



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Country Called Nonamia

Evelyn Sharp

Ever so long ago, in the wonderful country of Nonamia, there lived an absent-minded magician. It is not usual, of course, for a magician to be absent-minded; but then, if it were usual it would not have happened in Nonamia. Nobody knew very much about this particular magician, for he lived in his castle in the air, and it is not easy to visit any one who lives in the air. He did not want to be visited, however; visitors always meant conversation, and he could not endure conversation. This, by the way, was not surprising, for he was so absent-minded that he always forgot the end of his sentence before he was half-way through the beginning of it; and as for his visitors' remarks—well, if he had had any visitors, he would never have heard their remarks at all. So, when some one did call on him, one day,—and that was when he had been living in his castle in the air for seven hundred and seventy-seven years and had almost forgotten who he was and why he was there,—the magician was so astonished that he could not think of anything to say.

"How did you get here?" he asked at last; for even an absent-minded magician cannot remain altogether silent, when he looks out of his castle in the air and sees a Princess in a gold and silver frock, with a bright little crown on her head, floating about on a soft white cloud.

"Well, I just came, that's all," answered the Princess, with a particularly friendly smile. "You see, I have never been able to find my own castle in the air, so when the West Wind told me about yours I asked him to blow me here. May I come in and see what it is like?"

"Certainly not," said the magician, hastily. "It is not like anything; and even if it were, I should not let you come in. Don't you know that, if you were to enter another person's castle in the air, it would vanish away like a puff of smoke?"

"Oh, dear!" sighed the Princess. "I did so want to know what a real castle in the air was like. I wonder if yours is at all like mine!"

"Tell me about yours," said the magician. "I may be able to help you to find it." Of course, he only said this in order to prevent her from coming inside his own castle. At the same time, a little conversation with a friendly Princess in a gold and silver gown is not at all unpleasant, when one has lived in a castle in the air for seven hundred and seventy-seven years.

"My castle in the air is much bigger than yours," she explained. "It has ever so many rooms in it,—a large room to laugh in and a small room to cry in—"

"To cry in?" interrupted the magician. "Why, no one ever thinks of crying in a castle in the air!"

"One never knows," answered the Princess, gravely. "Supposing I were to prick my finger, what should I do if there was wasn't a room to cry in? Then, there is a middling-sized room to be serious in; for there is just a chance that I might want to be serious sometimes, and it would be as well to have a room, in case."

"Perhaps it would," observed the magician, who had never listened so attentively to a conversation in the whole of his long life. "What else will you have in your castle?"

"I shall have lots of nice books that end happily," answered the Princess; "and they shall be talking books, so that I need not read them to find out what they are about. I shall have plenty of happy thoughts in my castle, too, and lots of nice dreams piled up in heaps, and—well, there is just one thing more."

"What is that?" asked the magician.

"Well, I think I should like to have a Prince in my castle, a nice Prince, who would not want to be just dull and princely like all the princes I have ever danced with, but a Prince who would like my castle exactly as I have built it and would play with me all day long. That would be something like a Prince, wouldn't it?"

"You could not possibly have a Prince," said the magician. "If you allowed some one else even to look into your castle in the air, it would vanish away like a puff of smoke. I have lived in my castle for seven hundred and seventy-seven years, and I have never allowed any one to put a foot in it."

"Is it so beautiful, then, your castle in the air?" asked the Princess, wonderingly.

"I'm sure I don't know," said the absent-minded magician; "I don't think I ever noticed. I came to live in it, because it was the only place in which I could be left alone. That reminds me, that if you do not go away at once I shall be obliged to become exceedingly angry with you."

"By all means," said the Princess, who had the most charming manners in the world; "but I should like to have my castle first."

"I haven't got it here," said the magician, looking about him vaguely. "I know I saw it somewhere not long ago, but I can't remember what I did with it. However, if you ask the people of Nonamia, they will be able to tell you where it has gone. You will find that they are very obliging."

"Will they not be surprised?" asked the Princess.

"Dear me, no! The Nonamiacs are never surprised at anything," said the magician; and he drew in his head from the window. The Princess in the gold and silver frock sailed away on her cloud, and landed presently in the flat, green country of Nonamia.

"Have you seen my castle in the air?" she asked, very politely, of the first Nonamiac she met.

"What is it like?" asked the Nonamiac, without showing the least surprise.

"It is ever so large and ever so beautiful, and it is packed full of happiness, and there is a nice Prince inside," answered the Princess.

"Ah," said the Nonamiac; "then it must be the one I saw being blown along by the South Wind. But there was no Prince inside."

The Princess thanked him and hastened away in the direction of the South Wind until she met another Nonamiac, to whom she explained as politely as before what she wanted to know.

