The Question
by Jewelfox

Summary

"That's two questions. But I'll answer them anyway." She lowered her glasses, and glanced at the book I was reading. "Have you gotten to chapter ten yet?" Garnet asked.

I flipped through pages in Pretty Magical Soldier Luna. "Uh, no, what does ... oh. Oh." Luna was holding out a bouquet of flowers, and telling someone else in her high school class that she loved her. "Wait, I'm in LOVE with Pearl?!"

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Lapis Lazuli realizes why she was so eager to tie Pearl up, in "Don't put me in charge!" But even though everyone's supportive of their relationship, there are some hurts you can't mend with reassurance alone. Featuring four illustrations by Alias-Pseudonym!
Peridot

Chapter Summary

Peridot almost kills Lapis with a meep morp, and then tries to ship her with literally every Crystal Gem except Pearl.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Illustrations by Alias-Pseudonym.
The more I thought about what I’d done with Pearl – how I’d controlled her, restrained her, and even tried to fuse with her – the more it scared me. So over the weekend, I tried to think about it as little as possible.

It helped that I lived with Peridot. Partly because she let me read these long, Japanese comic books that she’d borrowed from Amethyst, and partly because she was Peridot.

“Watch out for the morp!” she yelled, as I rounded the corner to head into the barn.

“Huh?” I said, looking up from my book. Then I ducked, as I saw a giant metal wheel coming right at my face.

It stopped right where I would have been standing if I hadn’t ducked, and I saw Peridot on the other side holding it back with her metal powers. Then it swung the other way – it was tied to the rafters – and smacked her in the face, knocking her into a pile of Earth junk in the back.

“Peridot!” I dodged around the giant swinging morp, and tried to pull her out by her arm. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah!” Her head was buried in the pile, and her voice sounded echoey. “I just … need … to … ”

She came free of the junk, and we both crashed to the floor. “I just need to implement safety features of some kind,” she said, dusting herself off.

I picked myself and my book back up. As I did so, my eyes fell on the circular, squishy parts of the truck Peridot had disassembled. “How about those?” I pointed at them.

Peridot squeed. “Perfect! Thank you, Lapis!” She ran past me and towards them.

“… you’re welcome.”

I watched her struggle to pull the black squishy part off of the metal, bracing her feet against its frame and pulling with both arms. Then I looked up at the morp itself. It was slowly swinging to a stop, and was bouncing up and down a little on an elastic cord.

“Peridot?” I squinted at it. “What’s this one supposed to be?”

“Grrrr!” She had been using her teeth to pry at the thing. “Huh? Oh, that.” She gestured at it, and her eyes lit up. “It’s a yo-yo!”

“I thought we were calling them meep morps.”

“We are! And this particular morp is a yo-yo.” She ran up to it and proudly presented it to me.

“How is it supposed to make me feel? When it isn’t about to hit me in the face.” It was hard for me to tell sometimes.

“I don’t know, I just like how it looks. And it reminds me of Smoky Quartz!” Peridot climbed up and stood on top of it, holding onto the cord that held it up. “Lapis, you should have seen it! The tricks they could do. The music for the eyes, that they played with this yo-yo!”

It started swinging back and forth, and up and down a little ways, without anyone having pushed it. I assumed she was using her metal powers to move it. I tracked it with my head and eyes, nodding a little and glancing from side to side.

“They even swung it in circles, and turned it into a fan! It looked sort of like this.” The wheel
started circling around the barn floor.

“Um, Peridot?” I wasn’t sure this was a good idea.

“It moved so fast that you couldn’t see where it was anymore.” I had to duck, as the yo-yo started gaining altitude.

“Peridot, this is-”

“I don’t know how they could control it!” Her morp was *whooshing* over my head about twice a second now, and it looked like she was holding on for dear life.

“Peridot, I get the idea!” I was flinching and covering my head with my book now.

“AAAAHH! MAKE IT STOP!”

“Huh? You’re the one with the … ” I groaned and set my book down.

The toilet morp was on the other side of the barn from me, and was connected to the pond outside. I thrust one of my arms into the air, my palm facing towards me, and a giant watery arm shot up from one of the toilets and caught the yo-yo.

Unfortunately, Peridot kept going. She flew off of it and smacked into the wall.

“Peridot!” I put both hands to my mouth, and the water arm splashed to the ground. “Are you okay?”

“Ugggh … ”

I stepped around the yo-yo, which was now swinging slowly, and got to where Peridot was. Just in time for her to peel off the wall, and land in a heap.

I helped her up, and she coughed up some water. “Sorry, Lapis. I was excited to demonstrate its physical properties.”

“It’s okay.” I made sure she could stand on her own, before letting go. Then I went back over and picked up the book I’d been reading.

“But anyway!” Peridot tried to regain her composure. “That’s how Smoky Quartz beat Jas … I mean,” and she held both hands out at me and looked frazzled, “that’s how they dealt with those things, in the Beta Kindergarten!”

I ignored the part about Jasper. Pearl had already told me, in the most awkward conversation I’d ever had since I had been trying not to think about either of them. “Who’s Smoky Quartz?” I asked instead.

