

Siani Shetland

Anwen Francis

Their journey in the lorry took them an hour and finally they arrived at the sales. They parked alongside other lorries, cars, vans and cattle trucks in the large parking ground. The town square was full of tradesmen selling farm tools, saddlers selling saddles, bridles and ‘horsey’ things, a woman with some cackling geese in a big cage and in the back of a car nearer the horse sale, a rough looking man had six terrier puppies for sale. The black and white puppies looked at Beca and usually she would have shown some interest in them and tried to touch them through their cage, but not today. She was thinking of the pony she was going to have and hoping that somewhere in the huge shed, the right pony was waiting for her.

‘Stay close to me now Beca,’ said her mother. ‘Horse sales are dangerous places for adults and children alike.’

‘Okay,’ said Beca with a sigh. ‘But hurry up mum, before all the horses are sold.’

As they entered the huge shed, they could hear the farmers, horse dealers and other people talking and laughing. They could see some leading and others pushing their horses and one woman shouting ‘Watch your backs, stallion coming through.’

Above all this noise and commotion, they could hear horses neighing.

Suddenly, Mrs Lewis grabbed Beca towards her as a man rushed past them leading a very excited Welsh cob. She was a young filly, not accustomed to being in a sale with all its strange sounds and people everywhere. Her eyes were wide and wild, her nostrils flared with terror and she held her short tail up high. There seemed to be chaos and panic everywhere that Beca looked and she felt very small and frightened. She hid her face in her mother’s coat. After the sound of the filly’s hooves faded away, Mrs Lewis and Beca made their way further into the shed. Beca

could see the auction rings and that’s where the sales would begin at midday. She felt very nervous and excited.

There were over a hundred horses inside, some were small, some enormous, some were in foal and some were very, very thin and looked sad and bewildered.

‘A few of the ponies look frightened,’ said Beca sadly.

‘Yes,’ said her mum. ‘Some of these horse sales can be very cruel places and sometimes you see things that are upsetting. But come on Beca, let’s see if there’s a suitable pony for you.’

‘What about that one?’ asked Beca, pointing her finger at a grey mare shivering in a dark corner of her pen.

‘No,’ said Mrs Lewis. ‘She looks too frightened and nervous and not suitable for a child to ride her. Unfortunately, some of the ponies here today in the far end of the shed will be sold for meat. They will go to the continent where people eat horse meat.’

Beca shivered at the thought.

‘Come along Beca, I can see some smaller ponies over there.’

They walked further along the crowded aisle, being jostled and pushed around by people who seemed to be in a terrible hurry to get somewhere.

‘What you need is a Welsh mountain pony or something similar – a mare or gelding would be fine – a pony can be so much fun.’

Beca ran over to the gates.

‘Oh mum, look at these ponies.’

There were seven ponies in one pen. Some were fairly wild, rolling their eyes and neighing loudly. Others seemed to be in a state of shock and looked around in bewilderment.

Beca looked at each one in turn, wishing that she could take them all home to Parc yr Ebol Farm. But she knew that she would have to

choose just one and that it would mean hours of brushing and mucking out – but also hours of fun and loving friendship.

‘Look at that one over there,’ said her mum, leading her over to a small, black mare.

‘She comes from the Shetland Isles in Scotland.’

Although Beca had dreamed of having a brown or chestnut pony, she followed her mum politely to the pen. And there she set eyes on a furry black mare, standing strongly and squarely on four short furry legs. Her thick black tail reached to the floor and her eyes were hidden behind a long thick mane and forelock.

‘Hello,’ said a deep voice from the depths of the pen. ‘Are you looking for a pony for this pretty young lady?’

The owner was big and burly and had a rather frightening booming voice but when he smiled his face smiled all over and his kind face was wreathed in wrinkles.

Although he towered above them all, he was gentle as he patted the little mare on her head and scratched behind her ears. The mare, in turn, nuzzled her soft nose against his rough tweed jacket.

‘Yes,’ replied Mrs Lewis, ‘a pony that’s kind and considerate but with a little sparkle as well. Something safe and dependable with a leg in each corner.’

‘She’s just the one for you then,’ he said. ‘Come inside the gate,’ he added. ‘You can

stroke her, she’s a real softie, but can be quite naughty sometimes like all little girls,’ he said, looking a Beca with a twinkle in his eye.

