

Chapter 117: Real

[Name: Fiona Bellum

Class: **Superimposed Paragon (20)**

- Techniques
 - Spear Techniques
 - Spear Technique - Fundamentals (**Inevitability**)
 - Swift Spear (Intermediate)
 - Momentum Shift (High)
 - Qi Techniques
 - General
 - Aura Suppression (Intermediate) (Keeping your Qi contained inside your body allows you to appear perfectly ordinary)
 - Aura Sense (Basic) (Perceive your surroundings by being in touch with the energies suffusing them)
 - **Golden Glass**
 - Spear Spirit (**Intermediate**) (Your weapon - **Astraeus** - has resonated and fought with you. Now, it actively cooperates)
 - **Weapon Unification [New!] (evolved Weapon Resonance + Spear Qi) (Basic)** (You and your weapon are one. You need not hold it to wield it.)
 - **Inexplicable Reinforcement [New!] (evolved Golden Body + Reflection) (Intermediate)** (Your Qi makes your body incredibly tough, flexible, and fast. When in peril, you superimpose yourself over it.)
 - **True Mirror [New!] (evolved Gateway + Lost and Found + Keeper Manifestation) (High)** (You and your Keeper work together. Manifest them and your gateway where your will reaches.)
- Stats
 - General
 - Strength: Greater (**Lesser**)
 - Agility: Greater (**Lesser**)
 - Endurance: Greater (**Greater**)

- Resilience: Greater (**Basic**)
- Manipulation: Greater (**Intermediate**)
- Capacity: Greater (**Basic**)
- Absorption: Greater (**Basic**)
- Qi
 - **Golden Glass**
 - Purity (**Perfect**)
 - Realm (Wellspring)
 - Stage (**7th Step**)
 - Path (**Stride beyond inflicted Skies**)
- Disposition
 - Covenant
 - Familiarity (~~Kind to the known, distrustful to the new.~~)
 - Trust (Your care comes in layers, always possible to rise or fall.)
 - Temperament
 - Impatient (Time ticks and you wish to be ahead of it.) (Wavering!)
 - Disciplined (Your command over yourself is admirable.)
 - Iron Will (Your tenacity is incredible, even among the outstanding.)
 - **Compassionate (You truly care. So you find joy, and you find suffering.)**
 - Talent
 - Slight Edge (Average is below your standards. Go above, even by a little.)
 - Single-Minded (Your focus is your strength. Once your mind is set, nothing will shake you out of it.)
 - **Superimposed Experience (evolved Mirror Mind) (You can place another's experience onto yourself. See the world from new perspectives.)**
 - **Precipitous Wings (evolved Precipice) (Growth lies wherever risk does. Find it, sprout wings, and soar through the sky.)**
 - **Budding Nova (You saw the stars, right? Stay kind to yourself.)**

Current Status: Agitated]

I took a long time to let my eyes trail over all the emboldened text.

My abilities had changed. My classes fused into one, and evolved. All their old functionality was still there, but new bits and pieces had been added to almost everything I could do. I felt

them at the edge of my awareness, in the same way that new abilities usually came with a switch.

But my control over Qi was different now. I couldn't just feel the lever - I could interpret what it meant, and activate it manually. The training wheels that the Gift offered were not required in this instance.

I was surprised at the volume of change in my main powerset. I was *shocked* at the change to my covenant, but then it did make sense. Recently, new people had entered my life, and all of them had earned my trust rapidly. Chris, Orvan, Saif, Reya and even Eric. They had all become familiar fast.

My experiences changed me. My impatience was wavering. Was I getting better at being patient? I smirked at the thought. But, perhaps, I had gotten a little better about giving people a chance.

Amusingly, this removed the whole... "family" business out of my status fully. Familiarity had always reminded me of my parents. Now, it was trust. Bonds forged entirely based on people's own merits. I kind of liked that.

Then, when I saw my talents, I cried a little again. My new talent, [Budding Nova], had Orvan's last words in it. Damn.