"Ah," said the Nonamiac, "that must be the castle I met just now as it was being carried off by the North Wind. But I saw no Prince inside."

The Princess turned round and hurried after the North Wind as fast as she could go. As soon as she met another Nonamiac, however, she had to turn round once more, for he told her that her castle had just been stolen by the East Wind; and when she had been walking quite a long time in the direction of the East Wind, she met yet another Nonamiac, who told her that it was the West Wind who had taken away her castle in the air.

"It is too bad!" said the little Princess, sitting down exhausted on a large stone by the side of the road. "Why should all the winds be playing with my castle in the air?"

"Castles in the air generally go to the winds," observed a traveller in a dusty brown cloak, who was sitting on another large stone, not very far off. She was quite sure he had not been there the moment before, but, in Nonamia, there was nothing remarkable about that. The Princess wiped the tears out of her eyes with a small lace handkerchief, and looked at the stranger.

"Mine is a very particular castle in the air, you see," she said. "It is ever so large and ever so beautiful, and it is packed with happiness and dreams, and perhaps there is a Prince in it, too."

"A Prince?" said the stranger. "What sort of Prince?"

"A nice Prince," explained the Princess, "who can play games and tell stories and be amusing. All the Princes I know can do nothing but dance, and they are not at

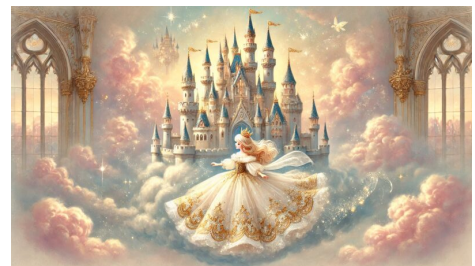
all amusing. I am afraid, though," she added, sighing, "that I am going to have my castle without a Prince, after all."

"Would it do," asked the traveller in the dusty brown cloak, "if you were to have a Prince without a castle?"

"Oh, no!" answered the Princess, decidedly. "If you knew how beautiful my castle in the air is, you would not even ask such a stupid question!"

Then she again took up her small lace handkerchief, and she brushed the dust from her gold and silver gown, and polished up her bright little gold crown, and made herself as neat and dainty as a Princess should be; for, in Nonamia, one never knows what may happen next, and it is just as well to be prepared. And, in fact, no sooner was she quite tidy than the West Wind came hurrying along with her castle in the air; and the Princess gave a shout of joy and sprang inside it; and the West Wind blew, and blew, and blew, until the castle that was packed full of happiness, and the little Princess in the gold and silver gown, were both completely out of sight. The traveller looked after them and felt a little forlorn; then he picked up his stick and walked on until he came to the magician's castle. This may seem a little surprising, as he had no wings of any kind and the magician's castle was in the air; but it must be remembered that it all happened in Nonamia.

"Dear, dear! Here 's another of them!" grumbled the magician, when he looked out of his window and saw the stranger standing below. After being alone for seven hundred and seventy-seven years, it was a little exhausting to have two visitors on the same day. Besides, a traveller in a dusty brown cloak is not at all the same thing as a dainty Princess in a gold and silver gown.



"Good-day," said the stranger. "Are you the magician who has given a castle in the air to a Princess in a gold and silver frock with a bright little crown on her head?"

"Very likely; but I cannot say for certain," said the absent-minded magician. "I believe there was something of the kind, now you come to mention it; but I could n't tell you what it was. However, I don't mean to give away any more castles in the air, so the sooner you leave me alone, the better."

"I don't want a castle in the air," laughed the stranger. "People who spend their lives in building real houses never have time to build castles in the air! I want to find the Princess, not the castle."

"That you will never do as long as she is happy in it," said the magician. "People who live in castles in the air are never to be found, unless they have grown tired of living in them."

"Oho!" chuckled the stranger. "Are you tired of living in yours, then?"

The absent-minded magician tried to determine whether he should be angry or not, when the stranger said this; but, by the time he had made up his mind to be angry, he had forgotten what there was to be angry about, and while he was thinking about it, the man in the dusty brown cloak walked away and left him.

Evidently, it was not very long before the Princess grew tired of living in her castle in the air, for the very next day, as the traveller was once more resting on the large stone by the side of the road, down she came, castle and all, and stopped just in front of him. Truly, there is no end to the wonderful things that happen in Nonamia!

"Hullo!" said the traveller, smiling. "What is it like inside your castle?"

"It is not half so nice as I expected to find it," said the Princess, popping her head out of the top window. "You see, there is no one to play with; and even if your castle is the most beautiful castle in the world, it is always dull when there is no one to play with, isn't it?"

"I don't know," answered the stranger; "I have never had any one to play with. What else is wrong with your castle?"

