

Birthmarked Study Guide

Birthmarked by Caragh M. O'Brien

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Plot Summary

"Birthmarked" is a novel by writer Caragh M. O'Brien. In this novel, Gaia is a midwife who has just delivered her first solo baby. When Gaia returns home, she discovers that her parents have been arrested for unspecified crimes against the Enclave. When Gaia learns that her parents are to be executed for their crimes, she sneaks into the Enclave to speak with her mother one last time. However, on the way to find her mother, Gaia witnesses the execution of a pregnant woman and finds herself compelled to save the child. Gaia is quickly arrested and interrogated, forced to choose between death and the betrayal of her parents. "Birthmarked" is a passionate novel about family, loyalty, and coming of age in a world governed by fear.

Gaia Stone has just turned sixteen, the age at which she is deemed old enough to practice her own trade. Gaia has studied midwifery under her mother. As the novel opens, Gaia is delivering her first child. The child, a girl, is the mother's first, making it that much more of a burden for Gaia to have to advance it to the Enclave. Gaia does her duty, however, because she is a loyal citizen serving the Enclave.

As Gaia makes her way home she runs into Old Meg, her mother's assistant. Old Meg tells Gaia that her parents have been arrested. Old Meg is going to the Dead Forest out of fear that she will be arrested next. Old Meg encourages Gaia to go with her, but when Gaia refuses, Old Meg gives her a small bag that her mother wanted her to have. Gaia ties the bag to her thigh and returns home to find a member of the Guard waiting for her. Captain Grey asks Gaia questions about her parents, but refuses to answer her questions.

Several weeks pass. Gaia does her best to remain loyal to the Enclave despite her fears for her parents. However, when a baker, who was once a friend of her parents, tells her that her parents are to be executed, Gaia insists that he help her get into the Enclave so that she can speak to her parents. The man agrees and that night helps her sneak into the Enclave. Gaia walks to the area where she knows the prison to be, but is unsure of how to get to her parents. Then an execution begins. Gaia is shocked to find that one of the criminals to be executed is a pregnant woman close to her due date. Gaia cries out in outrage, but can do nothing to stop the execution. However, Gaia is able to trick the guard into thinking she is a friend of the family. They allow her to be alone with the bodies.

Gaia uses her skill as a midwife to cut the baby from the mother's womb. At first it appears that Gaia's efforts have been too late. Gaia performs CPR on the child. A man comes into the barn where she is hiding and Gaia is forced to run. Eventually trapped in a garden, Gaia is arrested. The child, who has miraculously begun to breathe, is taken from her by an Enclave doctor. Gaia is placed in a cell with multiple other women and left to guess at what the future might hold.

Gaia learns from the other women in her cell that her father was killed weeks ago attempting to escape. This pushes Gaia into a depression that is only lightened with



brief trips out of the prison and thoughts of escape. One day Gaia meets Captain Grey near the prison and he takes her for a walk, warning her that she will soon be interrogated. Gaia learns that her mother is still alive and that the Enclave has the ribbon on which her parents recorded a record of the babies advanced from their sector. It is this code that so interests the Enclave.

During her interrogation, Gaia learns that the Enclave needs to find out who parented the babies advanced from her sector because they are thought to have a gene that stops the gene for hemophilia, a condition that is killing many inside the Enclave. Gaia finds herself in a difficult situation, forced to betray her parents or face death. Gaia breaks the code, but then finds a sympathetic guard, who coincidentally turns out to be her brother, who helps her escape.

Captain Grey comes back for Gaia, even though he too is a wanted man. Captain Grey and friends of Gaia's help her get into the Bastion to save her mother. However, Gaia's mother is far advanced in pregnancy and does not make it far. Gaia delivers her baby sister, and then watches as her mother bleeds to death. Gaia then flees the Bastion only to be caught by the Protectorate himself. Gaia and Captain Grey manage to escape. However, when they try to leave the Enclave, Captain Grey is caught. Gaia escapes and she keeps her word to Captain Grey by fleeing the city for the Dead Forest immediately.



Chapters 1-5

Chapters 1-5 Summary

"Birthmarked" is the first novel in the "Birthmarked" Trilogy.

Chapter 1. The Baby Quota. Gaia, who has been training under her mother for years, has just become a full-fledged midwife. Called out while her mother was gone, Gaia has just delivered her first baby, a perfect little girl. The mother believes the child will remain with her, therefore she becomes hysterical when Gaia tells her she must advance the child to the Enclave as required by Enclave law. Gaia walks the baby to the Enclave gate and is greeted by Masister Khol and praised for doing her duty to the Enclave.

Chapter 2. A Small, Brown Parcel. Gaia is on her way home when she runs into Old Meg, her mother's assistant. Old Meg tells Gaia that her parents have been arrested. Old Meg is running away to the Dead Forest and she wants Gaia to go with her. When Gaia refuses, Old Meg gives her a small, light parcel that she says her mother wanted her to have. Old Meg encourages Gaia to keep the parcel hidden. After Old Meg leaves, Gaia ties the parcel to her thigh before continuing home. When Gaia returns home, she finds a member of the Guard, Captain Grey, waiting. Captain Grey asks Gaia a number of questions, none of which make sense to Gaia. Captain Grey refuses to tell Gaia why her parents were taken or when they will return. However, he tells her that she will receive higher compensation for each child she delivers than her mother ever received.

Chapter 3. Rapunzel. A neighbor, Theo Rupp, comes to check on Gaia. Theo is the father of Gaia's childhood best friend, Emily. Theo wants Gaia to go home with him in light of what has happened, but Gaia refuses because she wants to be there when her parents return home. Three weeks pass. Gaia finds herself walking past the Tvaltar on her way to advance another baby. As she does, she recalls when she was a child and she went with Emily and another girl to the Tvaltar to see Rapunzel for Emily's birthday. Gaia had wanted to sit up front like she always did with her parents, but was told that was for the freaks. It was then that Gaia realized that due to the scar on her cheek most people in the sector considered her a freak.