“Steven and Amethyst. They fused *right in front of me!*” She grinned, and started making excited hand gestures. ”And of course I was startled; who *wouldn’t* be after seeing two different Gems fuse. Am I right, Lapis?”

The water inside me ran cold, and I dropped my gaze to the floor.

“Uhhh … ” Peridot’s face fell. “I didn’t mean-”

“It’s alright!” I said. A little too quickly, because it wasn’t. “I’m … happy for Steven. And Amethyst. I hope it helped her feel better.” I looked away. “Steven’s good at that.”
I walked outside and sat on the grass by the pool, clutching the book to my side and leaning on the pool ladder’s railing. A moment later, Peridot followed me out, nervously pressing her fingers together.

“I’m sorry, Lapis …” Her reflection in the pool was cringing. “I didn’t mean to remind you of the ‘M-word.’”

“Peridot, why is fusion so … amazing?” I held my hands out in front of me, at a loss to describe it, and let the book fall to my side.

Peridot stared at me for a second, before her arms and hair drooped. “That’s one way you could describe yours.”

“Being Malachite was amazing!” I turned to face Peridot, kneeling at eye level with her, and gripped the ladder railing with both hands. “I felt so powerful. So in control. I … I could be angry with people, and no one could stop me.”

“Didn’t you beat up the other Crystal Gems like that?”

I narrowed my eyes at her. “Remember what you said? That it’s okay to hurt people if they deserve it?”

Peridot raised one hand, like she was about to object, then just looked away and sighed instead.

I sighed too, sitting back down and feeling guilty for hurting her. “I’m sorry. You’re right; being her was really unhealthy. For me, for Jasper … for everyone.” I wasn’t sure how much I cared about Jasper being hurt by it, but I did care about whether or not I hurt the next Gem I fused with. Even if it was Pearl …

… no. Especially if it was Pearl.

“Why are we talking about fusion again?” Peridot fidgeted uncomfortably. “I thought-”

“Because I know it can be amazing in a healthy way.” I leaned on the railing, and looked up at the handful of clouds in the sky. “Garnet fused by accident the first time, but I guess once Ruby and Sapphire knew what it was like they wanted to be that way all the time.”

“Well, yeah, you’re … wait. How did you know that they fused by accident?” Peridot looked startled.

“Because I saw them the first time. In my-” I caught myself. “I mean, Blue Diamond’s court.” I glanced over at Peridot. “I guess she told you about it?”

“Well, yeah! Obviously. I’m a Crystal Gem too, aren’t I?” She put a hand to her chest, and looked proud of herself. “I even attempted to fuse with her once.”

“You did?” I put both hands on the grass this time, and stared at her. “What happened? What was it like?”

“Well, uh … I could tell that Garnet wanted it, from the way she was looking at me. So I generously offered to fuse with her, and she said yes!”

“That was so brave of you, Peridot.” I was still staring at her, in horror and awe. “What happened next?”
“Well … ” Peridot started scratching the back of her hair, while looking away from me. “She – I mean, I – put on some music to help with the mood, and then we danced together. But I – I mean, she!” Peridot looked like she was panicking. “She backed out at the last second! Because she knew that she wasn’t ready to fuse with a modern Gem like me.”

It wasn’t until she said that I started doubting Peridot’s story. I let it slide, though. “How did ‘Garnet’ feel about ‘your’ offer?” I asked. “Did she say?”

“We-ell … ” Now Peridot looked really uncomfortable. “It was a … a combination of fear, and respect. Or admiration! It was definitely closer to admiration. Is what Garnet said,” she hastily added.

“That’s the part I’m unfamiliar with.” My face fell, and I sat back down, this time hugging my knees. “If you admire the Gem that you fuse with, is that what makes it healthy?”

“Well, if you, er, want to find out, we could … uhh … ” Peridot fidgeted.

“Yes?” I looked up.

“… experiment with fusing, together?” She cringed.

“No, thanks.” I smiled at her, to show that I wasn’t upset.

“O-okay.” Peridot almost looked relieved.

“But what if … ” I had to choose my words carefully, here, so as not to insult Peridot or give away what I’d experienced. “What if I really like someone, and we both want to fuse with each other? Does that make it okay? Does that mean that it’ll be healthy?”

Peridot’s eyes lit up. “Hold that thought,” she said, and held up one hand. “I’ll be right back!”

I watched her run into the barn. This is either going to be very good, I thought, or very awkward.

I stood up to wait for her, and started swishing the water around in the pool idly. A few seconds of clanging and rummaging later, Peridot came running back out, holding a piece of paper out at me proudly.

My eyes glazed over as soon as I looked at it. “Your Camp Pining Hearts relationship chart?”

“No, look closely. This is a Gem fusion chart!” Peridot grinned madly at me.

"A what?” I stared at it, shocked.

Peridot started pointing out different parts of it. “I’ve already figured this out! The most optimal fusion is between you and Garnet, since she’s the strongest Crystal Gem and you’re the strongest Gem, period! On Earth, anyway.”
“Uh … ” I didn’t know what to say to any of that.

