



NORTH WALES TALES

The Mountain Spirit of Conwy Castle

Conwy Castle, North Wales

Long ago, when Conwy Castle was still being built, a girl named Mali carried water to the stonemasons every morning.

Her father was one of the workers. The whole town was busy. King Edward the First had ordered a great castle and a walled town here by the River Conwy, and the building went on from 1283 right through to 1287. The man in charge of the design was James of Saint George, who had come all the way from a faraway land called the Savoy.

Mali loved to watch the eight tall towers grow, stone by stone, higher than the tallest tree.

One cold evening, when the workers had gone home, Mali heard a soft sound from the mountains above the river. It was not the wind. It was a sigh.

She looked up and saw a shape made of mist and silver light, sitting on a high rock. It had kind eyes the colour of a winter morning.

"Who are you?" Mali asked, not at all afraid.

"I am the spirit of the mountains," said the shape. "I have watched this river for longer than anyone can remember. But now your great grey castle hides my favourite view of the sea, and the nights feel lonely."

Mali felt sorry for the spirit. "I cannot move the castle," she said. "It took so many people such a long time to build. But perhaps I can help in another way."

The next day, Mali climbed up to the spirit with a small lantern and a warm woollen blanket her grandmother had made.

"This is for you," Mali said, "so you are warm at night, and so you have a little light when the dark comes."

The mountain spirit smiled, and her smile was like the sun coming over the hills.

"No one has given me a gift in a thousand years," she said softly. "Thank you, Mali."

After that, the two became friends. Each evening Mali would climb a little way up, and the spirit would tell her stories of eagles and rivers and the slow turning of the seasons.

And the spirit gave Conwy a gift in return. On the coldest nights she breathed a gentle warmth down over the castle and the town, so the workers slept snug and the new walls never cracked with frost.

When the castle was finished, with its eight towers, its two strong gateways called barbicans, and a small postern gate leading down to the river, it stood proud beside the water. People said no castle in all the land was finer.

Years went by. The castle would see many great days. It once held out against the siege led by Madog ap Llywelyn in the winter of 1294, and long after, brave folk loyal to Owain Glyndŵr held it too.

But Mali never forgot her friend in the mountains. And the mountain spirit, they say, never forgot Mali.

Even now, when mist drifts softly over Conwy Castle on a quiet morning, some say it is the old mountain spirit, looking down with kind eyes, keeping watch over the town she came to love.

And the castle still stands today, looked after by Cadw, for every family who comes to visit.

What's real?

- Conwy Castle was built between 1283 and 1287 for King Edward the First, during his conquest of Wales.
- The main architect of Conwy Castle was James of Saint George, whose work had close links to the Savoy.
- Conwy Castle is defended by eight large towers and two barbicans, with a postern gate leading down to the River Conwy.
- Conwy Castle withstood the siege of Madog ap Llywelyn in the winter of 1294 to 1295, and was later held by forces loyal to Owain Glyndŵr in 1401.
- Conwy Castle is now looked after by Cadw and is a World Heritage Site.

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