Chapter 4. The Folded Triangle. Gaia arrives at the Enclave gates to advance the infant she just delivered. Masister Khol comes to get the child. As she is taking the child from Gaia, Masister Khol slips a small folded triangle into Gaia's hand. Gaia opens the triangle in the shadow of a business a few paces from the gate and discovers it is from her mother. It is written in partial code. As Gaia reads it, the owner of the business, the baker Derek Vlatir, draws Gaia inside and tells her that he has heard that her parents are to be executed the following week. Gaia is frightened and knows she must see her parents one last time. For this reason, she talks Derek into sneaking her into the Enclave. He agrees, but for a stiff price.



Chapter 5. Shepherd's Purse. Gaia took the note from her mother home and figured out its code. The note tells Gaia to destroy the parcel given to her by Old Meg. Gaia has struggled with this parcel the entire time her parents have been gone, unsure if she should turn it in or destroy it. Now her mother is telling her to destroy it. However, Gaia cannot make herself do it.

Chapters 1-5 Analysis

The first few chapters of "Birthmarked" introduce the main characters, the setting, and the conflict that will push the plot to its conclusion. The setting is of great importance to the plot of this novel. The novel is set in the future, in the year 2409. This world has been devastated after what appears to have been some kind of oil crisis that caused all the fresh water to be siphoned off and used up. Gaia's community, the western sector of Wharfton, is set right above the unlake, a lake that was once known as Lake Superior. This lake is empty. The Enclave is a community that grew up during the crisis that is walled off from the community that has grown outside its walls. The Enclave keeps itself separate in an attempt to conserve resources. However, the Enclave gives food and water to the people outside the walls out of a sense of generosity. In return, the people of Wharfton consent to participating in a program in which the first three babies born each month are advanced to the Enclave. These children are adopted by families in the Enclave and raised as their own, given every advantage that they would not have outside the walls.

The main character of the novel is Gaia, a sixteen year old midwife who lives in the western sector of Wharfton. Gaia's mother was the only midwife in the western sector until Gaia became of age. Gaia's father is a tailor. As the novel begins, Gaia's parents are arrested for unspecified crimes. Gaia is unsure of what has happened to her parents and continues to be loyal to the Enclave. However, Gaia soon learns that her parents are to be executed. Gaia is still unclear as to the reason for this except for the fact that the Guards were looking for some kind of list. Gaia was given a parcel with a ribbon inside that she thinks might be this list. However, Gaia is unsure of what to do with the list. Gaia considers giving it to the Guard, but she does not want to do something that will make things worse for her parents. Gaia is caught between her sense of duty to the Enclave and her sense of duty to her parents.



Chapters 6-10

Chapters 6-10 Summary

Chapter 6. The Obelisk. Gaia spends most of the day dying an outfit red as per Derek's instructions that she dress in red. When she is ready, Gaia goes to Derek and he immediately walks her to a place in the wall where the stones are loose. Gaia slips in and walks toward the Obelisk where she knows the prison stands. Gaia is at a loss as to where to go from there or how to get to her mother. Then the square is transformed as a planned execution begins. The criminals are a man and a woman who broke the rules against possibly related people marrying one another. Gaia is shocked when she sees that the woman is pregnant.

Chapter 7. Noon. Gaia calls out to stop the execution, but this only brings scorn on her from the crowd and warning from a young servant. Gaia sees her mother behind a fence at the prison. Her mother signals to her not to do anything, but Gaia cannot allow for the murder of an innocent baby. Gaia convinces the guard whose responsibility it is to dispose of the bodies that she is a friend of the family and has been asked to remain with them until the family can come. When she is alone with the bodies, Gaia uses her experiences watching her mother perform such a procedure to cut the baby from the mother's womb. The baby is not breathing and Gaia is afraid it is too late. Then a man comes into the barn and calls out in alarm to the Guard. Gaia runs and quickly finds herself cut off in a garden. When she is surrounded by the Guard, she is surprised to recognize Captain Grey among them. Captain Grey stops a guard from shooting Gaia and tells her that the baby she fought for is alive.

Chapter 8. Life First. Gaia and the baby are taken into the prison. Captain Grey returns with a doctor and Masister Khol. The doctor takes the baby and Gaia becomes frightened that he will kill it since he considers it an abomination under Enclave law. Captain Grey then has Gaia taken to a room where she waits for some time before Captain Grey returns to interrogate her. He tells her that there is a rise in children's deaths from inherited hemophilia in the Enclave and infertility among the women. This has something to do with the list the Enclave believes Gaia's mother has kept. Then he takes the watch-locket her parents gave to her to help her time contractions in her work.

Chapter 9. The Doctors of Q Cell. Gaia is taken to have a shower. When she goes to redress, she puts the ribbon from her mother in her hair. However, the female guard insists that she give her the ribbon. When Gaia resists, the woman hits her. Gaia is then taken to Q cell, a room that houses multiple other women. Gaia learns they are all doctors imprisoned for controversial aspects of their work. These women tell Gaia that her mother stayed in that cell for a brief time, but was quickly moved. They also tell Gaia that her father was shot while trying to escape.

Chapter 10. Blueberries in the Unlake. Gaia remembers a time when she was a little girl and she was sleeping on the back porch of her house. Gaia woke to find that someone



had stolen two of their chickens. When Gaia went to tell her parents, she found them still tangled together in bed. Gaia's father took her outside to look at the chickens and told her that the chickens were probably stolen from someone hungrier than them. He then took her to the unlake so they could pick blueberries for breakfast. While there, Gaia's father told her how her mother delivered twins the night before. Gaia's mother had one more baby to advance for the month, so she allowed the mother to choose even though she should have taken the first born without consulting the mother. This left Gaia's mother feeling bad. Gaia then asked questions about how the advancing of children began. Her father tells Gaia that it began when a new family moved to Wharfton and they were lazy drunks who beat their children. The Enclave took the children to protect them. Then other families began to wonder why they could not send their kids to have the advantages of growing up in the Enclave. For this reason, the Enclave began a lottery of sorts in which children at the age of one could be chosen to go to the enclave. Then ten years ago it was decided it would be best to take the children immediately after birth, creating the current rules.

Chapters 6-10 Analysis

Gaia breaks into the Enclave although it is expressly against the rules for someone from the outside to enter the Enclave without permission. This goes against all Gaia has been doing from the beginning. Gaia is an obedient girl who has tried to honor the Enclave with her service. However, now that she believes her parents are about to be executed, she is willing to do anything she needs to do to see them again, even if it means breaking the rules.

