"Don't put me in charge!"

by Jewelfox

Summary

I stopped right in front of Pearl, and put my arms to the wall on either side of her head. "This was my life, for thousands of years. How do you like it?"

Only then, with my face up close to hers, did I realize that she was blushing. And that my cheeks, in her forehead Gem's reflection, were a deep shade of blue.

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A bit of light, fluffy bondage with slice of life bookends, where Lapis confronts her inner demons and learns about trust and consent with Pearl's help. And her roommate's, even if Peridot doesn't realize it. Featuring two illustrations by Alias-Pseudonym!
Do you know what it’s like to be a mirror?

No?

I don’t either.

Mirrors exist to show you reflections. You’re supposed to forget that the mirror itself is even there. And after awhile, I forgot I was there.

Sometimes, I wish I could go back. Because every time I realize what I’m like … when Peridot stops rambling at me, and I walk outside and try not to look up at the night sky … every single time, I end up hating myself.
Not because I held Jasper down, at the bottom of the ocean, for months. Not because I toyed with Gems who couldn’t hurt me. And not because I almost strangled Steven and his friend.

Because I liked it.

I try to forget. I try to tell myself that I’m past that now; that I stood up to Jasper and told her off, and that I get along with Steven and Peridot now without wanting to hurt or restrain them. Usually.

But every now and then, something happens that reminds me how terrible I really am.

* * *

It was a few days after the mess at the Beta Kindergarten. Steven wanted to show Pearl and Garnet what we’d been working on, in the barn.

He and Peridot did all the talking. I just stood back and folded my arms, and tried not to glare at Pearl. Because of all my memories of being stuck in that mirror, her face was the worst. She didn’t just use me to look up things from Gem history; she used to practice *lecturing* at me, in that snobby voice of hers, winning every argument she’d ever had with her friends. I’d spent thousands of years watching her be smug and condescending towards me, and it hurt so much.

That’s why I made myself forget I was there. It was easier not to take it personally if I wasn’t a person.

They got around to looking at the morps that I’d made, and Steven gave them my sarcastic explanations for them. I really wasn’t sure *what* I’d been thinking when I made the ones with the leaf and the baseball bat. But then they got to the one with the mirrors and TV screen, and Percy saying he feels trapped. And Pearl didn’t give Steven time to explain it.

“Oh, Lapis. This is an … interesting piece.” She put one hand to her chin as she squinted at it.

“It seems very personal,” Garnet said, from behind her. “It was brave of you to show us this.”

I wrinkled my brow at her, not sure if that was a compliment or a threat. “Thanks.”

“It really was!” Peridot said, stepping up next to me and grinning at them. “At first, she would only watch *Camp Pining Hearts* with me from the barn entrance, and would go away when I noticed her. But this one time, I pretended I *didn’t* notice her *all day*, and she watched a whole season with me! Then later I asked her ‘Hey Lapis, wasn’t the episode with the pancake shortage hilarious?’ And she said yes! Now we talk about it *all the time*. I’m so glad she admitted she likes it.” She waved her hands in the air the entire time she was explaining this.

Pearl just cringed, and then tsked at Peridot once she was finished. “Yes, this work is definitely about *Camp Pining Hearts* … on a superficial level. But making art is all about communication! A piece of art is a conversation. Every choice you make is a statement.”

Peridot’s face fell.

I just looked at Pearl blankly, while she stepped in front of the display and explained my own morp to me and Peridot. “These mirrors, for instance, *clearly* represent the time Lapis spent in that mirror. Meanwhile, the television stuck on an endless loop captures the helplessness of …”

“I just feel trapped,” Percy repeated.

“ … of being trapped!” Pearl finished, gesturing at the screen.
“It actually represents the years I spent listening to you say the same things to me, over and over again.”

Everyone gasped.

I kept my face blank, but inside I was seething as I went on. “Did you think that I wouldn’t remember? That I was just an object back then, but now I’m a person so everything is okay? Everything’s not okay. I’m not okay. I don’t want to hear your lectures, and I especially don’t want to see your face.”

