

## NEKO THE FOUNDLING

(revised)

## SYBERPOLIS

The Sorceress looked out from a high window in a tower of her enclave pointed and said, "All those human beasts down there in the streets, those without names, they have no power and have no rights." She uttered this for the benefit of one person in particular. She glared at Neko as she said this.

Neko looks up from the mats. She has just been thrown to the mat by one of her trainers. As Neko uprights herself, she brushes herself off, runs her fingers through her black short cropped hair and then calls, "Kojie come here." Her three-legged pet crow flies to her shoulder. He is her only friend and companion in this world. He seems to understand. He gives her a little peck on the shoulder that hit the floor. It makes her feel a bit better.

Neko then looks up at the Sorceress and says, "Yes I could there be but I'm not. You need me for some reason and as long as you do, and you have the control over me you do, I'm here."

And like the martial arts trainer having thrown Neko to the mats, the Sorceress has done to her ward Neko, pretty much the same thing. Neko's true identity is kept from her. Without a name she can claim no legitimacy and no recognition short of becoming much like the Sorceress. Neko is only known as Neko the Foundling, Ward of the Sorceress, and that is no true name. It is simply protection.

Without those links, and being alone, she had no chance of life except by being taken in as she has been. Others were not so lucky. They were killed off, made slaves or worse, in her case, being female and attractive, the fate was usually prostitution.

The Sorceress spits back, "And what would you do out there?" and points to the street and to the whole visible city. "This ancient city of Syberpolis, once the capital of a great island empire, is now ruled by me."

Neko could see it was in ruins. The once huge white glistening towers and spires that reached to the sky and the glistening marble in the piazza, were now encrusted by mold, moss, and algae the color of bile. Most were ruined relics of a

world only wished for. The roofs were mostly rotted and caved in. Neko said nothing.

"Being my ward is something, and better than nothing. You could be one of them," the Sorceress continues while pointing to those outside her residence. "Without my protection a little girl with a sword would last a week, maybe, if you were lucky." This has been reiterated by the Sorceress countless times.

"Now go clean yourself off. You reek." She glares at Neko and considers an apt punishment for Neko's insubordination. Instead, being tired of always fighting with this girl, all she says is, "Control your insolent mouth."

Neko knew life was too dangerous to remain in center-city other than for the few mid-daylight hours when the sun light penetrated most locations. In the remaining time, the rats, thieves and kidnappers held court, while all the more emerged as the planet made its daily rotation away from its star.

"Yes madam," Neko replied. She too was in no mood for a fight.

The sorceress turns her back on Neko and looks down from the high turret and surveys the city. The extensive infrastructure that had once supported Syberpolis is all but nonexistent. The sanitary system is an open sewer. The stench of death and offal have been the springtime perfumes. No one stayed in center-city if they didn't have business with the Sorceress. Most covered their faces to repel the odors. The sound of gagging and/or retching was the sound of those who were not accustomed to the stench. This was an indication of non-local origins and an opportunity to do evil, by those so inclined. The Sorceress's spells keeps the filth from entering her enclave, her castle as it were and makes life somewhat pleasant. Those that work there know full well what it means to be dismissed. Death would be better.

No one had the training to maintain the science and technology of the old world which lay in the ruins. What was usable was frequently dug up to supply building material for the current inhabitants. Any rebuilding of the old world would have been impossible to accomplish in this world of chaos and quick death.

In Syberpolis, brute power was the only arbiter. The Sorceress liked it like that. She was the only entity with an organized force. She had the physical-military and most of all, the magical strength. She was the ultimate law. She smiled at that thought.

The Sorceress observed all there was to see, and was content. She was aware of any and all subterfuge. She allowed just a bit keeping the pressure of revolt from building. She always squashed that which was considered dangerous along with all family members guilty or not down to the third generation. Terror was a powerful medicine. No one approached who she did not summon. She feared no

man and answered to no name. Only the chosen have names and therefore power. The sorceress respected power.

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Neko went to her apartment, cleaned herself off and changed into a fresh tunic. Then she threw herself on her bed.

Kojie glides down from a perch landing on a bed post. He looks down at Neko and caws quietly rubbing his head against her arm which is bruised from the physical training earlier.

"Kojie what am I going to do? She has me and..?" She grabs her sword and slashes it in the air. Neko's ebony sword was created from unobtainium. She keeps it under her pillow when she sleeps.

