

# The Past Cannot Be Cured



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loriana sits upon her throne. Her handmaid pries her arm from its socket.

Spring has come early this year. Around the balcony doors, the curtains flutter in a passing breeze. Flower petals dance into the sitting room, and Gloriana's optics gauge the trajectory each of them will follow.

When Levina severs her mistress's right arm completely, Gloriana vocalizes a sigh. It bothers her so when any marks tarnish her pristine plating. In her most recent match, a laser blast singed her arm near the shoulder—the fault of some up-and-comer, no doubt wishing to steal her glory and all too cocky in his approach. She dealt with him quickly enough, the fool. But being forced to wear the lesion through all post-match formalities was an embarrassment. Even now, as her handmaid sees to its repair, the scarglares in her vision. Her discomfort remains until Levina removes the arm from view.

"Thank you, my dear Levina," Gloriana dotes, "I'd surely be a mess without your help."

Levina nods, peeking up from her work for a brief moment.

"Of course, Madame," she answers. Levina has always spoken in clipped, soft words. It pleases Gloriana—she enjoys the company of good listeners.

Gloriana peruses the fingers of her remaining hand, admiring the pearly, metallic sheen that envelops her physique.

"The arena has been so taxing of late. So many victories, so many ceremonies... The turnout for such a routine result baffles me!" She swings her arm, a gesture over dozens of holographic awards adorning the sitting room. "If the other competitors struggle to even touch me, is anyone surprised by my success?!"

"I suppose not, Madame," Levina returns.

When Gloriana's sensors detect an electric hum to her side, she faces the source of the disturbance. Levina's Ameliorated fingertips trace lasers along the gilded seams of the severed arm. But the handmaid's robotic fingertips meet human fingers, human hands, and a human body. Freckles and blemishes mar her flesh. Gloriana counts every one.

Levina's free hand pushes her mousy bangs from her eyes; the motion exposes a birthmark on her forehead.

Gloriana turns back to the balcony doors. In all the months of her handmaid's service, Gloriana has grown acutely aware of the girl's humanity. For the sake of civility, she has suffered in polite silence. But the phantom pain of the charred blast wound aches in Gloriana's mind—so much that her restraint now fails her.

"Levina, dear, you *must* get more Ameliorations," Gloriana urges, "The times are changing, you know—soon augmentations will be more standard than flesh!"

She tilts her head at her handmaid, coyly adding, "You wouldn't wish to be left behind, would you?"

Levina pauses to consider her mistress's words.

"Well, I'd love to," she begins. She folds into her work. "But I'm afraid I need to save the money."

"Whatever for?" Gloriana inquires.

"My husband and I hope to start a family," Levina notes behind a meek smile, "We're trying to afford a home nearer to the arena." She pops the plating off her mistress's limb. "I wouldn't wish to raise a child on the fringes."

Again, Gloriana eyes her handmaid. Again, she finds the birthmark.

It conjures flashes of a history she so desperately yearns to forget.

"I suppose it can't be helped," Gloriana muses. "Who am I to impose Ameliorations on those less fortunate?"

"After all, I am more fortunate than many," she recalls.

Levina glances to her mistress, submission written in her eyes. With grace, Gloriana rises from her throne. She saunters to the balcony, looking out upon the city surrounding the St. Amies arena.

"I was blessed with this form from my very creation."



*Within a fringe home, a teenage girl stares at the image in the mirror. Birthmarks paint her mouth and eyes, discoloring her pale skin in uneven patches. Her long, gangling limbs squeeze tight against her frame.*

"Years ago, the world received the gift of my presence—the first wholly Ameliorated being."

*Even her eyes do not share their same colors. She brushes away the tears that slip from them.*

"Divine will designated me a paragon of beauty and grace..."

*A knock rattles the door. A well-dressed woman with Ameliorated eyes grants a large sum of credits to a rough, older man. Broken, the man hands the teenage girl to the woman, despite the girl's protest. Even as he closes the door behind her, she reaches out for him. He mouths a pained apology.*

"...and divine command dictated that I would fight within the arena, bathing the world in the light of my glory."

*On the spanning lawn of a massive estate, the girl stands opposite a lord. His handsome metallic clothing glints in the light as he shares words with the robotic-eyed woman. He ends their exchange with a nod, and a handful of servants rush to outfit him and the girl with weapons.*

*The lord wields his twin blades with confidence, a twisted mirror of the girl's awkward stance.*

*The robotic-eyed woman waves her hand—the lord's training may commence. The lord stalks upon the girl; she staggers backward to no avail. When he lifts his swords, hers rise in turn, and her eyes pinch closed.*

*A swift strike cuts through the girl's attempted parry. The lord's blade meets her shoulder. Her severed arm falls to the ground, and beside it, she collapses in agony.*

*The servants pull the girl away. The lord and the woman with Ameliorated eyes discuss.*

"Of course, I accepted this burden."