Pearl took a step back, her hands to her face. “I … I’m sorry, Lapis. I can’t imagine what it must have been like for-”

“Then let me show you.”

I raised one arm towards Peridot’s toilet morp, bringing a fountain of water up out of it and then crashing it down on the floor, as a wall of ice that cut me and Pearl off from the rest. Steven, Garnet, and Peridot had just enough time to jump back before I sent a torrent of water crashing into Pearl with my other arm, slamming her into the wall.

The helpless look on her face was priceless.

“Lapis, don’t hurt her!” Steven cried. I heard Garnet summon her weapons.

I ignored them, and glared at Pearl as I walked towards her slowly. The water surrounding her turned into shackles and chains. “Do you like being helpless?” I asked her. “Not being able to move? Not being able to stop listening to that grating voice?”

“I just feel trapped,” Percy repeated.

I stopped right in front of Pearl, and put my arms to the wall on either side of her head. “This was my life, for thousands of years. How do you like it?”

Only then, with my face up close to hers, did I realize that she was blushing. And that my cheeks, in her forehead Gem’s reflection, were a deep shade of blue.

I turned on my heel and let go of her suddenly, the water crashing back down to the floor and the ice wall crumbling to bits.

Garnet desummoned her weapon. “Pearl, are you okay?” she and Steven asked at the same time.

“Lapis, are you okay?” Peridot asked.

“I’m fine,” I lied, staring straight ahead at the barn entrance. “I’ll be back later.”

Before anyone could respond, I summoned my wings and flew off.

* * *

SHE’S the one you should be afraid of.

Jasper’s words taunted me, in my mind.

I thought I was a brute, but YOU … you’re a monster.

I had flown all the way to the Galaxy Warp, trying to escape her. Trying to escape myself. But I
couldn’t. I knew that no matter what I did, this was who I was. A terrible, bullying Gem, who liked to hold people down and then watch them squirm.

“I should’ve just stayed in that mirror,” I whispered to myself. It was nighttime by now, and I was leaning forward with my arms around my knees, and my lower back to one of the pylons. I couldn’t sit upright or my Gem would scratch against it.

I thought about what it’d felt like to be cracked. Knowing that *something* was wrong, but unable to do anything about it. Lashing out at the world and the people around me, and hurting them. Trying to get back to Homeworld without any wings.

Had I really changed that much? Had Steven actually healed me? Or was I still cracked on the inside, somehow? Corrupted, like those monsters the Crystal Gems fought? And if I ended up fighting again … would anyone be able to stop me?

I started shaking and tearing up, the water inside my Gem leaking out through my eyes. I squeezed them shut, and clutched my knees even tighter. I don’t know how long I stayed like that.

The one thing that made me feel better was the thought that at least I knew this was wrong. That even if I enjoyed hurting and restraining others, I could remember what it was like being trapped in the mirror, and how bad it had felt.

Of course, *that* got blown away as soon as I got back “home.”

* * *

I took the warp to get back and then walked the rest of the way slowly, trying to calm down. Trying to think about what I would do for the rest of the night. I wasn’t in the mood for Peridot’s ranting about Earth stuff, and I especially didn’t want to hear her attempts at sympathy. I almost just wanted to hide for a week, or a year. Or a few hundred years.

Unfortunately, Pearl was waiting for me right next to the barn.

I sighed, when I was still far enough away that she couldn’t hear me, and started walking even more slowly. I wasn’t going to hurry for her.

Light came out of the inside of the barn, around the corner from the side I was on, and I could hear the TV inside as I got closer. I wasn’t about to acknowledge Pearl, and I guessed that she was afraid of me, because it wasn’t until I’d just about rounded the corner that she spoke.

“Lapis?” She gave me an anxious look. “I … I think we should talk.”

I heard people laughing, on the TV inside the barn.

“About what?” I said, without looking at her. Hoping it showed on my face how little I wanted to do with her.

“I wanted to properly tell you I’m sorry.” She was looking away. “I guess what I mean is … I really came to think of you as an object. I believed that this was the best we could do for you. I can see now that I was wrong, and how demeaning this must have been. I … I wish that I’d let you out sooner.”