Peridot kept on ranting, her free hand waving frantically in the air. “With her electrical powers plus your aquatic ability, you’d make a perfect match! That’s because water conducts electricity, so between the two of you you’d have storm powers! A deluge of water and lightning, blasting away at Earth’s foes! Nyeh heh heh heh!”

“But I don’t feel that way about Garnet!” I blushed anyway, because the thought that my roommate had spent so much time thinking about this made me nervous.

“You don’t? Huh.” Peridot scratched her head. It looked like the thought that someone might not feel attracted to Garnet had never occurred to her. “Well, then what about Steven or Amethyst?” She pointed out other faces on the chart. “As Quartzes, they’re both natural fighters.”

“Peridot, they already have each other.” I was cringing and squeezing the grass with my bare toes now.

“Ooh, you’re right.” She held up her chart at different angles and squinted at it. “You should try fusing with Smoky Quartz, then.”
“No!” I gestured at myself, my face flushed blue with embarrassment. “Pearl offered to fuse with me!”

“Pearl?!” Peridot jumped backwards, startled. “What does she have to offer a Lapis Lazuli? If anyone should fuse with her, it should be me.” She stuck her thumb out at herself. “Pearl’s efforts at understanding Earth technology have made her an … adequate, engineer. The two of us combined could create an unstoppable giant robot!”

She held out her chart at me again, and pointed out a crude sketch of a robot holding its arms up triumphantly.

“Peridot, I’m scared. I’m trying to figure out how I feel about it, and this isn’t helping.” I wrapped my arms around my sides, and looked away. “When she came over two nights ago, Pearl asked if I wanted to … do things to her.” I blushed even harder. “And fuse with her. And I ended up doing … ”

I shook my head and squeezed my eyes shut, and went on. “I trapped us underwater with Malachite’s chains. And I almost fused with her right there. What’s wrong with me, Peridot?” I held both hands towards myself, while pleading with her. “Did I become corrupted by fusing with Jasper? Is this just how I feel now, when someone offers herself to me the way Pearl did? Is this why Blue Diamond wanted to shatter Ruby?”

Peridot looked horrified.

“I’m sorry.” I turned away from her, my eyes closed. “I didn’t mean to scare you.”

“Lapis, I-”

A cheery electronic chirp cut her off, from inside the barn. Peridot’s face fell. “Uh, can I … “ She gestured towards it.

I looked back up at her, nodded. “Sure.”

She came back out a moment later, clutching her tablet nervously and looking away from me. “What is it?” I asked.

“… Steven says Pearl wants to know if you can come over today.”

“Oh.” I put one hand to my face, and the pond shook and splashed beside me.

“Should I, uh, tell her you’re busy right now?” Peridot looked at me helplessly.

“No!” I bent over to pick up my book, and clutched it like Peridot’s tablet. “Tell her I’ll be right there. And thank you.”

I looked out over the hills to where the Warp pad was, waiting for Peridot to finish typing, before something occurred to me. “Wait, does this mean you’re ‘cheeping’ again?”

“Ugh, no.” Peridot made a face, and waved one hand as though to fan away a disgusting scent. “Not after those clods said they’d shatter me for saying stuff they didn’t like.”

“They said that?” I stared at her.

“Yeah. And the humans in charge told me to handle it on my own. Something about frozen peaches. So I handled it by going someplace else, and now Steven can talk to me through this
‘ChatSnap’ world wide web page!” She held up the screen to show me, a catlike smile on her face.

“… I see.” I was never sure what I was looking at, with this Earth computer of hers. “I guess I’ll be going, then.”

“Ooh, hang on … I forgot if she said what time to come over.” Peridot turned her tablet back around and tapped it a few times, then frowned. “Wait, it says I need zero-point-nine-nine of something to replay the message? What is it even talking about?!”

I really didn’t understand Earth computers.

“It’s okay,” I told her. “I’m sure you would have remembered it if it was important. Thanks again, Peridot.” I smiled at her, even though I was nervous inside, and held the book tight to my chest all the way to the Warp pad.

Chapter End Notes

If you were wondering what that last entry on Peridot's Gem fusion chart was about, check out Alias-Pseudonym's cute illustration! It also helped a lot with the editing.
Lapis reflects on her feelings, and asks Garnet some questions about them. She does not like the answers.

The beach house was quiet when I Warped in. Sunbeams streamed in through the skylight, and I heard gulls and ocean waves and smelled salt outside the screen door.

“Hello?” I stepped off of the Warp pad and looked around. No one seemed to be home.

I found myself treading carefully, and holding tight to my book and myself. I had bad memories of this house … and it was right next to the ocean, which I really did not want to think about.

I heard laughter from outside, and went over to the screen door to peek out. They had a net set up on the sand out there, and were using mesh rackets to swat a white cone back and forth over it. Steven and Amethyst were on one side, and Garnet and Pearl were on the other. I guessed this was what the Crystal Gems did for fun?

The Gems other than Steven were wearing outfits that I hadn’t seen before, and Pearl’s was striking. It was a dress sort of like mine, except it was lighter and airier and it covered more of her. I would’ve worn it as a two-piece, myself, but somehow this way just fit her.

