew. Though Mark insists he'd never betray Luke, he's also antagonistic to his brother, frightening Luke by yelling "Population Police!" when he enters Luke's room, or teasing Luke for being effeminate when Luke tries to make bread. He also makes little effort to hide the fact that

Mother still tries to make him play games with Luke.

Matthew Garner – Luke and Mark’s oldest brother is about 16 years old. He dreams of being a hog farmer one day, so he’s distraught when the Government commands Dad to sell the family’s pigs and to not raise them anymore. Luke and Matthew seem to get along fine, as Matthew is quiet and is more interested in other things, like his girlfriend, than in either spending time with Luke or in tormenting him.

General Sherwood – Jen’s dad tells Luke about General Sherwood, who took control of the country and promised law, order, and food for everyone at the height of the famines and riots. Technically, he was able to deliver, but to do so he curtailed everyone’s rights. He’s responsible for drafting the Population Law.

Carlos – Carlos is one of Jen’s friends in the secret chat room for shadow children. He lives somewhere warm, as he complains about having to suffer in 105°F heat when Luke first meets Jen in early winter. Carlos initially thinks Jen’s rally is silly, but he eventually comes around and helps her plan it. It’s never specified if he attends the rally.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Buellton – Buellton is one of Jen’s older half-brothers.

Brownley – Brownley is one of Jen’s older half-brothers.

Yolanda – Yolanda is another shadow child and a regular visitor to Jen’s secret chat room.

Sean – Sean is a shadow child who regularly spends time in Jen’s secret chat room. He has a younger brother named Pat.

Pat – Sean’s younger brother and another shadow child, Pat is an extremely rare fourth child.

TERMS

Baron – In the world of the novel, barons are wealthy, upper-class people. Many of them are in government, and they enjoy more privileges than the rest of society (such as access to junk food, and forged documents and passes for third children).

Population Law – Passed by **General Sherman** 20 years before the novel begins, the Population Law dictates that parents may only have two children. It’s enforced by the Population Police.

Population Police – The Population Police are a specialized arm of the government police force that is tasked with upholding the Population Law. This entails finding shadow children, punishing the children’s parents, and dealing with the children. (Though the novel doesn’t specify what this entails, it’s implied that the children are likely killed.)

Shadow Child – Shadow child is the term **Jen** uses to refer to illegal third children.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don’t have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



PROPAGANDA, FEAR, AND CONTROL

Among the Hidden introduces readers to a world where, following a multi-year drought and an ensuing food shortage, the government of an unnamed country has seized control of every aspect of citizens’ lives. So in addition to mandating what crops farmers grow and forcing factories that once produced junk food to produce more nutrient-dense food, the government has also implemented the Population Law, a controversial policy that states families can only have two children. Twelve-year-old Luke is an illegal third child, known as a shadow child, and he’s spent all his life fearing that if anyone outside of his immediate family learns of his existence, he’ll be made to disappear. To protect him, Mother and Dad force Luke to stay away from the windows and stay in his attic bedroom, and they don’t allow him to watch television or use the computer—they believe the government is always spying on them and will be able to see Luke through the television. To them, the government is all-seeing and all-knowing, and so they live in a constant state of fear.

When the government seizes the **woods** near Luke’s house and clears it to build a housing development for wealthy people (who are known as Barons), Luke makes a shocking discovery: he’s not the only illegal third child in the world. He soon befriends Jen, a third child in the new housing development, and their friendship changes Luke’s understanding of how the government works. Jen spends most of her day on the computer in a secret chat room with other shadow children, and she rejects outright the idea that the government is always watching people—it’s far too inefficient and incompetent, she insists, to be able to spy on people through their computers or televisions. But what she suggests is essentially that the government uses propaganda, like TV commercials saying all televisions are recording devices or books insisting that having more than two children will drive the world to ruin, to instill fear in the population and scare people into complying. Propaganda that uses fear to convey its message, the novel shows, is an extremely effective way to control people, as it’s controlled his family’s choices and hence Luke’s life. And while the novel ends with Luke only just becoming aware of the extent of his country’s propaganda machine, he nevertheless realizes that the only way to change things for other shadow kids like him is to face his fears—and to uncover, and then tell, the truth.



PRIVILEGE, WEALTH, AND PERSPECTIVE

Through Jen and Luke's friendship, *Among the Hidden* explores how privilege and wealth dictate how a person sees the world. Though both kids are shadow children (third children who, thanks to the government's Population Law dictating that parents can only have two children, are illegal and live in hiding), they live vastly different lives due to their families' economic statuses. Luke has grown up in near poverty, as Dad is a farmer. Luke is used to hearing his parents worry about money, and it's normal for his family members to wear worn and patched hand-me-down clothes. And though Luke is shocked to hear the news, his brothers and Dad aren't at all surprised when Mother takes a job at a local factory and begins working 12-hour shifts every day. In Luke's world, the only thing that matters is trying to scrounge enough money to survive and keep food on the table. Anything beyond that, like becoming educated or thinking critically about the world, is simply not a concern.

When Luke meets Jen, it's a shock to realize that not all families live like his does. Jen's family are Barons, or wealthy Government officials. They live in a fancy house filled with technology like televisions and computers, have access to junk food (which is technically illegal), and most surprisingly for Luke, Jen doesn't live in fear of losing her life like Luke does. This is because being a Baron affords Jen's family privileges that Luke's family could only dream of. For instance, Jen is able to do things like go out and shop with her mom because Jen's dad, who works for the Population Police, bribed someone to get Jen a shopping pass. His money and his high status in the government mean that he can barter with or bribe people to better secure Jen's safety. But Jen's family's privilege also means that Jen has grown up knowing way more about the government and how it works. Since her dad works in the government, Jen knows that the government is nowhere near as competent as its propaganda would have people believe—and this knowledge motivates her to organize a protest, as she's certain she knows how the government works and believes it won't hurt a bunch of protesting kids.

Ultimately, however, *Among the Hidden* shows that privilege can also blind people. While Luke grows up not knowing anything about how his government really functions or what's possible when a person is wealthy, Jen is overconfident that her privilege, wealth, and status as a government official's daughter is enough to guarantee that the Population Police won't murder her—and she's wrong. Only once he learns of her death does Luke understand the importance of perspective. Wealth and privilege, he realizes, can improve a person's quality of life, but a more nuanced perspective and understanding how the world actually works (and not just knowing how the wealthy or the poor live) is perhaps a more effective path to change.



PROTEST AND RESISTANCE

When 12-year-old Luke meets Jen, a fellow shadow child (an illegal third child who lives in hiding), his life changes. One of the most significant changes is that for the first time, Luke is introduced to the idea that it's not just possible, but morally imperative, to protest and resist the Population Laws that mean he, Jen, and thousands of other shadow children live in fear and in hiding. Jen believes that resistance should take a very specific form: public protest in the form of a rally, where thousands of shadow children will assemble in front of the president's house and demand the same rights as others in the country. As the organizer of the rally, Jen believes fully in her mission and encourages Luke to see that making a public spectacle is the only way to change things. The alternative, she insists, is to essentially sit back and do nothing. In her mind, there is no other option than to protest publicly.

However, when Luke sneaks over to Jen's house a week after the rally, meets Jen's dad, and learns that Jen and the other protesters were murdered at the rally, the novel suggests that Jen wasn't entirely correct. There are many other ways to protest, and it's possible that those other methods might do more good in the world. For instance, Luke learns that Jen's dad works for the Population Police, but he uses his position and his prestige to protect shadow children and procure fake IDs for shadow children when possible. And Luke realizes that by refusing to accompany Jen to the rally (which means he didn't die with her), he may have opportunities to resist and change things in other ways, such as by becoming a scientist and finding more ways to grow enough food for people, or by getting involved in politics and working to abolish the Population Law. But while *Among the Hidden* suggests that these less showy forms of resistance might be more effective than Jen's rally, it shows that Jen's sacrifice has an effect too. Jen's sacrifice is what inspires Luke to accept a fake ID from Jen's dad so he can assume a legal identity, receive an education, and go on to change things in the future. Put another way, Jen's rally might not have changed any laws about shadow children, but it does inspire Luke to find his own way to resist.



COMING OF AGE, INDEPENDENCE, AND FAMILY

Over the course of *Among the Hidden*, 12-year-old Luke comes of age. Through his journey, the novel suggests that coming of age happens as young people become independent from their families and discover their place in the world. At the beginning of the novel, Luke, a shadow child (an illegal third child), has to endure a difficult change when the government purchases the nearby **woods** and cuts them down to build houses. The woods sheltered Luke and gave him the opportunity to play outside while still being protected from

anyone who might see him and turn him in to the Population Police. Their disappearance means that Luke has to stay inside—something he finds untenable. And it doesn't help that Mother treats Luke like he's much younger than he is, tucking him in at night, reading him stories, and giving him kisses, all things that Luke appreciates but also resents—a mark of his burgeoning maturity. And for Luke's safety, Mother suggests that he can never become independent and grow up—he'll spend his life living in the attic and when she and Dad can't care for him anymore, it'll fall to his brothers, Matthew and Mark, to continue hiding Luke.

Mother's desire to effectively keep Luke a child forever, however, ultimately fails. As Luke feels increasingly claustrophobic in his attic room, he discovers another shadow child, Jen, living in one of the new houses next door. He asserts his independence from his parents by sneaking over to see her during the day when Mother and Dad are out working, and his visits with Jen afford Luke a life of his own—one that he doesn't share anything about with his parents. Moreover, Jen takes it upon herself to educate Luke about the Population Law forbidding their existence, something that has a profound effect on Luke and his growing independence. As Luke reads government-sponsored books and then independently published articles on the subject, he initially begins to doubt whether his existence is morally acceptable. Is he, as the books insist, taking precious food away from starving people who exist legally? Eventually, though, Luke comes to agree much more with the views expressed in the articles: that his existence is merely illegal, not immoral; and that he has as much right to exist as any other person. Thinking critically and clarifying his beliefs leads Luke to agree to accept a fake ID and leave his parents' house to assume a new identity as Lee Grant, an action that completes Luke's coming of age journey. As he's still only 12, his identity is still changing—but Luke is nevertheless secure in the belief that he deserves to live and continue growing up long after the novel ends.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE WOODS

The woods symbolize Luke's coming-of-age process. When Luke recalls being a young child, he thinks fondly of his family's woods. The woods protected him, shielding him from view of the road and of any nosy neighbors who might notice him and report his existence to the Population Police. The woods, in this sense, symbolize Luke's youth, innocence, and sheltered upbringing. He begins to lose his innocence when Dad is forced to sell the woods to the

Government, so that the Government can cut the trees down and build houses for wealthy Barons on the land. The sale of the woods creates an environment where Luke can learn more about his world than he might have otherwise. Not long after the housing development is finished, Luke meets Jen, another shadow child who lives in the new house closest to him. Luke begins crossing the open land between his house and hers to visit, a sign of his growing maturity, boldness, and desire to learn more about why he must hide all the time. And ultimately, because the woods no longer exist and so can't protect him, Luke chooses to accept a fake ID and leave home to live undercover as a legal child. This represents the final step in Luke's maturation process, and he leaves behind his innocence and fully comes of age.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Simon and Schuster edition of *Among the Hidden* published in 2000.

Chapter 1 Quotes

“Why?” he asked at the supper table that night. It wasn't a common question in the Garner house. There were plenty of “how's” [...] Even “what's” [...] But “why” wasn't considered much worth asking. Luke asked again. “Why'd you have to sell the woods?”

Luke's dad harrumphed, and paused in the midst of shoveling forkfuls of boiled potatoes into his mouth.

“Told you before. We didn't have a choice. Government wanted it. You can't tell the Government no.”

Related Characters: Luke Garner, Dad (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 1-2

Explanation and Analysis

Dad has recently sold the Garner family's woods to the Government so the Government can build houses on the land. Luke is doing something extremely unusual and asking why Dad sold the woods in the first place.

First, it's interesting that the narrator highlights that it's not normal in Luke's house for anyone to ask why something happens. It's possible to read this as a reflection of the family's economic status. Luke's family is concerned with practical matters, like what to plant, what to cook, or how to do those things. They do—and farm—what the Government

tells them to do, and it's not usually fruitful to ask *why* the Government tells them to do anything. So perhaps the Garners don't normally ask why because it doesn't get them anywhere. However, it's also a sign that Luke's family is focused on practical matters and not on thinking critically about things. Asking why things are the way they are is how people begin to think critically—learning why provides context and helps people better understand their world. The fact that Luke is asking why Dad sold the woods suggests he's starting to grow up—he wants to learn more about the world around him and why it works the way it does.



Also significant here is how Dad speaks about the Government. He portrays the Government as something that can do whatever it wants—the people it ostensibly serves have little say in what they do with their lives, at least where the Government is concerned. This is just something Dad accepts as an unfortunate fact. This helps explain why the Government has mostly been so successful in enforcing the Population Law that makes third children illegal—Dad is likely not the only adult who feels this way.


Chapter 2 Quotes

☝☝ And somehow, after that, he didn't mind hiding so much anymore. Who wanted to meet strangers, anyway? Who wanted to go to school [...] He was special. He was secret. He belonged at home—home, where his mother always let him have the first piece of apple pie because he was there and the other boys were away. [...] Home, where the backyard always beckoned, always safe and protected by the house and the barn and the woods.

Until they took the woods away.

Related Characters: Luke Garner, Mother, Matthew Garner, Mark Garner

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator is explaining how, when Luke was six, Mother finally told him that third children are illegal and that this is why Luke must stay hidden forever. It's a sign of just how young Luke is at this point that learning this makes him feel special. Right now, his biggest joy is getting so much special time with his mother, something neither of his older

brothers got because, as legal citizens, they had to go to school. This also shows how much Luke trusts his family members to protect him. Notice that in this passage, there's no mention of Luke feeling afraid or vulnerable—the Government could and would kill him, if they learned he existed. Instead, it's just a given for him that his parents and brothers are going to continue to protect him and allow him to live this privileged life, where he gets extra pie and can play in the backyard whenever he wants.


However, the passage does make it clear that this idyllic period of Luke's life comes suddenly to an end when the Government purchases the woods and begins to cut them down. This suddenly makes the Garners' property much less safe for Luke, as the woods can't protect him from view anymore. This reinforces the woods' symbolism: they represent the happiness and safety of Luke's childhood. When they disappear, Luke is suddenly thrust into young adulthood and put into a situation where he begins seeking independence from his family.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☝☝ He could have told her then about the vents—he didn't see how anyone could object to him looking out there—but something stopped him. What if they took that away from him, too? What if Mother told Dad, and Dad said, "No, no, that's too much of a risk. I forbid it"? Luke wouldn't be able to stand it. He kept silent.

Related Characters: Luke Garner, Mother, Dad

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

With the woods coming down outside and making life more dangerous for Luke, Dad insists that Luke now spend all his time in his windowless attic bedroom for his safety. Luke has just discovered the attic's vents, through which he can see the road and the new houses being built. The attic vents represent the first time ever that Luke has had anything resembling a life of his own. Up until this point, Luke has only had access to entertainment provided by his family members. He has a hand-me-down train and access to whatever books his family members have, for instance. The vents, though, are more like a television set that only Luke has access to—watching the houses go up next door is its

own drama, and with so little else to do, it's very compelling for Luke. He's starting to grow up—and by choosing not to tell Mother about the vents, Luke also asserts his independence. The vents might be a small thing, but by not sharing that he can see out of them, Luke preserves something of his life that's for him alone and isn't mediated by his parents. The fact that he wants so badly to have the vents highlights his growing unease at being treated like a small child in need of protection. Even as he recognizes that there might be some danger to the vents, it's still way more important to him that he be able to continue to take this risk and not let his parents forbid him from looking out the vents outright.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☝☝ She jerked. “—but I cleaned that chicken al—oh. Sorry, Luke. You need tucking in, don't you?”

She fluffed his pillow, smoothed his sheet.

Luke sat up. “That's okay, Mother. I'm getting too old for this any”—he swallowed a lump in his throat—“anyway. I bet you weren't still tucking Matthew or Mark in when they were twelve.”



“No,” she said quietly.

“Then I don't need it, either.”

“Okay,” she said.

She kissed his forehead, anyhow, then turned out the light. Luke turned his face to the wall until she left.

Related Characters: Mother, Luke Garner (speaker), Matthew Garner, Luke Garner

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 34-35

Explanation and Analysis

Mother has recently begun working long shifts at a chicken factory, and she's just fallen asleep in the middle of tucking Luke in.