Her hand clasps in that same familiar manner it as it did when her tiny body was discovered out side the city of Syberpolis, in a cove, by the Sorceress's huntsman years ago. The Sorceress and her huntsman had to keep the infant's hand close to the sword in order to move it. The sword was connected to Neko, in a manner that was beyond the Sorceress's power and understanding. She could not lift it. No amount of magic could budge it. Why she didn't leave it there never made sense to Neko. Neko didn't understand how important her discovery was, and by the nature of association, so was the sword.

The Sorceress sometimes watches Neko as she sleeps. In spite of her desire for complete control, she never feels threatened by the strange metal weapon that was propped up by the child's bed. In fact she felt just the opposite, even though she never had the power to use it. It was a conundrum she decided not to peruse. She could manipulate the child. That was power enough. She keeps what she believes are tight reins and a close watch on Neko.

Engraved into the back of the hilt was a crane that glowed any time Neko touched it. Just above that were two gold crane mons cast, on either side, just before and aft of her hand's grasp. The sword guard was made of the same black metal and was deeply imbedded with an intricate geometric design surrounding a swan and covered in thick gold leaf. The gold leaf was pounded into the metal giving it a wood block like, engraved image to the designs underneath. The Sorceress never fully examined it. It was too much of an effort.

The sword had features that only Neko could arouse. It was light and indestructible. It would open up a claw like feature in the hilt upon close quarters combat. The sword was linked to her mind and they become as one. If any but Neko attempted to take the sword, it instantly acquired a mass that was beyond the ability of the offender to lift or move it. The sword was hers, and some hoped that both she and it was a gift from the gods to avenge the wrongs committed in their names.

Kojie landed on the hilt and brushed Nekos's hand with his head. He sat there watching her as Neko fell asleep crying. Kojie stood watch, as he always did since she was a baby, until she awoke.

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Neko knew there had been better times. She sees the ruins, and more importantly, Neko can read. She was born with the ability to decipher code. She has a secret place. When she was a child, Kojie led her to an old metal encased vault of a room buried deep in one of the buildings in the enclave. It was a place to hide away when she needed the solitude. Little did she know that it was sheathed in lead, copper and made from an ancient steel alloy. That combination of metals kept the Sorceress's vision from penetrating her secret room.

Now the room slowly became her library. Whenever she found a book, no matter the subject she had Kojie fly it to the secret room. This way the sorceress would never know. "Reading is my escape from the outside world," Neko whispered to Kojie. "I know there is something about me the Sorceress fears. What exactly, I do not know. She is not actually mean to me. I can't complain. She treats me with a modicum of respect – but there is no love." Kojie makes a sound in his throat to let her know he understands. She continues to speak to Kojie. "Reading is something the Sorceress is not aware that I can do. She assumes she knows everything about me. One day I will surprise her. These books may give me what I require. Up to now they have not. The ancient histories are incomplete. Volumes are missing, and so is my family name."

What pleases Neko most is history and her quest for her family. And that has never pleased the Sorceress. For the most part Neko kept that exercise to herself. But every now and then it came out. Neko wasn't foolish and kept that aspect of her life to a minimum. The girl-warrior is all the Sorceress is allowed to vision, since that's all she ever really wanted to see.

To the local world, Neko is the Great Sorceress's ward. Neko the Foundling is beyond reproach. She is protected and free to do as she pleases, except when

the Sorceress deigns to give her some task to occupy her time, or some punishment for real or supposed unidentified infraction.

#### A DAY IN THE LIFE OF NEKO

For fun Neko launches herself from a roof top, spinning faster as she descends. Neko ricochets off the building wall, and plants her landing. Her face, flushed from exertion, is a pleasant mixture of black, ginger and white. She brushes her short cropped jet black hair from in front of her eyes. When she stares out of her dark green eyes, no one can or dares to withstand her gaze for long. All fear Neko and her connection to the Sorceress. Kojie lands on her shoulder. A three legged crow scares the locals even more. They think she too, is a witch like the sorceress, and that bird is her familiar.

Everybody notices Neko's calico coloration. No one says a thing. They glance at her as she strides by, then just as quickly, lower their heads or pull their hoods lower so as not to be observed staring. It's as if to view her is a curse. She is oblivious.

A few local beings are known to have pigmentation similar but no where near as vibrant to Neko. All appear to be slow-witted. It is rumored those that still exist are distantly related, possibly bastards of the deposed royal family and are a result of wayward behavior which is falsely rumored to be the reason for the rulers demise so many centuries ago.