I blushed as I realized what I was thinking about, and stepped away from the screen door slowly. This probably wasn’t what I was here for, so it looked like Peridot was right after all. I had no way of knowing when I was supposed to be here without asking Pearl, though, so I decided I might as well wait for them to finish what they were doing first.

As I sat down on their couch, next to the stairs to Steven’s loft, I realized that Pearl might find my presence embarrassing. Would she really want everyone to know I was here to see her? What would they think it was for? I still felt like it was shameful, what I was doing with her, and that I needed to hide it somehow or I’d be caught and punished …

Like Blue Diamond almost did to Garnet, I realized, and it sent chills through me. Both at the knowledge of what my Diamond would think I deserved, and at the thought that I had no idea where this would take me and Pearl. What would we become? How long would we stay like that? And would I have to control the both of us again? I wasn’t sure I could take that!

I guess I should ask Garnet about this, I thought. We were friends now, right? Sort of? She probably already knew what Pearl and I were doing together, what with having Sapphire’s foresight.

I blushed hard and giggled at a sudden thought. If I wanted to really embarrass Pearl, I could just reach out from the ocean and grab her, then hold her upside-down or in some other embarrassing position. It’d be hilarious … and the thought was strangely appealing.

I wasn’t ready to do something like that to her, yet. But the Crystal Gems were going to think I was so weird when they walked in and saw me like this.
Maybe I should get back to my book, I thought. So I tried to read *Pretty Magical Soldier Luna, volume two*, but kept getting distracted by Pearl’s voice outside. And remembering what she had sounded like when I had restrained her and teased her.

I was so caught up in imagining what I’d do to her next, that I didn’t realize someone was coming up the stairs outside until Amethyst yelled “Hey Steven, you want me to get you anything?” from just past the screen door. Before I could decide what to do, she yelled “Okay!” and pushed it open, then walked right past where I was sitting without appearing to see me.

I stayed still and tensed up, until she went into a nook past the loft and I heard a door open and shut. Then I let out a sigh of relief … and a moment later, Amethyst did so as well, from behind the wall.

I blushed, and tried to bury my face in the book I’d been reading.

A minute later she opened the door and came back out, then went over to the refrigerator and got out a can of something and drank from it. She still didn’t acknowledge me until she was on her way back out of the house, when she pointed her fingers on both hands at me and was like “Heeeeey, Lapis,” with a cheeky grin.

“H-hi, Amethyst!” I blushed harder, and brought the book up to cover most of my face while still keeping my eyes on her.

“I bet I know what you’re here for … ”

Somehow I managed a response. “Just let Pearl know I’m here early, okay? Peridot didn’t get the whole message, and I thought—”

She just gave me a thumbs-up. “No prob, Bob.”

“ … it’s Lapis.”

But she was already heading outside. She pushed the screen door open, and I heard it slam shut as her footsteps went back down the stairs. A few seconds later she said something to Pearl that mentioned my name, and then Pearl sounded startled and gave orders to everyone. I couldn’t hear them swatting the cone anymore, and guessed they were packing things up.

Should I go out there and help? I asked myself. But getting teased by Amethyst had rattled me, and I couldn’t make myself get up from the couch … or stop shivering. Didn’t she know that this wasn’t funny? My Diamond could’ve shattered me for this!

I guessed the Crystal Gems didn’t care what their Diamonds thought.

* * *

I wasn’t sure what kind of welcome I was expecting from Pearl, especially when I was here early. But I knew by now what to expect from Steven, and sure enough, the first thing he did was ran up and hugged me. “Lapis!” he exclaimed.

“Hey, Steven.” I smiled and hugged him back. “What were you doing out there?”

“Playing badminton!” he said as he let go. “Do you want to join in next time?”

I glanced down at the beach outside, unsure. Being so close to the ocean was still really unsettling. “Uh, maybe?” I said. “Maybe if-”
“Hold that thought,” he said, and raced to the nook that Amethyst had disappeared into earlier. “Bee are bee!”

“… I’m fine being Lapis, thanks.” He had already shut the door, but it still made me feel better to say it.

The next one in through the door was Garnet, carrying a set of rackets in one arm and a rolled-up net in the other. “Hello, Lapis,” she said, and moved next to me so she could put all that stuff in a closet under the stairs. “How are you feeling today?”

“Uh … okay, I guess?” I didn’t know what I’d expected from her, but I guessed maybe we really were friends now. Which made this the perfect time to get her – or at least Sapphire’s – insight. “Garnet, can I ask you a personal question?”

“I already know what you’re going to ask.” She looked up from organizing the clutter, and smiled at me. “So go ahead.”

I blushed, but went ahead anyway. “What am I getting into with Pearl,” I asked, “and is it like what Ruby and Sapphire did … or is it more like what I did with Jasper?” I suppressed a shiver.

“That’s two questions. But I’ll answer them anyway.” She lowered her glasses, and glanced at the book I was reading. “Have you gotten to chapter ten yet?” Garnet asked.

I flipped through pages in Pretty Magical Soldier Luna. “Uh, no, what does … oh. Oh.” Luna was holding out a bouquet of flowers, and telling someone else in her high school class that she loved her. "Wait, I’m in love with Pearl?!" I realized she could probably hear me outside, but I was too much in shock to stay quiet.