Luke's primary motivation for turning Mother away is an extremely mature one. He realizes how exhausted she is now that she's essentially working two jobs (that of a line worker at a factory, and that of a housewife at home), and he's trying to maturely protect her by dismissing her from this third job (parenting him like a little kid) so she can get some sleep. As a hidden third child, there's not much Luke can do to help his family—but he realizes he can give Mother a chance to recharge by asking less of her. However,

there's more to Luke's request than this. Luke is well aware that in his family, 12 is too old to still be tucked in every night by one's mother—so part of his motivation for turning her away is to assert that he's growing up. It's difficult for him, and he's not entirely sold on giving up more special time with Mother just so he can feel mature and help his family, but it seems necessary.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☝☝ “Am I just supposed to sit in this room the rest of my life?”

Mother was stroking his hair now. It made him feel itchy and irritable.

“Oh, Lukie,” she said. “You can do so much. Read and play and sleep whenever you want... Believe me, I'd like to live a day of your life right about now.”

“No you wouldn't,” Luke muttered, but he said it so softly, he was sure Mother couldn't hear. He knew she wouldn't understand.

If there was a third child in the Sports Family, would he understand? Did he feel the way Luke did?

Related Characters: Luke Garner, Mother (speaker), Jen Talbot/The Girl

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

Earlier in the day, Dad caught Luke downstairs making bread and tidying the house—and he forbade Luke from leaving his attic room. Mother is now talking to Luke about what happened.

As Luke starts to grow up and think more about his future, he's less and less excited about what he sees. He realizes that as an illegal third child, he'll never be able to live a normal life—he'll have to stay in the attic, hidden from view, and rely forever on his parents and brothers' care. While that didn't seem so bad just a few months ago, Luke's burgeoning maturity makes sitting in his attic room for decades sound like a terrible idea, and like no way to live. This passage highlights Luke's maturity here when he doesn't appreciate Mother stroking his hair—he's feeling too old right now for that kind of comfort. He'd rather be independent, but given his circumstances, he can't be independent.

Mother then highlights how little she understands about how damaging it is for Luke to live in hiding. She may simply

be trying to make Luke feel better and it might not reflect her actual feelings, but she totally dismisses Luke's implication that he's no longer happy living in the attic. It's feeling more like a prison to Luke these days, even though to Mother (who's working long shifts at a factory in addition to doing all the household labor), Luke's life seems somewhat idyllic. Luke, at least, seems to believe that Mother honestly thinks it'd be nice to live forever shut away in an attic, which is why he inaudibly argues with her that his life isn't any fun.

What Luke craves right now is someone else who understands what he's feeling—and since he recently caught sight of what he believes is a third child living in the new neighborhood, Luke suspects there's someone out there who will understand his difficult emotions. This is another way the novel highlights Luke's burgeoning maturity as well. While Luke's family was once able to meet all his needs, he's now looking outside his family for support—a sign of his desire for independence.

normal life, when Luke believes that will never happen for him.



These difficult, angry thoughts lead Luke to wonder if there are any other options for him as he grows—even if the options that might help him would hurt the rest of his family, as if Mark were to actually die. But it's a sign of how desperate Luke feels that he even considers this. As he notes, he wouldn't poison anyone—but he wonders about it anyway, because that might mean he could live a happier life than he's currently living. This is wildly uncomfortable for him, and it highlights how difficult having to stay hidden makes it for Luke to grow up. Luke also seems to suspect that simply having one of his brothers disappear wouldn't fix much, anyway—his family would have to come up with a backstory as to where Luke came from, and that would be no small feat. So Luke realizes that practically, nothing is going to change for him. He's stuck, and even thinking about ways to escape his current situation is uncomfortable.

Chapter 10 Quotes

☝☝ Luke felt strange about the joke, anyway. Of course he'd never poison anyone, but—if something happened to Matthew or Mark, would Luke have to hide anymore? Would he become the public second son, free to go to town and to school and everywhere else that Matthew and Mark went? Could his parents find some way to explain a “new” child already twelve years old?

It wasn't something Luke could ask. He felt guilty just thinking about it.

Related Characters: Luke Garner, Mark Garner, Matthew Garner

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis


It's suppertime on the day that Luke tried making bread. Mark has just teased Luke about the bread (which is misshapen and tastes bad), and Luke joked that he poisoned it with something that will only kill Mark.

Luke has only lashed out at Mark because he feels so constricted now that the woods are gone. Luke's world has shrunk down to his attic bedroom and nothing beyond that, which makes Luke even more aware of how he's growing up—and how his current lifestyle isn't going to allow him to ever really grow up. Part of making this joke to Mark stems from Luke resenting his brothers for being able to live a

Chapter 13 Quotes

☝☝ He thought about returning home—trudging up the worn stairs, going back to his familiar room and the walls he stared at every day. Suddenly he hated his house. It wasn't a sanctuary. It was a prison.

Related Characters: Luke Garner

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

Luke is standing outside his house, preparing to run across the backyards to meet the third child at the neighbor's house. This is a terrifying prospect—but being outside helps Luke realize once and for all that he can't sit forever in his attic bedroom.

This shift in Luke's thoughts highlights that he's growing up and becoming more independent from his family. Prior to this, Luke has thought of home as a sanctuary, particularly when Mother was still home all day. She made Luke's days worth living by spending time with him, giving him first dibs on pieces of pie, and generally making him feel special and loved. Though it's possible Luke would've come to think differently about his relationship with his mother as he got older anyway, her getting a job outside the home suddenly made being at home (where he's ostensibly safe) seem terrible. Essentially, what Luke is realizing in this moment is what he thinks makes life worth living. Life isn't worth living,

he decides, if he has to stay in hiding in a windowless attic all the time—where’s the fun in that? In order to truly live, Luke realizes he has to get out of his attic and see more of the world. At this point this is still a somewhat unformed thought for him, but it will guide the decisions he makes later in the novel, such as the one to accept a fake ID so he can receive an education and leave the attic.

roll her eyes—suggests that at least for her, the danger isn’t so great. Later, Luke will learn that Jen isn’t in quite as much danger as he is because her family are wealthy Barons. But this means that she has a very different perspective on her safety than Luke does, which is why she’s able to speak on the phone and joke with her dad about something that, in Luke’s house, would create an environment of utter terror.



Chapter 15 Quotes

☛☛ She ran to a phone, Luke following breathlessly. She dialed. Luke watched in amazement. He’d never talked on a phone. His parents had told him the Government could trace calls, could tell if a voice on a phone was from a person who was allowed to exist or not.

“Dad—” She made a face. “I know, I know. Call the security company and get them to cancel the alarm, okay?” Pause. “And might I remind you that the penalty for harboring a shadow child is five million dollars or execution, depending on the mood of the judge?”

She rolled her eyes at Luke while she listened to what seemed to be a long answer.

Related Characters: Jen Talbot/The Girl (speaker), George Talbot/Jen’s Dad, Luke Garner

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

Luke is visiting Jen for the first time; he had to break in to enter her house and she’s now calling her dad to cancel the alarm system. They don’t know each other’s names yet.

This is a mind-boggling experience for Luke because Jen is doing something Luke didn’t know was even possible for third children to do: speak on the phone. Mother and Dad are extremely paranoid that the Government is going to discover Luke through technology like the phone or the television, so they’ve forbidden him from even being within eyesight of such devices. Jen’s behavior, however, suggests that Mother and Dad have no reason to behave this way—she’s speaking on the phone like it’s a normal and safe thing to do, even if one is an illegal third child. Then, even more shocking is that Jen seems to be joking with her dad about the penalty for protecting a shadow child. Jokes like this are unheard of in Luke’s house, where the project of keeping Luke safe occupies much of his parents’ time and attention. The fact that Jen can joke about her safety—and

☛☛ “But you’re a third child, too,” Luke protested. “A shadow child. Right?”

He suddenly felt like it might be easy to cry, if he let himself. All his life, he’d been told he couldn’t do everything Matthew and Mark did because he was the third child. But if Jen could go about freely, it didn’t make sense. Had his parents lied?

“Don’t you have to hide?” he asked.

“Sure,” Jen said. “Mostly. But my parents are very good at bribery. And so am I.”

Related Characters: Luke Garner, Jen Talbot/The Girl (speaker), George Talbot/Jen’s Dad, Jen’s Mom, Mother, Dad, Matthew Garner, Mark Garner

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 64

Explanation and Analysis

After talking to Jen for just a little while during their first meeting, Luke is extremely confused: Jen seems to be able to do all sorts of things that Luke has been led to believe he can’t, even though she’s also an illegal third child.

Luke can barely comprehend that the lengths his parents have gone to to protect him for his entire life may not have been necessary. He might not have needed to spend all his time in his windowless attic bedroom, and if Jen is to be believed, Luke could’ve been out meeting other people (Jen has just shared that she’s met people outside of her immediate family like that’s something normal for third children). Interestingly, though, as Luke considers these things, his first thought is that perhaps his parents lied to him. Later, Jen reveals that Luke’s parents are so paranoid and have done so much to protect Luke because of the Government’s effective propaganda campaign, which has frightened Luke’s parents immensely. But this doesn’t occur to Luke because, like his parents, he expects the Government to be correct and all-knowing—so he turns to the only fallible people he knows, his parents.

Jen also implies that she and Luke live such different lives

because of their differing economic statuses. Luke's family lives in near poverty, and this has caused his family members to focus on survival, not on thinking critically about the Government (which might have helped them see through the propaganda campaign) or about questioning anything. (This is why, at the beginning of the novel, the narrator noted that Luke's family doesn't usually ask "why" questions—they're too busy trying to survive). Jen's family, on the other hand, is extremely wealthy, so as she implies here, they have the money to bribe people to keep Jen safe. This is something that Luke's family cannot do; it's a privilege afforded to only the wealthiest in the novel's society. But Jen has also had time to think more critically about the government, and for the most part, she's decided it's not something she needs to take particularly seriously.

Chapter 16 Quotes

☞ “Don't tell me your family believes that Government propaganda stuff,” she said. “They've spent so much money trying to convince people they can monitor all the TVs and computers, you know they couldn't have afforded to actually do it. I've been using our computer since I was three—and watching TV, too—and they've never caught me.”

Related Characters: Jen Talbot/The Girl (speaker), Luke Garner, Mother, Dad

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

Luke is thinking back on his first visit with Jen, and he's remembering how she told him with authority that the Government can't actually see him through the computer or television, or track him through the phone.

This is Luke's first introduction to the possibility that his Government might not be as powerful as he's been led to believe it is. There are a couple caveats to this—Jen, for one, is a wealthy Baron and doesn't understand how privileged she is compared to Luke, and it's very possible that her family is surveilled differently than a poor farming family like Luke's is. But still, the possibility that she's right is transformative for Luke. It causes him to begin to question his parents and what they've raised him to think is true. This is a normal part of coming of age, but for Luke, it's almost traumatic—if Jen is to be believed, his parents have been overly cautious and have deprived Luke of all sorts of experiences to keep him safe. It's also surprising for Luke to

learn that the Government relies on propaganda—spreading information that isn't true, but that paints them as extremely powerful—to remain in power. And while Luke isn't there yet, this is his first indicator that standing up to the Government is even possible.

☞ “Haven't you learned? Government leaders are the worst ones for breaking laws. How do you think we got this house? How do you think I got Internet access? How do you think we live?”

“I don't know,” Luke said, fully honest. “I don't think I know much of anything.”

Related Characters: Jen Talbot/The Girl, Luke Garner (speaker), George Talbot/Jen's Dad

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

During Luke's first visit to Jen, he's shocked to hear about how she lives and the privileges she has as a wealthy Baron. Luke goes into this conversation wanting everything to make logical sense, and for the Government's laws to be applied to everyone. But Jen turns those hopes and assumptions on their head as she tells Luke about how her parents paid scientists so they could use assisted reproductive technology to conceive her and select her sex, and how her dad works in the Government and yet has an illegal shadow child of his own. Put simply, Luke is learning that his world isn't simple. It's full of shades of gray, and few people are as straightforward or easy to read as they seem. This causes Luke to realize how little he knows about his world, and how sheltered his upbringing has been before this point.

Jen's main point here is that as Barons, her family can bribe people to keep her safe and get other luxuries, such as their lavish house and Jen's internet access (and Jen herself, since as a third child, Jen isn't legally supposed to exist). Luke has never had access to money before, so this kind of lifestyle is totally foreign to him.

Chapter 19 Quotes



☝ In the evenings, spooning in his stew or cutting up his meat, Luke felt pangs of guilt now. Perhaps someone was starving someplace because of him. But the food wasn't *there*—wherever the starving people were—it was *here*, on his plate. He ate it all.

“Luke, you're so quiet lately. Is everything all right?” Mother asked one night when he waved away second helpings of cabbage.

“I'm fine,” he said, and went back to eating silently.

But he was worrying. Worrying that maybe the Government was right and that he shouldn't exist.

Related Characters: Mother, Luke Garner (speaker), Jen Talbot/The Girl

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 92-93

Explanation and Analysis

Luke has now read the Government-sponsored books Jen gave him, which explain the rationale behind the Population Law. Essentially, the Government instituted the Population Law to make sure there would never be too many people for the country to feed in the wake of a massive drought and famine.

Reading these books causes Luke to wonder whether it's actually morally acceptable for him to exist. Luke cares about others and is a compassionate person, so it's difficult for him to confront the possibility that his existence is taking food away from other people (legal people, whom Luke seems to consider more deserving of resources at this point) to feed him instead. The fact that Luke takes this so seriously and feels so terrible about potentially hurting other people highlights how traumatizing it is for him to grow up as a shadow child, knowing his existence is illegal. Luke is having to question everything he ever thought he knew about himself, his family, and his society—and at this point, he suspects that he, and other kids like him, are the root of all society's problems. In some ways, this reflects the way that Luke has been raised to think of the Government as an entity that's nonsensical, but that's trying to do the right thing—they're the ones who have made Luke's existence illegal for reasons Luke will later find out might not be entirely valid, and yet Luke sees himself as the enemy rather than them. This highlights that Luke is still at the beginning of his coming of age journey; he must get through this difficult process of deciding whether it's okay for him to be alive or not in order to keep growing up.

☝ Luke looked at the stack of thick books on the Talbots' kitchen counter. They looked so official, so important—who was he to say they weren't true?

Related Characters: Luke Garner, Jen Talbot/The Girl

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis

Luke has finished the reading assignment that Jen gave him, which included Government-sponsored books (arguing for the Population Law's necessity) and independent articles (arguing that the Population Law is unnecessary and inhumane). According to Jen, the Government is lying to get people to believe them, but Luke has a hard time accepting that. The fact that Luke struggles to accept Jen's view reflects both his family's status as poor farmers, and his inexperience with thinking critically about propaganda. Because Luke's family are farmers and the Government mandates everything that farmers do, it's normal for Luke to get letters from the Government telling his dad to do or not do something for no apparent reason. This has desensitized Luke's family from ever wondering, let alone asking, why the Government does anything. They've learned to just accept what the Government says as fact, and this is part of the reason Luke has such a hard time even considering the Government might be wrong. Luke also doesn't fully grasp how much money the Government has to put into making their position seem correct—money they could use to make “official,” “important”-looking books like these. Making them look so official is part of the point: it makes what's in them seem more likely to be true. But this is something Luke is going to learn to think more critically about as he grows up and realizes his Government isn't entirely trustworthy.

Chapter 20 Quotes

☝ “No, of course I wouldn't rather hide,” Jen said irritably. “But getting one of those I.D.'s—that's just a different way of hiding. I want to be me and go about like anybody else. There's no compromise. Which is why I've got to convince these idiots that the rally's their only chance.”

Related Characters: Jen Talbot/The Girl (speaker), Luke Garner, Carlos

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis

Luke and Jen are in Jen's secret chat room, discussing fake IDs with other shadow kids. The other kids want fake IDs; Jen does not.

Fake IDs in this world allow shadow kids to assume new identities and go live with a new set of parents for the rest of their lives—but to not have to be in hiding, as Luke and Jen currently are. This seems like freedom to Carlos, Luke, and numerous other kids in the chat room, as it means they're not confined to their homes and they'd be able to go outside, make friends, go to school, and do other normal things for kids their age. They also see it is as their only way out of hiding, given the political climate that isn't at all friendly to shadow children and will indeed kill them if a shadow child is discovered.

As far as Jen is concerned, though, life with a fake ID might be marginally better—but it's not enough, and it's still living in hiding. Her goal is to get all the shadow children in the chat room to realize that they deserve to live as who they really are, not whatever name comes to them on a fake ID. They deserve to grow up with their own parents, not new ones they have to pretend they've had all their lives. And the only way to get everyone to change their thinking and allow them to live with their given names and their original parents, she believes, is to hold the rally and demand the same rights as everyone else from the Government. This highlights Jen's strong belief that public protest is the only valid way to stand up for what she believes in. But it also highlights that Jen is generally unwilling to acknowledge that shadow children are rightfully afraid of dying if they step out of hiding—there are perhaps other ways to protest that are less dangerous but still meaningful, such as participating in the chat room in the first place.

