

There is a bird with many scars

Pearl was not expecting a basketball to slam into the back of her head. She did not want to be in this dusty gym, where she got scolded for not exercising during “free time”. The two years she had spent at Mapleleaf Mental Institute had not exactly been the highlight of her life, and the searing pain shooting through her skull was doing little to change her opinion on things.

“Sorry, Pearl!” Richard said. He wore a smile on his face that was far from apologetic. He was one of the mental health nurses, supposedly in place to provide help and support. In reality, he was yet another reason for Pearl to constantly drift off into another world in which she was not here. A world where she didn’t have to be alive.

Pearl didn’t respond except for to stare intently at her medical label bracelet on her right wrist. The whiteness glared at her, with black font reminding her that her name did not feel like her own. Her medium length raven hair fell over her eyes. She thought about pushing it out of her face but chose to instead embrace the darkness.

Dinner was mostly uneventful. Pearl didn’t want to eat anything at all but ate her usual plain toast anyways. She would get in some trouble for not eating something deemed appropriate by the nurses but in less trouble than if she did not eat at all. Pearl didn’t care too much about getting in trouble; she didn’t care if she got a “time-out” in the isolation room, or if they took away her copy of *The Call of the Wild*, the one book she had. Mostly, it would just be slightly more of an inconvenience in her mediocre life than she could currently tolerate.

On her way back to her room, Pearl obediently stopped by the medication counter for her evening dose of anti-depressants and anti-psychotics. When she was first admitted, she had tried explaining to the doctors that she wasn’t schizophrenic: the demons in her head weren’t real, they were just manifestations of her depression and anxiety. All the medications did was make her body weak and her

mind foggy. She didn't cause anyone much trouble, though, and to many people at Mapleleaf, that constituted as "helping".

Pearl felt the faintest beginnings of a smile on her face as she approached her room. Her roommate, Cano, was on the windowsill singing softly to herself, as she would sometimes do.

"Inside my soul behind the bars, there is a bird with many scars" Cano's voice was soft, sweet, and soulful. Cano greeted Pearl with a smile. They exchanged a brief conversation about nothing at all before the nurses rang the bedtime bell. This daily exchange brought a small amount of solace to Pearl. She reluctantly got into her small, stiff bed, closed her eyes, and was swallowed by nightmares.

An older woman with no face reached out towards Pearl. Pearl tried to step back but was blocked by a two-headed giant with long horns and terrible claws.

"Such a pretty whore" the giant cooed. Its claws stroked Pearl's hair, cutting her face in the process. "You will always be mine, and you shall never escape".

Pearl was frozen, drowning in tears and blood.

It was only a few hours later that Pearl awoke, but it felt like years. It was not yet dawn, so Pearl stared at the ceiling. She longed for an escape from her torment but living in a secure mental facility made suicide difficult.

Pearl dreaded Sundays. They turned the group therapy room into a "church" so that Richard could tell everyone how worthless they were without God's love. He wasn't even a priest, or preacher, or any sort of official spokesman of God; he was merely the only staff member to have a bible. He relished this position; he especially enjoyed talking down to women during his sermons, at least when no other staff members were present. Pearl usually tuned out as much as she could.

“I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over man; she must be silent” Richard exclaimed, flapping his hands in the air as if that would emphasize his point better. Pearl gritted her teeth and started ripping at her fingernails. She stared at the clock, waiting for either the two hours to end or for Richard to become bored and dismiss everyone early.

Sunday dragged on, until it was finally over. The only positive thing to be said about Monday was that it was at the very least not Sunday. Pearl was drifting in a fog as she woke up and received her morning medications. If you asked her what they served for breakfast that day, she did not pay enough attention to remember. She sat in her usual seat for group therapy, but before she could tune out completely while staring at the ground, she noticed a new pair of shoes. Those shoes led up to inexpensive but well looked-after slacks, a plain blue button-up shirt, and then a young, unfamiliar face. His lips were in a slight smile, his nose was a little too big for his face, and he had gentle green eyes. The man’s smile widened slightly after noticing Pearl, and he introduced himself as Myles.

“I’m your new junior counselor. Please be gentle, it’s my first day!” Myles said. Pearl blinked in confusion. She did not feel completely averse to interacting with this man.

“Um, my name is Pearl,” she mumbled. She carefully watched him as he received introductions from the rest of the group. She continued to observe him throughout group. He managed at least the appearance of genuine sympathy. Myles did not interject, or offer his opinion about people’s experiences or emotions, like most counselors at Mapleleaf did. Pearl felt a drop of hope try to ripple throughout her soul, but she tried to keep it contained. Even if Myles did have a good heart, life at Mapleleaf would break him, just as it broke everyone.