I slumped my shoulders, and sighed. Then I walked over to where she was, and where the TV noise was quieter.
“Okay,” I said, once I could hear myself think. “I forgive you. Now go away.”

I didn’t really forgive her, for neglecting the cracked Gem that had powered her mirror for thousands of years. For keeping me inside her Gem, and just forgetting about me. But nothing she could do could ever make up for that. And I knew that if I had to listen to her again, I would do something I’d regret. So I just turned around after I said that, and started heading back to the entrance.

“W-wait,” Pearl added, as soon as I’d turned my back. “There was something else that I wanted to tell you!”

“What?” I clenched my hands into fists, not moving or looking at her but feeling the water in the nearby pool.

Pearl rushed on, embarrassed. “I was just going to say … if restraining me helped you feel better, I wouldn’t mind letting you do it again. After I kept you in that mirror all this time, I owe you!”

I literally froze in my tracks, as the dew on the grass turned into ice. “What.”

“So if you ever want to take out your feelings on me … to taunt and restrain me, and tell me how awful I’ve been to you … then I would accept that. I-if it helped you feel better, I mean.”

I turned around to stare at her, icicles breaking off of my feet. As soon as I did she dropped her gaze again, blushing.

“Well, I guess I’ll be going now … ” She smiled, nervously. “You know where to find me!” And with that, she was off, in the direction of the Warp pad.

I started to shake, and to thaw inside. But I waited until I heard her Warp out, before screaming.

Something clattered inside of the barn, before Peridot ran out looking startled. “Lapis! What happened?”

“Nothing!” I lied. “I’m fine. Everything is fine!”

“Are you sure?” she asked. “Because Pearl stopped by earlier and said she wanted to talk to you, and it sounded like you two were…”

“Yes, Peridot, I’m sure. Now let’s go watch TV together.” I had to walk past her and into the barn before she got the hint.

The “truck” that she’d had the TV plugged into earlier was spread out across the grass, the walls, the piles of junk, and the barn floor. She had its seats set up in front of the television, which was plugged into its guts. I took a seat and folded my arms to keep them from shaking, and then waited for Peridot to come in and sit down in the other one before speaking.

“ … this isn’t Camp Pining Hearts.” I squinted at the TV.

“It’s a series that Amethyst showed me!” Peridot sounded proud of herself. “It’s called ‘Li’l Butler.’” I saw her make air quotes with her hands, out of the corner of my eye.

“You people have too much money!” a tiny human on the screen said. I heard people laughing again.

“Why can’t I see the people who are laughing?” I asked.
“My theory is that this is the ‘live studio audience’ that they mentioned. It’s only a theory, though.”

Something else was bothering me about this show. “Do they make tiny humans with facial hair?” I asked Peridot.

“No. That’s why he’s funny! Nyeh heh heh heh!” She doubled over laughing, and I gave her a bemused look. Peridot was too easy to distract sometimes.

We watched it in silence for a little while. Or relative silence, anyway. I was used to tuning out Peridot’s rants, but at one point I realized that she was explaining why it wasn’t as good as Camp Pining Hearts. “Nothing that happens to them ever lasts beyond a single episode! And to compare the Money family to the campers? Ha. None of them even come close to the synergy displayed by Pierre and Patricia. Paulette would fit in better with them, since she has no talent anyway!”

“You people have too much money!” the character exclaimed again.

“Also, they have too much money,” Peridot finished.

I glanced at her. “What is ‘money?’”

“Well … it’s the humans in the Money family, obviously! There are simply too many of them.”

“I see.” I resumed squinting at the TV. Something seemed off, again.

“Sometimes they say they have money in ‘stocks,’ so clearly those are their version of a-”

“Wait.” I held up a hand to interrupt her, since I’d just realized what it was. “I thought you saw Pierre and Percy as the strongest couple.”

Peridot fidgeted with her hands, and looked away. “I did … but that was before Percy spent all of season five moping about Paulette.”

I made a face. “Season five was garbage.”

“Exactly! Only a fool would think Percy was good for Pierre after watching that.”

We watched the show for another few seconds, before I sighed and looked down at the floor. “Peridot?”

“Yes, Lapis?”