Chapter 21 Quotes

☝☝ “When I was little, Mom used to take me to a play group that was all third children,” Jen said. She giggled. “The thing was, it was all Government officials’ kids. I think some of the parents didn’t even like kids—they just thought it was a status symbol to break the Population Law and get away with it.”

Related Characters: Jen Talbot/The Girl (speaker), Jen's Mom, Luke Garner, Mother

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 102

Explanation and Analysis

During one of Jen and Luke's secret hangouts, Jen tells Luke about a play group she used to attend specifically for third children like her. Just having access to such a play group drives home how privileged Jen is, particularly since she notes that all the kids at the group had parents in Government. Because of their parents' prestige, these kids didn't have to fear for their lives the way Luke did when he was little. Instead, they got to have a bunch of pretty normal experiences, such as this play group. This helps to explain why Jen is often so nonchalant about hiding and makes fun of Luke's paranoia. She genuinely doesn't understand how afraid Luke and his parents are all the time that Luke is going to be discovered, because even though she has to hide she's also spent a lot of time doing normal kid things like playing with friends and accompanying her parents in public.

This passage also highlights how different the stakes of having a third child are for wealthy parents versus poor parents like Mother and Dad. In the case of the wealthy parents, having a third child (to say nothing of the first and second children they had before the third) is just something they do to protest and flaunt their power—they didn't do it for their own happiness, or because they wanted to raise another child. It's just something they can do to feel powerful. Mother and Dad had Luke on accident, but Mother at least desperately wanted a third and even a fourth child. So while all the parents who have a third child are resisting the Government's Population Law, the novel shows how their economic statuses makes such an act very different. For women in Government, it's just something to do—while for Mother, it was an extremely stressful and emotional act, the consequences of which frighten her every day.

Chapter 22 Quotes

☝☝ “Jen, can't you understand? I do want it to work. I hope—”
“Hope doesn't mean anything,” Jen snapped. “Action's the only thing that counts.”

Related Characters: Luke Garner, Jen Talbot/The Girl (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 113

Explanation and Analysis

Luke is refusing to accompany Jen to the rally later in the week. This exchange encapsulates Jen and Luke's differing



ideas when it comes to what constitutes meaningful protest and resistance. Luke is far too afraid of dying to stand up with Jen and demand his rights from the Government in person—he's been raised to fear the Government and the Population Police, and he can't quite believe that a police force specifically designed to murder children they deem illegal won't murder shadow children when they gather en masse. Jen sees this as a moral failing, but as the novel soon shows, Luke actually has the right idea: he's practical, and he also realizes he cannot trust the Government to care about his life at all. While it takes Luke a while longer to come up with a way he feels comfortable protesting, it's the fact that he doesn't trust the Government that keeps him alive long enough to figure something out.

Jen, on the other hand, believes the only way to protest is to get out in public and demand things. It's not enough, she insists, to either sit at home and hope for change, or to do something that changes things slowly. But for now, her telling this to Luke only makes Luke feel even worse about his choice to not protest, and it damages their friendship. It keeps Jen from being a good friend and helping Luke come up with some other way that he could help.

Chapter 24 Quotes

☝ “I still can't go. I'm sorry. It's something about having parents who are farmers, not lawyers. And not being a Baron. It's people like you who change history. People like me—we just let things happen to us.”

Related Characters: Luke Garner (speaker), Jen Talbot/The Girl

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 117

Explanation and Analysis

Jen has snuck into Luke's room in the middle of the night to pick him up and take him to the rally, but Luke again refuses to accompany her. Finally, Luke is able to put into words why he doesn't think it's appropriate for him to go. He recognizes that Jen's privilege makes her believe that she can actually do something. She's used to getting what she thinks she deserves, so it's not a stretch for her to believe that because she deserves rights, she should successfully be able to demand them. Luke and his family, on the other hand, are poor and don't expect the world to give them anything, which in this situation makes Luke feel powerless and as though he shouldn't even get a say in what happens to him or his country. The wealthy, Luke believes, are the

ones who can throw money and privilege behind causes, while poorer people can only go along.

The novel ultimately suggests that Luke's analysis here isn't entirely correct; he can protest and fight for what he believes in, just in different ways than Jen does. But for now, Luke sees his lack of privilege as something that holds him back and turns him into a passive observer in his life.

Chapter 27 Quotes

☝ “They shot her,” Jen's father said. “They shot all of them. All forty kids at the rally, gunned down right in front of the president's house. The blood flowed into his rosebushes. But they had the sidewalks scrubbed before the tourists came, so nobody would know.”

Related Characters: George Talbot/Jen's Dad (speaker), Jen Talbot/The Girl, Luke Garner

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 128

Explanation and Analysis

When Luke sneaks over to Jen's house a week and a half after the rally, he meets Jen's dad—who explains that Jen and the other protesters were all murdered at the rally.


This is an earthshattering moment for Luke, as it shows clearly that Jen's assumptions about how the rally would go were very wrong. Though Luke has been pretty skeptical of Jen's certainty that the rally would work, he also respected her deeply held beliefs that the Government and the Population Police would act fairly and wouldn't kill a bunch of children whose parents work in the Government. The fact that the Population Police (who are presumably the “they” Jen's dad refers to) killed all the protesters show just how committed the Government is to exerting control over the population. Not even children can stand in their way of enforcing their laws.

Then, Jen's dad also shows how badly the Government wants to cover up what it did, something that suggests the Government knows murdering children is terrible for publicity and will enrage a lot of people. This plays into how the Government controls information in this country: the Government decides what, and when, people hear about things—if they hear about things at all. Luke has been listening to the radio for days now, expecting to hear something about the rally. But instead, Jen's dad makes it clear that the Government doesn't want anyone to know

what happened. This way, the Government doesn't have to admit that the Population Law isn't being enforced well (if there are shadow children at all, that means people aren't following that law). Then, they also don't have to admit that shadow children are beginning to organize and fight for their rights—and they certainly don't have to give any shadow children rights.

“Did she really think the rally would work?” he said. “Yes,” Luke assured him. Then, unbidden, the last words she'd spoken to him came back to him: *We can hope*—after she'd told him hope was worthless. Maybe she knew the rally would fail. Maybe she even knew she would probably die. He remembered the first day he'd met her, when she'd cut her hand to cover the drops of blood on the carpet. There was something strange in Jen he couldn't quite understand, that made her willing to sacrifice herself to help others. Or try to.

Related Characters: George Talbot/Jen's Dad, Luke Garner (speaker), Jen Talbot/The Girl

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 129

Explanation and Analysis

As Luke and Jen's dad discuss what Jen thought of the rally, Luke starts to wonder if Jen knew she'd end up sacrificing herself for the cause instead of walking away with the same rights as everyone else. As he starts to wonder this, Luke realizes that Jen's rally might have had a different purpose than the one she stated: to inspire kids like him to keep fighting by showing how heartless the Government is. Jen, Luke now understands, was fully committed to the cause of securing rights for shadow children. She had her purpose, and even at her young age, she perhaps felt that her life was best spent doing something dangerous (and eventually) deadly in organizing and attending the rally. Essentially, Luke realizes that the rally might not have gotten shadow children rights, but it did perhaps make a statement—though likely a smaller one than Jen probably hoped it would, given that the Government has suppressed any news of the rally. Luke is the only person readers are aware of who knows about the rally and how it ended, though the other shadow children who frequented Jen's chat room and knew about the rally can likely infer what happened. This, Luke believes, will perhaps become an inspiring event for others—hopefully, Jen won't have died in vain if he and other shadow kids respect her sacrifice, remember it, and use it to inspire them to actions that may

be more successful than the rally.

Chapter 28 Quotes

“I only work at Population Police headquarters. I don't agree with what they do. I try to sabotage them as much as I can. Jen never understood, either—sometimes you have to work from inside enemy lines.”

Related Characters: George Talbot/Jen's Dad (speaker), Luke Garner, Jen Talbot/The Girl

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 133

Explanation and Analysis



Jen's dad is explaining to Luke how he uses his job at the Population Police to fight for shadow children. Luke has just grabbed Jen's dad's gun and pointed it at the older man in his panic, which is why Jen's dad notes that Luke doesn't understand what Jen's dad is doing.

It's a new idea for Luke that someone like Jen's dad could use his status, wealth, and connections to fight for shadow children from within the very organization that seeks to kill them. Jen has been telling Luke for months now that the only way to effectively fight for shadow children's rights is to go out in public and demand those rights—but Jen was murdered for doing that. So Jen's dad presents an interesting, and to Luke, barely understandable alternative. In general, this makes the case that there isn't just one way to protest and stand up to injustice. Just as Jen's rally had its place (as it inspires Luke to go on and protest himself), Jen's dad's work is also meaningful because it allows him insider information. With that information, Jen's dad can help improve conditions for individual shadow children by securing them fake IDs, as he does later for Luke. This conversation, then, expands Luke's understanding of the various ways one can resist injustice, which helps him figure out the best way for him to stand up for his own rights.

“Before [the famines], our country believed in freedom and democracy and equality for all. Then the famines came, and the government was overthrown. There were riots in every city, over food, and many, many people were killed. When General Sherwood came to power, he promised law and order and food for all. By then, that was all the people wanted. And all they got.”

Luke squinted, trying to understand. This was grown-up talk, pure and simple.

Related Characters: George Talbot/Jen’s Dad (speaker), Luke Garner, General Sherwood

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 135



Explanation and Analysis

Jen’s dad is explaining to Luke how the Population Law was implemented to save the country from famine and riots. With this explanation, Jen’s dad highlights essentially that people who are hungry, scared, and desperate are easy to control—this is how General Sherwood came into power and was able to implement a law like the Population Law. By insisting that it would solve the problems posed by the famines and thereby bring an end to the riots, he was able to sell a draconian law to the population without, it seems, much fuss or opposition. This again highlights how the Government uses fear to control the population; it understands that fear is a powerful motivator, and people who are afraid will agree to all sorts of things to make the things that frighten them stop.

Luke has never been spoken to like this before. Recall that Luke’s family doesn’t often ask why things happen—they concern themselves with practical matters. For the first time, then, Luke is learning why the world is the way it is, and this feels like “grown-up talk” to Luke. Having this conversation, though, brings Luke closer to adulthood, as it encourages him to think critically about his world and about what he’s hearing. It’s a challenge to engage in the “grown-up talk” now, because Luke isn’t used to it. But he’s still growing up and coming of age, and if he continues, this will become easier.

☛ Luke felt a strange sense of relief, that it wasn’t truly wrong for him to exist, just illegal. For the first time since he’d read the Government books, he could see the two things being separate.

Related Characters: George Talbot/Jen’s Dad, Luke Garner

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 137

Explanation and Analysis

Near the end of Luke’s conversation with Jen’s dad, Jen’s dad says outright that he truly believes there’s enough food for everyone, even without the Population Law; and that the Population Law is immoral. While Jen had said as much before, it’s different hearing it from her dad. On some level, Luke realized that Jen was believing what made the most sense to her and what kept her spirits up (something that Jen’s dad has also mentioned during this conversation). Hearing this from him, an adult Luke realizes he trusts, is different. In this way, Jen’s dad steps into a mentoring role to Luke and helps him come of age. And realizing that his existence is just illegal, rather than morally wrong, is a huge turning point for Luke as he grows up. It helps him believe that he has the right to exist—and with this knowledge, Luke is able to make the choice to go on and figure out how to change the world to better support shadow kids like him.

Noting that there’s a difference between morality and legality is also a more adult concept: Luke is becoming more comfortable with gray areas, and he no longer believes the Government knows everything and knows best. It doesn’t always make laws that help people, and it’s up to Luke to think critically about how his Government works and come to his own conclusions about what’s right and what’s wrong.

Chapter 29 Quotes

☛ Maybe he could succeed where Jen had failed precisely because he wasn’t a Baron—because he didn’t have her sense that the world owed him everything. He could be more patient, more cautious, more practical.

But he’d never be able to do anything staying in hiding.

[...]

I want a fake I.D. Please.

Related Characters: Luke Garner, Jen Talbot/The Girl

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 146

Explanation and Analysis

Luke is considering whether to accept a fake ID from Jen’s dad, and he’s coming around to the idea. He’s specifically considering here whether he can be more successful in

protesting for rights for shadow children than Jen was.


As Luke considers where he and Jen differ in their approach to protest, he realizes that Jen's privilege as a Baron perhaps blinded her. For instance, Jen went to the protest believing that the Population Police would never hurt a bunch of innocent children, particularly when those children had parents in the Government. Because she's lived her life relatively safely and trusted people to treat her as well as they have thus far, she made a fatal mistake in believing she'd be safe. Luke, though, has spent his entire life frightened that the Population Police would come for him, take him away, and kill him. Living with that fear has fundamentally changed his perception of the world: he sees it as a dangerous place, whereas Jen sees it as kind of dangerous but mostly benevolent. Luke now realizes that he can use this worldview to change things for shadow children, and by being more cautious, he might experience more success.

Realizing this, though, isn't enough—Luke knows he also has to take the brave step of coming out of hiding by accepting the fake ID. This represents Luke accepting the responsibility of carrying on Jen's work. It also represents a turning point in his coming-of-age journey. Accepting the fake ID means moving away from his parents and living a totally new life—a life that's adult and independent, compared to his highly controlled childhood.

Chapter 30 Quotes

☝☝ Luke could tell his father's words came out painfully, but they still stabbed at him. Maybe part of him had been secretly hoping his parents would forbid him to go, would lock him in the attic and keep him as their little boy forever.

Related Characters: Luke Garner, Mother, Dad

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 150

Explanation and Analysis

As Luke recalls his conversation with Mother and Dad in which he told them about Jen and his fake ID, he remembers Dad saying that Luke should go because he won't ever be able to live a normal life without it. This is a bittersweet memory for Luke. On one hand, Luke is thankful

to be able to go and live his own life for the first time ever—but on the other hand, growing up and leaving his parents is hard. This passage suggests that it's normal, on some level, for children to not want to grow up and to fear what will happen if they do. Luke is afraid, as he's never been in public before or met people outside of his immediate family, Jen, and Jen's dad. His life after leaving home will be full of new, frightening experiences—but this, the novel suggests, is a normal part of growing up. It also highlights how much Luke loves his parents, and how much he appreciates all they've done for him.

☝☝ “I'm doing this for you, too, Jen,” he whispered, too softly for Jen's dad or the bug to hear over the car's hum. “Someday when we're all free, all the third children, I'll tell everyone about you. They'll erect statues to you, and name holidays after you...” It wasn't much, but it made him feel better. A little.

Related Characters: Luke Garner (speaker), Jen Talbot/The Girl, George Talbot/Jen's Dad

Page Number: 153

Explanation and Analysis

In the car on the way to a boarding school, Luke—in his new identity as Lee Grant—whispers that he's “doing this” (accepting a fake ID and leaving home) so that he can continue Jen's work of advocating for shadow children's rights. In this passage, Luke crystallizes the idea that he now sees Jen's sacrifice at the rally as an inspiration. It's not something he can forget—he doesn't want her to have died in vain. Rather, he wants to someday memorialize her and make sure that all shadow children realize that they have Jen to thank for the rights they'll one day have.

The fact that Luke suggests it's a sure thing that shadow children will someday have the same rights as everyone else shows how committed he is to continuing Jen's work. He's going to take what he's learned from her and carry it forward, and he'll use it to inspire his own protest and resistance activities. And if he's successful, he believes he'll have the power to put up statues honoring Jen, and create a holiday for her. This also makes it clear that Jen didn't die in vain: she inspired Luke to take action, and Luke can now go on to inspire others.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

As Luke watches the first tree in the **woods** fall, Mother calls for him to come inside. Luke always obeys this order and has since he was tiny. Today, though, he hesitates and reminds himself that he might never feel the warm dirt under his feet again. Silently, he goes inside.

That night, over supper, Luke asks why Dad sold the **woods**. Asking why something happened is unusual at the Garner house, where most conversation is about how or what to farm, but Dad answers anyway—the Government wanted the woods, and the Government gets what it wants. Luke figures his parents defied the Government as much as they could when they had him. He whines anyway that the Government isn't going to live in the houses that will replace the woods, but Mother notes that Government employees will probably live in the houses. Luke tries to imagine rows of houses where the woods once stood. He's only snuck one look outside; already, with half the woods gone, he feels scared and exposed.

Sadly, Luke asks if he has to stay away from the windows once people move into the houses. Dad loses his temper—Luke has to stay away from the windows *now* because if someone sees him, something bad will happen. Luke isn't sure what, exactly. Maybe he'd die. He knows what death is—runt pigs die all the time on the farm—but he can't imagine himself dying.

Luke's older brother, Mark, grumbles that he and Matthew will have to do Luke's chores now. He asks if Luke could come outside to work at night, but Matthew snickers that Luke doesn't help much anyway. Mother assures her sons that Luke will do what he can, just like he always has. Just then, the family hears a car in the driveway. Luke instantly rushes for the back stairs. Mother, he knows, will hide his supper in a cupboard and push his chair away. Within moments, it'll look like Luke doesn't exist.

