

The Princess, the Labyrinth & the Tower

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Once upon a time there was a princess (to whom tradition gives the name Sophie), and Sophie lived in a labyrinth. She did not know whether it was a large or a small labyrinth. She did not even know she was living in a labyrinth. She was content to live a somewhat limited and undemanding existence in a small part of the space, and she kept it clean and tidy and was exceedingly proud of its places and intricacies and decorations. She had an inchoate understanding that there may have been other spaces outside of her own, but for reasons best known to herself she assumed they were not worth visiting (as they were certain to be identical to her own space), and besides, she enjoyed the familiarity of her home comforts.



It is in the nature of labyrinths of this kind that they are subject to seismic disturbances. No one knows why fairy-tale labyrinths have this instability – they just do. The ground trembles, the walls shake, and from time-to-time a section of masonry collapses.

The tremors disturbed Sophie. Decorations were tumbled, her neatness was disturbed, and worse still ... bricks tumbled down and an opening appeared. What to do? She contemplated piling the fallen bricks back into place, but her desire to explore was difficult to ignore. Although Sophie feared what she might find, she stepped through the gap, and found herself in a new space, in a space of beguiling complexity. She explored, she made maps, and for the first time she began to ask questions about the nature of the space in which she had her habitation. Just how many spaces were adjacent to her space? Were there additional spaces adjacent to the newly discovered space? She felt unease as she imagined what might be in these spaces. She kept a journal of her imaginings and dreams.



The tremors continued, and every few years another wall would tumble, and another space would beckon Sophie. Her initial fear of seismic events was replaced by a positive liking for earth tremors.

Her domain grew. She kept a space in the labyrinth to accommodate her growing library of charts and maps and speculations. A day came when Sophie realised her collection of maps were her proudest possession. She still enjoyed exploring and decorating new parts of the labyrinth, but the collection of maps she had produced were a labour of love, and she liked nothing better than to browse through them, admiring the clarity of line and detail, the dimensional precision, the interconnectedness. She

began to catalogue the maps, and when a partial index system was complete, she began a new activity on the art and craft of cataloguing. Such fun!

Within two decades Sophie's space within the labyrinth had become truly vast. It took her weeks to traverse her domain. There were others who lacked Sophie's courage for exploration, and her cartographic institute had become renowned throughout the labyrinth for its size and complexity, and for its prolific literature on mapping, cataloguing, and metaphysical reflections on the nature of the labyrinth. Students came for guidance and for tuition. Public benevolence enabled her to devote more time to her institute, and she gave public lectures on the nature of space.

Sophie, like many people, had her days of confusion and doubt. She had begun to reflect on the arbitrary nature of the spaces and passages within the labyrinth. The larger the space within her domain, the greater the likelihood that a tremor would undermine a wall somewhere, and the more effort she needed to expend to keep her maps current.

And each new space had something in common with each old space. Sophie was becoming bored and increasingly sceptical of the value of mapping. What was the point in having maps when walls could fall down? It was not only the walls that were being undermined; her beliefs about the nature of space itself were beginning to crumble. The level of external interest in her cartographic institute had also become an irritation and a distraction – she felt like a hypocrite when she lectured on ideas she no longer believed in.

The first major breakthrough came (in a literal sense) when Sophie suggested an unsettling new experiment to one of her burlier students. She asked him to research methods to destroy walls. The student (his name was Peter) invented a new instrument he named “a sledgehammer”. Peter demonstrated his wall-smashing apparatus on a wall. The wall fell down. Peter smashed his way through wall after wall. A profound unease developed in Peter and Sophie. What was there to stop Peter smashing down all the walls? Sophie panicked and swore Peter to silence.



Sophie realised her famous cartographic institute, so lovingly nurtured for so long, would become irrelevant in a world without walls or spaces. Her many colleagues, and the students of the institute, would think she had gone insane. For the first time Sophie picked up loose tumbled bricks and puzzled over how to cement them back into place. For a mind that loved exploration this was truly an awful thing to contemplate, but she realised she needed her labyrinth. Something in her would die without it.

Her brief insight of a world without walls and spaces shocked her, rendered her dysfunctional, made her ill. Sophie withdrew from public life and for months she pondered the nature of the labyrinth. Eventually she wrote a small monograph describing her conclusions, and published it anonymously. The reaction confirmed her fears. It was

publicly reviled, suppressed, condemned, burned. Meanwhile, in secret, in the least accessible part of her domain, she experimented with bricks and cement.

Sophie's clandestine (and dangerously heretical) experiments with bricks had an interesting consequence. She could do more than repair breaches. She found she could build her *own walls*.



This became more fun than making maps. Maps became a private joke, a joke she could not share with others, but a subject of much quiet hilarity as she built walls of arbitrary shape. It was only a matter of time before she found she could build above the level of the existing labyrinth, and as she added stairs and levels, Sophie built her first tower. This was a revelation. As the tower took shape, the overall structure of the labyrinth became clear. Sophie was no

longer in the labyrinth. She could *see*.

And so it was that Sophie began her study of towers. The energy that went into cartography now went into her study of towers. She produced many designs for towers. Some had seven levels. Some were elaborate, decorated with many strange designs. Some were empty shells; others were nothing more than plain columns. In time she realised that towers, like labyrinths, were also fabrications. She could make them, and she could unmake them. The labyrinth itself was not arbitrary (she still needed a place to live) but neither was it a necessity. She had gained the perspective to make walls where she wanted walls, and she could remove them when they served no purpose.

And she lived happily ever after.

And now an exploration of this fable. What is the labyrinth? The labyrinth is the collection of cognitive categories within each individual's mind that are employed to make sense of the world. Objects, principles, beliefs, customs, laws, doctrines - these constitute a labyrinth that both enables us to make our way in the world, but also constitutes an invisible necessity that blinds us to the broader nature of things. The nature of the labyrinth cannot be understood from within the labyrinth.

And the towers? These are mystical systems that show us how to construct a new set of cognitive categories. These categories provide a vantage point from which we can see the labyrinth. The towers have no inherent virtue in themselves; each one is only an architectural plan for something that has to be



constructed in the nervous system. If our princess had created an Institute of Tower Architecture then that too would have been within the labyrinth.

And what about the fairy tale princess? The princess is the self-transcendent capacity in the human soul that can stand apart from whatever labyrinth the circumstances of life has created in us. Sometimes she will reveal herself an external agency, a figure of mystery and magick whose revelations are concealed by a veil. In time she is revealed as a projection of our self-transcendent urge.

She can be still be found as the High Priestess card in the Tarot, seated between her pillars, with her cartographic scrolls and books. If you are fortunate, she may show you how to invent hammers, demolish walls and build towers. She is also the dancing woman in the World card, maker of labyrinths, but free in herself to dance where and when she chooses.

