

This is the legend of how Girls Guild came to be.

A very, very long time ago there was a Princess named Sophia who lived on an island called Atlantis. Sophia was a bright and adventurous girl. She didn't much care for being cooped up in the royal palace. Sitting around in her fine jewels and gowns bored her half to death. And so, whenever she could, she loved to put on peasant clothes, sneak away from the palace grounds and explore the island.

And such marvelous sights she saw! Atlantis was a beautiful paradise, with many exotic flowers and birds, beaches and waterfalls. There were great temples and wide boulevards lined with lush gardens and statues of all the heroes of Atlantis. There were wonderful inventions too. Even though it was ancient times, many were beyond anything we have today. There were horseless carriages that ran on sunlight alone. There were wind-up mechanical birds that could fly, speak and play games. Here and there fountains played music as water jetted from glass trumpets.

The greatest marvel of all, however, was the Library of Atlantis. It stood at the very center of the island. Its gold dome rose high over the surrounding buildings. Often Sophia would



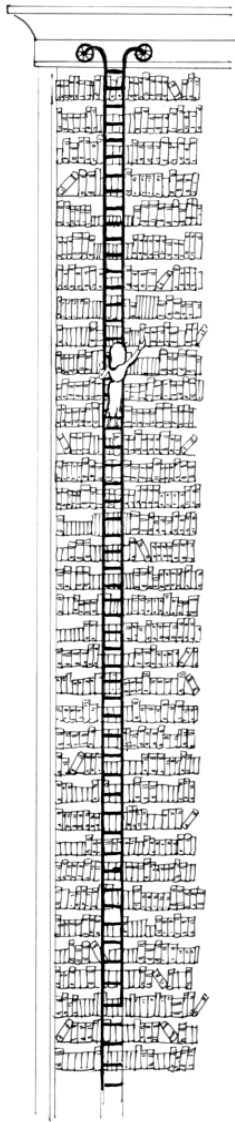
stand at the base of the marble steps that led to the entrance and wonder at all the knowledge contained inside. The cures for every disease known to man were said to be there. So too were answers to some of the great mysteries of science like how gravity works and how big the universe is.

But as much as she wanted to go inside, Sophia was not allowed through the huge bronze doors. Girls were not allowed in libraries, nor even taught how to read on

Atlantis. Female minds were too weak for reading, it was thought. Even learning to write her own name would cause a girl such distraction that she might wander right off a cliff or fall down a well. To make sure no girl ever read, her father, King Canute, issued a decree ordering imprisonment for anyone who taught a girl reading and writing.

One day, Sophia's curiosity got the better of her. She put the hood of her peasant cloak over her head and tagged along behind a group of school boys going into the library. Once inside she was astonished at what she saw. The library was more magnificent than anything she had imagined. The reading room was situated beneath the golden dome. It was so cavernous that an entire palace, turrets and all, could easily fit inside. And even then there would be plenty of room for the wind-up birds to fly around as though the blue sky painted on the ceiling were the real sky.

Yet with all this space, the reading room was only a small portion of the vast building. Sophia knew she had to explore the whole wonderful place. She returned many times in the weeks that followed, sneaking in behind groups of school boys, or climbing in a window. She returned so often that she became friends with one of the mechanical birds that lived in



the library. The bird's name was Lenore. He would ride on her shoulder as the two wandered among the seemingly endless volumes, each leather-bound and decorated with gold and jewels, lining row upon row of massive bookcases that stretched along miles of winding corridors.

It was said that it would take a thousand lifetimes to read the books from even a single bookcase. But such vast numbers, rather than overwhelm Sophia, only spurred her curiosity. Sadly though, Sophia had to be content with looking at the pictures and wondering what all the words on the surrounding pages said about them.

One day a kindly librarian named Plato happened upon her in one of the out-of-the-way corridors where she sat cross-legged on the floor surrounded by a pile of books. He was quite taken with her desire to learn. After much pleading by Sophia, agreed to teach her how to read. The two spent many afternoons together. In time, Sophia became an excellent reader. Now all the wonderful knowledge of the library was available to her. She learned about poetry, history and far away places. She learned about science and how the tools of science, reason and observation, had solved many of the mysteries of nature that had baffled mankind for so long. Armed with her new knowledge, she resolved that she too would go out into the world and make great discoveries.

She soon got her chance while walking on the beach one afternoon. She and Lenore had gone a long way down the beach. They were returning as the tide came in. As the surf began to wash over her feet, they moved higher on the beach to the dry sand. Before long, the surf was again washing over her feet. They again moved higher, but the water kept coming. They moved higher still and sat watching the surf come closer and closer. When the water finally stopped advancing she was sure that she had never seen such a high tide. She

marked the spot with a large nautilus shell. The next day, she hurried down to the beach to see if the tide would be so high. To her surprise, the surf came right up to the nautilus shell. Then it went right past it. She found another nautilus shell to mark this even higher tide. The next day, the water rose higher. After several days of watching the tides get higher and higher, it occurred to her that soon the tide would go right over the entire beach. If it didn't stop, the whole island would end up under water.