Luke doesn't seem to have much agency—he's spent his life obeying Mother when she tells him to come inside. For now, it's unclear why Luke has to come in, and what this has to do with the woods coming down. But reminding himself that he might never feel dirt again is ominous—the implication is that he might never go outside again.



This passage establishes several important ideas. First, Luke's family doesn't usually think critically about things—they concern themselves with how and what they should do, rather than questioning why they should do something. Dad's response also suggests that the Government in this world is all-powerful and perhaps dangerous. Luke reads as young and vulnerable in this passage. The Government seems like his enemy, particularly since they've taken the woods that made Luke feel safe and secure.



Here, the novel starts to clarify why Luke has to hide and come inside now that the woods are gone: something terrible will happen to him if his existence is discovered. This is still a pretty abstract idea for Luke, which highlights his youth. Dad, however, seems fully committed to keeping his son safe—as well as terrified that he might not be able to do so.



Matthew and Mark are far more concerned with fairly distributing chores than with keeping Luke safe, which may reflect that they're young and naïve. Mother, meanwhile, emerges as Luke's protector—both when she speaks to her sons and when she hides Luke's existence. The tone here suggests that while Luke knows it must look like he doesn't exist, this is a heavy thing for him—it's emotionally difficult to know he shouldn't exist.



CHAPTER 2

Kids like Luke—third children, or any children beyond the allotted two per family—are illegal. Luke has no idea if he’s the only one, since he knows they “d[o] things” to women to prevent them from getting pregnant or make them “get rid of” any babies after their second. Mother had explained this to Luke when Luke was six. Before that, Luke just assumed little kids had to stay out of sight. He figured that when he got to be as old as Matthew and Mark, he’d get to go to town or even just to the back field or the front yard. But somehow, Luke never got to be as old as his brothers.

On his sixth birthday, as he blew out the candles on his cake, Luke remembered Mark’s sixth birthday. Mark had wanted to have a party with his friends, but Mother had shushed him. The memory caused Luke to mess up when he tried to blow out his candles, so his brothers teased him for being a baby. Luke told himself he was remembering wrong: he must be remembering Mark’s seventh birthday, because Mark would’ve been in hiding and wouldn’t have had friends on his sixth birthday. But this didn’t seem right, so four days later, Luke asked Mother if Matthew and Mark ever had to hide.

At first, Mother had told Luke he didn’t really need to know. But thinking of how he was the only kid who still sat in Mother’s lap or listened to bedtime stories—which Mark and Matthew deemed “sissified”—he insisted on learning the truth. Mother had explained that she and Dad had wanted Luke, so she wouldn’t let Dad consider “getting rid of” Luke. Somehow, Luke knew she wasn’t talking about leaving him in a box on the side of the road like people used to do with kittens, back when people had pets.

Mother explained that the “Population Law” hadn’t been around long, and she figured that the Government would abolish it. But they didn’t. Then, the Government started saying on TV that they could find out anything about anyone and would do anything to enforce their population laws. Dad was hearing rumors in town about other babies. Mother said that she always wanted a fourth baby, a John, but she’s happy now with her three sons. After this conversation, Luke stopped minding having to stay hidden. Now, he believes he’s special. At home all day, he gets Mother’s attention and can play in the barn and the backyard—at least until the **woods** are cut down.

*Haddix based the world in *Among the Hidden* on China’s one-child policy, which allowed the government to forcibly sterilize women or mandate abortions for pregnancies after a woman’s first; that’s presumably what Luke is referring to when he talks about “d[oing] things” to women and “get[ting] rid of” babies. This highlights again how controlling Luke’s government is. However, Mother has also gone out of her way to protect Luke from this reality—and she’s been successful, since Luke thinks it’s normal for little kids to hide.*



Mother is trying to protect Luke’s innocence, but to do so, she also has to curtail her older sons’ activities (such as by refusing to throw a birthday party for Mark so Luke won’t feel different from his brothers). This may contribute to Mark’s resentment toward Luke in the present. The fact that Matthew and Mark tease Luke for being a baby suggests that Luke needing to stay in hiding somehow contributes to his feeling perpetually young—it’s keeping him from growing up like his brothers do.



Again, the novel confirms that needing to stay hidden essentially keeps Luke acting like a much younger kid, since Matthew and Mark imply that they think six is too old for bedtime stories. Mother is trying to explain things in an age-appropriate way, but Luke still senses that there’s a dark undertone to what she’s saying—he realizes on some level that had Mother “gott[en] rid of” him, he just wouldn’t be here at all.



Finally, Mother clues readers into why she’s so worried about protecting Luke: she’s afraid the Government will take him from her (and harm him) if they find out he exists. Luke seems to grasp that his life depends on listening to her, and it helps him cope to think that he’s special. But again, note that hiding means that Luke essentially acts like a much younger child: he’s home all day with Mother, rather than making his own friends and living his own life. His life is very circumscribed, even if it’s the safest way for him to live.



CHAPTER 3

Luke is on his belly in his attic bedroom, unhappily playing with a toy train. Once, he wanted nothing more than to inherit the train from Mark, but today, Luke just wants to play outside. These days, Luke can't even be in the room with an open window—Dad shouted so loudly at Luke this morning when Luke peeked outside that Luke almost cried. Remembering this, Luke shoves the train off its tracks.

Mark knocks at the door and shouts, "Population Police!" Luke snaps that that isn't funny, but Mark bounds up the stairs to Luke's attic bedroom anyway. (Luke has the biggest bedroom in the family, but he's jealous of his family members' bedroom windows.) Mark teases Luke for jumping about the Population Police. He's been joking about the Population Police for years and it doesn't normally bother Luke, but with Dad so worried, Luke is more anxious than usual. Suddenly serious, Mark says he's never told anyone about Luke, so Luke is safe. He invites Luke to play checkers, but Luke nastily spits that Mother probably sent Mark up to play. Offended, Mark leaves.

Luke feels bad for being mean, but he paces his room instead of apologizing. As he ducks under the rafters and catches sight of his model car collection, Luke realizes he hates everything in his room. He'll never get to do anything and will just rot here. What if something happens to Matthew, Mark, Mother, and Dad, and Luke ends up dying in the attic? He's read books about that sort of thing before.

As Luke looks up at the roof, he realizes there's natural light coming in from two vents at either end. Mother always gives Dad a dirty look when he grouses about them—the vents, he insists, make it wasteful to heat the attic at all—but now, Luke climbs onto a trunk by one. Through the vent, Luke can see the road and the cornfield. He moves to the vent at the other end of the roof. From this vent, he can see the area where the **woods** once stood. There are bulldozers digging, and more people than Luke has ever seen (aside from a starving homeless person who came and asked for food once, Luke has never seen people other than his family members). The sight is overwhelming.

Luke is beginning to grow up: his train is starting to feel juvenile, and he longs for the outdoors, which to him symbolize independence and freedom. He's feeling more constricted than usual these days with Dad so upset. And since Dad reacts angrily due to fear, Luke also feels like he's being attacked for something that isn't his fault.



Making jokes about the Population Police shows that Mark doesn't fully comprehend how much danger Luke is in (this seems a more likely explanation than just being a jerk, since he assures Luke he's safe). But right now, Luke isn't willing to accept an apology, especially from someone who seems to lord his good fortune as a legal person over him. This is another indicator that Luke is growing up: he's starting to see and understand how different his brothers are from him, and he resents that.



Another way Luke shows he's growing up is that he's starting to think more critically about his future. He understands that his life depends on his parents and brothers being able to care for him, and it's perhaps smart to think of what might happen if they can't do that. But Luke feels powerless to do anything but assume he'll just die.



It's an indicator of Luke's family's poverty that Dad seems, on some level, to not want to heat the attic where one of his sons lives. Mother's dirty looks, though, suggest that she'll go out of her way to protect Luke's wellbeing. Discovering the vents is huge for Luke, as it introduces him to the world outside his house. More importantly, the view outside isn't mediated by his parents, as his books and toys have been. Being able to look outside gives Luke access to a world that's totally his own—a sign of his growing maturity.



Hearing Mother calling, Luke moves to his bed and tells her she can come in. Mother sits down next to Luke and says she understands how upset he is. Luke considers telling her about the vents, but deciding Dad might take issue with them, Luke keeps quiet. He leans into Mother as she says that things could be worse. This isn't comforting—it seems like she means that things *will* get worse.

Deciding to keep the vents a secret is one way Luke asserts his independence. Even if he can't leave the house, he's creating a life for himself that's totally his own. However, he still relies on Mother for comfort, and he realizes she knows more about their lives than he does—hence her insistence that things could be worse seeming particularly ominous.



CHAPTER 4

A few days later, when Luke comes downstairs for breakfast, things *do* get worse. As usual, Luke silently opens the stair door, peeks into the kitchen, and whispers if the windows are closed. At the sound of his voice, Mother appears in the doorway with a plate of bacon and eggs. She asks him to eat on the bottom step; Dad doesn't think it's safe for Luke to eat in the kitchen, even with the shades closed. From the table, Dad says that yesterday a construction worker asked if they had air conditioning, since the shades were closed—people will get suspicious. Luke accepts his plate, but the food looks terrible now. Mother pleadingly says that things won't be too different and scurries back to the kitchen. Luke wants to argue with his parents, but he reminds himself that they're just trying to protect him.

Luke already feels uncomfortably different from his brothers. His life is constrained, and he has few "normal" experiences. Not letting him eat at the table deprives him of one more normal experience, in addition to not letting him connect with his family members. In Dad's opinion, this is a small price to pay to keep Luke safe from nosy construction workers. But this is devastating for Luke. Interestingly, Mother seems like she might not fully agree with Dad, but she's not willing to stand up to him. So Luke is forced to sit alone, feeling even less like he belongs in his family.



CHAPTER 5

From that meal on, Luke eats on the bottom step. He hates it: Mother speaks too softly for him to hear, and now Luke can't hear what mean things Matthew and Mark are saying about him. After a few weeks, Luke stops even trying to interact with his family during meals. But one day in July, he can't hide his interest, as a letter arrives about the pigs. Normally, mail is boring—it's bills or Government orders to plant corn or use a specific fertilizer. But this letter is different. It's as thick as a letter from family, and Matthew holds it at arm's length like he does with the dead piglets. Dad says that since it's bad news, it can wait until after dinner.

What Luke resents so much about eating on the bottom step is being disconnected from his family. He can't bicker with his brothers, and he can't give Mother the attention he'd like to give her. This makes him feel even more alone and desperate for something to change. The novel again highlights how controlling the Government is when it notes that the Government dictates everything Dad does on the farm, from what to grow to how to fertilize crops. And calling those letters "boring" speaks to how normal this is for Luke's family.



Once Dad has finished, he opens the letter. He tries to read it aloud, but the language is too difficult. After consulting the dictionary and reading it silently, Dad announces that the government is going to make them get rid of their pigs. Matthew is aghast; he dreams of running his own pig farm one day. But Dad says that the smell is going to bother the people in the new houses, so they can't raise pigs anymore. Luke asks if the government can really do that, but nobody answers. After a moment of silence, Mother asks what they're going to live on now. The pigs were their main source of income. Dad, Matthew, and Mark all look at Mother. Luke can't figure out why.

It's a huge blow for the entire family to have to get rid of their pigs. It affects the family's finances, and Matthew's dreams for the future seem to disappear in an instant. But again, there's no room for the family to push back; they see the Government as fully within its rights to dictate this sort of thing. The Government's reasoning also introduces that it prioritizes some people over others in this society (presumably, it values the Government workers who will live in the houses more than the farmers, and it is willing to put farmers in danger of financial ruin to make employees happy). It also highlights how disconnected Luke is from the family when Dad, Matthew, and Mark all look at Mother and seem to be thinking the same mysterious thing.



CHAPTER 6

Two weeks later, on the same day that Dad, Matthew, and Mark take all the pigs to an auction, the tax bill arrives. When the three of them get home, Dad hands the bill to Mother. Mother drops the bill when she sees it—the Government is asking for three times as much money as they usually do. She suggests it must be a mistake. But Dad says he spoke to their neighbors at the auction, and the fancy houses next door are making everyone's taxes go up. Their land is worth more now.

Raising the taxes on Luke's family is another way the Government asserts its power. Mother seems to want to see the Government as fair and reasonable (she seems to believe they wouldn't really ask so much of them when it's obvious the family can't pay). But Dad implies that the Government doesn't actually care about people with less money, like them.



Luke asks if this is a good thing. He's now been watching the houses go up for weeks, and he's fallen a bit in love with them. Dad says it's not good unless they sell. Matthew remarks that the tax bill is more than they got for the hogs today. Quietly, Mother says she just got her work permit for the factory, and maybe they'd give her an advance on her first paycheck. Luke wants to protest—Mother is the only one who talks to him during the day, and he'll be all alone if she gets a job. But he knows that'd be selfish, so he stays quiet.

Understanding the tax bill is difficult for Luke, since it seems like it should be a good thing that their land is more valuable—and because Luke is forming an attachment to the new houses. This reflects his inexperience, which is certainly related to his not being able to leave his bedroom and gain any experience. Finally, Luke discovers what his dad and brothers were thinking when they stared at Mother the other day: she's getting a job. He maturely swallows his protest, as this is the only way he knows to help his family.



CHAPTER 7

By the middle of September, Luke is familiar with the new routine. Mother has to get to the factory early, so breakfast is always hurried. Luke's toast is always dry, but he doesn't want to ask for butter. Since the kitchen window is always open now, this would mean that someone would have to pretend to need something upstairs just to bring him the butter dish. Once everyone is gone to school or work, Luke goes to the attic. He watches Matthew and Mark get on the bus from the front vent, and then spends the rest of the day watching the workmen put together the new houses. The houses are huge and these days, the workmen are painting and installing carpet.

Luke's family acts all the time as though they're being watched and can't trust anyone. This reflects how afraid they are of the Government, particularly if the Government were to discover Luke's existence. Though Luke now gets less time with his family, he has entertainment that changes daily as the workmen construct and finish the new houses. And watching the houses is something that only Luke gets to do, which helps him feel independent and as though he has his own thing to love.



The traffic in the new housing development starts to change, too. Luke watches fancy cars drive up to the houses and families get out. He realizes the visiting families want to buy the houses, so he studies his potential new neighbors. All the people who look at the houses are Barons, who are extremely rich and powerful. They look different from Luke's family members: the men all wear what Dad calls "sissy clothes," which are clean and dressy. Luke is embarrassed, but he can't figure out if he's embarrassed that the new people are dressed like that, or because his family *can't* dress like that.

Luke pays special attention when people show up with kids, and he keeps an eye out for any third children—though he knows nobody would dare bring a third child out in public. Maybe if a family moved in with only one kid, he could pretend to be their second child. Whenever Luke has a thought like that, he stops watching the houses and reads instead. Most of the books available are about farming, but there are a few adventure stories. They help him forget he's a third child.

Around noon, Dad comes in from the field to eat and Luke eats with him. Dad doesn't talk, but he turns on the radio until he leaves again. Mother comes home at 6:30 and gets right to work doing household chores, and Matthew and Mark don't visit Luke much since they have homework. The three boys used to be able to play outside after sundown, but now they're stuck playing checkers or cards. They'd all rather be outside. The best part of Luke's day is when Mother tucks him in—until the day that Mother falls asleep in the middle of a sentence. Luke tells Mother he's too old to be tucked in and swallows the lump in his throat.

CHAPTER 8

A few weeks later, Luke's family members leave in more of a rush than usual in the morning. Once they're gone, Luke peeks into the kitchen. It's a mess—and Mother forgot to open the window shade. Checking that the other shade is down too, Luke puts a foot out. He hasn't been in the kitchen in six months, and he could dance or even clean the kitchen. But the floor squeaks, so Luke hurries upstairs. He's disgusted with himself for being such a coward, but he tells himself he's just being cautious.

It's clear that Luke has heard of Barons before, but he hasn't seen any wealthy people before this. He's learning more about his world and its apparent income inequality by watching these families come see the houses. Luke's embarrassment is interesting. It's not like he's learning for the first time that his family is poor, but it may be a shock for him to see just how poor his family is compared to these Barons.



The fact that Luke is looking for third children at all highlights how alone he feels. He desperately wants to connect with someone, anyone, who might understand how he's feeling—but for now, he has no way of knowing if he's the only third child in the world or not. At this point, even daydreaming about leaving his current life feels dangerous, so Luke goes out of his way to stop himself from dreaming of more for himself.



The new routine, and particularly Mother's new job, means that Luke is left to his own devices more than ever before. And being inside all the time also starts to feel even more constricting. It makes Luke feel less connected to his brothers, too, since he knows neither of them want to be inside. It's a sign of Luke's burgeoning maturity when he asks Mother to stop tucking him in. He's giving up something he loves so that she can get some more sleep, something that's extremely selfless.