The Calico Ones, as they are called, have no names, no benefactors and they are treated worse than a regular person. Their kind are usually abandoned at birth to perish -- a grim reminder of a past long gone. No family needs the additional burden and stigma of a throwback to an ancient bloodline as part of their daily existence. A few are kept alive for the worst tasks.

Neko is also oblivious of her resemblance to the old royal line, of the fair and just world that had existed once many centuries ago. No one dares to mention it especially the Sorceress. Neko has never located the data that would support such knowledge. But the Sorceress knows and uses Neko, her sword and that damned crow as a badge of legitimacy enhancing her stature. It is easier to rule in this fashion, using fear and brute strength to a required minimum.

Neko is petite, agile and fearless. She accepts any challenge from man, woman or beast. Although she is sometimes bloodied, she has never lost a battle. There is something about her and that sword. It seems to guide her in combat, as if it knows what the opponent has in mind and communicates that knowledge to Neko. Observers claim that the cranes glow when she touches the hilt in combat.

When it comes to combat, Neko likes to get in close. Her sword is what some would call a wakizachi. It lends itself to her style of combat. The sword is shorter than most would use. When she closes in and can smell the fear from her opponent, it drives her harder. This is a winner take all world. No quarter is given, no prisoners taken, and in general, no mercy is ever shown.

The sword can slice through anything without suffering so much as a scratch, chip, or dent. The deep ebony color remains flawless. It reflects light like an obsidian mirror, no matter how it is used or abused. It rings like a finely-crafted silver bell when it strikes another blade -- and it has always been as if it is that very sound shatters or cleaves the other sword or armor, or spear, or skull, when contact is made. And yet, the sword is light in Neko's grasp. It never leaves Neko's person, ever.

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Some times what pleases Neko is to taunt her benefactor. "I'm a foundling. Where, who is my family?" And then she screams, "I must know, please."

"You are who you are. You are my ward. Accept that fact as it is. Now silence yourself," the Sorceress commands, intending to cut the conversation short.

"I have to be someone. Look at this sword!" Neko cries. "I am someone in my own right, not just 'your ward'. And you know. *Tell me*," she screams even louder.

"Neko, to your suite," the Sorceress commands. If, and usually when Neko does not obey immediately, as it is the case now, the Sorceress places a spell of silence upon the girl that lasts a day; sometimes more. She'll decide later when to lift it.

The assistants scurry away as quickly as possible whenever one of these episodes begins. Neko's screams can be heard on the streets. That Neko still lives after screaming demands of the Sorceress and refusing her commands earns her a street legitimacy that the Sorceress could not even begin to understand. But no one dares to speak of it. But no matter, she is still considered a witch by the population.

The Sorceress quickly removes herself from Neko's presence. Neko notices the help's furtive glances and their smiles as they scurry away. She barely bows in their direction and an ever so slight smile spreads from her face in recognition. Though she cannot make a sound she would never give them away to face the Sorceress's wrath.

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Yet, in a similar fashion, Neko brooks no insult either.

One day Neko found herself in the path of a monstrous warrior. She was about to move out of his path, but stopped and looked when he shouted, "Out of my way," and spit in her direction. She still intended to step aside until the monster sneered and muttered, "Foundling." She was in no mood to fight.

"I have a name!" Neko shouts back. Kojie digs into her shoulder as if a warning. "And your name is?" she demands.

"Neko the Foundling? That's a name?" The warrior scoffed. *Good*, he thought, *I'll get her so riled up and she'll slip. She may have a reputation but she's young.* "I have a name but I wouldn't give you the satisfaction or the honor of knowing it," he continues. He knows about her and uses that information to his advantage. He smirks and spits again in her direction taunting, "Foundling witch."

His sword, heavy, double bladed, and is chinked in spots from many combats. It is not sheathed and rests on his shoulders. As he stands he spreads his legs to get a firm grounding. He plants his sword in the ground in front of him. His gauntleted hand rests on the hilt. It's a taunt. He's not worried.

Neko frowned. She sizes up the situation. She whispers to Kojie, "this warrior-monster is looking for a fight. It doesn't matter with whom or what. It could be a dragon, a warrior, or any one for that matter, it simply didn't matter. I just happen to be here and he obviously knows something about me."

"Fighting is my life," he bellowed. "Maybe the Sorceress will give me a position in her force when I rid her of you, you foul pest." He too has a reputation to uphold -- and he knows that Neko has a reputation too. "To defeat you would greatly enhance my fame, you bothersome evil colored girl creature." He stops to see what reaction she will give him.