“You said it, not me.” Garnet pushed her glasses back up on her face, and stood up. “As for your other question, you and Pearl are the only ones who can truly say if it’s healthy or not. No one else can decide that for you. But if you don’t trust your feelings, then ask someone else who you trust. After you’ve gone on more than one date.” She smiled at me again.

“It wasn’t a date!” I exclaimed, throwing my hands up in the air and tossing Amethyst’s book aside. “And if I do love her, then why did she … why did I …” I started blushing again, as I thought about what we’d done.

“Sssh.” Garnet put a finger to her lips.

“Huh?” I stared at her.

Just then, Pearl came up the steps holding an armful of the cone things they’d been swatting. “Lapis, are you alright?” she asked, as she pushed open the screen door. “Garnet’s not teasing you, is she?”

“No!” I exclaimed.

“Yes,” Garnet said.

Pearl gave her a horrified look. "Garnet, she’s our guest!"

“All the more reason to tease her.”

Pearl glared at her, then caught sight of Amethyst’s book on the floor and went over to pick it up. Garnet leaned over to me and whispered “have fun!” And I blushed furiously as she made her way
back to her room.

Pearl tsk’ed at the book in her hand, as she went over to the open closet where I was. “Honestly, if it’s not one thing it’s another. Now Amethyst is leaving her trashy literature all over the floor. You could have tripped over it!” she told me, as she stood up and closed the door.

“Thanks … ” I stood up. “But I dropped that there. Sorry.” I couldn’t meet her gaze for more than a second.

Pearl blushed, as I gently took Amethyst’s book from her arm. “Well … they say not to judge a book by its cover!” She giggled nervously.

“No, it’s okay! It is kind of trashy.” I flipped through the rest of its pages, and saw way more awkward romance than I was prepared to deal with right now. “I’ll give it back to Amethyst.”

“W-well, you don’t have to on my account … ” Pearl looked away, and wrung her hands.

I winced, and squeezed my eyes shut. This was so awkward. What would Steven do in this situation? I wondered. He was so good at putting people at ease.

“Lapis?” Pearl sounded concerned. “Are you okay?”

I reached out and hugged her, before I lost my nerve. She tensed up at first … then, after a second, relaxed and hugged me back. Her fingers were so close to my Gem.

“I’m okay.” I squeezed her reassuringly, unsure of what else to say. “I was going to stop reading it anyway.”

“Okay, if you’re sure … ”

Of course, Amethyst came back in just then.

The screen door slammed shut, and as soon as Amethyst saw us she did some kind of weird dance with her hips, and pointed both hands at us over her head. "Aw yeah, Pearl and Lapis are gettin’ it ON!"

I jumped away from Pearl, startled, and she glared at Amethyst and folded her arms. “We would have ‘gotten it on’ much sooner if you hadn’t interrupted us!”

I heard the bathroom door open. “Wait, who’s getting what on? What are Pearl and Lapis doing?” Steven asked.

I wanted to sink into the floor.

Pearl just put one hand to her head, and closed her eyes. “Go get dinner, Steven.”
The next few minutes were agonizing for me. I knew I wasn’t supposed to be here this early, but it was too late to go back to the barn and then visit here later without making Pearl or Steven think they’d done something wrong. So I just sat back down on the couch (Pearl graciously offered me the seat), and waited while Steven and Amethyst ate up at the table.

“Lapis, do you want anything?” Steven was taking a bowl of something orange and squiggly out of the microwave.

“Um … no thanks.” I looked away. “I’m not putting that in my body.”

“I know what you mean,” Pearl told me. She had moved over to stand uncomfortably close to me now, and was swishing a feather-thing at some objects on the shelf above the couch. Morps, I guessed. “Eating is one Earth ritual I can definitely do without.”

She’s trying to impress me, I realized, as I looked up at her. She’s cleaning house and empathizing with me, because she wants me to like her.

I blushed and looked away, my hands tightly clasped in my lap. Whatever she was trying to do, it was working.

“All the more for me!” Amethyst exclaimed, and ate an entire plateful of icky something or other in one bite. At least, if you didn’t count how much of it she left on her face.

Steven handed her a paper towel, and Pearl just looked away and sighed dramatically. “Where are your manners, Amethyst?”

I did my best to ignore all of them, fidgeting uncomfortably and wishing I had Peridot’s tablet to listen to music on. Or even her to play music for me. Something like that would distract me from how nervous I was.

I was able to relax a little, when Pearl moved away and started sweeping the floor where Amethyst had gotten crumbs on it. But I didn’t notice where Amethyst had gone until she was standing right next to me, and leaning on the closet door. “You doing alright, Lapis?” Amethyst asked.

“Yes!” I said, startled. “I mean, I don’t know. Maybe?” I tried to smooth out my frazzled hair.

Amethyst shapechanged into a dove, and landed on the couch beside me. “What say Steven and I give you lovebirds some ‘alone time?’” She winked at me, and elbowed my leg with her wing.