It's a sign of how difficult life is for Luke's family, and for Mother especially, that they leave the kitchen in such a mess. Mother will just have to attend to these chores later—but for now, her job at the factory takes precedence because it's how she earns money. Luke's parents have trained him to be cautious and afraid. Stepping into the kitchen isn't a simple, ordinary thing—it's an action that could lead to his death.



Luke climbs onto a trunk so he can look out the back vent. By now the houses are all occupied and Luke has made up names for all the families. There's the Big Car Family with their four big cars, the Birdbrain Family with their birdhouses, and the Sports Family. The Sports Family lives closest to Luke, so he has a good view of the two teenage sons' various sports equipment in their backyard. Today, Luke has a goal as he watches: he wants to see every person in the new neighborhood leave. He counts people and cars as the families leave the neighborhood and finally, Luke knows he's alone.

Luke is ecstatic. He's never made bread before, but he's seen Mother do it and figures it can't be too hard. Vacuuming would be too loud, but he can do other cleaning; and he can start supper later. Housework has never seemed exciting before, but now it seems like an amazing opportunity. So Luke walks right into the kitchen, scrubs every dish, and starts bread. He even turns the radio on quietly. A few hours later, as Luke is picking lint out of the carpet, he hears a car in the driveway. It's Dad. Suddenly, Luke is hyper aware of the radio and the smell of his bread in the oven. Crying, Luke tells Dad he was just trying to help, and he made sure nobody was at home in the neighborhood.

Dad scolds Luke that people in the neighborhood get deliveries and have maids. Luke could argue; he knows the maids don't come until the kids are home from school. But Dad asks what will happen if a Government inspector comes and finds bread baking in a house that's supposed to be empty. The timer on the oven goes off. Dad gives Luke a dirty look, pulls the bread out, and tells Luke to stay hidden upstairs. Luke races up the stairs. He wants to stomp, but he can't—it's too loud. Just to prove to himself that he was careful enough, Luke looks out the back vent. Nobody's in the neighborhood. But in the Sports Family's house, Luke sees a child's face in a window—a new face. The family already has two kids.

CHAPTER 9

Luke is so shocked that he almost falls off his trunk. The face isn't there when he looks out again, so maybe he imagined it. Or maybe one of the kids came home from school. He doesn't let himself think of what it might mean if the face belongs to a third child, but he spends the rest of the day staring at the Sports Family's house. In the evening, he watches the two teenage sons get home. They don't seem concerned about a thief, and Luke hasn't seen anyone else leave the house.

The fact that Luke has named all these families speaks to how isolated he is—making up names and stories for the new neighbors is one of the few ways he can entertain himself. This passage also highlights the coping mechanisms Luke has developed to keep himself safe; in this case, that's knowing exactly how many people live in the neighborhood so he can know if he's alone or not.



Recall that Luke's brothers and dad have looked down on anything that's considered even a little bit feminine, from accepting Mother's affection to clothes that aren't dirty. Luke recognizes that with his life so circumscribed, he has to look outside of what his family considers properly masculine in order to find anything to keep him entertained. Deciding to make bread and clean up also highlight how much Luke cares about his family and wants to contribute. However, he soon realizes this was a mistake: he's putting himself in danger, and is at least inviting Dad's anger.



Dad wants to keep Luke safe from the Government, and the only way he knows how to do that is to keep Luke locked up in his room, not doing anything that might make noise or otherwise attract attention. This is heartbreaking for Luke, who desperately wants to do anything but sit in his room by himself all day. However, it seems like things might change for Luke when Luke catches sight of this other child's face. It's too early for Luke to tell, but this may mean there are other kids like him out there—and he may have access to new friends as a result.



Keep in mind that Luke has gone his whole life not knowing if he's the only illegal third child in the world. The world starts to look a little different to him as he considers that there might be another third kid across the way. Notice too that Luke's attention is now fully focused on other people and not his family, something that's perhaps unsurprising in this situation but that nevertheless indicates that Luke is growing up and starting to look outside his family for support.



Soon after, Mother knocks on the door and lets herself in. She thanks Luke for his hard work, but tells Luke he can't keep doing housework. Luke says it's okay, but he knows it isn't. He asks Mother if she'd talk to Dad, but Mother insists Dad is just trying to protect him. Miserable, Luke decides that even if there is a third child living next door, it won't matter. They'll never see each other. Glumly, he asks Mother if he's just supposed to sit in the attic for the rest of his life. Mother says she'd love to spend a day reading and sleeping like Luke, but she doesn't understand. Maybe the third child in the Sports Family would understand.

Luke feels increasingly distant from his family members, since it's clear to him that they don't understand how demoralizing it is to sit in the attic and do nothing. Of course Mother thinks it'd be great to spend a day like Luke does; she's working long hours and clearly wants a day to herself. But that's not the same as being isolated all day, every day, for one's entire life. The only person Luke thinks might understand is the third Sports Family kid—this kid presumably lives a life much like Luke's, and to Luke, it seems likely they also resent hiding.



CHAPTER 10

At supper that night, Mother puts Luke's loaves on her special holiday plates—but Luke did something wrong, so the loaves are flat and misshapen. He wishes she'd just gotten rid of them. Ignoring this, Luke asks if he could sit with everyone else. It's cold out, so it wouldn't be suspicious to draw the shades. Dad says someone might see Luke through the shade, and Mother says that a fifth shadow through the shade might be suspicious. They're just trying to protect him. Luke is glad to be on his own on the stairs when Dad complains that he only got home early because he couldn't afford any farm equipment at the auction today—Luke can grumble without anyone knowing.

Mother is doing her best to try to help Luke feel better by making a big fuss over his bread. However, she doesn't understand that if Luke doesn't get to enjoy the bread at the table with the rest of his family, he's not interested in accepting her attention. Luke desperately wants to feel like he exists and is a valued member of his family—and sitting on the staircase, supposedly for his safety, is making him feel the opposite. Dad again highlights how poor the family is when he notes he couldn't afford anything at the auction.



Luke is even gladder to be by himself when Mark asks what's wrong with the bread. When Mother says Luke made it, Mark says, "Yuck." Luke jokes that he poisoned one of the loaves with something that will only kill Mark. Luke feels weird about the joke—he'd never poison anyone, but also, if one of his brothers died, would Luke be able to take their place and live a normal life? Mark makes a show of trying the bread and announces that it's terrible. Luke has to agree. Dad says that Luke doesn't have to get good at baking bread because one day he'll be married and have a wife to bake for him. Mark teases Luke about getting married, but Luke has a lump in his throat again. He's never getting married, since he's never leaving the house.

Luke's difficult situation is now leading him to think uncomfortable thoughts, such as what might happen if Mark were to actually die. Thinking this way is a direct result of growing up knowing that he only has to hide because he already has two brothers, so on some level, Luke has grown up resenting Matthew and Mark. This is another way that Luke's status as a third child is distancing him from his family. Then, it's even more difficult for Luke to realize he's never going to do adult things like get married. Marriage would mean meeting someone outside the family, and this would put him in danger. Dad also seems to joke about marriage in a very offhand way, suggesting he hasn't thought about how hurtful this comment might be—or, indeed, that Luke will probably never marry.



As the rest of his family teases Matthew about his girlfriend, Luke asks to be excused. Back in his room, he looks out the back vent. Some of the houses have their shades drawn, but Luke can see through most of the windows at the families eating dinner. The Sports Family is the only family with totally dark blinds.

The Sports Family's totally opaque blinds tell Luke that it's likely he was right, and he did see a third child in their home. Only people with something to hide—such as an illegal third child—would have privacy blinds like this, as far as Luke is concerned.



CHAPTER 11

Luke takes to watching the Sports Family's house all day long. It takes several days, but Luke does see signs of life when nobody is supposed to be home: blinds flickering, lights going on and off, and even what he thinks might be a glowing TV. Someone is there, but Luke doesn't know what to do about it.

Luke has never been able to take action based on any information he gathers. Recall how Dad scolded Luke just for trying to make bread, for instance. So Luke feels stuck here, as it's unthinkable to him to come up with a way to meet this other third child.



CHAPTER 12

Harvest season arrives, so Matthew and Mark stay home from school to help Dad. Mother also starts working overtime at the chicken factory. Luke dutifully doesn't complain, and he doesn't watch the Sports Family's house as much anymore. What's he going to do, anyway? But despite knowing he and the other third child can't just go out and play in the backyard, he starts to formulate an idea: to sneak into the Sports Family's house and meet the other kid. It's possible in theory. The Sports Family has a sliding glass door that they've been leaving open in the unseasonably warm weather. Luke thinks about going for days and finally, Luke decides he can't wait. He counts as everyone leaves the neighborhood and then runs out the back door.

The novel again highlights how poor Luke's family is when Matthew and Mark must stay home from school to help Dad harvest. The family's focus is on survival, not on becoming educated. Gradually, Luke's belief that he's incapable of doing anything starts to give way to wondering if he could perhaps take action. His habit of watching and learning is helping him now, as he sees exactly what he must do to get safely from his back door to that of the Sports Family. And as time goes on, doing something starts to seem necessary—this may be his only chance.



CHAPTER 13

For a moment, Luke stands against the house, breathing the fresh air. He's been inside for months now, and those months feel like a dream. But he knows being outside is dangerous, so he crouches and hurries along the barn. He pauses before he crosses the open expanse between the barn and the Sports Family's house—Luke has never been in such an open space before. He can almost hear Mother shouting for him to come inside. Luke knows he should go back, but instead, he runs forward. His house now feels like a prison. Luke sprints for the sliding screen door and tugs on it—but it's locked.

Being outside again is transformative for Luke. He remembers now how much he loves being outside—and his house might be safe, but Luke starts to wonder if it's better to live dangerously outside than to stay inside forever. As he crosses the yards, Luke also begins to build more of a life for himself that has nothing to do with his parents. He's disobeying them to do what he feels he must do. This is one way he continues to come of age.



CHAPTER 14

Luke hadn't decided what he'd do if the screen door was locked. He mutters that he's an idiot and struggles with the door, feeling exposed. Though Luke knows he should run back home, he instead punches through the screen and unlocks the door. He lets himself into the house.

At this point, Luke figures he's come too far to just go back home without trying his best to get into the Sports Family's house. This speaks to how essential he believes it is that he do this: he's willing to commit a crime, which could put him in danger, to experience something new.



Even though all the blinds are drawn, the house is still light and bright. Everything is neat and polished. Luke has never seen new furniture before, or such polished wood floors. He only moves deeper into the house when he hears a strange beeping noise coming from another room. When Luke reaches the room where he thinks the buzzing is coming from, he peeks inside. A girl is sitting at what Luke thinks is a computer, typing furiously. It's shocking to learn the Sports Family's third child is a girl.

Everything Luke notices about the Sports Family's house suggests that they're far wealthier than Luke's family is. So in addition to the shock of discovering another person for the first time, Luke is also getting his first look at how very wealthy people in his world live. Noting that Luke only thinks the computer is a computer shows how sheltered he is, and potentially that his family can't afford this kind of technology.



When Luke gulps, the girl turns around and tackles him to the floor. She pins him with his face in the carpet and tells him that the security guards will be here soon. Panicky, Luke says the security guards can't come. When the girl asks who Luke is and why the security guards can't get him, Luke says, "Population Police." The girl lets Luke go.

The girl seems just as concerned about intruders in her home as Luke would be if someone broke into his house—which gives more credence to the possibility that she's an illegal third child. Invoking the Population Police is the only thing Luke can think of to save himself—he fears the Population Police more than anything, as his life would end if they found him.



CHAPTER 15

As Luke sits up and massages his arm, the girl says he's lying—and then smiles and says Luke is "another one," and his code word is great. She'll use it for the rally. Seeing Luke's confused look, the girl asks if Luke is another shadow child. When this doesn't clear anything up, the girl says she thought "shadow child" was a universal term. In any case, she says, Luke is an illegal third child. She tries to get Luke to say that he's a third child and insists that it's nothing to be ashamed of—and then she leaps up, remembering the alarm system.

Everything the girl says and does is confusing for Luke—who, recall, hasn't met any people outside of his immediate family. But the girl does seem to confirm that she's also an illegal third child, and mentioning a rally suggests that she might be part of some political movement (though what that movement is is a mystery). Unlike Luke, though, this girl doesn't seem to see being a shadow child as a bad thing, since she says Luke shouldn't be ashamed of his status.



The girl races down the hall to a closet, opens it, and starts pushing buttons. She then picks up a phone, shocking Luke (Mother and Dad have told him the Government can identify people who shouldn't exist by tracing phone calls). The girl tells her dad to call the security company and reminds him that people found guilty of harboring a shadow child are fined five million dollars—or they're executed. She rolls her eyes as she listens. When she finally hangs up, Luke reminds her that the Government can find her now. But the girl laughs and says the Government isn't competent enough to do that sort of thing.

Luke is even more confused when the girl uses the phone—and makes jokes about the consequences to adults for protecting shadow children. The fact that she rolls her eyes suggests she's not taking this seriously, and she confirms that this isn't serious for her when she contradicts what Luke says about the Government. As far as the girl is concerned, the Government is nowhere near as competent and as concerned with hunting down shadow children as Luke has grown up believing.



Unconvinced that he's actually safe, Luke confirms that there was an alarm, and that the girl does have security guards. The girl initially scoffs that everyone has security guards, but then noticing Luke's worn clothes, admits that's maybe not true. Then, she explains that her family does employ security guards, but the guards don't know she's here. Still, she likes to set off the alarm sometimes for fun. She's not afraid of the guards, and her past antics definitely helped today—her dad didn't ask any questions as to why the security system needed to be shut off.

Luke is so confused. He just wants to get home safely, and then he'll stay there forever and never complain. Maybe this girl is just trying to distract him until the Population Police arrive. Seeing how anxious he is, the girl suggests they start over. Luke introduces himself, and she introduces herself as Jen. She says she's actually a Jennifer, but she confuses Luke by asking if she really looks like a Jennifer. Luke studies her sweatshirt and messy, short hair, but he doesn't understand what she means. He says he only knows Matthew, Mark, Mother, and Dad—and then silently wonders if he should've kept his family members' names secret. For the first time, he realizes people have all sorts of names he's never heard of. Jen explains that Jennifers are supposed to be "girly and prissy."

Jen asks if Luke has never met anyone except for his immediate family members. Luke says that as a third child, Jen certainly hasn't met anyone else either—but she says she has. Suddenly, Luke wants to cry. Why does Jen get to go out and do things and he doesn't? Have his parents been lying to him? He asks if Jen has to hide, and she says she does, but her parents are also good at bribing people. She asks Luke to explain how he found her. Luke starts from the beginning, with the **woods** coming down. Jen asks lots of questions and looks very concerned when Luke talks about seeing her face in the window. But she says that Luke found the right person. She's his ticket out of hiding.

CHAPTER 16

At supper that night, Mother asks three times if Luke wants more potatoes—it takes him that long to hear her and stop thinking about Jen. Luke desperately wants to tell his parents about her, but he knows they'd never let him go back if he did.

It's immediately clear to the girl and to Luke that they come from very different worlds. While the girl has grown up with security guards, has daily access to a computer, and doesn't take her safety seriously, Luke has grown up in poverty and afraid to so much as touch the phone. These differences make it a bit harder for the kids to connect, particularly because Luke is so confused and out of his element.



Luke is discovering that he's entirely unprepared for life outside his attic bedroom—he has no idea how to talk to Jen, and he doesn't know much about various cultural assumptions, such as how a girl named Jennifer should act. Particularly because it feels like Jen is speaking a different language, Luke is terrified and wants nothing more than to go back home, where he knows he's safe and where he knows how to act. He's beginning to see how big and varied the world is, and due to his sheltered upbringing, this is a lot to take in.



It's not yet clear exactly how or why Jen has grown up so differently than Luke has (though it likely has to do with her family being wealthy), but it's interesting that one of Luke's first thoughts is if his parents have been lying. They are the biggest authority in Luke's life—and suddenly, he wonders if he can trust them to ever tell him the truth. Jen then confirms that her privileged upbringing is thanks to her family's money, since she mentions bribing people to ensure her safety.



Up to this point, Luke has shared most details about his life with his parents. He's only recently begun keeping secrets, a sign that he's growing up and beginning to desire independence from his parents.



Luke thinks back over his day with Jen. First, Jen insists on setting up a signal to communicate whether it's safe for Luke to visit or not. She shows Luke the mirrors installed in her house that allow her to look outside without actually peering out the windows. At first, Luke wonders if Mother and Dad would set up something similar for him—but then he realizes such a system would be expensive. Jen suggests that Luke shine a flashlight her direction at nine every morning if he can come. Luke notes that his family doesn't have flashlights because they can't afford batteries.