As group therapy was wrapping up, Pearl was about to leave when she was stopped.

“Hey, Pearl,” Myles called out. Pearl turned to look at him.

“Yes?” she asked.

“I noticed that you were quiet during group. Didn’t you have anything that you wanted to share?”

Pearl remained silent for a moment, gently tracing her scars on her wrist with her fingertips. Myles waited patiently.

“I don’t have anything worth saying,” she said. Pearl noticed Myles was about to object, so she clarified, “That is, I don’t have anything to say that will have any sort of impact on either my life or those around me”.

“Well, it’s definitely up to you on if you feel like your words have worth. I can speak for me, personally, though, and I think it would have a positive effect on my day to hear you speak more,” Myles said, before cheerfully heading out at the insistence of the senior counselor. Pearl wouldn’t have had a response for this, anyways.

Cano’s song greeted Pearl as she entered her room.

“She longs for sunshine to light her way, a bit of hope to help her find her way” Cano paused slightly as she saw Pearl but finished the verse before greeting her.

“Cano?” Pearl asked, “Have you met the new junior counselor yet?”

“You mean Myles? What about him?”

“Well,” Pearl said, “he seems a bit different, doesn’t he?”

“You mean, not an outright asshole?” Cano smiled. “Yes, I suppose he is a bit different. I’m surprised that you took notice at all”. Pearl shrugged. Cano raised her shoulders slightly and beckoned Pearl to sit next to her. Pearl obliged, and Cano started using her fingers to comb her hair. They sat together until their eyes grew heavy and they drifted off to sleep.

Pearl was in an open field. She felt the warm touch of the sun, so she stretched out her feathery wings and turned her face to the sky. There were only a few peaceful moments before the two-headed giant cast a great shadow over the meadow. Its teeth were like swords, with blood and saliva dripping down to the earth. With a single bite, it ripped the wings from Pearl's back. She fell to the ground and cried out in pain.

Pearl spent the next morning wielding red eyes and restless wrinkles as a shield against human contact. Some nurses avoided her altogether, and some counselors gave her “tsk” sounds as they passed by. Obviously, it was Pearl’s conscious choice to get poor sleep. The only person who didn’t treat her like a zombie was Myles. During group therapy, he gave her subtle opportunities to share, but didn’t push her. When lunchtime rolled around, he sat with her. Pearl didn’t mind, because his voice was one of the few that wasn’t a cheese grater scraping at her brain. She still didn’t want to open up about much, but she and Myles were able to exchange some details about each other. Pearl was 24, and a college drop out. Myles was 22 and had recently received a Bachelor’s in psychology. She had parakeets growing up, and Myles was always an avid doggy rescue dad. All in all, a short, light-hearted conversation on the surface but felt so much deeper to Pearl.

As the weeks passed, Myles and Pearl found small occasions throughout the day to have similar talks. Pearl occasionally found a smile on her face, and her heart hurt a little less and felt a little more hopeful. She found moments to look forward to and enjoy. Even difficult times, such as church, seemed more bearable. One day, Myles asked Pearl an important question.

“Pearl, do you ever want to get out of here? I think that you would be great candidate for an outpatient. You could start to live your life while still getting help”. Pearl took a moment to contemplate.

“Of course, I want to get out,” she said, “it doesn’t seem like a possibility at this point. I doubt the doctors think that I’ve been ‘working on my treatment’”.

“Well, you won’t know unless you try! If you talk to Dr. Reeves, I’m sure they’ll at least consider it”.

Myles gave a broad smile, and Pearl could not help but feel a tad optimistic. She decided that she would ask for a one-on-one session with Dr. Reeves for the next day in order to make her request for release.

Pearl excitedly told Cano about her plan. Cano beamed.

“Pearl, that’s great, I’m so glad that you are motivated and have goals! I really hope that they let you spread your wings, little bird”. They hugged, and Pearl asked Cano if she could sing her to sleep. Cano smiled gently and reached into Pearl’s heart with her song.

“She’s always beating her wings trying to be free, trying to find something that she cannot see”

Pearl was pleasantly surprised to awaken the next morning without any memories of bad dreams.

Despite feeling well-rested, she felt some anxiety about her meeting with Dr. Reeves as she approached their office.