I looked away quickly, blushing hard and clinging to the edge of the couch cushion. “T-that would be nice,” I managed to say.
Amethyst flew over to where Steven was putting his dishes in the sink, and changed back into herself. “Steven, my man! Think it’s time we introduced your watermelon friends to Smoky Quartz?”

“I thought you’d never ask!”

They high-fived and locked fingers together, and then there was a blinding explosion of light and a puff of smoke. I could only stare as a confident Gem fusion strolled out of it towards the Warp pad, giving me and Pearl both the “peace” sign while grabbing and drinking the rest of a can of something with their third hand.

“Later!” they said, in a voice that I didn’t recognize, and tossed the can into the recycling bin before Warping out.

Pearl went back to her cleaning, with a big smile on her face. I was still frozen in place, staring at where they’d just been, and feeling like I was boiling inside.

Pearl started humming a cheerful song that I didn’t recognize.

“Um.” I hated to interrupt her, but this was really getting to me. Especially now that I was alone with her.

“Yes, Lapis? Is there something you’d like to tell me?” She was still smiling, and I blushed as I remembered what she’d heard me say.

There was no way I was telling her that just yet, though. “You Crystal Gems seem very … casual, about this whole fusion thing.”

Pearl laughed softly. “Well, some of us try to perform a meaningful dance before fusing,” she said, and put one hand to the star on her chest. I realized she must have changed back to her old outfit while I was busy being nervous. “But when fusion happens and what comes of it can be as unpredictable as the Gems involved. And Steven and Amethyst are very unpredictable.”

“That’s not it. I mean, it partly is, but … ” I sighed and looked away. “Pearl, fusion scares me.”

She looked at me thoughtfully. Then she set the broom aside and sat down diagonal from me, on the part of the couch with its back to the stairs instead of the loft. “Do you know what about fusion scares you? Or reminds you of … ”

“Malachite.” I clenched my fists, and squeezed my eyes shut. “The entire time she existed, I fought to be her and myself at the same time. To stay Lapis, and stay in control, and also keep her in one piece. It felt like my mind was split in two … no, three.” I was starting to shake. “Because Jasper was there with me. And the more I fought to keep her down, the more trouble I had telling where she began and I ended. Which feelings were hers, and which were mine or Malachite’s.”

She put a hand on my knee. I couldn’t feel it. I was back under the ocean again, and digging all four legs into the ground as I tried to pull my chains apart.

“Part of me died down there.” I had my head lowered, my knees pressed together, and my arms wrapped around my sides. “I don’t know who I am anymore. I feel like I’m still Malachite, sometimes!” I started crying. “It’s like I never left. It’s like this is all just a dream, and I’m still there.”
“Oh my stars.” Pearl’s other hand went to her mouth. “Lapis, I’m sorry …”

“When I-” I sniffled salt water, and tried to stop crying. “When we did that thing in your room, it felt just like being Malachite again. Except this time it was with you, and I think that made a big difference.” My shuddering began to subside, and I started to feel the weight of Pearl’s hand on my leg, and the concern that she had for me.
“Do you think it would help if we tried that again?” she asked.

“Do you want that?” I looked up at her, my eyes wild and desperate, and gestured with both hands at myself. “Pearl, I’m a monster! I’m like one of those corrupted Gems you and Steven keep bubbling!”

Pearl shook her head. “Lapis, that’s not tr-”

“You had me locked up just like them!” I screamed it at the top of my lungs.

I had no idea where it had come from.

I guess that Pearl didn’t either. She just stared at me, in shock. Her eyes started to water.

I squeezed mine shut, to try to keep them from crying again. Then I curled up facing away from her and leaning against the back of the couch, hugging my knees to myself with both arms.

I don’t know how long Pearl stayed there, silently watching me except for the occasional sniffle.

At some point, I must have fallen asleep.

* * *

I groaned as I woke back up. That was the unpleasant thing about sleeping; I wouldn’t realize I’d dozed off until suddenly I felt all groggy and weird, and my arms and legs were stiff.

I’d had plenty of chances to find out what it was like, at the barn. It made the passage of time much more bearable. And it helped me get over being upset-

I made a face, as I remembered what had just happened. Of course it wasn’t enough to just tell Pearl that I was a monster. I had to prove it to her too, didn’t I.

It looked like it was getting dark outside. A faint orange light came in from the windows and skylight. Pearl only had the indoor lights on where she was, doing … something or other, with things on the kitchen counter. She was being quiet, I guessed so as not to wake me.

I tried to sit up and stretch, and realized there was something fluffy and warm wrapped around me. A blanket?

As soon as I started to move, Pearl stopped what she was doing and rinsed her hands off in the sink. By the time I’d gotten out of the blanket and stretched my arms over my head, she was there next to me with a delicate-looking cup and a flat round thing in her hands. “Lapis, are you feeling alright? Would you like some tea?”


“It’s a beverage that’s been refined throughout Earth’s history. I … I find that it helps me relax, and think with a clear head.”

I took the cup from her, and examined it. It was basically filled with hot water, with some impurities. I could sense it through the ceramic, and started swirling one of my fingers in the air to stir it. Just doing that felt warm and relaxing somehow, and made the flower scent that much stronger as steam wafted out of it.