Gaia witnesses an execution of a woman who is pregnant, but she cannot allow the child to die. For this reason, Gaia cuts the baby out of its mother's womb and saves it. This action is against the rules and leads immediately to Gaia's arrest. However, one of those who apprehend her is Captain Grey, and he steps up to save her from harm. Captain Grey cannot keep her from being arrested, but he seems to be trying to help her despite her resistance to his efforts. Captain Grey tells Gaia about the problems the Enclave is having with inherited diseases killing their children, specifically hemophilia, and how the woman are becoming infertile. This is a result of generations of inbreeding. The Enclave wants to find a way to counteract this, which is where Gaia's mother's list comes in. However, Gaia is unsure if she should cooperate, therefore she refuses to give him the list.

The list is taken from Gaia when she is prepared for life in the prison. Gaia is unaware of what this might mean, if they will even understand what they have. At the same time, Gaia learns that her father is dead and her mother has been moved. Gaia is depressed by this news and it causes her to recall a good memory of her father. This memory includes an explanation of how the babies outside the walls began to be advanced to the Enclave. Gaia learns that when she was a baby, the advanced children did not go to the Enclave until they were a year old. This is at the age her older brothers were advanced. Gaia might have been as well, if not for the accident that left her face scarred.



Chapters 11-15

Chapters 11-15 Summary

Chapter 11. The Gilded Mirror. A short time after her arrival at Q cell, Gaia is chosen by one of the doctors, Sephie, to assist her during a birth. Gaia and Sephie are taken to the home of a young couple where Sephie helps deliver a breech baby. Afterward, Gaia asks about the ink and the tea her mother usually uses after the birth, accidentally revealing something to Sephie she had not intended. It also makes her realize that the freckles her mother always marked the babies with after birth was something important, more than a tribute to her brothers. When they prepare to leave, the husband offers a gift to Sephie, but she refuses. The man then gives Gaia a mirror, but she takes it as an insult because of her scars. Later, Gaia admires the oranges she sees in the market.

Chapter 12. A Pigeon Visits. Gaia sees a pigeon land on the window sill of the windows above the cell. It gives Gaia the idea that they might be able to escape through the window. For this reason, Gaia enlists the help of the other women in using a couple of benches to climb to the window. Just as Gaia believes she has found a way, the Guards come. The Guards take Sephie away without explanation.

Chapter 13. Birthmarked. The next day, Gaia could not get anyone to help with the escape plan. Myrna convinced her that by her trying to escape would just put everyone else in danger. For this reason, Gaia lets it go. A few days later, one of the guards delivers a gift to Gaia. It is an orange, like the ones she had admired in the market days earlier. Gaia has no idea who might have arranged this for her. One afternoon while Gaia is out helping Myrna with a patient, she runs into Captain Grey. Captain Grey takes Gaia off alone to speak with her. They walk up a street, but he sees his mother and sister, so he takes Gaia into a private garden. There Captain Grey tells Gaia that the Enclave has found her mother's code and are working to decipher it. Captain Grey also says that Gaia will be interrogated sometime in the next day or two. As he walks her back to the prison, Gaia spots a bakery that her friend Derek told her was owned by a friend. She asks Captain Grey to buy her a loaf of bread there. Captain Grey reluctantly agrees.

Chapter 14. A Crime Against the State. Gaia shares her bread with the other women in Q cell. When they learn Captain Grey bought it for her, they begin to gossip about him. Gaia did not know until her stroll with Captain Grey that he is the advanced son of the Protectorate. The other women gossip about the reasons he fell out of favor with the Protectorate and became a member of the Guard. One of the rumors is that he had an affair with an aunt. The only thing anyone knows for sure is that it happened about the time Captain Grey's sister fell from a window and died. Gaia cannot imagine what could have been so bad as to cause the rift because she remembers seeing movies at the Tvaltar in which the Protectorate and his family looked very happy. Myrna warns Gaia to be careful of Captain Grey.



Chapter 15. The Yellow Pincushion. Gaia is taken out of Q cell the following day and taken to the Bastion. Gaia is taken to a foyer in the Bastion, a building the doubles as the Protectorate's home and his offices. A young boy comes running into the room and Gaia is shocked to see he has her yellow pincushion, something her father made for her. The Protectorate's wife comes into the room and demands the guards take Gaia away. Gaia is then escorted to the office of Mabrother Iris. Mabrother Iris has a desk whose top is covered with television screens. On one of these screens, Mabrother Iris shows Gaia her old friend Emily relaxing near the unlake with her husband and baby. Then he has a bird near them shot.

Chapters 11-15 Analysis

Gaia is deeply depressed as she begins to realize how desperate her situation is. Her father is dead, her mother has disappeared, and she is a prisoner. The only things that bring Gaia out of her darkness are the occasional trips out of the prison and her thoughts of escape. It is during one of the first excursions out of the prison that Gaia realizes that her mother's habit of tattooing the babies she delivers is more than a tribute to her older brothers. This is important information that Gaia is unsure what to do with. However, it seems that it would be important information to help the hunt for children with the gene to suppress the hemophilia gene.

Gaia tries to find a way to escape, but her only plan proves to be impossible to achieve. However, her desire to get herself and her mother out of the prison never truly goes away. Later, Gaia meets up with Captain Grey again. This is an interesting relationship that seems to be evolving even though their roles make a romance impossible. Gaia is weary of Captain Grey because of his role in the Guard, but the revelation that he is the Protectorate's advanced child shows Gaia a vulnerability in him that makes him somewhat trustworthy. It also helps that he places himself at risk by telling Gaia about the investigation against her and her mother as well as that he placed the baby she saved into the black market rather than allow it to be killed. It seems that Captain Grey is an ally even though his position makes this a dangerous choice.

Gaia is taken to be interrogated and the first thing she learns is that Mabrother Iris has cameras everywhere and he can manipulate people in and out of the Enclave. This is a frightening revelation that makes Gaia begin to question a great deal about the Enclave. The Enclave is supposed to be an entity to protect and care for all the people, but clearly this is not always the case.