With a nervous chuckle, Beca and Mrs Lewis entered the pen.

‘You can stroke her, I have four children at home and she’s used to having them around her,’ said the owner, taking out a dandy brush from his pocket and tidying up the mare. Beca bent forward and cautiously stroked the pony on her neck. The pony came closer and as Beca blew gently into her soft nostrils, she knew that she’d found a friend.

‘Hello,’ whispered Beca and the pony licked her hand with her warm, moist tongue.

‘Well, they seem to like one another,’ said the man.

‘Yes,’ said Mrs Lewis. ‘How much are you asking for her?’

‘Let me see, let me see,’ he replied. ‘She’s very intelligent, used to loud noises on the farm, good at loading into the lorry and is not too naughty when the farrier calls to trim her hooves.’

‘How old is she?’ asked Mrs Lewis.

‘She’s seven,’ replied the farmer.

‘What’s her name?’ asked Beca.

‘Well now, we call her Fluffball at home because she has such a thick coat, but her proper registered name is Morag Black Magic. She’s registered with the Shetland Pony Stud Book Society in Scotland. We don’t really have time for her and that’s why we’ve decided to sell her. She loves company and needs a good home.’

Beca could think of several names for the pony – Black Beauty, Stargazer, Frolic, Fantasia – but not one of them really suited the pony who was watching her closely from under her thick forelock. Then suddenly, the pony grabbed hold of her scarf, and with a toss of her head, pulled it down to the straw on the floor of the pen.

‘Oh you naughty shortie Siani,’ exclaimed Beca with a laugh. ‘That’s it, I’ll call you Siani – Siani Shetland.’





Rhodri

age	10
birthday	December
home	a farmhouse on the Epynt range
family	parents, brother, 13, and two sisters aged 7 and 4
interests	cricket, rugby and sports, the trumpet and playing on the farm



“I’m really happy being around the farm. What I don’t like is going back to school at the end of the holidays.”

Rhodri



Organic farming

Farm and family

The old farmhouse where Rhodri and his family live nestles on the slopes of Mynydd Epynt in mid Wales. Years ago, his great-grandfather owned the farm, and Rhodri’s grandmother still lives locally. His mother comes from Malvern in Worcestershire. She is now learning Welsh, and all four children speak Welsh and go to a Welsh school. Sometimes Rhodri goes to Malvern to see his grandparents. “We take some of the sheep up in the spring to graze in Granny and Grandad’s field, because the grass grows earlier there than it does here. We borrow a trailer from the farm down the road. Everybody helps one another up this way.”

Rhodri’s parents met at Reading University when they were both studying agriculture. Now his father works for the Welsh Government, a job linked to food production, and he helps on the farm at the weekend. Rhodri’s mother helps in school as well as looking after the family and working on the farm. And when it’s lambing time, the whole family helps. “This is an organic farm. We don’t use any chemicals to destroy pests or improve the soil,” explains Rhodri. “Mum does the garden and grows veggies like potatoes and carrots. I don’t like gardening. Sometimes the sheep get in and gobble up the kidney beans, and Mum goes mad.”

morning bleat. Though there are no ducks to quack, the hens cackle and quarrel, and the dogs bark excitedly. “Our dogs are called Poppy, Twm, Jess and Siani,” says Rhodri. “Poppy’s old – older than I am – and she’s retired now. Siani’s Twm and Jess’s mother. They work very hard with the sheep. We’ve two cats too, Sid and Tigger. Their job is catching mice. “We’ve got one horse, and everyone rides him around the farm. Well, all except Dad, who’s tall, and the horse is a bit short.”

Carnival of animals

In the morning, Rhodri often wakes up to a cacophony of competing animal voices. Welsh Black cattle in the nearby cowshed low loudly for their breakfast. In the fields, more than a hundred Speckled-faced Beulah sheep enjoy an early





At school

Rhodri, Gareth, Delyth and Megan travel on the school bus every morning along narrow, twisting country lanes. It's quite an adventure, especially in winter. Sometimes when the weather's really bad, the bus can't reach them.

"When there's snow, we can go sledging on the steep slope above the farm," says Rhodri. "That's one of my best things. Nearly as good as the first day of the holidays!"