Puzzled, Jen notes that Luke's family doesn't have flashlights or computers. Luke notes proudly that Mother and Dad do have a computer, but it's in the front of the house and Luke isn't allowed to touch it. Luke remembers when, as a three-year-old, he'd followed Mother into the office and touched the space bar. Mother had shrieked that "they" could find Luke and locked him in his room for several weeks after this whenever she couldn't supervise him directly. Rolling her eyes, Jen says the "Government propaganda stuff" is absurd; the Government can't afford to monitor every TV or computer. She's been using the computer since she was three.

Jen then suggests he signal with a candle, but Luke says they're kept in the kitchen and he can't go in there. Jen mocks Luke and says he's on a short leash, but Luke says his parents are just trying to protect him. Jen scoffs. Luke says he'll turn on the light by the back door. He's not allowed to do this either, but he wants to impress Jen.

Jen then tells Luke her story. Her parents had her on purpose. Jen's mom had two sons, Buellton and Brownley, with her first husband, so she and her second husband paid a lot of money to have a little girl. Her mom's current husband, whom Jen thinks of as her dad, is actually her stepdad. Jen explains that her mom got pregnant at the beginning of the gender selection experiments, so they made sure she was a girl, but the Government has since outlawed gender selection like that. Jen asks if Luke's parents were trying for a girl.

Jen's mirror system shows that while both her parents and Luke's parents have taken steps to protect their illegal third children, Jen's parents are able to take this a step further and give Jen more of a fun, interesting life. Due to their poverty, Luke's parents can't think about fun for Luke and can only keep him safe. Luke drives home how poor his family is when he notes that they can't even afford batteries.



Luke's recollection of touching the computer and scaring Mother shows clearly how paranoid his family is. As Jen suggests, Luke's family genuinely believes the Government is out to get them and can do so by monitoring every device in their house. Jen, though, insists that this is just propaganda, or lies designed to make the Government seem extra powerful. Since she has wealthy parents, it seems likely she has more information about how the government works than Luke does.



Up until now, it hasn't bothered Luke so much that he can't do all these things—recall how in the first chapter, for instance, the narrator noted that Luke has never obeyed Mother's order to hide. But Luke wants to impress Jen—a sign that he's shifting his focus away from his family and toward his new friend.



Jen's story drives home just how much money and power her family has. Recall that the Government "does things" to women after their second child—Jen's parents had the cash to not only sidestep sterilization, but also to pay for expensive assisted reproductive technology. Jen's tone suggests that this is normal for her, though. She has no idea that other people, like Luke, weren't aware that such a thing was even possible.



Luke explains that he was a surprise, and Jen responds that she didn't think Mother and Dad had "paid for" Luke. She apologizes and says Luke is just the first person she's ever met who wasn't a Baron. Luke is suddenly very aware of his old flannel shirt and patched jeans. Jen says it doesn't matter and anyway, Luke might be more helpful to her since he's not a Baron. She mentions a rally, asks if she can trust Luke, and then says she's not ready to talk about it with him yet. Luke is hurt, but Jen laughs. As they continue talking, Jen shares that Jen's dad is a lawyer with the Government—Government officials are corrupt. That's how she has internet access and such a nice house. Luke feels like he knows nothing now.

Soon after, Luke insists he leave. Jen walks him to the back door, but stops when she sees the blood on the carpet. Luke offers to clean it up, but instead, Jen cuts herself on the screen. She tells him to come back soon as Luke rushes out the door.

Back in the present, on the stairs eating his supper, Luke finally realizes how dangerous sneaking out was. He also realizes that Jen scares him. She'd cut her hand for him, just after they met. How could she do that?

CHAPTER 17

Over the next three days, Luke does nothing but remember his visit with Jen or think of his next visit. He can't go anywhere, though, because a Government inspector is on the farm the first day and Jen doesn't answer his signal on the third. What if she's sick, or what if she's been turned in? Luke tells himself that maybe Jen's parents are just planning to be home during the day. Finally, Jen signals back on the fourth day and Luke races over.

Jen explains that Jen's mom made her go shopping yesterday. Seeing Luke's incredulous look, Jen says the backseat of her family's car is hollowed out so she can hide, and then she has a forged shopping pass that says she's her mom's niece. She could still die if the Population Police found her, but her mom clearly thinks shopping is more important than Jen's life. Luke tries to picture hiding in the truck bed and going to town, but that won't work. Everyone in town knows Mother and Dad only have two sons. Jen says that shopping in the city was boring. Her mom wanted to buy her a dress and bras.

The fact that Jen has never met a non-Baron before shows how hierarchical society is in the novel. People of different social classes don't mix, which is why Jen keeps offending Luke (she has no idea how to be sensitive around someone with less money) and why Luke is just confused (his family focuses on survival, not on bribing Government officials). This is why Luke is so lost right now. It'd never occurred to him that bribery even existed, because he's never had enough money to consider using it for that purpose.



Jen might struggle to not offend Luke, but she is shockingly willing to sacrifice herself to keep them both safe. She is, in some ways, just as paranoid about keeping up her story as Luke is—but she has different ways of doing that.



Jen represents a whole new way of being. She's brave, she's wealthy, and she's willing to support her friends in ways Luke didn't know were possible. This is all new for him, and for now, it's unsettling for Luke to think about.



Luke's whole world has shifted since meeting Jen. While he hasn't been happy in a while just sitting in the attic, now he has something concrete to think about: his new friend. His fear for Jen's safety shows just how vulnerable Luke believes shadow children are. He doesn't truly believe she's just busy and not in trouble until he sees her in person again.



It's never occurred to Luke that third children could go out in public. Jen continues to make his life feel extremely small by telling him about all the things she can do—and that Luke knows he can't. Jen's tone is also pretty cutting as she talks about her mom prioritizing shopping over her daughter's safety. But the issue, Jen seems to imply, is her mother—she doesn't seem nearly as afraid of the Population Police.



Changing the subject, Jen says that she looked Luke up yesterday and he's "safe." Officially, he doesn't exist. Jen explains that she used Brownley's old fingerprinting kit to check one of Luke's prints against the national database. Luke wants to ask if the Population Police can find him now, but he barely understands what Jen is even describing.

Not noticing Luke's confusion, Jen says she can tell him about the rally and the secret chat rooms. But first, she offers potato chips and soda to Luke. Luke notes that these things are illegal. The Government shut down junk food factories years ago. Luke has only had potato chips once; Mother shared a bag with him that she'd saved for years and Luke didn't like them, though he pretended to. Jen shoves a bowl of chips at Luke—and these chips are delicious.

Jen asks if Luke ever goes hungry. Luke says he doesn't, but Jen explains that lots of shadow children do. They don't have ration cards, and their families don't always share. Luke says that his food comes from his family's garden, and when they still had pigs, they'd trade for beef and such. Jen is incredulous—she doesn't get meat often. She explains that the Government is trying to make everyone, even Barons, eat vegetarian diets since vegetables are more efficient. Luke notes that his family used to feed the grain the Government didn't want to their hogs, but now Dad lets the excess grain rot.

Suddenly ecstatic, Jen says she's going to post that on a bulletin board and leads Luke into the computer room. She boots up her computer as Luke stands carefully to the side, where he can't see the screen. Jen tells him to sit down—the Government is "incompetent and stupid," and they're not watching. Luke sits and watches Jen type that there would be more meat if the Government would let farmers feed their animals excess grain. The words then disappear. Jen explains that she put it on a Department of Agriculture bulletin board; hopefully someone will see it, think about it, and change things.

Luke is extremely confused. Jen explains that this matters because the Government passed the Population Law to make sure people would always have enough food. Outlawing third children was supposed to make sure everyone else had enough to eat. Suddenly, Luke feels extremely guilty about the potato chips. He thinks that his food would just go to Mark and Matthew, who aren't starving—but he also remembers the homeless man who hadn't eaten in three days.

Luke might not know exactly what Jen is talking about, but he knows enough about the Government to realize that Jen could've put him in real danger by scanning his fingerprint. Even if the Population Police might not be able to locate him, they may still know now that some other illegal child exists.



Though Mother seems to have intended the potato chips as a treat, potato chips don't keep for years—so it's no wonder Luke didn't like them. Pretending to like them was Luke's attempt to protect Mother's feelings, something that highlights Luke's maturity. Jen's chips, though, are presumably fresh and tasty. Luke is getting another perspective on how little his family has compared to the wealthy.



In some ways, Luke enjoys privileges that even wealthy people like Jen can't, such as having regular access to fresh meat. It's also interesting that Luke seems to have no idea that the Government is trying to make people eat vegetarian diets, which suggests that they perhaps aren't paying as much attention to poor farmers as much as Luke's parents think they are. The aside about Dad having to let his grain rot now also shows that the Government isn't very efficient: it may insist it is, but in reality it's creating a system that produces a lot of waste.



As far as Jen is concerned, Luke doesn't need to be as careful as he is. But Luke has been trained his whole life to believe his life depends on being careful, so breaking these habits is difficult for him. It's also hard to comprehend the possibility that the Government is "incompetent and stupid," since Luke's family believes the Government is all-knowing, all-seeing, and all-powerful. Posting Luke's observation about the grain is the first way Jen demonstrates to Luke that they can protest and advocate for a better, fairer world.



Notice that as soon as Jen explains the Government's reasoning for the Population Law, Luke immediately feels guilty. He's compassionate and doesn't want to hurt people—but he also believes what the Government says, so it never occurs to him to consider whether the Government is actually right or not. And he knows that at least a few people are hungry, which seems to give more credence to the Government's position.



Jen laughs and says the Government is wrong. According to Jen's dad, there's enough food, but it's not distributed right. They have to abolish the Population Law, and that's why Jen is organizing the rally. The rally, she explains, is going to entail hundreds of shadow children marching on the president's house to demand the same rights as everyone else. Luke can come too. It'll be great.

CHAPTER 18

Luke stares blankly at Jen. It's frightening enough to run from his house to hers, where there's probably nobody watching. The prospect of being in public and asking the Government for rights is terrifying. Jen says she's scared too, but once they've held the rally, they'll be free. They won't have to hide anymore, and it'll be a relief. She tells Luke to think about it and turns to her computer.

On the computer screen, words are appearing quickly. Someone named Carlos writes that it's 105 degrees and his parents won't run the air conditioning for him. Sean suggests Carlos turn it up and then turn it off before his parents get home, and someone named Yolanda says she can't wait to hear Jen's opinion on the matter. Quickly, Jen types a sarcastic response and when she presses a key, the words appear on the screen. Confused, Luke asks if this is a game—maybe these people are imaginary friends. But Jen explains that this is a secret chat room for third children. Sean, she says, even has a brother who's a fourth child.

As Jen explains that she'd be lost without these online friends, she writes a message to the chat room that she's here with another third kid named Luke. Several people respond with greetings to Luke, but Luke panics—the Government can surely find him now. Jen assures Luke he's safe, since the chat room is password protected. She insists that if it wasn't safe, the Government would've found her a long time ago. Luke argues that Jen's parents can keep her safe by bribing people, but his can't. In response, Jen says her parents can't totally protect her from the Population Police. That's why they have to hold the rally, so that everyone can live their lives without having to bribe people. Jen explains that she created the chat room with her parents' help; there are now 800 kids using it. The password is "free."

Finally, Jen explains exactly what's going on with the rally. By proposing a rally, Jen suggests that it's her responsibility to stand up to the Government and advocate for rights for kids like her. Participating like this, in her opinion, is the only way to change things for the better.



Jen seems to have no qualms about going into public and demanding rights, but Luke has been raised to fear the Government. So while Jen might be right that if the rally works they won't have to hide anymore, Luke can't get past the fact that going to the rally at all seems like a dangerous idea.



Remember that Jen has never met anyone who wasn't a Baron before, and these kids in the chat room seem to also be Barons. In this world, air conditioning seems to only exist in the homes of wealthy people—so if Carlos has access to air conditioning, his family is certainly wealthy. It's shocking for Luke to discover essentially that there are a bunch of kids in the world who are like Jen: wealthy and in hiding. They're kind of like him, but they have privileges he's never dreamed of.



It's worth considering that Jen's parents' ability to bribe people might offer her more security than she realizes. In other words, there may be more reasons than her password for why the Government hasn't found the chat room yet—and if Jen's parents are pulling strings, that's something that Luke's parents can't also do to protect him. Unlike Luke's parents, Jen's realize that their daughter needs an outlet, which is why they helped put the chat room together in the first place. Jen isn't totally isolated from the world, which contributes to her happiness.



CHAPTER 19

Later, Jen sends Luke home with two books and several computer printouts. When Luke gets home, he flips through *The Population Disaster* and can barely understand a word of it—it's written like the government letters that Dad struggles to understand. The printouts are short, but no easier to read. Though Luke is tempted to ask Jen to just explain the books to him, he doesn't. She offended him earlier by asking if he could read, so he settles in with the dictionary to prove to her that he can read. With the dictionary's help, Luke spends the next few days buried in the books. Dad is in and out of the house often since it's raining, so Luke keeps [Treasure Island](#) nearby to hide what he's actually reading.

On the fourth day, Dad comes upstairs and offers to play cards with Luke. Dad explains that there's nothing for him to do outside during the winter with all the pigs gone. Without thinking, Luke asks if Dad could grow things in the basement with special lights (he's just read a chapter on hydroponics, or growing things in water, in one of the books). Dad seems interested, though not suspicious about where Luke heard of such a thing—but Luke is terrified Dad will find out what he's been up to. Soon after, Dad leaves.

Luke wishes he had the nerve to ask Dad about the Population Law, the famines, or family history. Now that he's gotten used to the difficult language in the books, Luke is learning all sorts of things. He's learned that about 20 years ago, there got to be too many people on Earth. People in poorer countries were starving, and things were bad—and then things got worse when a three-year drought meant that the biggest food-producing countries couldn't grow anything. Luke's country began rationing food, forced junk food factories to make healthy food, and made farmers move to more fertile land. (This, Luke suspects, is why his family doesn't live near his grandparents.) In addition, Luke's country passed the Population Law to make sure there would never be too many people to feed.

Luke is trying to figure out the type of person he wants to be—and in this case, he wants to be someone who can read and interpret things for himself, rather than ask others to interpret things for him. This is a huge step forward in terms of maturity, as up to this point Luke has pretty much allowed his parents to interpret everything about the world for him. Jen shows again that she struggles to kindly connect with someone who's grown up without her privilege by assuming that perhaps Luke didn't know how to read.



Now that Luke is starting to build a life of his own, it's imperative that he keep it a secret from his parents. If Dad finds out that Luke has been seeing Jen, Dad will put a stop to it—so in some ways, Dad is becoming Luke's enemy. Fortunately, though, Dad doesn't question where Luke heard of or came up with the idea of hydroponics, so Luke's secret is safe for now.



Luke has never been able to engage with his parents honestly, like they're equals. This is in part because they continue to see him as a little boy who needs protection, not as a boy who's fast approaching adulthood. As Luke reads, he thinks critically for the first time about why his world is the way it is. He doesn't question the truth of what the book says about the famine, but it does make him wonder about how his family ended up where it is, farming like they do. Being able to think critically like this is an essential part of starting to grow up and come of age.



Now, whenever Luke eats, he feels guilty—is someone else starving because he exists? Maybe the Government is right and Luke shouldn't exist. He feels a bit better when he reads the printouts, since they say the Population Law is “evil” and suggest that what's happening to shadow children is genocide. The next time Luke sees Jen, he asks her how the books and the articles can say such different things. Which view is correct? Jen says that the Government allowed the books to be published and maybe even paid for them, so that's government propaganda. The articles' authors put themselves at risk to publish, so the articles are right. Luke asks why Jen even made him read the books in that case, and Jen says they prove how “stupid” the Government is. But the books look so official. Can Luke really just decide that what's in them isn't true?

Initially, Luke takes the books seriously and begins to question if he actually has the right to exist. This stunts his development a bit, as he's essentially wondering if he has the right to grow up and continue to use resources. The printouts complicate things further by not addressing the food scarcity issues, and instead just condemning the Population Law as “evil” and as genocide. It's worse, the printouts seem to suggest, to force kids like Luke to feel bad, or to hide or die, than it is to have more people to feed to begin with. Jen doesn't have to think hard about which she believes: the printouts tell her she's supposed to exist. But Luke, having grown up not knowing he could question the Government, is less willing to all of a sudden start writing them off as out of touch.



CHAPTER 20

To Luke's surprise, the winter is mild, and since there's no snow to leave footprints in, he visits Jen often. He even stops getting so anxious about running across the yards—Dad is the only person Luke worries about, since he's usually inside during the winter. But even Dad is often gone; he spends a lot of time at the library researching hydroponics. Luke brags to Jen one day that he got Dad excited about hydroponics after reading about it in one of Jen's books. Jen asks if the Government will actually let Dad grow plants that way—they take issue with all sorts of odd things for no apparent reason.

