



NORTH WALES TALES

# The Little Slate Dragon of Llechwedd Slate Caverns

Llechwedd Slate Caverns, North Wales

Once, in the town of Blaenau Ffestiniog, there lived a girl named Mabli who loved dark, echoey places more than sunshine.

One grey morning, her grandad took her to Llechwedd Slate Caverns, near their home in Gwynedd. They climbed aboard a little railway carriage that tilted down, down, down into the mountain.

"Hold tight," laughed Grandad. "This is the steepest narrow gauge railway in the whole of the UK."

The carriage carried them more than five hundred feet underground, into the old slate caverns where miners had once worked long ago. The air smelled cool and stony. Lamps glowed softly on the rough walls.

While Grandad read a sign about the brave old quarrymen, Mabli noticed something the grown-ups did not. In a quiet corner, behind a heap of broken slate, sat a small grey shape no bigger than a cat.

It had folded wings made of thin, shining slate. It had eyes like little blue lamps. And it was crying tiny, cold tears.

"Hello," whispered Mabli, kneeling down. "Are you a dragon?"

"I am Llech, the last slate dragon," the creature sniffed. "Long ago, when the miners worked here, I lit their way with my glow. But the miners went home, the caverns fell quiet, and now my fire has gone out. I am too lonely to shine."

Mabli thought hard. She knew that lonely things needed a friend, not a fix.

"Then I shall keep you company," she said. "Tell me everything about your home."

So Llech showed her the caverns. He flapped ahead on his papery wings, past dripping pools that mirrored the lamps like stars. He showed her the deep, hidden places where the slate sang when you tapped it, a sound like soft bells.

And as Mabli listened, and laughed, and gasped at every wonder, something warm began to happen. A faint blue light flickered along Llech's wings.

"You're glowing!" Mabli cried.

Llech looked down at himself in surprise. The more she smiled, the brighter he shone, until the whole cavern shimmered blue and silver, like moonlight under the mountain.

"I remember now," Llech said softly. "My fire was never coal or flame. It was friendship all along."

They played until Mabli heard Grandad calling. High above, she could hear other children somewhere in the mountain, bouncing and giggling on the giant underground trampolines.

"You won't be lonely now," Mabli promised. "Children come here every single day. Glow for them, and they'll fill these caverns with laughter."

Llech nuzzled her hand, warm as a teacup. "Then I shall shine for every visitor who is kind enough to look closely."

When Mabli climbed back into the tilting carriage, Grandad asked why she was beaming.

"I made a friend," she said. "Deep, deep down."

And to this day, the story goes, if a child at Llechwedd looks into the quietest corner of the slate caverns and feels a sudden warm blue glow, that is only Llech, the little slate dragon, saying a gentle hello.

The end.

## What's real?

- Llechwedd Slate Caverns is a visitor attraction near Blaenau Ffestiniog in Gwynedd, Wales.
- The Llechwedd Deep Mine Tour has the steepest narrow gauge railway in the UK and travels over 500 feet underground to the disused slate caverns.
- Llechwedd Slate Caverns has giant underground trampolines called Bounce Below.
- Llechwedd Slate Caverns is home to Zip World Titan, which is the longest zip course in Europe.
- Llechwedd Slate Caverns details the history of slate quarrying in Blaenau Ffestiniog and the Llechwedd quarry in which it is located.

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