It took me a little to finally read my current status, and when I did, I sniffled, scoffed and snorted with laughter all at the same time. *Agitated?* Yeah, I sure felt agitated. In just about every single way that word could mean.

Damn Gift. Daring to summarize my grief and change and my best attempts to keep myself going and my growth all at once... It made me wanna punch it, almost. But I didn't.

Instead, I took a deep breath. Fine, then. This was the main window dealt with. I was changed. But not negatively. The world hadn't seen to cast me away.

There were stories of that. When a loss broke someone so utterly it whittled away their disposition. Their talents. And I was changed. I had learnt my lesson on hasty decisions, or so I hoped. Not quite, it seemed, given that [Impatient] still hung there.

But my grief was judged enough to make me [Compassionate]. Bastard. I sniffled again.

Slowly, I let out the held breath. My talents had grown. Despite it all, despite the loss and the grief, I could feel that. The power buzzing within my now singular wellspring. Both my

capacities had combined into one, my Qi reserves increased, the glass beneath my skin having shifted to being golden.

I took a moment to feel it - genuinely feel it.

Taking a deep breath, the shakiness that filled my body abated briefly. The power coursing through me felt like a raging bonfire, hidden behind a thin gossamer curtain. I pulled the veil between me and my strength apart, and let it course through me for once.

The world changed. My perspective drifted. Lines blurred, stars blossomed, another reality superimposing it on the one I was in. I *felt* the connection to that reality. Traced my hand through the air, saw it shift and morph as if I was seeing double, yet it clearly parsed in my mind.

Simply put, there were two realities now. I could almost pick and choose which one to interact with, and the one I superimposed onto the one I had been in until now was under my control, somewhat.

When I wanted the air to shift, it shifted. If I wanted to shift my hand *only there*, I could. And if I wanted to, I could displace myself into this new reality immediately.

Blinking, I controlled the ability. My other self, that ethereal copy of me that was so me and yet remained in my field of vision, got up. From the bed. Walked over to the table in the middle of the room, and stepped on top of it. Then, another step, onto a platform of Qi, standing in the middle of the air.

And then I let myself sync with her - with me?

There was a snapping, lurching sensation, and both worlds collapsed into one another. The table shifted slightly from where I had put my weight on it. And I stood in the air, having walked there and yet not taken a single step at all.

"What the fuck."

Cass materialized her avatar on the bed, now carrying a thin metallic sheen on her skin. "Trippy," she said.

I nodded, staring at my hands. Already, they were blurred again, a second reality at my fingertips if I so chose. Briefly, I wondered if there was another reality where I wasn't as fucking sad.

There was.

Faintly, resonating across that boundary, I felt a reality in which I was uncaring. Where what happened to Ann, what happened to Orvan *hadn't touched me*. For a moment, that other version of myself and me communicated, a song of loss.

Almost as if she had reached out, asking if there were some version of *her* that was sad.

I recoiled in surprise and a bit of disgust, and that version of myself disconnected, snapping away, lost. My stomach turned. The memories of carelessness mixed with the ones of grief in a dizzying cacophony.

Feeling my stomach churn, my concentration on my martial arts wavered, which made the Qi under my feet vanish. With the platform gone, I lost balance, stumbling through the air. I crashed against the small table, knocking it over, and then my bed slammed into the bedframe.

My skull left a dent in the wood.

Briefly, I started getting up, but then it all crashed back into me. The heaviness, the disdain for my inaction, the revolt at my uncaring self. I felt disgusting. My arms froze in the air, and dropped low like lead weights.

I let my head sink back into the end in the wood, slowly sliding until it fell into the floor. It didn't even hurt, my physical stats far too high. My skin was too tough to get a splinter, now. I kinda wished I got one,

Was that self harm?

"Bell?"

My eyes were closed, but I recognized Cass' soft voice. I felt Astraeus hum within my wellspring as well, expressing... comfort. The two of them cared so much. I wish they didn't.