I looked up at her, my eyelids still heavy and hair all messed up. “Why are you doing this?”
“It’s okay if you don’t want any … I understand completely. I can just take it and put it away.” She held out her hand.

“No! I mean, it’s okay,” I said, holding it close to my chest with both hands. Maybe I did need some help relaxing. “It’s just, why are you taking care of me like this?” I gestured at the blanket.

Pearl sighed, and looked away. “Because I care about you, Lapis. And I care about making things up to you … for your sake, not mine.”

Huh? “I don’t understand,” I said.

She set the flat circle-thing on the knee-high table in front of me. “Why don’t you finish your tea,” she said, “and then we’ll talk about it in the kitchen.”

I guessed that putting this liquid in me wouldn’t be too different from storing water in my Gem. I sipped at it experimentally, as Pearl went back to what she was doing. It tasted like I’d expected; basically hot water with sediment. But there was a hint of something that I couldn’t place. Sweetness? It left my mouth feeling a little dry, with an aftertaste that was like how it smelled.

_Not too bad_, I thought, and stirred it some more so I could inhale the steam. Then I drank the rest of it, the hot liquid pleasantly warming my insides.

I stood up and took the cup and the circle-thing back to Pearl, concealing a small bubble that came out of my throat on the way. “Here,” I said, and handed the things to her.

“Just set your cup in the sink … oh, let me get the coaster.”

So that’s what it was called.

I did as she asked, and while she put the coaster away I examined the stuff she had out on the kitchen counter. There were glass bowls, and cups with handles and measurement labels, and a metal can labeled “CHERRY PIE FILLING.” “Are you making a pie?” I asked.

“Oh! Yes, Lapis.” She went back to the counter, moving slowly and carefully around me, and glanced at my face on the way.

“I thought you didn’t like eating,” I told her.

“It’s not for me … ” She picked up a wooden cylinder with handles, and started rolling it across a lump of what looked like white clay, smoothing and flattening it out. “I enjoy baking for Steven and Amethyst,” Pearl finished.

I watched her process the ingredients. “I guess you would want to do stuff for other Gems,” I said.

“Because I’m a Pearl?” She didn’t sound upset, but there was something about how she said it that suggested this was a touchy subject for her. Or maybe she was still on edge because of me?

“ … I guess.” I wasn’t sure what else to say.

Pearl laughed, not in a mocking way but just to show how silly that was. “I am a Gem of many talents, Lapis. I’ve learned to go far beyond my original purpose.”

The vivid memory of her and Rose Quartz attacking Blue Diamond’s stronghold came to mind. “Yeah … you definitely have.”

“Besides,” she went on, “it’s not like there was any call for baking back on Homeworld.” She
peeled the flat circle off of the paper that it was on, and sprinkled a pinch of white powder from a bag marked “flour” onto the paper before smoothing out the circle’s other side.

“You’re not a big fan of Homeworld, are you?” I wrapped my arms around myself, nervous to be talking about such sensitive topics with her. Especially after my outburst, and when she was being so careful around me.

A wistful look crossed Pearl’s face. “It was magnificent … but, I have the Earth now. And it’s my duty to protect it.”

I remembered that Pearl had a thing for duty and loyalty. “I guess you couldn’t go back even if you wanted to … ?” I asked. Sort of like me, I thought but didn’t add.

Pearl closed her eyes and lowered her head, and shook it slowly. “Not even if they invited me back.”

“How?” I gave her a confused look. “Why not?”

She spoke softly, her eyes still closed. “During and after the war, they did things I can never forgive.”

I tensed up, as I remembered the battlefield I’d gotten caught in. “Worse than poofing their soldiers?” I asked. I remembered how scary the Crystal Gems were back then.

“They shattered ours, Lapis! The prisoners they took … Homeworld broke them into shards, and made them fuse with each other.”

“Oh.” I was starting to feel sick, and I didn’t think it was the tea.

When Pearl looked back at me, there were tears in her eyes. “I can’t forgive them! It’s not a matter of whether or not I want to. I just can’t. Nothing can ever make up for what they did.”

I held up my hands, trying to calm her down. “I didn’t say-”

“And … ” She sniffled, and it looked like she was trying to maintain her composure. “And if that’s how you feel about me. If nothing I do can ever make up for keeping you locked away. Believe me, I want to try!” She put the hand that didn’t have flour on it to her chest, and gave me a pleading look. “But if I can’t … if being around me just brings up bad memories … ”

I was really starting to feel sick now.

Pearl lowered her head, and shook as she held back tears. “If that’s the case, then I understand if you have to go.”

Was that how she thought I felt? “Pearl, I-”

“You can come back for tea anytime … ” She smiled awkwardly. “I won’t say anything about our past. I could clean the barn for you and Peridot, if you like! Even if it is filled with-”

“No!” I blurted out, throwing my hands up in exasperation.

Pearl blinked. “You don’t want me to clean the barn?”

I reached out and took Pearl by the hand, glancing up at her blushing face to make sure that she was okay with this before taking her back to the couch.
When we got there, I gestured for her to sit down on it (she did so politely) and reclined on the corner and end parts. Then I clenched my fists and shook for a moment, as I realized what I was about to say.

