

SWORD MAID ~剣術メイド菊田舞~

by Rawle Nyanzi

***NOTE:** All Asiatic names are written in Asiatic order, with the family name first.*

As the daimyo's samurai stomped into the house, the maid Kikuta Mai hid in a dresser in her master's bedroom. She knew what those sword-swinging goons wanted: to force her master, the famed mage Yonekura Kyohei, to hand over his magical research.

"Do not disturb my circles!" Yonekura Kyohei shouted. Mai heard it loud and clear. A chair crashed. A man grunted in pain. A sword tasted flesh. A girl screamed. Angry chatter. A heavy tumble. Yonekura Kyohei had joined his wife in the hereafter.

Someone approached Mai's hiding place, but the steps were softer, lighter. The young maid jumped when the dresser opened, but her worry melted away in an instant when she saw the petite, short-haired girl of nineteen, none other than Yonekura Kyohei's daughter Sana.

The diminutive girl entered the dresser. "Oh, Mai!" Sana said tearfully. "They took the other maids away, and my father..."

"I heard it all." Mai embraced the sobbing girl.

Sana backed away a bit. "There's only one hope now," she said. She reached beyond Mai and put her hands on what, in the extremely scarce light, looked like a short dress. The Yonekura household didn't hold to traditional aesthetics, opting instead to borrow from the oceanic barbarians who had once visited in days gone by. Sana went to the corner and grabbed a long, thin sword with a hand guard, a barbarian blade known as a rapier.

"These are called the Maiden's Arms. My father made them for me, but I want you to have them. They'll even expand to fit you," Sana said.

The stomping came uncomfortably closer. "Ah, there's no time to change," Mai said.

"Allow me!" Sana placed one finger on Mai's stomach, then in an instant, Mai was in the outfit, and she held the rapier unsheathed in her hand while the sheath sat at her waist.

"Good," Mai said.

"You should be as strong as ten men, but you can also-"

The door to the bedroom opened with a loud thud. "Show yourself, you little rat. If you come quietly, I'll let you be my plaything!" the samurai said.

With a bold push, Mai opened the door to the dresser. She saw the enemy before her: men in gold-horned kabuto helmets and crisp lamellar armor, their gleaming katanas ready. A carved mask covered their lower faces, giving them the appearance of demons.

Mai hesitated for the briefest of moments, then sprang into action.

She thrust her blade into the belly of a samurai, and it poked straight through him as if he were paper. Mai kicked the samurai away, sending him into a bookshelf, his gut bleeding profusely. The other samurai swung at Mai in anger, but Mai dodged their slashes and pierced their hearts with ease. Sana used her wind magic to fling the two remaining ones into a wall; Mai stabbed them in the head to finish them off.

Emboldened by their victories, Mai and Sana ran through the house, dispatching any samurai foolish enough to confront them. None could challenge Mai's magical strength, and those who made it past Mai didn't make it past Sana. In mere moments, they fought their way outside the house, with plenty of energy to spare. Mai and Sana burst out into the sunlit street, ready to make their escape.

This time, however, the samurai didn't only bring swordsmen; they brought archers as well. A samurai in a white kimono and elaborate, over-designed armor stepped out from among his men.

"I don't know how you slaughtered my men, but right now, your

life is forfeit," the samurai leader said. He turned to his men. "Shoot her!"

In that moment, Mai saw her chance at escape: she would jump right over their heads with her augmented strength. With her free arm, she grabbed Sana around the waist and jumped right before the arrows could strike home. Sana assisted with a blast of wind from her hand, then both girls sailed above the ranks of samurai swordsmen and archers and landed behind their lines. The two girls made a run for it, but they failed to notice that two of the archers had a clear shot at both of them.

Mai heard the whistle of flying arrows. She kept up her pace, but a swift missile of wood and steel caught up to her and punched through her back. Mai let out a cry as she fell to her knees, blood leaking from the wound. To her horror, Sana fell beside her, having taken an arrow to her side.

"I guess it's over for us," Mai said to Sana as the samurai rushed over to inspect their stricken prey.

"It's not over. The Maiden's Arms have one more secret," Sana said. Sana used her remaining strength to place her finger on Mai's belly. She said a short chant, and then a warm, pleasant energy coursed through Mai's body. Mai strained as the arrows pushed themselves out and both Mai and Sana's bodies healed. The miraculous feat had stunned the samurai, but once they got over the shock, they drew their katanas. The gleaming blades fell, all too ready to bite the flesh of the insolent girls.

Except the girls weren't there. Mai had dodged at the last moment, taking Sana with her. Hunched over with rapier in hand, Mai glared at the menacing samurai. Her level of strength had greatly diminished, but she still felt stronger than the average male warrior.

The white-clad leader stepped forward, this time with katana drawn. "You bleed like the rest of us. All the better to wash my blade," he said. The leader rushed at Mai, but a mighty gust of wind flung him into his men.

"Great work, Sana!" Mai said. She dashed over to the enemy and

put her blade in the swordsmen and archers before they could reorient themselves. Sana continued to launch gusts of wind, keeping the archers off-balance and allowing Mai to skewer them. Soon enough, only the leader was left, and he loomed over the maid, the tip of his blade mere inches from her face. Just the same, Mai's rapier pointed right at the captain's heart.

"Checkmate," the leader said. Both swordfighters thrust their blades forward, hoping to strike the fatal blow. Tempered steel flew, backed by the power of their wielders. The leader gasped as Mai's rapier smashed his sternum and ruptured every chamber of his heart. Mai had moved her head to one side, avoiding the leader's katana by half an inch. Mai pulled the blade from her opponent's body, and the leader, once so proud and imperious, collapsed to the ground as an inert, bloody corpse.

"You'll never hurt anyone again," Mai said to the fallen samurai captain. She hadn't noticed in the heat of the battle, but many in the town had gathered to watch the confrontation. When Mai and Sana had finally vanquished the samurai, the spectators let out a mighty cheer. However, Mai ignored the adulation and ran back to Sana's side.

"We can't stay here any longer," Mai said.

"You're right -- we'll be branded outlaws for sure," Sana replied.

"Then we'll have to make our own way," Mai said. Ignoring the crowd, the two girls walked away to forge a new destiny for themselves.