“If you like something that’s bad, does it make you a bad person?”

She gave me a look like I’d asked her to clean up her trash. “How bad are we talking, here?”

There was no way I was telling her what this was really about. Not just yet. “Thinking Pierre and Percy are right for each other,” I said.

Peridot laughed. “No one could possibly think that!”

I gave her an annoyed look. "You did."

“That’s because I was missing out on essential information!” Peridot started making the hand gestures that she does when she’s explaining something. "Without seeing how Percy ruined Pierre’s plan to defeat Blue Team, I would’ve thought that his lung capacity gave him
the advantage in swimming. But it turns out that if he’s not trying to save his precious Paulette’s friendship bracelet, he can barely even paddle! Unless he’s in a canoe, which only happened in one episode."

“I’ve seen the entire series. What if I still thought they were right for each other? What then?”

Peridot looked uncomfortable with this. “Well … I guess there are other things to consider besides their effectiveness in the Colour War … ” She started mumbling something to herself.

“Spit it out, Peridot.” I was gripping my arms tightly now, and trying not to shake. “Does liking something bad make you a bad person?”

“No, of course not!” Peridot put one hand behind her head and started scratching her hair with it. “I mean, it makes you wrong, but it’s not like it hurts anyone or makes them feel bad.”

I pulled my knees up to my face again, and watched the TV with half-lidded eyes. “What if I like hurting people and making them feel bad.”

It took her a couple of seconds to respond. Long enough for me to regret having said that.

“Then … I guess … you wouldn’t be a bad person if you only hurt people who deserved it? Or wanted it.” Peridot frowned, and put a hand to her chin. “‘Wow, Thanks!’ makes me feel bad when I look at it, so I only look at it when I want to feel bad.” She looked up at the morp that she’d made out of the tape recorder I’d smashed, and smiled. “And it works!”

“You don’t look like you feel bad right now.”

“Of course I do! I’m happy because it still works.” She beamed at me.

“… whatever.” I stood up.

“Lapis, where are you going?” Peridot got up too. “Did I make you feel bad?” Her eyes glistened. I couldn’t help but smile at her earnestness. “No, Peridot. I’m okay,” I said. “I just need to talk to someone.”
Bonding

Chapter Summary

Lapis takes Pearl up on her offer.

I hesitated at the Warp pad, thinking about what Pearl had said. What was I going to do, exactly? Why had she offered me this? And why did I feel so nervous instead of angry at her?

I clenched my fists in frustration. I’m just going to talk to her, I thought. If she REALLY wants to make up for what she and the Crystal Gems did, then I’ll find a way.

At the time, I had no idea that Pearl had already planned things out from start to finish. But I shouldn’t have been so surprised.

* * *

The tunnel of light disappeared, leaving me inside of the Gems’ house. It was still dark outside, and the lights were all off. But Pearl was standing there by the front door, waiting for me.

Or was she? It looked like she’d been watching the loft for some reason. As soon as I appeared, though, she turned to look at me and then gasped. “Lapis!” she whispered.

I gave her a quizzical look as I stepped off of the Warp pad. “What are you doing?” I asked.

Pearl shushed me. “It’s not important!” she whispered. “Quick, let’s go to my room before Steven wakes up.”

I heard him snore, and saw his bed up on the loft. Had Pearl been watching him sleep …?

She hurried past me while I was trying to figure this out. Then there was a flash of light behind me, and I turned around to see that she’d opened the giant stone door behind the Warp pad. I heard fountains from somewhere inside.

“Lapis, this way!” She beckoned me urgently.

I felt even more apprehensive about going into Pearl’s room than I had about Warping here. “Why are you in such a hurry?” I whispered.

“Because Steven and Amethyst would ask too many questions, and Garnet … well, there’s no telling what Garnet would do.”

Suddenly I had a bunch of questions for her. But I didn’t think she was going to answer them while I was out here, so I gathered my courage and strode past her into her room.

The place was nothing but fountains. The centre of the room was an oval-shaped pool of water, big enough to fit both the barn and the Crystal Gems’ house in it. Everything was a soft blue and grey, with cream-coloured streamers fluttering down from an overhead pillar that glowed.

