

MARGARET PETERSON HADDIX

*Author of **Running Out of Time***



**Among
the Hidden**

The first book in the Shadow Children sequence

CHAPTER ONE

He saw the first tree shudder and fall, far off in the distance. Then he heard his mother call out the kitchen window: "Luke! Inside. Now."

He had never disobeyed the order to hide. Even as a toddler, barely able to walk in the backyard's tall grass, he had somehow understood the fear in his mother's voice. But on this day, the day they began taking the woods away, he hesitated. He took one extra breath of the fresh air, scented with clover and honeysuckle and—coming from far away—pine smoke. He laid his hoe down gently, and savored one last moment of feeling warm soil beneath his bare feet. He reminded himself, "I will never be allowed outside again. Maybe never again as long as I live."

He turned and walked into the house, as silently as a shadow.

"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"—*How much rain'd the backfield get? How's the*

planting going? Even "what's"—What'd Matthew do with the five-sixteenth wrench? What's Dad going to do about that busted tire? 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."

Mother came over and gave Luke's shoulder a reassuring squeeze before turning back to the stove. They had defied the Government once, with Luke. That had taken all the defiance they had in them. Maybe more.

"We wouldn't have sold the woods if we hadn't had to," she said, ladling out thick tomatoey soup. "The Government didn't ask *us* if we wanted houses there."

She pursed her lips as she slid the bowls of soup onto the table.

"But the Government's not going to live in the houses," Luke protested. At twelve, he knew better, but sometimes still pictured the Government as a very big, mean, fat person, two or three times as tall as an ordinary man, who went around yelling at people, "Not allowed!" and "Stop that!" It was because of the way his parents and older brothers talked: "Government won't let us plant corn there again." "Government's keeping the prices down." "Government's not going to like this crop."

"Probably some of the people who live in those houses

will be Government workers," Mother said. "It'll all be city people."

If he'd been allowed, Luke would have gone over to the kitchen window and peered out at the woods, trying for the umpteenth time to picture rows and rows of houses where the firs and maples and oaks now stood. Or had stood—Luke knew from a sneaked peek right before supper that half the trees were now toppled. Some already lay on the ground. Some hung at weird angles from their former lofty positions in the sky. Their absence made everything look different, like a fresh haircut exposing a band of untanned skin on a forehead. Even from deep inside the kitchen, Luke could tell the trees were missing because everything was brighter, more open. Scarier.

"And then, when those people move in, I have to stay away from the windows?" Luke asked, though he knew the answer.

The question made Dad explode. He slammed his hand down on the table.

"Then? You gotta stay away *now*! Everybody and his brother's going to be tramping around back there, to see what's going on. They see you—" He waved his fork violently. Luke wasn't sure what the gesture meant, but he knew it wasn't good.

No one had ever told him exactly what would happen if anyone saw him. Death? Death was what happened to the runt pigs who got stepped on by their stronger brothers



SHADOW CHILDREN

Luke has never been to school. He's never had a birthday party, or gone to a friend's house for an overnight. In fact, Luke has never had a friend.


Luke is one of the shadow children, a third child forbidden by the Population Police. He's lived his entire life in hiding, and now, with a new housing development replacing the woods next to his family's farm, he is no longer even allowed to go outside.

Then, one day Luke sees a girl's face in the window of a house where he knows two other children already live. Finally, he's met a shadow child like himself. Jen is willing to risk everything to come out of the shadows—does Luke dare to become involved in her dangerous plan? Can he afford *not* to?

An ALA Best Book for Young Adults

"Readers will be captivated by Luke's predicament and his reactions to it."
—*School Library Journal*

"A chilling and intelligent novel."
—*Kirkus*

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