Gathering my willpower, I cracked open my eyes. The world was slightly blurry, as if my eyes couldn't be bothered to put in the work to focus. I blinked the blur away. Cass stood over me, skin metallic and solid.

Her featureless face seemed scrunched up with concern for me. I reached out, almost mechanically, my hand reaching her cheek - and encountering resistance. I flinched back for a moment, not expecting the cool, smooth feel of her skin.

But then, her fingers came against mine. Her hand was smaller, almost fully spread while mine was barely open. I felt her fingertips. My eyes opened wide. Cass froze, shocked.

I wrapped my hand around her tiny one. Squeezing it. "Cass," I said, breathless, sitting up. "Cass! You're- you're real! You're physical! Oh, divines!"

She stared at me, head slowly trailing back and forth from where I grasped her fingers, to my face, then to her hand again. Slowly, with a gentle force, she squeezed my hand back. "Oh," she said. Her voice cracked. "O-oh."

Suddenly, as if the spell broke, Cass leapt at me, wrapping her arms around my neck. I felt her, like a weighty doll - different from a human in the way that her weight seemed to be distributed strangely. Her skin was more solid than most living things, taking significant force to bend-

A thousand thoughts ran through my head, but all I did was wrap my arms around her as well.

"I can hug you," she said, voice cracking. She would have cried, had she had eyes. "I- I can hug you. You have no idea how long I've wanted to do that."

Squeezing back, the thinnest, smallest smile I could conceive crept onto my lips. "Actually," I said, "I think I have a pretty good idea."

Cass broke out into pearly laughter. She kept giggling on and on, as if I had told her the funniest joke I had ever told, resting her head against my shoulder. "Bell. Thank you. So much. For giving me... everything."

And that, finally, made me cry again, too. My arms dropped, slowly sliding down to my sides. I couldn't bear to hold her anymore. "No, Cass," I said. "I didn't do anything. I- I... it's my fault you didn't have anything in the first place."

"What?" she asked, aghast. "No. Bell, please, no. C'mon. I- Without you, I wouldn't be alive. No mind to think. No body to live."

"And you would have never been *locked up*!" I cried.

At that, she stared at me aghast. One of her hands lifted from my back, and she touched my cheek, softly, with that cold, metallic skin of hers. "You're so fucking stupid sometimes, you know that?" she said, angrily.

"What...?"

"Bell. Look at me. *Look at me!!*" she demanded.

Bringing myself to do the effort, I opened my eyes again. I hadn't noticed that they closed. I saw Cass, my partner, my friend, my safekeeper, and she was furious with me. Shaking, literally. My breath hitched.

She brought her other hand to my other cheek, squeezing my face slightly. "What does this look like to you, Bell? I have a *body*. I can do things. Everything is incredible right now! But it's not new, you know why? Because of *you*. You showed me before. What it's like to live."

Shaking her head she continued talking. "Things are better now. I am happier with this. But being freer now doesn't mean I was locked up, you idiot. I have never once hated my way of living. Do I want more? Of course I do! But who doesn't, Bell?! Who doesn't want anymore?!"

By now, she was eyelessly crying again. "I'm not always happy! I can't be! Happiness means improvement, it's something to constantly work towards. So don't. Don't act as if I was trapped, don't act as if my life had just begun. Because it *hasn't*. I've been with you for a while now, so don't you dare reduce all to that down to me suffering. I've laughed. I've cried. I've fucking *lived*!!"

She breathed. "And I intend to do more of that," she added, quietly, breathlessly. "So much more. So don't you dare blame yourself, or be angry. I'm happy right now. Please, let yourself share in that, just a little."

For a long moment, I was quiet. Cass moved to hug me again, and I hugged her back.

"Okay," I eventually squeezed out. "Sorry."

"Apology accepted. I love you, Bell. You're like the crossover between a mom and a best friend."

A thin smile made its way onto my lips. "I love you too, Cass."