A stone walkway engraved with Gem-shaped designs surrounded the pool, and scattered
throughout it were these fountains shaped like bowls, floating in midair with water pouring down from them in curtains. They were high enough that I couldn’t see what was on top. But below each one was what looked like a bottomless pit, the exact width and shape of the fountain above, with water pouring down its sides. I guessed that those led to other rooms … ?

Pearl closed the door behind me, and gave a sigh of relief. “Well, here we are!” she said.

“I see you’ve redecorated.” I wasn’t sure what else to say.

“I’ve what?” She sounded even more nervous than I was. ”Oh … of course you’ve seen my room before! Ha ha! Silly me.”

I guessed she was having trouble making the connection between me and that mirror she’d left me in. I narrowed my eyes, looking out at the giant fountains. Maybe I was still angry with her.

“So,” Pearl said, and I turned around to look when she clapped her hands together. “Let’s get started! Do you need me to explain this for you?”

”Explain what?” I asked.

“A human thing I’ve adapted for Gems, called Dominant / submissive roleplay!”

Pearl projected an image from her Gem, of two smiling stick figures standing next to each other. One was holding a string attached to the other’s neck. “The Dominant (that’s you) physically restrains the submissive (that’s me), and gives her orders and verbal or physical discipline, to reinforce being in charge. It’s a form of play-acting which promotes bonding and stress relief!”

I was as confused, now, as I was scared. “You just want me to pretend to hurt you?”

Pearl’s hologram disappeared. “Well, I don’t mind if you want to be rough with me.” She tapped her chin. “But it’s important to follow safety procedures, to ensure no one really gets hurt. For instance, we need to establish a safeword before starting. Something like … hmm. ‘Red,’” she finished.

“W-why ‘red?’” I had wrapped my arms around myself again.

“Because nothing in here is red, so it’s not likely to come up.” She smiled.

Pearl gave me another hologram presentation, of stick figures in what looked like embarrassing positions. The one in the most vulnerable spot always had X-ed out eyes and was sticking its tongue out. “Nothing we do here should cause lasting damage. So remember: No strangling, poofing, dismemberment, or scratching or chipping the other’s Gem. Speaking of which, we should set boundaries before we begin. Touching Gems, or no? Fusion, or no?”

“Touching Gems? Fusion?” I took a step backward, and tried and failed to suppress a shiver. ”What are you trying to get me to do?!”

“Lapis, dear … ” Pearl’s hologram disappeared. “It’s alright. Really. I promise you don’t have to do anything you don’t want to.”

I took a few more involuntary steps back before turning to sit by the pool, my legs dangling in it. Pearl came over and sat by me, and I scooted away from her. She didn’t act like I had done anything wrong, and although I was staring down at the water now – my cheeks burning with fear and embarrassment – the reflection of Pearl’s face just showed concern.
“Will you be alright?” she asked.

“I don’t know.”

“How are you feeling right now?”

“I don’t know!” I pounded my fists on the walkway, and as soon as I did there was a sound like someone had cannonballed into the pool. No one was there, since it was just my nervous energy, but we both got splashed anyway.

Pearl flinched, and tried to dry her face off. I brushed the droplets away with my mind, and she nodded gratefully. “Thank you, Lapis. Is … is it okay if I hold your hand? Would that make you feel better?”

“I guess.”

My face turned a deeper shade of blue, as she cupped both of her delicate hands around one of mine. After a moment, she started tracing patterns on the back of it, and I shivered again. I had no idea what I was feeling right now, and it scared me.

“Lapis … ” Pearl sighed. “I’ve been extremely unfair to you. I made excuses to myself and the other Gems, about why we were keeping you trapped. We were bubbling the corrupted Gems, so how was this any different? A Homeworld soldier dropped you, so what if you attacked us when we set you free?”

I wrinkled my brow at her. “I did attack you when Steven set me free.”

“Yes, that you did.” Pearl nodded to me. “But you were cracked at the time, and you were just trying to return home. It’s not your fault. We deserved to be punished for what we did. I … I deserved it.”

“So now you want me to punish you. Is that it?”