Nothing, she says nothing. She continues to stare at him judging the situation.

"A girl with a sword?" He laughs again aiming a taunting question at her. "Are you afraid?" He spits again. "This will be a snack," he yells, and then adds, "that's a damned good idea. You do look good enough to eat. I'll dine on your bones this evening."

With a plan and cool head and while the warrior is bellowing, Neko leaps to the roof of a nearby building where Kojie is now perched. Without any hesitation she launches herself, rebounding/springing off a wall and begins to spin. While tightly drawing herself up into a ball, she gains increased momentum as she dives. This tactic gives her even more energy and power beyond what her petite size conveys. She plants her landing and instantly transfers all the energy to the drawn sword while simultaneously slicing upward. Then faster than the warrior's eyes can follow, her sword finishes the rest of the discussion. Neko's sword shears through his armor, flesh and bone like a scythe through straw.

What remains of the warrior lies on the ground, dismembered, his sword blade is still planted in the ground, his gauntleted hand still attached to the hilt, eventually falling away to the bloodied earth by his still spread bodiless boots. Neko looks around as the people turn their heads away. Kojie flies back to her shoulder and gives her a peck with his beak.

One man -- a serf -- did not turn away as quickly as the others. His face bore patterns in black, ginger, and white not quite similar to Neko's. Someone slapped him in the head and through gritted teeth said in almost a whisper, "You simpleton, quit staring. You'll be next to face that little witch. Quit staring and

get away from here. The sorceress's people will be here in a few moments and if they catch you it will be worse than facing her."

The serf with a bobble-head sort of acknowledgement moved away from the killing scene.

Neko did not notice him. She is more concerned with the blood that stained her clean tunic. She would rather bathe but that would mean returning to the enclave and possibly having to explain it all to the Sorceress. And she knew her people would be here soon. She departed quickly.

The serf watched from a safe distance so as not to be noticed. He follows her movements and moves in what he assumes is a parallel direction but distant enough to be unobserved. He kept his head hooded and body well covered.

Neko decides to get away from the urban decay and into the forest that has been growing back and reclaiming that which was once cultivated. Neko is sure she is beyond the vision of the Sorceress.

Once in the forest she laughs aloud. The combat was invigorating. Kojie caws loudly too doing all sorts of aerial acrobatics. The wind blows through Neko's hair turning it into a knotted mess. She does not care. Swinging from the vines in the nearby wood, Neko is playing with Kojie's and his version of tag.

Kojie stops mid air, notices movement in the bushes below, and cawing loudly dives for it. Neko acknowledges the warning, tucks her body into a tight ball and launches herself toward the movement. She lands in a clear location just short of the spot Kojie warned her about. Her eyes shine brightly. Her smile is tight but wide.

"*You!* Halt or die!" she demands her sword drawn.

The bush shakes. From the other side a serf drops something dark. Bowing low, quivering like a leaf, he pleads, "Please do not harm me I was picking berries. I saw you flying through the air. I was struck by your agility, Your Grace."

Neko's sword drawn high, the mons, the golden cranes, reflect the sun, which she aims at his eyes, blinding the serf.

"I know you have no name, but what do you call yourself?" Neko demands.

His hands rose slowly, to indicate no evil intent, blocking the glare from the sword.

"Lady Neko, I have no name. I am called Man-child. And that is all."

"Man-child come closer. I want to see your face."

Quaking, bowing, he approaches.

"Stop. Look at me," she commands.

"I dare not. It is forbidden."

"Eye to eye, Man-child. Do it!"

"If I am discovered I will die. I have been warned. Please don't force me," he blubbers.

"I will never say anything. Now gaze at me and I will the same of you."

He looks up.

"Stand straight, Man-child."

As commanded he rises to his full height -- a few centimeters taller than Neko.

She looks him up and down. She observes no likely weapon.

She sat down. "Now, you sit right there," she orders, pointing to a spot in front of her. One hand holds the unsheathed black *wakizachi* and she lays it across her bare, well-formed calico legs. With the other hand, she points to the spot where she wants him to sit.

After he lowers himself to the ground, she notices that he is staring at her.

Neko laughs, her eyes sparkling with a new found pleasure, and taps him with the sword.

He quickly brushed it away. His green eyes glared into hers. There is no fear now.