Chapters 16-20

Chapters 16-20 Summary

Chapter 16. Cooperation. Mabrother Iris shows Gaia an image of her mother sleeping in a room with two other women, reassuring her that her mother is still alive. To try to show that she is cooperating, Gaia tells Mabrother Iris about the tattoos. Then he shows her computer images of the ribbon that contains her parents' code. As he describes the attempts to decipher it, Gaia comes to realize the code is more than likely her father's. Gaia agrees to try to decipher the code. Gaia is taken to a room then where she is allowed to shower and begin work on the code.

Chapter 17. The Baby Code. The guard who takes her to the room, a friend of Captain Grey's named Sgt. Bartlett, saw the diagram of the tattoos that Gaia drew for Mabrother Iris and asks her if the code will tell her who his parents are. Gaia agrees that it will. Gaia then asks Sgt. Bartlett if Captain Grey knows she is there, and he promises to inform him. Gaia takes a shower and then returns to the room where a paper with some of the code on it has fallen to the ground. Gaia thinks she sees something, but cannot be sure. Then she begins to think of her father and the codes he used to make up when they were kids. She takes the papers into the bathroom and looks at them in the mirror, but again she thinks she sees something but cannot be sure. Captain Grey arrives with a meal. Gaia talks to him about what she saw and they begin to work it out together. Gaia figures it out and explains it to Captain Grey. When he prepares to leave, Gaia asks him to help her escape, but he refuses.

Chapter 18. One Chance. Gaia begins decoding the code. However, she has an attack of conscious - and thinks she might tear it up. First, however, she checks Captain Grey's birthdate and discovers that he is Derek Vlatir's son. Then Sgt. Bartlett comes back. He asks Gaia if she can figure out his birth parents and she tells him she will let him know if he will help her escape. Sgt. Bartlett then lets Gaia know there is a camera in the room and encourages her to go into the bathroom. When she does, Gaia finds that Sgt. Bartlett has written a message on the mirror agreeing to help her and telling her his birthdate. Gaia does not even have to look on the code to identify Sgt. Bartlett's parents because she knows he is her brother, Odin. Sgt. Bartlett sneaks Gaia out of the Bastion and she tells him who he is. He sends her on her way and tells her that he plans to run away too. Gaia runs and is nearly caught until the baker helps her.

Chapter 19. Jacksons' Bakery. Gaia meets Mace Jackson and his family. They offer her a safe harbor until she can decide what to do next. Mace offers several ways to get her out of the Enclave, but none seem like viable ideas, especially since they would all require her to leave her mother behind. Gaia stays for a few days before a plan begins to develop. Mace tells Gaia that his wife has a friend who works for the nursery who might be willing to sneak Gaia into the tower room where they think her mother is being kept to help a political prisoner who is pregnant. This woman is Masister Khol. They



plan to sneak Gaia into the room to get her mother out and then find a way to sneak out of the Enclave so they can go to the Dead Forest.

Chapter 20. Forty-Six Chrome Spoons. Captain Grey arrives unexpectedly that night, telling everyone that he is Derek Vlatir's son and that Derek sent him to Mace. Mrs. Jackson reluctantly allows him to stay. Captain Grey then tells everyone how he went to Mabrother Iris and his adoptive father, the Protectorate, to ask for leniency for Gaia. They, in turn, explained to Captain Grey about the suppressor gene for the hemophilia and how they need to identify the children with this gene so that they can encourage reproduction between those with the gene and those with the hemophilia gene. Gaia is outraged that they would want to influence reproduction to such a degree while Captain Grey argues that the idea is good, it is the methods that are bad. In the end, however, they both agree that Gaia and her mother are in danger.

Chapters 16-20 Analysis

Gaia is taken to be interrogated by Mabrother Iris. Immediately the reader can see how powerful Mabrother Iris is, therefore understand why Gaia would chose to be as cooperative with him as she can. Gaia only wants to be reunited with her mother and able to secure their freedom. She is filled with false hope when Mabrother Iris promises she can see her mother after she has cracked the code. However, when Gaia does crack the code, she begins to worry that she is betraying her parents and will be killed anyway. For this reason, Gaia pressures both men she has contact with, Sgt. Bartlett and Captain Grey, to free her. Although Captain Grey is sympathetic to her and the one the reader most expects to be willing to help her, he does not. Sgt. Bartlett, who turns out to be Gaia's brother, does.

Gaia escapes and begins making plans to rescue her mother. Gaia plans on going to the Dead Forest even though everyone continuously tells her there is no such thing. However, it seems like her only choice at this point. Captain Grey, who has now become an enemy of the state by running from his adoptive father, has decided to help her. Now they are both fugitives and they both need a plan. The only problem is, there seems to be no easy way for them to escape the Enclave.

Gaia also knows now why the Enclave is so interested in her mother. Gaia's mother is the only midwife who has kept records of the advanced children and therefore her records are the only way the Enclave can assure their survival by breeding specific people to other specific people. This is a way for them to assure their survival, but it also a creepy way of doing it. Instead Gaia thinks they should simply tear down the wall and let romance go where it wants. This is not likely to happen, however. The Enclave is a world of elite people who do not want to mix with the lower classes except under their own conditions.



Chapters 21-28

Chapters 21-28 Summary

Chapter 21. Happiness. The Jacksons go to bed and leave Gaia and Captain Grey to talk. They talk about their childhoods. Captain Grey seems particularly interested in what Gaia's childhood was like outside the wall. Then he tells Gaia that his childhood was not as happy as it appeared on the movies in the Tvaltar. Mace returns with Masister Khol. Masister Khol agrees to help Gaia, but in such a way that she will not be blamed for anything Gaia might do. The family quickly sets to work to disguise Gaia as a boy and prepare the cart for selling bread in the market.

Chapter 22. The Women of the Southeast Tower. Gaia, dressed as a boy, goes to market with Mace, his son, and Captain Grey, also in disguise. They wait a long time for Masister Khol to finally arrive. Masister Khol is carrying a heavy basket and she asks Gaia to help her. The disguise fools the guards and Gaia is able to reach the room where her mother is being kept. Gaia is shocked to discover that her mother is the pregnant political prisoner she had thought her mother was helping to care for. Gaia helps prepare tea for the two women caring for her mother and Masister Khol, slipping a sleeping medication into it that Mrs. Jackson gave to her. In a matter of minutes the three women are asleep.