“Well-”

“Why do you think I would want that?” I gestured angrily with my free hand. “Being trapped in the ocean with Jasper was a nightmare. What makes you think I want to pretend to be there?”

Pearl fidgeted uncomfortably.

“Is this because I was blushing when I chained you up?” I figured I might as well go there. “Because I don’t know what I was feeling then. I just … suddenly realized … ” My voice trailed off.

“Realized what, Lapis?”

How close I was to you, I thought. How helpless you were beneath me. My reflection’s cheeks turned a deep shade of indigo, as I stared down at them.

Pearl scooted right up next to me, her hips touching mine, and put one hand on my shoulder. “Would you like to experiment, to find out what it was you were feeling?”

Something fluttered inside my chest then. I realized that, yes, I would like to. I would like to do it with her. And I felt safe enough with her to do that.

I remembered being the mirror, unable to reach out to anyone. Deprived of so much as a
comforting word. And I started crying, my free hand pressed to my face as it contorted.

I felt Pearl squeeze my hand, and it just made me cry even more. It felt like awhile before I was able to settle down, enough to get out “Where were you when I needed this?”

Pearl’s reflection looked down at the water in shame, and closed its eyes. “Being terrible to Greg, and all the other humans that Rose took an interest in. Also Garnet and Amethyst, Amethyst especially.” She looked up at me, her reflection’s eyes pleading. “But ever since Steven was born, he’s been teaching me that no matter how highly I think of myself, I’m not perfect.”

I snorted my tears. “That’s for sure.”

Pearl blushed and looked away, chastised. “I … I can’t change the past. But I can try to make it up to you, Lapis. So I’m here for you now, if you’ll have me. Just do whatever makes you feel better.”

If you’ll have me.

Lightness and warmth spread through me from the Gem on my back, as I started moving my feet in small circles inside the pool. Grasping water with my toes, and weaving it where Pearl couldn’t see it. “Anything?” I asked.

She smiled, and I thought I saw her blush a little. “Well, within the bounds of safety, of c-”

Pearl backflipped from where she was sitting, pushing off with her hands while kicking up water and splashing me, before landing safely out of my chains’ grasp. I turned around and climbed to my feet, but she’d already taken a running leap onto a nearby platform. “You’ll just have to catch me first!” she taunted.

I grinned in spite of my nervousness, and remembered how fast she was. But this was something I knew how to do.

Without making any movements to give me away, I turned the fountain streaming off of the platform’s edge into cords. Then I brought them all down on Pearl, with a sound like Amethyst’s whip, and had them yank her under the surface.

As soon as I lost sight of her, I felt my watery cords go slack. A moment later, she pirouetted up from the invisible depths of another floating platform, striking a graceful pose before calling out to me. “Try again, Lapis ~ ”

I summoned a whip made out of water from one of the platforms beside her, and swung it at her. She jumped over it and landed on a third platform, then dove down into its surface and came back up right next to the base of the whip, slicing it with her spear and sending it into the pool with a splash.

So that’s how this place works, I thought, letting the challenge occupy me. I could feel the tips of Pearl’s feet as she moved across the water’s surface, and I could sense hidden depths to each platform, which must have been where the portals were. I couldn’t reach into them, though, which meant I would have to wait until she was most vulnerable: in midair.

I flailed at her with a few tiny whips from the other platforms, trying to get her to jump closer to me. When she did, after fending them off with her spear for a moment, I raised my arm as high as it would go, sending chains up from the pool’s depths to catch her and wrap around her until she couldn’t move anymore.

“Oh nooooo,” Pearl cried out dramatically. ”I’m completely helpless! Lapis has taken me
prisoner!"

I burst out laughing.

The chains slackened a little when I lost my concentration, but I felt Pearl struggling in them and pulled them tighter. I knew she couldn’t get away, but something inside me took her squirming as a challenge. I felt more secure and more confident, somehow, just knowing I had her where I wanted her.

What did I want to do with her, though? Those feelings that were making me nervous were still there, but I didn’t understand what they meant.

“I hope that she doesn’t punish me!” Pearl went on. “Even though I’ve been a bad Pearl, so I certainly deserve it!”