She springs to her feet instantly. The sword is up with the blade pointing at him, her feet shifting into a defensive posture and her eyes are mere slits. The hidden claw-like blade instantaneously appears. She peers at Man-child, looking for any hint of hostile intent.

Man-child does nothing. He just sits there, returning her emerald stare with his own.

Neko blinks, recognizing the same penetrating gaze she has seen in the mirror a thousand times. The claw-blade retracts into the sword-hilt, and she slides the sword back into its scabbard. Leaping high, she grabs a vine and disappears into the leafy shadows above.

Kojie stayed a bit longer to observe and soon catches up to her.

The serf got to his feet and moved quickly away, his stride quick and graceful for someone who seemed terrified only moments before. It was out of place. Neko took note of that. She notes that he returned to the bush from where he came not even bothering to turn around.

Before she vanishes from sight she said, "I will see you again." There is a bit of a question to that statement which surprises her even more.

From a distance Neko watches him leave. The memory of his facial markings and his bright green eyes fixed are in her mind. "I knew it," she said to herself. "The Sorceress *is* hiding something from me. She is afraid of something. This is confusing. I know I was found in a cove, this sword by my side, and with you Kojie. No one can use it but me. No one can stand before it. But *he* brushed it away. And he was not really afraid."

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"Kill the Man-child," the Sorceress says. "I saw him with Neko in my scrying mirror. If she discovers her real name -- and his -- we are doomed. They are both of the royal line. I kept her alive because she gives me the legitimacy to rule. The folk would never rise against me with her at my side. I had no idea about him. How did he stay hidden? I see all."

She keeps her other plan to herself. I will kill this troll too once he completes his task. I want no witnesses.

The troll nodded and picked up a weapon among the assortment The Sorceress had laid out.

"No, use these," she commands pointing to a group of simpler weapons spread out on a large table. "Leave them in this house." She indicates one house on a grid. "I now know where he lives that traitor. They have been stirring up trouble. The evidence you leave will end that issue."

Neko listens to all. Her eyes narrow to slits, her lips draw back bearing her teeth and as her hands grip the hilt of her sword, the claw-blade silently emerges.

The hidden door bursts open and Neko emerges like a whirling shuriken blade, the sword a shadowy blur in her hands. The troll died instantly without a sound. The sorceress would be next.

She sat in her chair calmly waiting for Neko to get closer. "Yes, I knew *it could come to this*. I was hoping for a different ending. I am sorry dear Neko, but your time is up. I will rule without you. The masses are but sheep and fodder. They will bow to power. What a waste of energy and life."

"Before I die, tell me who I am. I heard everything. I have that right!" demands Neko.

The Sorceress laughs as she says, "I will tell you that you are more than you can imagine. Your pigmentation and wakizachi affirm that."

Neko said something that had been in the back of her mind but unarticulated. It was a recent epiphany. "Your tattoos were your attempt to match my colors, weren't they? I have something more you want, something you desire," and with an after thought continued. "It's more of my pigmentation that you need, what you yourself desire, isn't it?"

The Sorceress was taken off guard and sit back in her chair.

Neko realizes that she it home and continues, "The tattoos may have worked in the beginning. But the color couldn't hold against the being you truly are. The colors ran. Look at you. You're hideous. Mine are pure and don't run. Why you kept me alive all these years was beyond me. You really didn't need me. You had the power. It was this." Neko points to her body.

The Sorceress is in shock and in a rage. She screams, "How dare you! Where did you get that information? Where were you during those times I couldn't locate you. Where were you?"

Neko continues driving her new found knowledge home. "Your once beautiful body, covered in artful tattoos, and I've seen the pictures of you, morphed into a walking horror of color that ran into a fading green mush and smeared black and blues. The vivid reds, yellows and other hues and tints had long since disappeared. Some thought but never dare uttered that the color reflected your soul. You were once physically extremely attractive.

"You're covered all the time to hide the disfiguration that came upon you. In the hottest weather you wear robes dark and opaque enough to hide the marbling colors, yet light enough not to cause too much discomfort. How do I know this? Reading dear ruler, from reading. I can do that. You'd be surprised. You thought I was just your little smart but uneducated little warrior girl, your human pet."

The Sorceress raged on, "You have really sealed your death warrant little girl. I will tell you my dear you are the result of a mating between a God and a human. Only such creatures have that coloration. It should have been me that was his mate not your mother. Your wakizachi and that stupid crow hold the clues to your birth origins. Those cranes are sacred to one greater than I am." The Sorceress is shaking with rage. "But the gods abandoned you and your kind long ago. You are mine to do as I please. So I win in the end."