Chapter 23. Maya. Gaia tells her mother who she is and leads her out of the room. However, Gaia's mother has been on bed rest due to premature labor, therefore she is weak and unable to move fast. To add to their problems, Gaia's mother goes into labor. They are nearly caught in a hallway by guards, but the young servant who helped Gaia once before decides to help her once more. The girl leads Gaia and her mother to a large linen closet. Gaia and her mother hide behind a couple of dirty linen baskets. Gaia's mother continues to progress in her labor and soon Gaia delivers a small, but healthy baby girl. However, Gaia's mother continues to bleed profusely and there is nothing Gaia can do. Gaia's mother apologizes to her for purposely burning her face when she was a child to keep the Enclave from taking her. Then she tells Gaia to care for the baby, whom she names Maya.

Chapter 24. A Perfectly Circular Pool. Gaia leaves the linen closet and begins to make her way through the Bastion. She quickly gets lost, but then finds herself in the foyer she had been in the day before. As Gaia tries to escape, the Protectorate and his family descends the stairs. At almost the same instant, the guards bring Captain Grey in, whom they say they caught trying to break in. The Protectorate orders them shot, but Captain Grey's stepmother and siblings argue against it. The Protectorate refuses to listen. Captain Grey then breaks free of his captors, grabs Gaia, and makes a run for it. They run through the Bastion until they reach the entrance to some tunnels in a wine cellar.



Chapter 25. The Tunnels. Gaia and Captain Grey quickly lose their pursuers in the tunnels. However, they eventually run to a place where they have to decide what to do next. When Gaia learns there is an exit near the nursery, she insists they go there so that they can gather supplies for Maya and find information about who adopted the babies from outside the walls. They go into the nursery and Captain Grey disables the two women working there. Gaia gathers supplies for Maya while Captain Grey searches for information, but he cannot find anything. Gaia then tells him that the worker in the kitchen knows something, so he pulls a knife and forces her to tell what she knows. This leads to Gaia finding a stack of ledgers in a file drawer in the office.

Chapter 26. White Boots. Gaia and Captain Grey leave the nursery and head out into the streets. They run into several guards and have to run again. They hide in the same garden they once talked in and care for the baby while they discuss what they should do next. Captain Grey decides they should go into the house attached to the garden and dress in the clothing of the wealthy. Then they can walk the streets unobserved and make their way to the gate. As they wait on the porch for the rain to stop, Captain Grey tells Gaia how he fell into bad standing with the Protectorate. His sister, Fiona, aware that they were not biologically related, fell in love with Captain Grey and made an attempt to explore her romantic ideas. They were caught and Fiona added fuel to the fire by showing her parents her journals that marked every romantic thing she felt Captain Grey had done for her. Captain Grey was shunned by his parents so he turned on Fiona, causing her to commit suicide. They then share an intimate moment before venturing out onto the streets.

Chapter 27. Trust. The disguises seem to work and Gaia and Captain Grey nearly reach the gate. However, someone recognizes Captain Grey and calls out to him in the street. Captain Grey pretends that all is normal, but he is aware that the guards on the wall have become aware of their presence. As they turn to make their way to the gate, the guards surround them. Captain Grey pulls Gaia in front of him and holds a knife to her throat, threatening to kill her if they do not let them go. By doing this, Captain Grey manages to move close enough to the gate that Gaia is able to run. However, Captain Grey is captured.

Chapter 28. Returned Property. Gaia runs to Emily's house to escape the guards following her. Emily quickly takes Gaia in and gives her all she needs to make the trip to the Dead Forest with Maya. In return, Gaia leaves the ledgers with Emily that tell who the advanced children became in the Enclave. Emily's father and husband walk Gaia safely to the edge of the city where she begins her journey alone.

Chapters 21-28 Analysis

Gaia and Captain Grey talk to one another and several misunderstandings come between them. It is clear that each is envious of the other's childhood despite the advantages each had in their lives. Gaia, however, comes to realize that being with loving parents was much better than the way in which Captain Grey grew up. However, the understanding does not come until later.



Gaia is able to get her mother out of the room where she is being held prisoner, but her mother is in bad shape because she is in the eighth month of pregnancy with a late in life pregnancy. Gaia's mother immediately goes into labor. This poses a problem for them escaping the Bastion. However, luck wins out and Gaia finds help in a sympathetic servant. They find a safe place and the baby is born, but Gaia's mother dies. This adds another level of difficulty to the situation for Gaia. Now Gaia has lost her reason for wanting to survive, for wanting to escape. However, she has a new reason in the form of her premature baby sister, Maya. Gaia has promised her mother that she will raise the baby herself and keep her safe. This makes it even more urgent for Gaia to get out of the Enclave alive.

Captain Grey is caught coming to Gaia's rescue. Together they escape and manage to get away from the Bastion and find some information they need from the nursery. However, the Enclave is filled with guards searching for them. They find a disguise, but it fails when someone recognizes Captain Grey. In the end, Captain Grey sacrifices himself so that Gaia and Maya can escape. Gaia does not want to leave without her new found love, but she runs because she promised him she would. Now Gaia is on her way to the Dead Forest, a place many do not believe exists anymore. The reader is left wondering if Gaia and Maya will survive, a question that will more than likely be answered in the next novel of the trilogy.



Characters

Gaia Stone

Gaia Stone is the main character of the novel. Gaia is a sixteen year old girl who has grown up outside the walls of the Enclave. This life was a good one thanks to the love and support of her parents, but Gaia wonders what her life would have been like had she been advanced to be raised inside the walls of the Enclave. Gaia was unwanted by the Enclave, however, because of a scar on her face. Gaia has always believed this scar was the result of an accident, but later learns that her parents inflicted the burns intentionally because they could not bear to lose a third child to the Enclave.