It's not that I don't like school, though. I enjoy Welsh and maths and PE, especially rugby and cricket. And the Eisteddfod. I was in the recitation group that went to the Urdd Eisteddfod in Cardiff. And I like it when a speaker comes in to school. Penri Roberts came in to help us to write a poem in Welsh, and Jenny Sullivan came to help us with a story based on a picture of a flying dragon and a man in armour. I prefer listening to people, rather than talking all the time myself."



✓ Cricket, football - and the trumpet

Rhodri is a great fan of cricket. When England and Australia were playing for the Ashes, he was glued to the television set. He's been down to the Sophia Gardens cricket ground in Cardiff too, to watch a game. "I'm thrilled to bits when I get picked for trials," says Rhodri. By now, he plays for Brecon as well as once a fortnight for mid-Wales, travelling to places like Llandrindod. "Chicken curry and Mum's Sunday dinner keep me going, though Mum says I should eat more veggies."

Playing the trumpet is a good exercise for the lungs, too. And as for football, Rhodri's favourite team is Aston Villa.

✓ Fun with friends

Friends mean a lot to Rhodri. Though his home is isolated, there's always a buzz there. Nearly every weekend and holiday, friends come to play with Rhodri and his brother Gareth. The trampoline's very popular with them all.

"I've got five special friends," explains Rhodri. "When they're here, we often play up the top, near the mountain, building cities out of stones. Or we play card games like 'Spit' with Gareth and Delyth. Megan's still a bit too young yet."



Did you know?

- that 'Epynt' means 'the way of the horses'?
- that 'Malvern' comes from two old Welsh words, 'moel fryn' – bleak hill?
- that long, long ago, Old Welsh used to be spoken in the counties on the English side of the Welsh border? Welsh place names there became anglicised. Perhaps you can think of other place names which show the effect of bilingualism.
- that the first Welsh banks were set up because of the Welsh Black cattle? Cattle and sheep used to be 'exported' to English fairs by the drovers. On their way home, highwaymen would often lie in wait to steal the money the drovers carried after selling the animals. In the end, David Jones, one of the drovers, set up a bank in Llandovery where the money could be kept safely. It was called 'The Bank of the Black Ox'. The building is now home to a HSBC bank.
- that if you love getting muddy, the annual Bog Snorkelling Contest in the small spa town of Llanwrtyd could be just the place for you? In the past, people who were ill used to go there to bathe and drink water from the local wells, hoping to be cured. Now they go there to have fun in the peaty mud of Mynydd Epynt.

✓ Concerts and barbecues

Near Rhodri's home, an old school has been turned into a community centre. Harvest suppers and Christmas concerts are held there, while barbecues and sports are held in an adjoining field. Rhodri's family and friends and neighbours all go and have a good time together.

"It's almost as good as our camping holidays in Pembrokeshire. I'm

allowed to bring a friend and we go to the beach every day to swim and build dams and look for sandworms – the ones that puffins eat – and crabs. Really great!"

hunting the wildboar

Helen Emanuel Davies, Ann Saer, Graham Howells

Padrig the shepherd ran helter-skelter down to the village. ‘Ships!’ he yelled. ‘Ships on the horizon – come to attack Ireland!’

‘Don’t be stupid, Padrig,’ scoffed some of the villagers.

‘You’re imagining things,’ jeered others. ‘Go back to tend your sheep.’

In a little while, though, a few of them did go down to the shore to see if there was anything happening. And they had the shock of their lives! The beach was swarming with King Arthur’s knights, huntsmen and hound-dogs. And the king himself had just come ashore from his ship, the *Prydwen* and was striding towards them across the beach.

The Irish who lived along the coast were terrified. They flung themselves down on the sand in front of the king. ‘Please don’t attack us,’ they begged. ‘We are fishermen and shepherds, peace-loving folk. We don’t want to fight.’

Arthur certainly didn’t look angry. ‘Get up,’ he said, kindly. ‘That’s not why I’ve come. I’m here to find the terrible Wildboar they call the Twrch Trwyth.’

And so he told them the story.

Culhwch, King Arthur’s cousin, had fallen head over heels in love with Olwen, the daughter of a wicked giant-king called Ysbaddaden, who had insisted that Culhwch would have to complete a long list of very difficult tasks before he would allow him to marry Olwen. One of these tasks was to find a razor, a pair of scissors and a comb, and this was especially challenging because they were kept between the ears of the Wildboar.