Dr. Quincy Reeves reminded Pearl of most people that she used to see on survival reality shows: they appeared bulked up from previous military experience but had since become a little soft, and a layer of fat was on top of rusty muscles. They were in their fifties, and fortunate enough to still have a head full of hair but some silver streaks were starting to show. Their beady brown eyes stared at Pearl as she entered.

“When’s the last time you needed a one-on-one session?” they asked, their voice oozed authority.

“Well,” Pearl said, “I was hoping to discuss when I might be released on an outpatient basis”.

“Release?” Dr. Reeves could not hide their amusement and frustration. “You barely eat, you do not engage with either staff or other patients, you do not share in group, staff report screams and cries from your room while you sleep, and you have given no indication that you no longer harbor suicidal or otherwise self-destructive thoughts”.

“Yes, but...”

“No buts about it. If you wish to discuss in more detail why you’re here, or if you need a medication change, let me know. Otherwise I want you to move along, you will be late for group”. They waited to see if there was to be any response: when Pearl was unable to utter another word, they ushered her out of their office.

Pearl understood logically why her request had been denied, but logic did not prevent her chest from feeling crushed. Logic did not help her catch her breath. In that moment she hated the irrational feelings within her. Her feelings retaliated by causing extreme anxiety, which inevitably lead to her puking her meager breakfast into the trash can. It did not take Myles long to realize that things did not go well. He reached out as if to embrace her, but hesitated. He chose to instead gently pat her hand with his while murmuring soothing words.

After some time of comfort went by, Pearl almost felt like she might be feeling a little better. Myles decided to break the silence.

“Maybe we could sneak you out!” he declared enthusiastically. Pearl stared at him blankly. “Yes, maybe I’m too inspired by movies and tv shows, but maybe we could sneak you out in the laundry? You just have to get out of here, you’ll probably do much better once you’re away from this depressing place,” Myles continued. Pearl laughed and thought it sounded crazy at first, but soon found herself getting into this plan. They slowly walked towards her room, and bumped into Abby, another in-patient at the oh-so popular facility, Mapleleaf Mental Institute. Pearl wondered if Abby had overheard any of her conversation with Myles, and if she would report anything to the counselors or not.

Abby was fairly new to the unit: newly 18, so had never been to an adult ward before. Her exterior showed a stereotypical “preppy” girl: beautiful, classically feminine, took good care of her hair and nails, always wore makeup, had a pep in her step. What most people didn’t take the time to notice was that

she was also very intelligent and sensitive. Pearl had only had a couple conversations with Abby, but she had always seemed quiet but friendly, and spoke with more wisdom than her years would suggest. They got along okay: Pearl suspected Abby wouldn't have it in her to report her. This calmed Pearl's anxiety, to a certain extent.

Shortly after exchanging brief pleasantries with Abby, Pearl reached her room. She and Myles shared a brief look; Pearl felt her heart quicken. Myles kept opening his mouth slightly and then closing it, like he had something to say but the words couldn't come out. Pearl felt overwhelmed with grief, confusion, gratitude, and impulse. She went up on her toes and planted a small kiss on Myles's lips. He could only stand there, startled, as Pearl ducked into her room. She felt herself starting to sweat a little and felt some throbbing deep in her chest.

Cano was looking out the window, softly singing like she usually was; *"Once she sees her wings that bleed, she instead starts to sing a haunting plead. A song that begs for freedom, a chance to escape her dark kingdom"*. Pearl listened quietly, closing her eyes to absorb the melancholy sounds. The music faded, and Pearl felt Cano's arms wrap around her in a warm embrace.

The next thing that Pearl notices was that she was biting down on a bagel. She paused mid-bite: was it breakfast? It had to be breakfast, that was the only meal that she would eat bagels. What happened last night? She had experienced blackouts before, but not since her early hospitalization days. Sure, she had been living each day in a fog since then, but at least she remembered what happened in that fog each day. Pearl tried to shrug it off; at least she did not remember any nightmares she might have had last night. She looked around, only to further startle herself; not only was it breakfast, but she was alone in an isolation room. The bite of bagel suddenly got stuck in her throat, but she managed to force it down. Pearl had no idea what she could have done to end up in here.

The door creaked open, and Richard poked his head into the room. His eyes looked Pearl over from her feet to her head, pausing to stare at some crumbs Pearl had on her shirt. Pearl was unsure why, but she felt extremely uneasy. She started to brush the crumbs off; Richard started to approach her but a nurse passing by started him. He stopped his approach, and said, "Dr. Reeves will see you now". His voice was angry. He dramatically gestured outside of the room, and Pearl hesitantly passed him and headed towards the office of Dr. Reeves.