After Gaia's parents are arrested by the Enclave, Gaia begins to realize that the Enclave is not as benevolent as she always thought. Gaia sneaks into the Enclave and discovers that the Enclave puts people to death for crimes ranging from illegal procreation to murder. Gaia also learns that the people inside the Enclave are dying at an alarming rate from congenital diseases, such as hemophilia, as well as experiencing a radical climb in infertility among their mothers. For this reason, the Enclave has begun increasing the number of advanced children from outside the wall and finding ways to manipulate the procreation of children in a way to strengthen future generations. To do this, they want to use a list they believe Gaia's parents have kept of all the children advanced from the western sector of Wharfton.

Gaia is arrested for saving the baby of a condemned woman. She becomes a pawn in the Enclave's game to get her mother to tell them about her list. Gaia, however, figures things out and manages to escape before the Enclave can execute her.

Captain Leon Grey

Captain Leon Grey is a member of the Enclave's Guard. Before becoming a member of the Guard, Captain Grey was the advanced son of the Protectorate. However, he and his adopted family had a falling out when his adopted sister committed suicide after it was revealed she had a crush on Captain Grey. Captain Grey is among the guards who arrest Gaia's parents and he interviews her after the arrest. There is an immediate connection between these two, but it is complicated when Gaia is arrested as well.

Captain Grey does all he can to help Gaia while she is in jail, but his influence is limited. For this reason, he is unable to get Gaia out of jail. Gaia turns to another guard to escape. Captain Grey, at the same time, has a falling out with his father and becomes a fugitive. Captain Grey finds Gaia and together they plot a way to get out of the Enclave. The plan goes wrong and Captain Grey sacrifices himself for Gaia.



Bonnie Stone

Bonnie Stone is Gaia's mother. Bonnie is a midwife who has been in charge of delivering babies in the western sector of Wharfton for many years. After her two eldest children were advanced to the Enclave, Bonnie and her husband began keeping record of the children advanced to the Enclave. This record was trivial and unimportant until the Enclave discovered that some children born in Wharfton had a gene that suppressed the gene that causes hemophilia.

Bonnie is arrested while in the fifth month of pregnancy. No one knows of Bonnie's pregnancy except for her and her husband. However, when the Enclave learns of her pregnancy, they lock her up so that the baby can be born in the Enclave. They anticipate this baby will be one with a suppressive gene. However, Gaia manages to break her mother out of her imprisonment and deliver the baby. Although Bonnie dies during childbirth, Gaia saves the baby and takes her away from the Enclave to raise it herself.

Jasper Stone

Jasper Stone is Gaia's father. Jasper is a tailor. Jasper is also a highly intelligent man who has made up codes that were games between he and Gaia during her childhood. When Gaia is interrogated by Mabrother Iris and sees the code again, she realizes that her father is responsible for the coded list of advanced babies from the western sector. Gaia breaks the code, allowing the Enclave to figure out which advanced child belongs to which family outside the wall.

Mabrother Iris

Mabrother Iris is part of the Enclave government, a man in charge of the Guard and security matters. Mabrother Iris is close with the Protectorate and more than likely an influence on the Protectorate's policies. Mabrother Iris interrogates Gaia, convincing her of his ruthlessness and coercing her into breaking her father's code. Gaia does, but then she runs away with the notes in the hopes that Mabrother Iris cannot break it. However, Mabrother Iris had a camera in Gaia's room and learned how to break the code as she did.

Masister Khol

Masister Khol is a woman who works at the nursery in the Enclave. When a midwife brings a baby to be advanced, she brings it to Masister Khol. Masister Khol proves to be somewhat sympathetic to Bonnie Stone. For this reason, she sneaks a note out to Gaia during Bonnie's initial imprisonment. Later, Masister Khol helps Gaia get to the room where her pregnant mother is being held prisoner.



Sephie

Sephie is one of the doctors with whom Gaia is held prisoner in Q cell. Sephie appears kind and gentle on the surface, but Gaia later learns that Sephie will do anything she has to do to make her own life better. To this end, Sephie uses information that she gained from Gaia to advance her position in the prison. Sephie is moved from Q cell to the room where Bonnie Stone's is being held until the birth of her child.

Myrna

Myrna is a doctor being held in Q cell at the same time Gaia is there. Myrna is a stern woman who takes her profession seriously. Myrna is in jail because she wanted to begin programs to help care for the hemophiliacs and other ill people in the Enclave. However, the Protectorate saw her programs as an attempt to begin a hospital, something the Enclave outlawed many years ago. Myrna seems to be cruel and uncaring when Gaia first meets her, but she later realizes that Myrna cares deeply and only appears cruel to protect herself.

Protectorate

The Protectorate is the head of the government in the Enclave. The Protectorate is a man who appears fair on the surface. The Protectorate creates laws in the Enclave to protect everyone, not the individual. However, Gaia comes to realize that the Protectorate is a cruel man who wants to use the people outside the walls to breed healthy children inside the wall. While the Protectorate's plan might have merit, the method is flawed and cruel. In the end, Gaia and Captain Grey decide to run away, but are nearly caught by the Protectorate. The Protectorate orders their immediate execution, but they manage to escape, briefly. Captain Grey is caught again and the reader must worry that the Protectorate might order his execution again.

Emily

Emily is Gaia's childhood friend. Emily is a kind and gentle woman who understands the cruelty of the Enclave. For this reason, Emily helps Gaia without any explanation when she shows up on the run from the Guard. Gaia leaves the ledgers she finds in the nursery with Emily to do with as she sees fit. These ledgers will tell the families in Wharfton which families adopted their children in the Enclave.



Objects/Places

Ribbon

Bonnie and Jasper Stone have kept track of the advanced babies in western sector by writing them down in code on a ribbon. Gaia is given this ribbon by Bonnie's assistant, Old Meg, at the beginning of the novel and when she is arrested the ribbon falls into the hands of the Enclave. Gaia helps decipher the code and uses it to identify one of her brothers and Captain Grey's biological parents.

Yellow Pincushion

Gaia has a yellow pincushion in her bag that her father made for her. This pincushion is confiscated upon her arrest, and she later sees a child in the Bastion playing with it.

Colored Clothing

Inside the Enclave, the different classes are separated by the way in which they dress. The wealthy and the Protectorate's family wear all white while servants dress in red. Gaia takes advantage of this dress code twice, once when she wears red to enter the Enclave and later when she wears white during her attempt to escape.