I was pretty sure I didn’t want to do that. I frowned a bit, looking up at her and rubbing my chin. “Be quiet so I can think,” I told her.

“Certainly! Shutting up now.” I guessed that counted as giving her an order? She looked absolutely thrilled.

I still felt self-conscious, and didn’t know what I was supposed to be doing. But something silly occurred to me just then, and I brought her down near the surface of the pool, just a little below my eye level. Then I walked up next to her, and examined my reflection closely in her forehead Gem.

Pearl gave me a questioning look, but I had the chains pull her head back down so I could continue. “W-what are you doing?” she asked. “Are you using my Gem as a-”

“I hope you don’t feel like touching it, too.” Pearl raised her head just a little, to look up at me. “There would be nothing I could do about that.”

I froze, and felt the water inside her chains run cold. But something about the smile she was giving me, through her half-lidded eyes, just looked so … inviting.

I stepped forward, hesitant, and traced my finger along the milky-white Gem in her forehead. The real Pearl, not her illusory body. Where she kept her spear when it wasn’t summoned … and where she had kept me.

I remembered how scared I had been, of it seeming to reach up and swallow me whole. But now it just felt smooth, and looked small and flawless and beautiful. Pearl blushed as I rubbed my wet fingers on it.
Still acting on impulse – after all, she had told me to do whatever I wanted to her – I stepped forward and licked it.

Pearl grinned, and seemed to blush with embarrassment now. “What did you do that for?”

“Because I could.” I honestly didn’t know why. But I knew what I wanted to do next.

Pearl giggled softly. “Now why are you giving me that look?”

Before she could react, I made the chains part for me and jumped in with her, holding on tight as they pulled us up onto the central platform. Air rushed past my ears and messed up my hair, before I had the chains set Pearl down on her back, with me and them on top of her.

We looked at each other’s faces for a moment, both of us shocked and blushing and nervous. Then I reached my arm and the chains around, and took hold of one of her hands, placing it on the Gem set into my upper back. She understood what was going on, and began stroking it gently.

This incredible warmth spread out from it into the rest of my body, and I melted into Pearl’s arms. Not literally – I checked – but it felt like maybe that wouldn’t be such a bad thing right now. Maybe it wasn’t so scary.

Maybe it’d be good for me.

The weight of my body sank her just a little ways into the platform, as I realized what I was thinking. “I’m still a little nervous about this,” I said, looking away from Pearl while squeezing her.

“It’s alright, dear.” Her voice was as soft as her hands were, and I realized I’d let both of them out. “Being nervous is nothing to be ashamed of. We can stop any time you want to.”
“I don’t want to.” I reflexively clung to her tighter.

She giggled softly again. “Alright, then.”

My body started to feel light, as though it were made of air. I saw her arm begin to glow, as she continued tracing her fingers over my Gem and my back, and I realized what was happening and how much I needed it. How much I wanted Pearl’s strength and compassion to be part of me. And how I was completely ready to share who I was with her, and …

And become a Fusion with Pearl.

Warm light enveloped us. *This is it,* I thought, as I closed my eyes and braced myself for the-

“’Sup.”

It was like a bubble had popped. I was flung out of the mass that had been “us” for just a split-second, and landed on my side on the platform, rolling and catching myself near the edge.

“AMETHYST!” Pearl yelled. I looked up and saw the violet Gem sticking her head up above the platform’s surface, and grinning at us.

“Hey, Pearl. Hey, Lapis. You’re into this stuff too, huh?”

I jerked my hand downwards like I was pulling a cord, and a sharp undertow forced Amethyst back down into her room (or wherever she’d come from). Then I froze everything from the surface down, as far as I could reach, and the ice cracked and expanded and grew over the rim of the platform. Its waterfalls turned into icicles.

I stared down through the ice in horror, even though I could no longer see her.

“Um … a little help here?”

I looked over to see that Pearl was stuck in the ice, since part of her had been beneath the water’s surface when it froze. She blushed hard when I saw her. “I mean … unless you want to take *advantage* of me while I’m-”

“Red,” I managed to get out.