As she approached, she could hear a voice coming from inside the office.

"But Jamie," Dr. Reeves pleaded, "I haven't seen the kids in 6 months, you said that I could have them this weekend". Dr. Reeves looked up sharply as Pearl gently knocked on their door. "Jamie, I have to go. I'm sorry, I have to go. We can discuss this later," Dr. Reeves put down their phone and stared at Pearl. Pearl promptly stared at the ground. The floor was fairly clean, but she saw a single ant walking across the room. Where was that ant going? It didn't seem to be carrying any food. Maybe it was scouting? Dr. Reeves cleared their throat. Pearl snuck a look, and their eyes had not shifted from staring at her. Dr. Reeves sighed.

"Pearl...do you want to talk to me about what happened?" they asked, exasperation clear in their voice. Pearl felt miniscule under their gaze.

"I...I don't know what happened," she said. Dr. Reeves raised their eyebrow. "I mean...I'm very sorry, I don't remember what happened after I went to my room last night," her voice was barely a whisper.

"You had a dissociative episode?" the doctor's voice was sharp. Pearl shrugged. "So, you think you're better? You think that you should be an outpatient?" Dr. Reeves's voice raised slightly. Pearl felt the slightest of moisture start to gather in her eyes. Dr. Reeves sighed and covered their face in their hands.

"I'm sorry, Pearl," they said rather sadly, "it is truly not my intention nor my job to take a sarcastic tone with you. Please, Pearl, I would really like to help you".

“What happened?” Pearl asked. Dr. Reeves looked back up at her, their gaze gentler this time.

“Pearl, you tried to steal a hospital key from a staff member,” Dr. Reeves explained. “You were not exactly subtle about it. They caught you trying to steal it. You tried to run off with the key. The staff member grabbed your arm. They accidentally bruised you, and they have been disciplined for handling you in that manner, and trust me, they feel awful about hurting you.”

Pearl looked down at her arm. There was indeed a blueish brown bruise on her left wrist. It hadn't hurt before, but now that Pearl was able to see it, she felt some slight pains.

“I'm sorry,” Pearl mumbled. Dr. Reeves rested their head on one of their hands.

“I appreciate the thought, Pearl, but you don't even remember doing it,” they said. “Do you have any idea why you might have tried to steal the key in your dissociative state?”

Pearl hesitated, “Well... I guess I was upset that you said I couldn't leave. I guess...I just wanted to leave”.

Dr. Reeves nodded slightly, then seemed to switch focus suddenly.

“What do you think of the new counselor, Myles?” they asked. Pearl tried to read their expression, but they had an excellent poker face on. Pearl shrugged as her response.

“Have you thought about opening up in therapy more?” Dr. Reeves changed the subject yet again. Pearl shrugged again. Dr. Reeves glanced at the clock and sighed again. “Well, speaking of, it's time for your group therapy session. Please do consider sharing something, anything,” they said and ushered her out of their office.

As Pearl headed towards the group therapy room, she could hear laughter and excited shouting. She went in, and saw that Cano was in the middle of the circle with a cake that said, "GOOD LUCK, CANO!"

Cano saw Pearl, and exclaimed, "Look, Pearl! I'm being discharged!"

Pearl smiled, even though she felt her heart sink some. She was happy that Cano was going to finally be free, but she didn't know how she was going to get through the rest of her own stay without Cano to help sing away bad dreams. Still, she grabbed a piece of cake with everyone else, and tried to listen to everyone's goodbyes and favorite memories of Cano. Her mind did wander off several times, and then way too soon, it was time to go back to the rooms. Cano gave Pearl one last hug.

"Don't worry, I'll write," Cano whispered to Pearl. Pearl watched Cano walk away as much as she could, before Cano was beyond the first set of security doors leading out, and thus out of sight. Never had Pearl walked more slowly towards her room.

It was empty. Not that anyone was allowed much personal belongings, but the room had never felt as empty as it did in that moment. Pearl stared at the bare bed; since no one was using it, the nurses had removed all blankets and pillows. Only the skeleton remained. Pearl hoped that she would not sleep but was eventually overwhelmed by slumber that was plagued with dreams.

There was a storm brewing overhead, and the rain was making her wings so heavy. She could smell the stench of the two-headed giant before she could see him. She tried to run, but her wings dragged on the ground behind her. It was not difficult for the giant to overtake her.