"Well," continued the Princess, "it is all very well to have a castle that is packed with happiness; but, when it is packed so tight that you cannot get it out without some one to help you, it is not much good, is it?"

"I don't know," answered the stranger; "my happiness has never been packed so tight as all that. Have you anything else to complain of?"

"A great many things," said the Princess. "It is all that stupid magician's fault. When I said, 'a small room to cry in,' I did n't really mean a room to cry in, did I? But every way I turn, there is always the room to cry in, staring me in the face! I am sure there is something seriously wrong with my castle in the air."

"No doubt about it," said the traveller; "and it is clearly the magician's fault."

"When you came to live in your castle in the air," continued the Princess, plaintively, "did you find that it was very different from the one you had built?"

The traveller in the dusty brown cloak burst out laughing.

"I have no time to build castles in the air," he said. "I build real houses for other people to live in, people who would, perhaps, have no houses at all if I did not build them. That is more important than building castles in the air for one's self."

"What are your real houses like?" asked the Princess.

"They are strong," answered the stranger, proudly. "All the four winds joined together could not blow them down. No one has ever built such strong houses as mine."

"Are they beautiful, too?" asked the Princess.

"I have no time to look after that," answered the stranger. "I build more houses than any one else in the world; and still, there are people who are waiting for houses to live in. I must build as fast as I can, day after day, year after year."

"Then why are you not building houses now?" asked the Princess. The great builder looked sorrowful.

"There is something wrong about my real houses, too," he confessed. "The people who live in them are never quite contented; and I have come away to think out a new plan by myself, so that the next houses I build shall be the most wonderful houses in the world."

The Princess leaned her chin on her hand, and looked quite thoughtful for a moment or two.

"May I come and help you to build real houses, for a change?" she said presently. "I am dreadfully tired of building castles in the air that do not turn out properly—though, of course, that was principally the magician's fault! Still, if you were to show me the way, I might be able to build something real that would turn out properly; and that would be ever so much more amusing."

"It is not at all amusing," said the traveller, shaking his head. "You would soon grow tired of it; besides, you would have no Prince to play with."

"I don't think I want a Prince to play with," said the charming Princess in the gold and silver frock. "He might turn out to be as dull as my castle in the air, especially if the magician had anything to do with it! I would much sooner come and help you to build real houses."

The traveller in the dusty brown cloak still shook his head.

"Little ladies in gold and silver gowns can only build castles in the air," he said.

"Do the people who live in your houses never build castles in the air?" asked the Princess.

"I never thought of asking them," answered the great builder. "I have been too much occupied in building their real houses."

"Then let us go and ask them now," said the Princess; and she came down from her castle in the air, and stepped once more on to the dusty road, and held out

her little white hand to the traveller. Her castle in the air vanished like a puff of smoke the moment she stepped out of it.

"What would be the use of that?" asked the traveller, smiling. He took the little white hand, however, for no one could have refused that much to such a very charming Princess.

"Why," said the Princess in the gold and silver frock, "then we could make their real houses just like their castles in the air; and only think how packed with happiness they would be!"

The traveller looked at her in amazement. It was certainly astonishing that so great a builder as he should find out what was wrong with his houses, from a Princess with a bright little crown on her head who had never done anything but build castles in the air. Still, we must remember that it all happened in Nonamia; and that accounts for a great deal.

"You are quite right," said the traveller; "you know far more about it than I do. You shall come and help me to build real houses, and they shall be the most wonderful houses that have ever been built."

"All beautiful to look at, and packed with happiness inside!" cried the dainty little Princess, clapping her hands for joy. "And we won't let that stupid magician spoil our real houses, will we?"

The magician was looking out of his window at nothing at all, when they came past his castle, hand in hand.

"We are going to build the most wonderful houses in the world," cried the Princess,— "ever so much more wonderful than the stupid castle in the air you gave me!"

This was not very gracious of her, for, after all, the magician had given her exactly what she had built for herself. However, as he had already forgotten both of them and could not think of anything to say, and as they were in too great a hurry to stay and help him, there is nothing more to be said about the magician, except that he is still living in his castle in the air and looking out of his window at nothing at all, which is a right and proper occupation for a magician who is absent-minded. As for the traveller and the charming Princess, they spent the rest of their days in building the most wonderful houses in the world for the people who had nowhere to live. And as for the people who had nowhere to live, it was only natural that they should all find their way to the country called Nonamia, where a little lady in a gold and silver gown taught them to build a castle in the air, and a great builder in a dusty brown cloak made it into a real house that was packed with happiness.

It is a little difficult to believe that this is all true; but then, it must be

remembered that it all happened in Nonamia, ever so long ago!

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