The ice that was holding Pearl melted.
Chapter Summary

Lapis realizes what she's gotten herself into.

“I am so sorry about Amethyst.” Pearl lowered her voice to a whisper, as she opened the door to the beach house for me. “She’s always invading my privacy. Taking things from my room, sneaking up on me when I’m-”

“Didn’t you just say you were mean and unfair to her?” I whispered back, making no attempt to hide my annoyance.

“W-well, I didn’t say I was unfair to her … but you’re right.” Pearl sighed. “I should have just told her not to disturb us. It’s my fault, Lapis, I’m-”

“Oh hey, Steven!” I raised my voice as soon as I saw him getting a carton of milk out of the refrigerator, hoping that Pearl would take the hint. “What’re you doing awake at this hour?” The stars were still out, past the windows.

“I couldn’t sleep.” He sounded glum and looked drowsy, as he poured the milk over a bowl of cereal. “I keep having these weird dreams. Wait a sec … what’re you doing here?” He gave me a confused look.

“Oh…”

“Lapis is our guest, Steven.” Pearl came up beside me, and put her hand on my arm. “I invited her over so we could talk about what happened at the barn the other day.”

“I’m … sorry.” I looked away from her. “For what I did to you there.”

Pearl laughed brightly, and waved my apology away with her hand. “Oh, don’t be!” Then she leaned over and whispered in my ear. “I really enjoyed it.”

“Oh.” My eyes widened, and I blushed furiously. “Oh.”

“Hey, what did you say to her?” Steven was giving us a weird look, over his cereal bowl. “How come you two are acting like best friends now?”

“It’s called ‘making up,’ Steven.” Pearl put her free hand to her chest and assumed a thoughtful pose. “It’s what one does when one realizes one has done something wrong.”

“That doesn’t explain why you’re holding her hand.” Steven pointed his spoon at us, and I realized she had moved her hand down to clasp mine.

“Oh!” Pearl blushed, and took her hand away. “Well, that’s because … um … ”

“It’s okay, Pearl.” I smiled and then hugged her, enjoying the look of shock and mortification on her face. “I had fun too. Thank you for having me over.”
“D’awwww!” Steven dropped his spoon with a clatter, and put both hands to his cheeks. “Does this mean what I think it means?!”

But I wasn’t there to answer him. I walked briskly to the Warp pad, even skipping a little, then turned around and waved goodbye to Pearl’s blushing face before disappearing.

* * *

As soon as I got back I collapsed on the ground, and stared blankly into space with my arms spread out to either side of me.

What did it say about me, I wondered, that Pearl had invited me to do anything with her and I’d recreated being on the ocean floor with Jasper? We’d almost fused, even!

What would’ve happened next? Would I have kept us there for months? Would I have gone the rest of the way, and started hating her and yelling at her inside of our head?

I could almost feel the weight of the entire ocean on top of me again, the crushing pressure and freezing cold in the dark. It made me so claustrophobic that I had to look around frantically, and remind myself that I was out in the open and wasn’t tied down to anyone.

But then I remembered what it’d actually been like with Pearl, instead of what I was afraid it’d become. How gentle she’d been with me, and how relaxed I had felt.

Maybe she’d let me do it again, soon.

Maybe that wouldn’t be such a bad-

“HEY LAPIS, ARE YOU OKAY?!!??”

I jumped, my hair frazzled, then sat up and tried to smooth it back down. I wanted to be mad with Peridot, but as she came running up to me I saw the concern on her face. She really tried so hard.

“I’m okay … ” I stood up, and thought about that for a second. “I think I’m okay. Maybe more than okay.”

“Wanna come see the sun rise from on top of the barn? I set up a dozen cameras to document it for my next morp!” Peridot grinned eagerly.

I wrinkled my brow at her. “Where did you get all those?”

Peridot stood up straight, and pointed at the tablet attached to her arm. “A little place I like to call ‘fleaBay.’” She sounded proud of herself.

I couldn’t help but grin back at her. “Okay, then.” I held out my arms. “Come on.”

She turned around and reached up in the air with both hands, and I took them in mine and flew us back to the barn.

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