"You will never have anyone except for me," one head growled as the other slid his infected tongue over Pearl's wings. Slime acted as glue, causing her feathers to stick together and into a growing puddle of inky black on the ground. Instead of Pearl's reflection, she saw the faceless woman trying to reach out of the pool. Pearl stopped struggling, there was not point. She could only stare into the dark as she felt her heart pierced repeatedly by the giant's claws.

The next few weeks were even hazier than usual. It didn't help that Pearl missed Cano and had nothing but an empty bed to look forward to each night. Also, due to her dissociative episode, her medications were either increased, or changed, or both. Pearl did not know, and she did not care. She could not even remember any brief conversations she had with Myles throughout the day. Pearl did get a few vague but uplifting letters from Cano; at least when her mind-fog made her forget about the letters, she could just read them over and over as if for the first time.

One day, Pearl was on her way back to her room after picking up her mail. She smiled as she started reading a letter from Cano while walking:

Dearest Little Bird,

Any crazy escape plans pan out yet? Or, even better, have you started opening up in therapy at all?

Whatever is going on with you, I hope that you get a least a little sunshine each day to give you a break from your stormy thoughts. I miss you a lot. I wish I could say things were going well with me, but they're not. I haven't found a job yet, I fell and broke my wrist, I'm overdue on my rent and I might become homeless. I really don't know what else to do...

But before Pearl could finish reading the letter, she ran into Richard. Quite literally.

"Watch where you're going, bitch," he snarled. While Richard was always unpleasant to some degree, he usually at least tried to pretend to be caring in case one of his supervisors was watching. Pearl frowned as she noticed he was zipping his pants while walking away. The frown deepened as she realized he had just left Abby's room, and that she could hear crying coming from the room. Even though it felt like lead was weighing down her veins, Pearl slowly approached the room and softly knocked on the partially open door. The crying paused, and then continued.

"Abby?" Pearl quietly called out, "I'm coming in..."

“Please don’t, I just want to be left alone,” Abby’s voice croaked through the crack in the door. Pearl hesitated, and then went in anyways.

Pearl had never seen such defeat, not even in her worst nightmares. Abby was in a heap on the ground. She was wearing her favorite dress, but it was ruffled and ripped. Abby’s makeup was tear-stained and smeared. Her arms were limp. She could not look up at Pearl; her eyes were fixated on a few drops of blood on the ground. Pearl stared, not knowing what to say.

“I’m a dirty rag,” Abby whispered. Pearl felt like she was going to throw up. “That’s what he said,” Abby continued, “that I’m dirty and tarnished and boys only want clean rags. Nothing can clean my soul,” Abby paused again as her sobs took over her voice. Pearl reached to hug Abby but stopped as soon as she saw Abby flinch in fear.

“I’m not going to hurt you,” Pearl managed to speak. Pearl felt like she wanted to scream or cry but was unable to do either. “You...we should report this,” Pearl stammered. Abby shook her head.

“Like they’ll believe a crazy person,” Abby said, “plus Richard told me that he’s close friends with Dr. Reeve’s eldest son. Reporting him would only make things worse”. Pearl wanted to argue. Pearl wanted to say something hopeful or uplifting. There were no words to be found.

“Please...thank you for checking on me, but please leave,” Abby turned away from Pearl. Pearl stared at the hellish scene for another eternity trapped in a minute, then slowly left.

There were miles of hallways before Pearl reached her room. She sat on her bed, just staring at the wall for at least an hour. She heard something fall on the floor; she had forgotten that she was still holding on to the letter from Cano until her hand was too tired to hang on anymore. The crumpled paper and ink did not give Pearl any hope or comfort, but she knew she had to finish reading it.

I really don't know what else to do... my insurance won't help me go to the hospital, neither the emergency room nor Mapleleaf. There is only one way out. I just want you to know, my sweetest, little bird... I want you to know that I love you and I want you to keep trying. I promise you can fly someday, even I can't. All my love, Cano

Pearl's mind was empty. What was Cano saying? Of course, Cano could make it! If Cano couldn't make it, then who could? Cano couldn't...wouldn't? She wouldn't make that final leap...

Before Pearl could finish processing Cano's letter, Richard silently snuck in. His face appeared calm, but his eyes screamed danger.

"I saw you go into Abby's room," he said, his voice dripping venom. "You know that the blood was just her period, and she's crying because she's feeling emotional about it. Plus, god knows her womanly feelings are probably intensified by all the pills she has to take," his eyes peered into Pearl's, trying to read her reaction.