Breathing slowly, her fingers digging into the side of the chair, and with great effort the sorceress gets control of herself and hisses, "But my dear little Neko, you are standing on the exact spot you should be. In a few seconds you will be plunging to your death just like the rest of your ancient family." The Sorceress

reaches for a switch.

Neko asked another question that stopped the Sorceress. Neko knew the Sorceress relished the opportunity to torture her victims and this was a fitting invitation and tactical diversion. "You killed them. I always suspected it. But you kept me. Why?"

The Sorceress stopped and barely smiled. "Not all. Obviously. You exist. But why my dear?" She thinks of the other one -- 'Man-child', somehow hidden from her sorcery until this day. That fact boiled inside her and how *he* got away from her. *He'll be next* she said to herself. But before she could answer Neko, "I too exist," said a voice interrupting her thoughts.

The Sorceress stops whatever she was about to say and do to Neko. She turns quickly toward the location of the voice. Her hands come up and away from the switch and point toward the voice immediately casting a spell.

Man-child stepped out from the same spot Neko emerged from earlier. He is unaffected by whatever it is the Sorceress had just attempted.

"I followed you," he says to Neko not taking his eyes off the Sorceress and continues speaking to the Sorceress, "I have the sign of the Owl on my weapon." It's a multi-shot crossbow made from the same material as Neko's sword. It is a gift from the Gods. My Mother is one you know too, and a favorite of her father. I know all that. I am protected and beyond your power. That is why you never found me. This is fate. The crow, Kojie protected, Neko in a fashion and with a power that you could never discern. He too is a guardian from the gods."

"Do you remember the huntsman you had search and kill any that looked as our kind, all those years back?" The youth asks this with vengeance. "He couldn't bring himself to do what you had commanded. He told me the whole story when I was younger. He explained the symbol on my weapon. He like you couldn't lift it without my touch. He hid me and a scroll with his family. He mentioned Neko. I've watched her for years."

"I killed him for disloyalty years ago," declared the Sorceress with a smile. There was no apparent reason to go after others like you with that old passion I had in the beginning, or so I thought. I made a mistake that I intend to rectify right now. I eliminate all my threats." She was conjuring up a new spell and needed a short amount of time to bring it together in her mind.

The youth continues, "That was because we, all of us with these features, we all feigned idiocy in order to survive. As fools and as reminders of the past, we were no threats to you. Only Neko was allowed her freedom and education. She was under your domination but not completely."

"That stupid deformed bird? I should have killed it," she hissed. She wanted to eliminate the youth first since he posed a greater threat, and then kill the crow so Neko could suffer watching before she eliminated her.

Man-child continued, "Yes I know, and we both know Neko, as you call her, is the daughter of my Mother's father and Métis thus the Swan and Crane motifs. What you never noticed were the lightning bolts engraved in the sword guard. That would have told it all. You were too enamored by the child Neko." He stopped for a second and looked at both of them before he continued. "And as we both know, her name is Neith."

Neko was taking this all in while slowly inching off the trap door toward the Sorceress. She stopped dead in her tracks with the mention of her true name. The Sword began to glow. As she whispered her name to herself her rage grew to a boil. Her wakizachi was not lifted high in her formal attack mode, but clutched low. This was a new tactic she picked up fighting the giant warrior some time ago. He didn't expect that either. The formal attack mode was a straight top down or an oblique cut again to the neck, the head and down the torso allowing the full body strength and mass to be applied to the cut. She liked it.

The blade sweeps up in a short arc as Neith springs off the trap door screaming her true name, "I am Neith. Fear me witch!"

The Sorceress who has been focusing her energy on this youth and his story turned too late to escape. The blade of one thought fulfilled its duty.

Tiapan venom-dipped darts, fired in quick succession, pierced the body armor of the Sorceress securing the desired result.

"This... I never ... She still had the nerve connections to hit the trap door switch.

The calico youth, holding a crossbow made of the same metal as Neith's sword in one hand, grabbed Neith's arm with the other and pulled her away from the maw of the trap door as it dropped away, making sure she did not back into it.

"Lady Neith, we do meet again," he said, bowing. "As you foretold, and my name is Lugh. Now maybe the two of us can make this city and this island a decent place to love once again with the help of our gods and the good people."

THE END