“Lapis, are you okay?” She sounded concerned. She really was concerned about me, wasn’t she?

That made it easier, I guess. “Pearl, I …” I winced. I just couldn’t say it like that. Not after six seasons of *Camp Pining Hearts*, and that scene Garnet showed me in Amethyst’s book. “I’m romantically interested in you,” I finished, my eyes wide with nervousness and my hands held cringing in front of me.

She put both hands to her mouth, blushing and staring at me. “But I thought-”

“You thought right!” I raised both arms in the air again, then started gesturing with them. “You can’t make up for it, because I was hurt in ways that Steven can’t heal. And if we’re going to do things together … which, I really want to.” I looked away and started blushing at that. “Then that’s something you need to accept. You can’t just get rid of it by trying to reassure me!”

Pearl was quiet for a few seconds.

“I still don’t think you’re a monster, Lapis …” she finally said.

I rolled my eyes and groaned. Why couldn’t I get through to her?!

“ … but if you feel that you’re a monster, and you still want to ‘do things’ with me, then perhaps it’d be best if you take me prisoner. You wouldn’t want me to escape before then, would you?”

I froze, and stared at her. Pearl’s face looked perfectly straight, with her hands steepled in front of it. But behind them, I thought I saw a hint of a nervous smile.

I gave her an unamused look through half-lidded eyes, to let her know I was on to her. But her smile widened until she started giggling, and then I was smiling too, and we both had dark blue cheeks from blushing so hard.

This is ridiculous, I thought, but I decided to play along anyway. “I’m not taking you prisoner with dirty hands,” I told Pearl, and pointed at them.

“Huh?” She turned them around and looked at them. “Oh riight, the flour. I’d better go rinse them off, then. I hope that nothing happens to me while I’m doing that!”

*I’ll bet you do*, I thought. She actually turned on the faucet and then just stood there, giving me an expectant look. But I let her rinse her hands a little before holding mine up and bending the stream of water upwards, making a loosely-matted tangle of rope that grew to be bigger than she was.

“Oh, my.” She stared up at it, using one hand to conceal her smile. “What on Earth could be happening to the waAAAAAHH!”

I grabbed Pearl by her wrists and ankles, and yanked her up off the floor all of a sudden, holding her upside-down over it. Then I walked over casually and smiled down at her, placing the tip of one finger on her Gem.

“That’s for telling me I’m not a monster,” I told her, and smiled.

“P-point taken!” she said, blushing hard and grinning at me.
I took another short length of rope from the faucet before reaching and turning it off. Then I “hmm”ed at Pearl, holding the rope in one hand, before turning her around and lashing her rear with it, just hard enough to startle her. “And that’s for telling me what to do,” I finished, dropping my whip in the sink.

“I’m sorry, Lapis!” She sounded like she was trying to keep from bursting out laughing.

“You’d better be.” I was blushing now, too.

I spread my fingers to let go of her. She responded by instantly back-flipping in midair, and landing splayed out in a wide crouch on the floor, one of her hands touching it and another held up to
balance.

It was so graceful, and effortless. My cheeks turned dark blue as she stood back up and washed her hands in earnest, then gave me a questioning look.

“Forgetting something, Lapis?” She raised an eyebrow at me while she dried off her hands.

“Huh?” I realized that I was still staring at her. “Oh! Right.” I split the “rope” that I’d gathered in two, draining half of it down the sink and tying the rest around Pearl’s neck as a collar.

I held onto the leash end of it and gave her a goofy smile, my cheeks still burning. “Is that better?” I asked.

"Much better." Pearl adjusted her collar and grinned proudly, wearing it like a crown. "Now, what would you like your prisoner to do, oh fearsome monster?" She gave an exaggerated bow.

I pointed at the part of the counter that still had the ingredients on it. “Bake Steven and Amethyst a pie.”

"At once … Master."

And with that, my knees just about melted.

* * *

I held onto Pearl’s leash the entire time she was making the pie. As it went on, I found myself gradually pressed up against her, then hugging her from the side.

Not once did she make me feel like I was getting in the way. Or like I was an intruder in her house. It still felt weird just to be here … and to be holding a Gem’s bonds, again. But the leash felt less like Malachite’s chains, and more like a lifeline that connected me to Pearl.

I didn’t want to let go.

I only noticed that she was done baking when the oven door opened, and there was a blast of heat that misted my Gem on the inside. Then I let go so she could put the pie in the oven and close the door, and after that she wound up an egg-like machine on the counter and turned to face me again. “So, what should we do now?” Pearl asked. “I could explain the process of making tea, if you like.”

It occurred to me that she’d been explaining what she was doing the entire time. I guessed I’d tuned out, and just listened to the sound of her voice.

I looked behind me, at the “living room.” After Camp Pining Hearts season four, episode five, I was pretty sure leaving the oven on unattended would be a bad idea. “Maybe we can just snuggle on the couch until it’s ready?”

She smiled. “I like your idea better.”

So that’s what we did, until Smoky Quartz Warped back in five minutes later.
Thank you all for your continued interest in this series!

Number of stories remaining until Pearl and Lapis Lazuli fuse: One.

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