Luke is slowly adjusting to his new life and the increased freedom he has right now. It also feels good that he was the one to suggest hydroponics—it makes Luke feel more useful in his family than he perhaps ever has. Jen, though, calls into question whether Luke is actually being helpful, since she reminds him that the Government isn't at all logical about their laws. The lack of logic may be part of how the Government gains control: by being unpredictable, and by demanding people obey anyway.



Jen turns back to her computer and rejoins the chat room conversation about fake IDs. Carlos, Pat, and Yolanda discuss the expense and whether it's better to wait until they're older and can get an adult ID. Jen angrily types that they shouldn't need fake IDs. She's been refusing to get one for years because she wants ID that says who she really is. This is why they need the rally; none of them should have to hide. After she sends her message, Luke timidly asks about the ID Jen uses to go shopping with Jen's mom. Jen says that's just a shopping pass; the kids in the chat room are talking about taking on fake identities permanently and going to live with new families.

Jen frames the ID issue as a matter of dignity. Having their own IDs, with their real names, would give shadow children the dignity and respect that they crave. Fake IDs of all sorts, she insists, are just a way of giving up and giving in to a system that would rather they not exist at all. And again, Jen makes it clear that she believes public protest is the only way to change things. She is unwilling to accept a middle ground—if these kids won't come to the rally, they're against her.



Luke asks if Jen would really rather hide, but he also can't imagine becoming a new person and living with a new family. Jen snaps that a fake ID is just a different way of hiding. This is why she has to convince everyone to go to the rally. The chat is silent for a moment, and then Carlos snarkily suggests Jen watch her blood pressure. Jen turns off the computer and screams in frustration. She says she can't take it anymore. Why aren't any of her other friends taking this seriously? Luke suggests that they just express themselves differently—the kids make jokes, while Jen screams.

The way that Luke thinks about fake IDs suggests he's learning about them for the first time—another sign of how poor his family is (since in the previous passage it was implied that the IDs are expensive). It's inconceivable to Jen that her online friends might not agree with her completely about how terrible and dehumanizing fake IDs are. But in general, Jen tends to downplay how afraid other shadow kids are of getting caught—recall how sharp she's been with Luke when he's expressed fear of the computer, for instance.



Luke is proud of himself for making this realization, since he doesn't know many people. He wonders how each of his family members would handle having to hide, and he realizes that he's the best suited to having to hide. Jen, though, scoffs at Luke's suggestion and turns her computer back on—she has to get everyone on board with the rally by April. She barely seems to notice Luke slip away hours later.

Again, Luke is starting to think critically, a sign of his increasing maturity. However, he does miss that he's perhaps best suited to hiding because he's been hiding his whole life—it would be a major upset if one of his brothers had to hide, as they've been free their whole lives. So he's thinking more critically, but he's not yet skilled at seeing all the reasons why things are the way they are.



CHAPTER 21

Dad gets a letter from the Government forbidding him from growing things indoors in February. After reading the books from Jen, Luke is the only one who can decipher the difficult language. He explains that the Government is afraid Dad will grow something illegal, and they want to confiscate the supplies. Mark giggles at the thought of Dad growing drugs, but Dad says this is serious—they might not be able to afford shoes next year. Dad says he could get a permit, but Luke has just finished the part of the letter that states the Government doesn't give permits for hydroponics.

Being able to decode the letter from the Government is a sign of how much Luke has changed over the last few months. He might not be in school, but thanks to Jen, Luke is receiving an education of sorts. Luke doesn't seem concerned in this case about Dad wondering where Luke learned to read this kind of language, which suggests Luke is growing more comfortable with the life he leads separate from his parents. And again, the Government shows how unpredictable and controlling it is by denying the permit in the first place.



Luke wonders again if his family could afford more things if he wasn't around. He tells himself he doesn't eat much and exclusively wears hand-me-downs, and it's not like the attic is sufficiently heated. Even worse than these worries, though, is the fact that Dad now has nothing to do and so is home a lot. Luke only visits Jen three times in February and March, but she's always thrilled to see him. They bake cookies, play games, and Jen shares stories about her life. Her mom used to take her to a play group for third children. Most of the kids there had parents in Government, and it seemed like some parents didn't really want the kids—having a third child was more of a status symbol than anything else.

It's another clue that the Government is perhaps less effective than it wants people to think that it essentially tells Dad to sit at home and do nothing all winter. Their goal seems to be control, not actually creating a functional food production system. It's no doubt a shock for Luke to hear about the play group for third children, and it highlights Jen's privilege once again. It also shows where she may have learned to stand up for what she believes in, if she thought some parents were having more than two kids to make a statement and defy the Government.



Jen says at the play group, she also got to spend time with another kid's dog. Luke is incredulous; nobody can keep pets anymore. Jen says that's because of the food issues; there's more food for people if they don't also have to feed a bunch of pets. Suddenly, Luke feels guilty for taking food away from animals as well as people. Seeing his expression, Jen reminds him it's all a lie—especially now that people aren't having enough babies. This piques Luke's interest.

Even if Luke wants to believe Jen is right about the Government lying about food scarcity, deep down he still seems to suspect that it's not morally right for him to exist. Again, Luke doesn't want to be responsible for causing someone else to starve, whether that starving being is human or animal. Accepting this responsibility, though, also points to Luke's youth: as one kid, he's only a tiny part of the problem, but he doesn't fully grasp this.



Jen explains how after passing the Population Law, the Government launched a campaign to make women think having kids was bad. They made pregnant women out to be criminals, insisted pregnancy makes women ugly, and now, pregnant women can't be in public. She starts to mention the rally, but Luke distracts her by asking what pregnant women do. Jen says they hide, just like shadow children, though some also pretend they're gaining weight.

The conversation turns to whether Jen and Luke's brothers would turn them in if they could. Jen says that Brownley and Buellton love her, and she jokes that they also aren't smart enough to not get the whole family in trouble. Luke insists Mark and Matthew would never give him up, but Jen asks if they might someday be motivated by the cash reward for turning him in. Luke remains firm, but he also feels like his brothers are outgrowing him these days. When Luke crawls home later, he thinks hiding isn't so bad—as long as he has Jen. Dad will also be in the fields planting soon. But April, and the rally, arrive before planting season.

CHAPTER 22

The first two weeks of April are rainy, so Luke doesn't see Jen at all. Finally, when the rain stops and Dad goes to the fields to plow, Luke runs over to Jen's house. Jen is thrilled to see Luke—she says she thought she'd just have to pick Luke up on Thursday for the rally. Luke's heart pounds as Jen explains that she's going to take her parents' car, pick up Luke and three other kids, and drive to the president's house. Leading Luke to the couch, Jen explains that she hacked into the Population Police database and switched some officers' schedules around; there will be more officers off that day than usual. Luke realizes that Jen was so relaxed during his last visits because they were breaks from planning the rally. She looks exhausted, but giddy too.

Luke asks what happens if someone finds out what Jen did, but Jen assures Luke that won't happen. As she starts to say she'll pick Luke up late at night, Luke asks what happens at the rally if someone calls the Population Police. Again, Jen isn't worried; she insists the Population Police won't harm a crowd of a thousand kids, especially not kids with parents in the Government. Not meeting Jen's eyes, Luke asks what happens if no other shadow children come. Jen scoffs. Carlos wasn't serious a few months ago, but he's been helping to plan this thing. She asks Luke whether he wants his protest sign to say "I deserve a life" or "Give me liberty or give me death!"

The Government has essentially criminalized pregnancy, even if a woman is pregnant with her first or second child. This is another attempt to control the population and if Jen is right and not enough women are having babies, it's been successful. The Government's propaganda machine seems strong and competent.



Neither Jen and Luke think their siblings would turn them in, but Jen wants to know if Luke's family's poverty would change things down the line. Essentially, she suggests that Mark and Matthew might one day want financial relief more than they want to do the difficult work of sheltering their brother—an idea that seems to root in Luke's mind, even as he tells Jen she's wrong. It's a sign of how important Jen's friendship is to Luke that he thinks hiding is alright with a friend. She's making his life livable right now—though the ominous ending here suggests his happiness will soon end.



Luke runs to Jen's house expecting a fun, casual hangout—but instead, he's caught off guard by her talk of the rally. The way Jen talks shows that she's serious about making the rally work: she's figured out how to hack into the Government sites, she's figured out how to drive, and she's been dedicating most of her time to this project for the last several months. In her opinion, she's also doing everything she can to protect herself and the other protesters, as by making sure fewer officers than usual will be off duty.



Luke hasn't been raised to believe that something like this rally could happen, so all he sees are the potential problems and dangers. He suspects the Population Police are more ruthless than Jen gives them credit for, and he also suspects there are plenty of shadow kids who, like him, are terrified by the idea of a rally. Jen, though, is extremely confident—she trusts that the Population Police won't hurt children. This seems like a misstep if it's true that, as Jen and Luke have both said, the Population Police's entire job is to kill shadow kids like them.



Luke imagines the eight-hour drive to the president's house. It'd be physically easy, but terrifying—and then he'd have to get out, be in public, and carry a sign. Sweating, Luke says he can't go. He asks if there's some other choice besides hiding or going to the rally. Very seriously, Jen says that Luke would be a coward for staying and waiting for someone else to change things for him. She says he'll forever regret not going, he deserves to live, and no matter what he says, he does hate hiding. Luke knows she's right; he desperately wants to be outside again. But he argues that he's not brave like Jen.

Jen says she'd argue that Luke is the brave one, since he's the one risking his life to run over to her house. Luke says he's just protecting Jen, since Dad is home all the time. Bitterly, Jen tells Luke that if he really cares about her, he'll come. But Luke tells Jen she's "crazy," and it's too dangerous for either of them to go. Jen tells Luke to go away. Luke tries to say that he hopes this will work, but Jen snaps that hope is useless and action is the only way forward. Luke runs home.

CHAPTER 23

Luke is so angry when he gets home that he lets the kitchen door slam behind him. Jen is so superior and thinks that just because she's a privileged Baron she's special. She's "just some dumb old girl," and Luke wishes he'd never met her. Luke thinks Jen can go flaunt her status as a third child at the president's house, and he hopes someone shoots her. But as soon as he has this thought, he wishes he could take it back. Remembering her sign slogan "Give me liberty or give me death," Luke wonders if she's actually prepared to die. If she is, he should go to protect her.

Hours later, Mother finds Luke with his head in his hands. He wants to tell Mother everything, but then Mother says she knows Luke is safe at home. Luke realizes he can't tell Mother. He can't betray Jen. He insists he's fine.

Luke might be able to admit that he doesn't want to hide anymore—his increased happiness now that he has a friend is proof enough that he craves connections in the outside world. But he's too cautious and afraid to do more than be her friend right now. Jen finds this offensive, as she can't see someone who isn't willing to go to the rally as fully committed to freeing shadow children from hiding.



Jen crystallizes her beliefs about protest when she snaps that action is the only way forward. And she may be right that protest is the only way forward—if the only other option is to simply stay in hiding. But she seems to totally discredit other ways of creating change, such as when she posted Luke's insight about farm waste on the agriculture bulletin board in Chapter 17.



For the first time in his life, Luke is letting his emotions show a little bit, as when he lets the door slam. This suggests that he's becoming less afraid of the Government getting him, thanks to Jen's tutelage. Wishing for Jen's death highlights how afraid Luke is—but it's also impossible for him not to wonder if Jen will die. She seems afraid of so little, especially compared to Luke.



Because of all the emotions he's experiencing, Luke wants to be a little boy who can tell his mother everything so she'll comfort him. It's a sign of his maturity that he doesn't—he has to protect Jen, which means dealing with his emotions on his own.



CHAPTER 24

Luke spends three days worrying about Jen and the rally. But whether he wants to demand an apology, persuade her to stay, or ask to go with her, he has to see her—and that's impossible, since it's pouring and Dad is stuck inside. So on Thursday night, Luke dozes off imagining Jen driving. He wakes up to a flashlight sweeping across his face. It's Jen. She talks about unimportant things, like how steep Luke's stairs are and how it's a good thing his family doesn't have a dog, but Luke stops her. He says he still can't go. His parents are farmers, not Baron lawyers, and only Barons can change history. People like him, he says, just let things happen to them.

Jen starts to argue, but then apologizes for pressuring Luke the other day. Before she goes, she wants Luke to know he was a good friend and she'll miss him. Luke insists that she'll be back. If the rally works, he might even come in through the front door. Jen tells Luke goodbye.

CHAPTER 25

Luke lies awake all the rest of the night and in the morning, he gets up and scrubs the mud Jen tracked in off the stairs. Hopefully she thought about all the details for the rally. He just has time to hide his dirty rags and sneak back to bed when Mother gets up. She notes that she heard something during the night, so Luke says truthfully that he had trouble sleeping. But he insists he's fine.

Once Mother, Dad, Matthew, and Mark leave, Luke risks turning on the radio. He listens to weather reports, music, and news of a car wreck, but nothing about the rally. When Dad comes inside for lunch, Luke asks him to turn the radio on again. Again, there's nothing about the rally, and this continues for days. Luke listens to the radio when he can and flashes his signal toward Jen's house, but she never responds. He watches Jen's family closely, but they seem to be behaving normally. Desperately, he suggests Mother go introduce herself to the new neighbors—but Mother scoffs that they're Barons and have been in their house for months now. By the end of the week, Luke decides to come up with a plan.

What Luke says about only Barons changing history shows that he's developed an understanding of how money affects a person's outlook. It's his parents' poverty, he implies, that means they're so afraid of the Government and so believe the Government's propaganda. Jen, on the other hand, has the money to be able to buy things most people can't, so she sees how weak the Government actually is and believes she can change it. For now, it's unclear if this view is correct in the world of the novel or not.



It's ominous when Jen doesn't really respond to Luke talking about coming in the front door. It suggests that she might be prepared to die at the rally, particularly since her goodbye to Luke seems awfully final. It's unclear if Luke picks up on this, though.



Luke demonstrates his loyalty to Jen by hiding the fact that she visited at all. But he remains anxious and hopeful that the rally will be successful, assuming Jen thought of everything she needed to. Insisting he's fine is another way he shows how mature he's become, as he's unwilling to burden Mother with his concerns.



Luke listens to the radio because, presumably, he expects the Government to tell the truth about whatever happens at the rally. When he hears nothing in the days after the rally was supposed to take place, though, it seems as though Luke once again overestimated the Government, or misjudged its aims. Eventually, Luke feels like he has no choice but to take matters into his own hands. It's essential, he believes, to find out what happened to Jen—and to do so, he must act alone.



CHAPTER 26

A week and a half after the rally, the weather finally clears and Dad plans to spend the whole day in the fields. Luke turns on the light to signal to Jen, but when he gets no response, he creeps across the yards anyway. He has to break the window and rip the screen door, but he decides Jen can come up with an excuse—he has to get in. Luke remembers the sequence of buttons to push to disable the alarm, so he disables it and then searches the house, calling for Jen. He can't find her anywhere in the huge house.

Finally, Luke goes to the computer room and fumbles as he tries to type “free” in to access the chat room. But when Luke gets into the chat room, there's nothing there—nobody is talking. Shaking, he types out “Where's Jen?” Nobody answers. He types more and when no one answers, he shouts at the computer that he has to know. Suddenly, the door opens behind him. A man's voice says he has a gun, and Luke should say who he is and why he's here.

CHAPTER 27

Slowly, Luke turns around. Guns have been illegal for a long time now, but Luke has seen pictures of big guns meant for hunting deer or wolves. This one is small—it's meant to kill people. Luke looks to the big man holding the gun and sees the man is Jen's dad. He then says he's a friend of Jen's and just wants to know where she is. At this, Jen's dad relaxes, lowers the gun, and walks around to turn off the computer.

Realizing Jen's dad is willing to talk, Luke shares that he's a third child and a neighbor. He tells Jen's dad how he learned Jen existed, and he admits that Jen showed him how to disable the alarm. Jen's dad says that “given the circumstances,” he set the system to notify him of any alerts, which is why he's here now. Luke doesn't ask what the “circumstances” are. Then, Jen's dad asks what Luke and Jen did during their visits. Luke explains that they chatted, and Jen talked about the rally. When Jen's dad asked why Luke didn't try to stop Jen from going to the rally, Luke says that's like “trying to stop the sun.” Jen's dad smiles, but only a bit.

Luke might not be totally aware, but sneaking to Jen's house in search of answers is one way that he can fight the Government propaganda. To believe the radio (which seems to be controlled by the Government), nothing happened—but Luke isn't willing to take that for an answer. He knows too much now to not think more critically about things.



Luke goes to the only place he thinks might have answers: Jen's secret chat room. So it's devastating when that doesn't give Luke any information, as he's not sure where else to turn. Things take a turn for the worse, and become even more frightening, when this man appears. Luke could be in even more danger now.