Sophia went to her father the king with the terrible news. The island was sinking, she told them. If they worked quickly, they could build an enormous ship to save the precious books of the library. King Canute was a good and kind man, but he relied far too much on the

advice of his chief counselor, Caliban. Caliban was very rich and powerful. He owned the quarries where they mined all the marble to build the beautiful buildings of Atlantis. He was also the man in charge of making sure girls would never read on Atlantis. When Caliban heard her plea he just laughed at her. A girl should spend her time picking flowers, he said, and not conducting silly experiments on the beach. Why, he asked, should she worry about books she was forbidden to read anyway? Unfortunately, King Canute agreed. There would be no great ark to save the library.

Sophia rushed back to the library to tell her friend Plato. Despite the rules, she ran right through the bronze doors. Grabbing the sleeves of the first librarian she saw, she demanded to see Plato. The librarian was shocked to see a girl in the library. He could only stammer that Plato had been taken to the dungeon. Someone had seen Plato teaching a girl in the library several days earlier and reported it to Caliban.

As Sophia predicted, the tide continued to rise until the waves crashed over the seawall along the beach. Despite her continued pleas, Caliban would not release Plato from the dungeon. Nor was anything done to save the books. The island began to tremble with small earthquakes. The tide began to wash over the roads at the edge of the city. It soon became clear to everyone that the island was sinking. But by then it was too late to save the library.

The island began to sink quite rapidly. Sophia realized that Plato would surely drown if not let out of the dungeon. The tide, however, was coming in too fast to send anyone down to release him. By then everyone on the island was scrambling to get aboard any boat they could find. Fortunately, there were enough boats for all to escape. It was a tight squeeze. There was no room for any books.

The thought of Plato sinking with the island made Sophia inconsolable. She needed help climbing aboard the royal boat. Once safely aboard she had another terrible thought: Lenore was no longer with her. Sophia turned and called for her mechanical bird to come back but to no avail. Lenore was no where in sight.

All around the boats the sea bubbled and churned as the island sank. The tops of the palm trees that lined the flooded boulevards disappeared beneath the waves. Then the tops of the taller buildings went under. Finally, all that remained above the surface was the shining gold dome of the library. Sophia fixed her teary gaze on the dome as firmly as she could. She knew that this would be the last time she ever saw it. And then, it too went under with a great gurgling sound. Her two best friends and every place she had ever known were gone.

Exhausted, she went into her quarters and cried herself asleep. She slept all the rest of the afternoon and that night. When she awoke the next morning sunlight was streaming in the small portal over her bunk. She rubbed the sleep from her eyes. Suddenly there was a small tapping sound at the portal. She opened her eyes with a start and there, outside the portal, was Lenore. Lenore had come back to her!

She jumped up, let Lenore in and ran up to the deck where was some kind of commotion going on. Crewmen were yelling and pointing over the railing. Sophia looked over the railing. She saw a man floating on a wooden trunk that bobbed alongside the boat. A sailor

jumped into the water with one end of a rope. He tied his end of it around the man. Then the other crewmen pulled their end and hauled the man and the sailor back into the boat. Once aboard, they laid the man carefully on the sunlit deck. Sophia elbowed her way into the circle of crewmen as they stood looking at him. When she saw the man lying there barely alive in a puddle of seawater, she couldn't believe her eyes. It was Plato! He had survived, Sophia would find out later, because her mechanical bird had flown through the bars of the small dungeon window, found the key to Plato's cell on the wall and released him. It was Plato! Sophia was never more joyful than to see her both of her friends still alive!

When Plato finally dried out he told everyone what had happened to him. One day while filing books in the back corner of the deepest basement of the library, he nearly fell into a rough hole that had opened up in the stone floor. Plato took a lantern and climbed down to explore. He found himself in one of the tunnels of the marble mine owned by Caliban. As he followed the winding tunnel he realized that the mine was enormous. It was so extensive with all its side passages and vaulted chambers that the bedrock that supported Atlantis was like wood riddled with termite holes. The whole island was in danger of collapse.

He confronted Caliban about his discovery and pleaded with him to stop the mining. But rather than stop, Caliban accused Plato of teaching a girl to read and had him thrown in the dungeon. He only survived the rising water because Lenore had flown through the dungeon window, found the key to Plato's cell, and released him.

Plato's story made the king very angry at Caliban. But there was nothing he could do as Caliban had disappeared in the chaos of everyone fleeing the island.

The king was also ashamed for not having listened to Sophia. He decreed that henceforth all girls would be taught to read. And to make sure no one would ever be able to prevent girls from reading again, he created a secret sisterhood called Girls Guild. Its job throughout all of history would be to stand up against the evil forces that would keep anyone in the darkness of ignorance. It would have plenty to do. According to legend, Caliban started his own secret society to keep girls in the dark, and Girls Guild has been working against it ever since.

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