"Cut the bullshit, Richard," Pearl heard herself say, as if it were someone else, "I know what you did. You're a monster, and I will stop you somehow".

"You?" Richard sneered, "You don't even have the energy or motivation to take care of yourself, but you think you can take me down? You think anyone would believe you? You, with your dissociative episodes and your impressive list of anti-psychotics you take that would probably kill any normal, functional person. Maybe I should teach you a lesson..." Richard reached a hand towards her face. He pushed her chin up, then released her with disdain. "Blech, I mean, Abby is barely pretty enough for anyone to take notice, and you're nowhere near what she is. You'd enjoy it way too much, and I probably couldn't even get off". Richard pushed Pearl away from him. Pearl couldn't stop the knots in her stomach from coming out in the form of vomit. Richard stepped a little away from Pearl.

“See, you’re disgusting,” Richard said. “Besides, the crazy thing is... I don’t even have to do anything to you. You’re so broken and worthless, I couldn’t do anything to you that would be worse than what you would do to yourself,” Richard left the room. He left a shiny, sharp gift for Pearl on her bedside table. The meager light from the room glistened off the edge of the razor.

Pearl gaped at it, not even aware of the tears falling from her eyes to the floor. She had wanted this for so long. Her hands trembled with need, so she picked up the razor. Her hands shook even more. She could barely get the metal to her wrist. Soon enough, she felt the warm embrace of the beautiful red spreading over her body. It was warm, but she started feeling colder. She just needed a nap, and everything would be better. She heard Cano’s voice as she started to drift away;

“Wings broken, voice too hoarse to cry, little bird no longer remembers how to fly, the only thing that she knows how to do...is die.”

For a moment, Pearl enjoyed the quiet and dark emptiness. Then: pain, beeping sounds, muffled voices. Drifting in, drifting out. Pearl thought she was done with nightmares, but she was wrong. Everything faded out again.

The faceless woman was reaching out for Pearl again. This time, Pearl reached her own arms out and pulled the woman in for an embrace. There was the faint smell of strawberry shampoo mixed with camel filters. Pearl pulled away slightly, and the woman had a face: one she had thought she had forgotten long ago.

The ground broke underneath Pearl, and she was scooped up by the giant. Both heads were rotting from hatred, with alcohol and tears wearing away at the little flesh that remained.

“You’re mine,” the heads cooed at Pearl. She looked them straight in their eyes.

“You mean nothing to me,” she declared. The heads screamed, and shooting pain went through Pearl’s head. She refused to look away.

“YOU’RE NOTHING!” Pearl shouted, and the giant disappeared. Pearl once again floated in the dark abyss. Up ahead in the distance, there was a faint, flickering light.

Pearl opened her eyes. She was in a hospital bed. The machines that she was hooked up to announced that she was not dead. Her wrists were bandaged, and she was in less pain than before. Dr. Reeves was looking at her from across the room.

“You’re awake,” they said. Pearl nodded. “How are you feeling?” they asked.

“Alive,” Pearl said. Dr. Reeves gave a faint smile.

“Anyways,” Pearl continued, “I think I’m ready to work on my treatment more actively”. Dr. Reeves sighed in both exasperation and relief.

“Well, good,” Dr. Reeves chortled, “let’s get on that as soon as you’re physically better, okay?” Pearl smiled and gave them a thumbs up.

Pearl was discharged from the hospital the next morning and went back to her life at Maple Leaf. The first thing that she did was request that Myles work in groups that she wasn’t a part of; she didn’t want to feel tempted to take any easy ways out, or to be distracted. She wasn’t sure if that would hurt Myles’s feelings or not, but she felt it was important for her recovery.

Next, she gathered the courage to talk to Dr. Reeves about what had happened with Richard and Abby. Dr. Reeves immediately called for security to detain Richard while they waited for the police to arrive.

Finally, Pearl worked on her treatment. She told Dr. Reeves that the medications made her feel worse, and so the doctor changed her prescriptions. She was finally able to open up about how her mother had

died while Pearl was very young, and how her father had become an alcoholic and obsessive and overbearing. She talked about those that had wronged her, as well as those she had wronged. Pearl talked about her nightmares and worked on thinking up what her goals and dreams were. She started working on a children's book called "Little Bird"; she wasn't sure if she'd ever be able to finish it, but at least she had a project to work on.

When Pearl was released from Mapleleaf, she was nowhere near "normal". She was going to be able to see each day clearly, and not in a fog. She wasn't going to live happily ever after, but she was going to live.