Guns make a person powerful anyway because of the damage they can cause, but in Luke's society, having a gun also likely means that a person is wealthy or well-connected. Both seem to be the case with Jen's dad; recall Jen said he works for the Government.



It's a clue that there's more going on than Luke realizes when Jen's dad mentions the “circumstances”; the novel will return to this mystery soon. Jen's dad also makes it clear that he had no idea that Jen was planning the rally—she planned it all on her own. Luke makes the case that Jen was far too stubborn for anyone to be able to stop her; he was seldom, if ever, able to convince her she was wrong about anything.



His voice breaking, Jen's dad says that Jen is dead. Luke accuses the man of lying. This is just a nightmare. But Jen's dad continues. He says that he got her body back because he's in the Government, but they couldn't bury her with the family, and he hasn't gotten any time off to grieve. Hoping the car crashed, Luke asks how she died. Jen's dad says "they" shot all 40 kids who showed up for the rally and then cleaned up the blood immediately. Nobody knows the rally happened. Luke argues that according to Jen, thousands of kids would be there. Jen's dad wryly says that Jen had too much faith in other shadow children.

Luke cries that Jen's death is his fault, since he refused to go. But Jen's dad says this isn't true: Luke couldn't have stopped Jen, and he's sure "they" would've still killed all the protesters, even if there'd been thousands. Sobbing now, Jen's dad asks why Jen did this—did she think the rally would work? Luke says Jen truly believed in the rally, but privately, he's not sure that's true. He wonders if perhaps she knew she'd die—she was willing to sacrifice herself and cut her wrist on the screen the first day she and Luke met, after all. She believed in helping others.

Still crying, Jen's dad asks if Jen wanted to die. Luke says she didn't want to die, and she didn't want to hide—she wanted to live. Saying these words makes Luke feel close to Jen, and it makes it seem like she's still alive. With a sigh, Jen's dad says he has bad news: by logging into the chat room, Luke set off alarms at the Population Police headquarters. He's managed to cover up that he's Jen's dad, but they will know the message came from his computer. Luke might be in danger now. Luke asks if he's in more danger than usual, and Jen's dad says he is—the Population Police will be looking for him now. Jen's dad offers to get Luke a fake ID. He can do this, he says, because he works for the Population Police.

CHAPTER 28

Luke screams. Totally out of control, he snatches the gun from Jen's dad and points it at him. Carefully, Jen's dad says it'd be nice to die and not have to grieve for Jen anymore, but he is on Luke's side. Luke studies Jen's dad for a moment, wondering if he can trust him. He lowers the gun, and Jen's dad gently puts it on the desk. Then, Jen's dad says he doesn't agree with the Population Police, so he works there to sabotage them from within. He explains some things that Luke doesn't grasp, and then asks how much history Luke knows. Luke points out the books Jen gave him to read and says she also gave him some printouts. Jen's dad says he's heard both sides' propaganda, but he hasn't heard the truth.

Finally, Luke learns the truth about what happened to Jen, and about the "circumstances" Jen's dad mentioned: Jen, and the other protesters, were all murdered. The implication is that the Population Police killed the children, showing that Jen was wrong to trust that the Population Police would let a bunch of shadow children live. Jen's dad also suggests that Jen was more committed to the cause than most other shadow children, if there were only about 40 protesters.



Jen's dad paints the Population Police as totally heartless: it's nothing for them, he insists, to murder thousands of children to support the Government. As Jen's dad question Jen's thought process, Luke starts to think more critically about Jen. He understands that her main goal was to help others, and she may have seen herself and the rally as small parts of a much larger protest movement.



As Luke says that Jen wanted to live rather than hide or die, he essentially realizes that hiding isn't truly living. So in this sense, he comes to finally agree with Jen: he can't spend his whole life in hiding. Things get more complicated, though, as Jen's dad explains the trouble Luke is in and that he works for the Population Police. However, it's interesting that he offers to get Luke a fake ID despite working for the organization designed to murder kids like Luke—he's protesting an inhumane system in his own way.



What Jen's dad says about working to sabotage the Population Police from within shows that Jen wasn't correct; there are many different ways to protest, and public rallies aren't the only way. Using his privilege and his connections, Jen's dad is perhaps able to do more to help shadow kids than Jen's rally did (though the novel never confirms this for sure). Jen's dad also goes out of his way to speak to Luke like Luke is an adult capable of understanding how complex things are. This will help Luke continue to mature and learn to think critically.



Luke is confused, but Jen's dad explains that the Government wants people to believe them, so they stretch the truth—and the people on the other side handpick their statistics to support their position. Luke snaps that Jen said the printouts were correct, but Jen's dad says she believed what she wanted to. Swallowing hard, he says he encouraged her to read that stuff because he wanted to give her hope. He just never thought she'd go this far with that information.

Luke asks what the truth actually is—and Jen's dad says that nobody knows. People have been lying for a long time and the Government is totalitarian, so they dislike the truth on principle. He explains that before the famines, their country believed in things like democracy and equality, but the famines led to riots over food and lots of people died. A General Sherwood came to power, and he promised law, order, and food—and technically, that's what they got. Luke struggles to comprehend what he knows is “grown-up talk, pure and simple.”

Luke quips that Barons got more than anyone else, which makes Jen's dad laugh. Jen's dad says he's not proud of it, but the Government chose to allow some people to enjoy special privileges. He mentions junk food. It's technically illegal, but nobody gets arrested for providing junk food to Barons—and all Government officials are Barons. Jen's dad continues that the Government keeps everyone else near poverty because people are more willing to work that way. They help people who cooperate, which is why Luke has probably heard his parents talking about how farmers don't lose their farms anymore. Luke wonders if his parents' money worries are unfounded.

Luke points out that Barons still have to follow the Population Law, and he asks if there are actually too many people. Jen's dad says there probably aren't. If people hadn't panicked and lied after the crisis, the Government might not have had to take people's rights away. However, the Population Law was General Sherwood's biggest accomplishment, and it allows him to say that he controls everything. Luke confirms that the law is wrong, and Jen's dad says he believes it is. This is a relief; Luke's existence is just illegal, not morally wrong. Maybe if he'd believed Jen entirely, he would've gone to the rally and died. Just as Jen's dad offers to get Luke a fake ID by tomorrow, the Population Police knock at the door.

It's shocking for Luke to hear first that Jen's beloved articles weren't correct—and then that Jen's dad manipulated her into believing they were. But just as Luke's parents keep Luke hidden because they believe the Government would kill him otherwise, Jen's dad frames feeding her these articles as just another way of protecting his daughter.



Part of what makes what Jen's dad is saying “grown-up talk” is that he says outright it's unclear what the truth actually is. It's true that the country has changed and that lots of people died during the famines and riots, but beyond that, it's hard to say what's true and what's not. Luke has been raised to believe that certain things are right, certain things are wrong, and that he should believe what the Government says. Now, though, Jen's dad is encouraging Luke to think for himself.



Bringing up junk food allows Jen's dad to illustrate how deep the corruption goes in Luke's society. There's a lot to gain, he suggests, by doing something illegal if it benefits Barons—which is, perhaps, why Dad wasn't allowed to use hydroponics, since that would benefit him. But Jen's dad also implies that Luke's parents probably aren't in danger of losing their farm or becoming destitute. Luke has spent his whole life listening to his parents worry about money, so this is a major shock—perhaps they've been manipulated into being afraid.



Again, Jen's dad notes that it's impossible to say whether there are too many people or not—it's his belief that there aren't, but that's not a fact. However, he still suggests that taking people's rights away by controlling their family planning decisions so extensively was wrong. This is comforting for Luke to hear, as it allows him to feel for the first time like he truly has the right to live, even if his birth was illegal. This realization helps Luke move forward and continue maturing, and it also shows him that his life—and those of other shadow kids—are worth protecting.



CHAPTER 29

Jen's dad shoves Luke into a closet and says there's a secret door in the back. Luke gropes his way to the back of the closet, listening to Jen's dad mutter for the computer to turn on and the Population Police break the door down. Jen's dad confronts the police in the hallway and makes it seem like he was on the toilet; the officers tease him about his fly being down. Though Luke would be terrified of Jen's dad and his real-seeming rage, the officers aren't—they ask to search the house. Jen's dad snaps that he sent a memo earlier this morning explaining he was going to keep posing as a third child in the chat rooms. He says he's been pretending to be Jen all along—and he notes that he was just praised for “the disposal of forty illegals.”

Luke would totally believe Jen's dad's act if he didn't know the truth and trust the man. But he's also afraid, given how coldly Jen's dad talks about “dispos[ing]” of third children. He burrows deeper into the closet and finds the back wall, but no door. Now Luke can barely hear what's going on outside the closet; he can sort of hear the men surrounding the computer. Then, he hears an officer say he's going to search the house. Jen's dad threatens to sue and invites the officers to start their search in the closet where Luke is hiding. As he flings open the door, Luke yanks a blanket over his head.

Everything is quiet for a moment, and then the officers seem to flip through the clothes on the hanging bar—and then they go away. Luke is terrified. He hopes the officers will let him go home and say goodbye to Mother and Dad, but he knows they'll just kill him. Luke is still frantically planning his escape or his arrest when Jen's dad opens the closet, pulls the blanket off of Luke, and covers Luke's mouth. He holds a paper up on which he's written that the Population Police are gone and Luke is safe, but Luke can't talk. When Luke nods, Jen's dad writes that the house is bugged. Luke is confused, so Jen's dad explains that bugs are listening devices.

Jen's dad writes that he bribed the Population Police with fur coats in the closet. Luke is aghast; why would anyone want a coat made of dead animals? But Jen's dad keeps writing. He writes that he never filed the memo, so he's in trouble now. The officers are clearly out to get him. Luke writes back and asks where the door is in the back of the closet—but Jen's dad says there isn't one. Luke doesn't know if he can trust a man who's such a good liar, but somehow, he can tell Jen's dad is trustworthy.

Keep in mind that if Jen's dad has been sabotaging the Population Police as a matter of course, this act is likely second nature to him. He knows how to make it look like he believes in their mission while quietly thwarting them (as by shoving Luke in the closet here). Luke may think Jen's dad's act is so frightening because Jen's dad has so much more power than he does—but it's unclear how far above the field officers Jen's dad is in the hierarchy. They might also be Barons, and they seem to not find Jen's dad's anger as impressive.



Again, Luke marvels at how good of an actor Jen's dad is—this is new for him, as he's used to his parents telling the truth except for when it comes to him. It's still unsettling, though, for Luke to hear Jen's dad talk about third children in such a callous manner. Using language like this might be necessary to keep up the charade, but it still has a negative affect on Luke, one of those third children whom the Population Police wants to get rid of.



Luke hasn't had much practice trusting people outside his immediate family, so it's difficult for him to trust that Jen's dad is actually going to be able to keep him safe until he opens the closet again. However, things have become more dangerous if the Population Police have bugged the house and Jen's dad. It exposes again how sheltered Luke is that he hasn't heard of bugs. Also, if the Government has to resort to actively bugging houses, it likely confirms that they're not actually watching through most televisions or computers.



Once again, Luke feels like he's in the middle of a dangerous situation that he doesn't understand at all. Jen's dad seems trustworthy, but also like a liar—and he's willing to manipulate Luke to keep Luke safe. So Luke has a choice now: will he trust this man who has kept him safe by deceiving him, or will he go back into hiding?



Still writing, Jen's dad asks if Luke wants a fake ID. When Luke asks if he's safe without one, Jen's dad says he probably is—the Population Police are after him, not Luke. But it's still safer to get an ID. Luke asks if he can think about it. Really, he wants time to grieve for Jen and think, since he doesn't want to think about difficult things at the moment. But Jen's dad writes that this might be Luke's last chance. He has power in the Government now, but there's no telling when he'll fall out of favor. Luke's eyes blur as he thinks about the life he's lived so far. He's certain Matthew and Mark will continue to care for him, and he knows his life is limited. But Luke is also bored and desperate.

Luke realizes that with a fake ID, he can help other third children. He wouldn't hold rallies like Jen or track down fake IDs like Jen's dad. But he can come up with ideas to make sure there's enough food for people, or change the laws so farmers can use hydroponics. Maybe he could even figure out how to live on the moon. He realizes that maybe he was wrong to tell Jen that only Barons can make change. Maybe he can make change because he's not an entitled Baron. Knowing he can't do anything in hiding, he writes that he'd like a fake ID.

CHAPTER 30

Luke climbs into the car, trying to keep his story straight: he's now Lee Grant. He's getting ready to leave the farm where he ended up after running away from home. The real Lee Grant was a Baron who died last night in a skiing accident; his parents donated his name and identity to an underground resistance group. That group is paying for Luke to go to a private boarding school, supposedly as punishment for running away. Living away from family is an odd thought, but Luke's glad he doesn't have to pretend to love strange parents.

Luke looks back at the porch, where Mother, Dad, Matthew, and Mark are waving. Mother is sobbing, just like she did when Luke finally told them everything. She'd broken down when Luke told her about the fake ID and said she'll miss him if he leaves, but Luke said he had to leave. He doesn't want to be a burden on his brothers, and he wants to help other third kids. She promised to get him a fake ID when he was an adult and asked Dad to back her up—but Dad agreed with Luke. Dad said he'd asked around to see if third kids can live normal lives. Around here, they can't. Luke was half disappointed as on some level, he wanted to stay his parents' little boy forever. This was two days ago. Since then, Mother has been reminiscing nonstop about Luke's entire life.

As Luke asks Jen's dad questions before making a choice about a fake ID, he shows how he's learned to think critically. This isn't a simple yes or no question for him: it's essential, Luke believes, that he has all the information to weigh so he can make a choice that makes sense. Jen's dad makes it clear that he thinks Luke should get an ID, but he respects Luke's autonomy by not pressuring Luke to agree to get one. This helps Luke feel more mature, and more like he can make this choice for himself.



Suddenly, things come together for Luke. Jen's rally might not have been successful at changing things, but it has done something important: inspire Luke to get a fake ID so he can resist the Population Law in other ways. He realizes there are lots of ways to tackle the root problems of overpopulation and not enough food—and perhaps if he can fix those problems, the shadow children's problem will also resolve.



As Luke accepts his new identity, his world suddenly expands. He discovers that there are lots of people willing to help kids like him, from the original Lee Grant's parents to the people in the resistance group. Now, Luke has to do his part by fully becoming Lee Grant—and by working toward his goal of finding some way to help shadow children that is more successful than Jen's rally.



Leaving his home and his family represents the final step as Luke grows up and comes of age. Particularly when he frames staying in his attic as being his parents' little boy forever, it highlights that staying in hiding was keeping Luke from coming of age. Dad seems to recognize this when he supports Luke taking the fake ID and leaving the farm. Though Dad has been a somewhat distant and scary presence for Luke throughout the novel, he shows here that he does want to do right by his son and make sure he has the opportunity to live.



This morning, Jen's dad pulled up and thanked Mother and Dad for housing the runaway. He'd then turned to Luke, scolded him, and slipped Lee Grant's ID into Luke's pocket. When Mother asked if they already had to pretend, Jen's dad mouthed, "bugged." Then, Jen's dad pulled out Luke's new travel papers that state he'll go to Hendricks School for Boys. Mother asked to hug Lee, since she got attached. Jen's dad allowed it, so Luke hugged his mother and stumbled to the car.

As Jen's dad pulls out of the driveway, Luke peers back at Mother, Dad, Matthew, and Mark. For the first time, Luke can see the whole barn and the fields in the distance. This is exciting, even if it's frightening. He thinks for a moment he should tell Jen and is instantly sad. Luke murmurs that someday, when third children are free, he'll tell people about Jen and put up statues honoring her. Luke looks back at his family's farm until it disappears—and then Lee Grant looks forward, to the future.

The fact that Jen's dad is still bugged speaks to how intent the Government is on finding and doing away with anyone who might compromise their mission and jeopardize their power. Again, the bug suggests that while Mother and Dad may have misjudged how the Government surveils people, it is true that they are watching and trying to control the population through fear.



What Luke says about honoring Jen shows again how important her rally was. It didn't get shadow children more rights, but it inspired Luke—and perhaps others—to find other ways to resist. Then, when the novel notes that Lee, not Luke, looks to the future, it symbolizes Luke's final step to coming of age. Lee will be Luke's adult identity, and Luke is now ready to accept it and greet whatever comes next.





HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Brock, Zoë. "Among the Hidden." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 16 Feb 2022. Web. 16 Feb 2022.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Brock, Zoë. "Among the Hidden." LitCharts LLC, February 16, 2022. Retrieved February 16, 2022. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/among-the-hidden>.

To cite any of the quotes from *Among the Hidden* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Haddix, Margaret Peterson. *Among the Hidden*. Simon and Schuster. 2000.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Haddix, Margaret Peterson. *Among the Hidden*. New York: Simon and Schuster. 2000.