

## WARNING

They brought him to me bloodied and beaten to a pulp three days before the Night of Lights.

Being battered black and blue after a fight came with the territory for an *ih'mohrô*, even one as good as Yüzuki Ōren. Not once in the past, however, had he ended up unresponsive in my treatment room. My stomach plummeted at the sight of two guards hauling him between them like a sack of coal. Was the dread that had haunted my dreams about to transpire?

Careful not to unmask my fear, I schooled my features. “Here.” I ushered the men to the exam table, erected in the middle of my study for easy access.

I did my best not to wince when Yüu’s limp body landed on top of the linen-dressed surface with a dull thump.

I got to him in two leaps and busied myself with arranging him in a recovery position. Placing two fingers on the inside of his wrist, I took his pulse. It felt thready and rapid, but it was there. I observed his chest rising and falling in shallow but regular breaths. Having seen no evidence of a collapsed lung or any blockage in his airways, I sighed with relief.

The blood caking his body—part dried, part fresh—prevented me from fully determining the damage.

I ordered the men to step back and allow me room to work. The next moment, I snatched my emergency kit from the side cabinet and prepared a basin of fresh water, dampening a soft muslin washcloth in it. Having settled Yüu onto his back with speed and care, I proceeded to clean the skin of the wounded man.

Not just *any* man, but the one I *loved*.

The scanty outfit of a pit-fighter, consisting of a simple loincloth, allowed me to get on with my task right away, taking stock of his injuries as the sweeping movements of my hands uncovered more and more scrapes, cuts and contusions.

Yüu was as tough as they came. The toughest. I would know, having treated him and other prized combatants of the Lyliņ Fighting House for over three years. If his body shut down, going into shock from blood loss and pain, both must’ve been significant.