*Within a bedroom, a servant lasers a line around the girl's shoulder, soldering an Ameliorated limb to her torso. The robotic-eyed woman supervises.*

*In the vanity mirror, the girl fixates on her augmentation. Her fingers trace the plating on the limb. It's smooth and white, laced with gold—not a fault dares to taint it.*

*The others leave her, and she sits alone. Her eyes find a framed projection of the goddess Amelia upon the wall, Her holographic figure pristine and pure.*

*Her visage possesses naught but a smile; She possesses no flaws.*

"Lesser beings must learn the image of divinity embodied."

*Once again, the lord and the girl hold their practice on the lawn. The girl stands taller now, decorated with Ameliorated arms and legs. She spars against the lord, holding her own despite his approach. Assuredly, she blocks his swings from all sides.*

*She tracks his movements count for count. When at last he lunges straight through, she offers no parry. His sword slashes across her face.*

"The masses adored me. They clung to me in awe."

*In her bedroom, servants surround the girl, drawing their lasers into her countenance. Again, the woman with robotic eyes supervises.*

*Upon their completion, the servants step away. In the mirror, a perfect, Ameliorated face stares back at the girl. She gets to her feet, erect and imposing.*

*In a jarring departure from the calm of her rebirth, she juts out her arms, clutching the closest servants by their collars and hurling them against the wall. Faster than they could possibly perceive, the remaining servants join them, slammed to the floor.*

*The woman with robotic eyes rushes for the door, but the girl moves faster and pins her to the wall by her neck. The impact knocks the projection of the goddess Amelia to the floor.*

*The girl needs not exert her greatest force to snap the woman's neck. The woman's Ameliorated eyes glow, even as her lifeless figure strikes the floor. Over the corpse, the girl grabs her blades.*

*Beside a crackling fire, the lord admires a medal from his most recent victory in the arena. His door flies from its hinges—through it, the girl emerges. Daunted by her silhouette, he scrambles for his weapons. His fingers find the grips in vain, for her swords have already punctured his chest.*

"They sang my name. They showered me in riches and regalia."

*The girl stands now, Ameliorated in full, among the sea swarming to the arena. Every passing eye finds her, but she fixates on the vibrant, ten-foot-tall hologram of a woman posted at the arena's gates.*

*The goddess Amelia beams and beckons as she welcomes Her patrons, but finds the girl stagnant amid the flow of figures. She kneels down to her, an intoxicating smile on Her lips.*

*The girl reaches out to Her. She reaches back.*

"But ultimately, the wealth didn't matter to me..."

*The girl, now clad with a jetpack and twin sabers, drinks in the roars of the arena's massive crowds. Her face remains statuesque, ablaze in the light of the setting sun.*

"Their reverence was all I needed."



The spring light reflects off the pallor of Gloriana's countenance. She lingers in the silent wake that follows her words—words that vie to overwrite dissonant memories. Unsure of the victor, she returns to her seat, where Levina has since repaired the plating on her limb.

With care, her handmaid reattaches her arm, sealing it with a spark of her fingers around the joint.

"You have an incredible history, Madame," Levina remarks. Gloriana nods, flexing the fingers of her reunited hand.

"It has made me wiser, my dear—more feeling. I understand that not everyone has the advantages gifted upon me," she explains.

Brushing out the skirt of her dress, Levina gets to her feet and bows her head. "Is there anything else you need of me, Madame?"

"No," Gloriana waves, "You are dismissed."

Levina curtsies, then tiptoes towards the door. Gloriana thinks on her handmaid as she leaves. A part of her aches, wrought with pity that Levina may never know the feeling of Ameliorated perfection as Gloriana has for all her life.

But another part still whispers in the depths of her mind. It prays she will never have to know.

After a moment's hesitation, Gloriana calls out, "Levina?"

Her handmaid stops. "Yes, Madame?"

Gloriana's gaze does not stray from the balcony. "I would wish you and your husband well," she says. A smile touches Levina's lips.

"Thank you, Madame." She nods. "I'll take my leave."

Her handmaid departs. Gloriana sits alone.

The sunlight casts a shadow long behind her.