Locket Watch

Gaia's parents gave her a locket watch on which she can time contractions in her profession as a midwife. This watch is taken from Gaia on her arrest by Captain Grey who later returns it to her during their escape from the Enclave.

Ledgers

Gaia and Captain Grey find ledgers in the Enclave's nursery that record to which families the advanced babies were given. Gaia gives these ledgers to her friend Emily to do with as she sees fit.

Q Cell

Q cell is the prison cell where Gaia is held during her imprisonment. Gaia shares the cell with several female doctors who have been imprisoned because of their attempts to help the individual over the whole.



Bakery with the Black Oven

When Gaia goes into the Enclave, Derek Vlatir tells her if she gets into trouble to find the baker with the black oven. Gaia finds this baker when she escapes the Bastion and the family who owns it, the Jacksons, help her find a way to save her mother.

Bastion

The Bastion is a large building in the Enclave where the Protectorate and his family live, and also where the government of the Enclave conducts business.

Enclave

The Enclave is a walled city near Lake Superior that was founded upon the decimation of humanity in an energy crisis that left all the fresh water in the world consumed. This Enclave allowed the creation of a city outside their walls that they help support with food and water allowances, but the people in this city are kept under control with specific rules, including the advancement of children from the poor to the rich inside the Enclave.

Wharfton

Wharfton is the city outside the walls of the Enclave where Gaia and her family live. Wharfton is divided into two sectors, the western and eastern sectors. Gaia's family lives in the western sector.

Dead Forest

Gaia flees the Enclave to the Dead Forest. However, many believe the Dead Forest is just a myth.

Themes

Post-Apocalyptic Society

In this novel, something dramatic but unnamed happened to the modern world. Natural resources disappeared in what appears to have been an energy crisis of sorts. This crisis has led to the deaths of millions because of a lack of water and other resources. One group found a way to grow mycoprotein, a wheat that thrives even in the worst conditions, and this led to their survival. They built a wall around their city and turned away people who wanted to come and live with them. Instead, they allowed stragglers to build a city outside their walls and even provided them with rations of food and water.

The devastation of the world on such a large scale has left many in need of someone to follow, of rules to follow. For this reason, the people outside the Enclave will do just about anything to please the Enclave and continue to receive support from them. This includes allowing the Enclave to take their children in what they hope will be a better life for the children. However, the Enclave is no longer satisfied with simply taking a few children here and there. Their own people are begging to die out because of generations of in-breeding. For this reason, the Enclave wants to begin controlling all aspects of reproduction in order to make their own people stronger.

The post-apocalyptic society in this novel is a society that has grown out of necessity in order to survive. For this reason their rules and motivations are somewhat cruel. However, most people accept them because they believe it is for the best of everyone, not just individuals. Unfortunately, their methods are cruel and some are beginning to rise against them, including the heroine of the story, Gaia Stone.

Parent-Child Relationship

The parent-child relationship is an important theme in this novel for two reasons. First, the parent-child relationship comes into play when the novel begins and Gaia Stone discovers her parents have been arrested for unknown reasons. Gaia soon learns that her parents are to be executed and she places herself in danger in order to speak to her parents, and learn what she should do next. It is the love Gaia feels for her parents that drives her to go into the Enclave against the rules to save them and later the love for her mother that drives Gaia to rescue her mother instead of simply escaping the Enclave on her own.

Second, the parent-child relationship is important in this novel because of the advanced babies that are given to families inside the Enclave. The people of Wharfton began willingly advancing their babies because they thought they were giving them a better life. However, when the Enclave began insisting on a specific number of children each month and taking them as infants, some began to think that this requirement was unfair.



Some even want to resist, but are afraid of the consequences. Therefore, the Enclave is allowed to take these children without protest.

As the novel progresses, Gaia learns that the Enclave is suffering from an increasing number of congenital defects among their children, most frequently hemophilia, and a growing number of infertile women. Then, when a child whose mother is from outside the wall, is found to have a gene that suppresses the hemophilia gene, the Enclave becomes interested in finding the families outside the wall who have this gene. This is where the relationship between parent and child becomes even more important. Gaia's entire family is devastated by the Enclave's attempts to find this information, making the parent-child relationship an important theme of the novel.

Survival

Survival is a typical theme in a futuristic, dystopian novel such as this. However, in "Birthmarked", survival is not so much a fight against the elements or creatures created by whatever devastated society, but of one person against a powerful government.

Gaia finds herself arrested and fighting for her life when she sneaks into the Enclave to find her mother and find out what she is supposed to do about their situation. Her parents have been arrested and rumor has it that they are set to be executed. Gaia is confused and frightened, convinced her parents never did anything wrong. In truth, the only thing her parents did wrong was to keep a list of the babies Bonnie advanced to the Enclave under the rules of the Protectorate. Gaia is caught in the middle, unsure if her loyalties should lie with her family or with her government.

As Gaia learns more and more about the Enclave and their agenda, the more she realizes that she and her mother will die no matter what she does. For this reason, Gaia fights to free herself and her mother. In the end, Gaia finds freedom, but the cost is overwhelming. In the fight to get free, Gaia has lost both her parents and the man she loves.



Style

Point of View

"Birthmarked" is written in the third person point of view. The main character is Gaia Stone, a sixteen year old midwife who lives in a futuristic world where fresh water is no longer freely available. Gaia and her community are forced to live poor, without electricity or running water, while the people in the Enclave have these luxuries and much more.

The point of view of this novel is the third person point of view. The author has chosen to remain in the mind of only one character, limiting the reader's ability to know the thoughts and feelings of other characters, but her one character is such a strong and complicated young girl that the reader does not miss the mind jumping that often takes place in similar novels. The point of view allows the reader to develop a relationship with the main character and to see the events of the plot unfold through her eyes only, making it a dramatic view for both reader and character. For these reasons, the point of view of this novel works well with the plot.

Setting

The novel is set in a futuristic world where modern society has been devastated by an energy crisis that left fresh water unavailable. A group of people who found a way to grow myoprotein survived this devastation, and built an Enclave to keep out unwanted survivors from the outside. However, they did allow a city to grow outside their Enclave that they have generously allowed to share in their resources. The Enclave has also generously allowed several children from this outside city to be raised inside the Enclave in a better world than their parents could have provided them with. This quota of children is the conflict in the novel that drives the plot, a conflict based on the Enclave's need for more children to safe guard their own survival and the parents on the outside no longer willing to give up their precious children.

The setting of this novel is imperative to the conflict of the novel because it sets up the situation that leads to the conflict. If the setting was a modern city the plot would not work well because there are rules and safeguards against what the Enclave is doing to the children of Wharfton. At the same time, a modern world would not allow for the more primitive way in which the people of both Wharfton and the Enclave live, a more primitive society that allows for the bakers that come to Gaia's aid on such numerous occasions as well as the lack of modern technology for the Enclave to break the code in which Jasper Stone kept record of the advanced babies in Wharfton.



Language and Meaning

"Birthmarked" is written in simple English. The main character is a teenager who was not educated as modern children are often taught, therefore her language would be expected to be different from that of a modern teenager. In some regards, Gaia's language is more refined than a typical teenager and in others it is simpler.

The language of the novel works well because it is authentic to the main character and it works well for the intended audience. The language is not filled with confusing vocabulary made up specifically for this novel nor does it include a great deal of slang. The language is simple and easy for readers of all ages to understand, making it an appropriate language for the novel.

Structure

The novel has twenty-eight chapters. Each chapter has a title that is related to the events unfolding in that chapter. The chapters vary in length, some longer than others. The novel is told both in narration and dialogue. The plot is told in a linear style that includes a few flashbacks to explain some of the more complicated parts of the plot.

The novel contains one main plot and multiple subplots. The main plot follows Gaia as she learns more about the Enclave and their plans to ensure their own survival. Another subplot follows Gaia's developing relationship with Captain Grey. Yet another subplot follows Gaia's relationship with her mother as well as the doctors with whom she is imprisoned. All the plots come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

"Gaia wished her own mother were there to help, especially with managing the afterbirth and the baby. She knew, normally, she wasn't supposed to give the baby to the mother to hold, not even for an instant, but now the mother was reaching and Gaia didn't have enough hands."

Chapter 1, pg. 7

"She would make sure that the babies in her care had the opportunities she'd never had, those lucky three every month. If the rest, the other half dozen or more babies were unadvanced, then that was their destiny. They would take their chances with life in Wharfton as she had."

Chapter 2, pg. 25

"Even the worst feeling, with time and familiarity, became tolerable." Chapter 4, pg. 33

"The prisoner's belly thrust outward and up in the unmistakable bulge of pregnancy."

Chapter 6, pg. 59

"It took her less than an instant to realize she had made her decision already, the moment she'd seen the mother drop through the hangman's platform." Chapter 7, pg. 63

"For a long while, Gaia was lost to blind, wordless misery. No light or tender words could penetrate her sorrow, while over and over she silently cried out for her lost father."

Chapter 9, pg. 83

"This was what she'd missed: freedom." Chapter 11, pg. 97

"She didn't know what she was listening for, but she listened late into the night, not daring to think of her mother, hoping only that the guards would bring Sephie back."

Chapter 12, pg. 110

"Stay strong. Remember, whatever you do, whatever you say, your first job is to survive." Chapter 15, pg. 136

"Her father had been an autodidactic tailor who had never needed a pattern for cutting out material. He'd been able to visualize in his mind how every scrap of fabric would need to be cut, even for the most complex garment, and he never made a mistake."

Chapter 17, pg. 154

"Gaia had never been so happy in her whole life. Before her, warm and massive, stood the hearth of the black-ovened bakery." Chapter 18, pg. 171

"For one, unblinking instant, Gaia couldn't think at all, and then she turned away from

the lights and the wall. She gripped the ripping bag with her baby sister to her chest and ran blindly." Chapter 27, pg. 266



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the setting of the novel. When is it set? Why do Gaia's family and her neighbors not have electricity or running water? How does this separate Gaia and her neighbors from those living in the Enclave? What other differences are there between those on the outside of the wall and those inside the Enclave? What explains these differences? How does this compare to the modern separation of the classes?

Who is Gaia Stone? What does she do for a living? Why? What is unusual about this profession? Who taught Gaia her profession? For what reason? What other professional choices did Gaia have? Why did she choose to be this one particular profession? How has it impacted her life?

Who is Bonnie Stone? Why is she arrested at the beginning of the novel? What does the Enclave believe she has done? Is this a crime? Why is Bonnie's husband, Jasper, killed shortly after his arrest? What did he do wrong? Why is Bonnie not executed as it is rumored she is supposed to be? Why does Gaia refuse to leave the Enclave without her mother? What does Gaia expect Bonnie to tell her? Where do they plan to go?

Who is Captain Grey? Why does Captain Grey come to Gaia's home at the beginning of the novel? Why does Captain Grey interrogate Gaia? Why does Captain Grey stop the Guard from shooting Gaia after she saves the convict's baby? Why does Captain Grey interview Gaia himself upon her arrest? Why does Captain Grey take Gaia for a walk and warn her about an impending interrogation? What does Gaia learn about Captain Grey's childhood that surprises her? Who turns out to be Captain Grey's biological father? Why is this important?

Who does Gaia witness being executed? What was their crime? Why does Gaia object to the execution? Why does Gaia call out in the crowd? What could have potentially happened to her? Who stops her from yelling out again? Why does Gaia pretend to be a family friend of the executed woman? What does Gaia do? Does the child survive? How? What consequence does Gaia experience due to her actions?

What is hemophilia? Why has there been an increase in this disorder among children in the Enclave? What has been done to treat this condition? What has been done to try to eliminate this disorder among Enclave children? What does this condition have to do with Gaia's parents? Why does the Enclave want to know the identities of the parents of the advanced children in the Enclave? What difference does their parentage make?

What is an advanced baby? How did advancing children to the Enclave begin? At what age did the Enclave originally begin advancing babies? Why did they decide to change to advancing newborns instead of older babies? What were parents doing to their children to keep them from being advanced? How many children did the Stone family advance? Why was Gaia not advanced? Why is she considered a freak among the people of her community? Why is this? How does it impact Gaia?