‘The Twrch Trwyth! Oh, no!’ moaned the Irish. ‘That Wildboar is a dreadful creature. It is ruining our countryside, with the help of its hoglets.’

They were so glad that Arthur hadn’t come to make war. And they too had had enough of the Wildboar, because of the destruction it and its seven young hoglets had caused throughout the land. People had been killed as well as cattle and sheep. Crops had been destroyed. To get hold of the razor, the scissors and the comb, Arthur would have to kill the savage beast, and they were more than ready to help him.

So Arthur, his knights, huntsmen and hounds, and a large crowd of the Irish set off for Esgair Oerfel, the Wildboar’s lair. When they came within sight, Arthur ordered them all to stay put while he and a few of his knights scouted ahead. As they crept stealthily through the trees, there came a noise like a great thunder-clap. It was the Twrch Trwyth! Arthur and his men dived into the undergrowth to hide. They gaped in horror at its long snout, and the white, knife-like tusks each side of its nose. And

they gasped at its strength as it crashed through the brushwood, breaking branches and snapping twigs. It charged onwards to a forest glade, where it used its snout to dig noisily under a great oak tree in the centre. It was looking for acorns and other delicacies to satisfy its huge appetite, and was close enough for them to see the spike-hard comb of bristles on its backbone. Arthur tried to see if the razor, scissors and comb were between its ears. And yes, there they were, glinting at him through the beast’s hairy, dark brown pelt.

Soon, the seven hoglets ran to join the ugly creature. Though they all looked just like their father, one was much bigger than the others, and Arthur knew that this one must be Crugyn Silverbristle, because of the silvery bristles glittering on its back. The boars scratched and dug and trampled around, churning the glade into a sea of mud in no time.

After he and his men had quietly and carefully made their way back to the others, Arthur decided that the first thing to do was to send his hounds to attack the Wildboar and its hoglets. The Irish were eager to help as well. ‘Let us attack with the dogs,’ they pleaded. So, when the huntsmen let the hounds loose to search out the Wildboars’, the Irish went with them. Very soon, the forest was an uproar of yowls and barks and grunts and yaps. By the end of the day, they were all very tired, and several of the Irish and the hounds had been injured and bitten – but they hadn’t managed to catch the Wildboar or any of its hoglets!

The following day, Arthur decided to send his knights to fight the beast. ‘Brave knights who are well used to fighting battles will be sure to find it easy to catch the Twrch Trwyth,’ he said. Away they galloped. Once again, the forest rang with the clash of swords and the clatter of knives, the thud of cudgels and a din of screams, thundering hooves and stampeding animals. By nightfall, they were all very tired, and several of the warriors had been bitten and butted – but they hadn’t caught the Wildboar or any of its hoglets!

Arthur was furious. ‘I’ve had enough of this Twrch Trwyth,’ he stormed. ‘Tomorrow, I myself will lead my knights into battle. We will not give up before we catch this wretched boar.’

So, the next day, Arthur himself led the charge against the Wildboar and its seven wild hoglets. It was a terrible battle – the boars squealed and grunted and charged, the hounds howled and the men shouted and yelled and clanged against each other. The frenzy made the earth tremble. Night fell – but the battle went on; there was another nightfall, and another, and another . . . By the ninth evening,

Arthur and his knights, his huntsmen and hounds and the Irish, and even the boars were all totally exhausted. And though one hoglet had been killed, they still hadn't caught the Wildboar!

While they all rested, Arthur sent a messenger – Gwrhir the Interpreter – to try and sort things out with the Twrch Trwyth. Gwrhir, or Longshanks as some called him, could change his shape. He turned himself into a bird and perched on an oak branch, just above the Wildboar and its family. Gwrhir decided to try and bully them into giving in.

'Listen to me, Twrch Trwyth,' he chirped. 'Arthur is determined to get that razor, scissors and comb from between your ears. He's bound to win them in the end, so you as might as well give in now.'

Grugyn Silverbristle glared up at him, and snorted. 'We've had enough of Arthur. Why can't he leave us alone? Anyway, we're going to swim over to Wales soon to wreck the country, so there.'

Oh, no! Gwrhir flew directly back to squawk this terrible news to Arthur.

There was no sign of the Wildboar when Arthur and his men landed in Pembrokeshire. Where could it be?

But soon, they could see the signs of terrible destruction everywhere – cattle slain in the fields, crops flattened and the countryside deserted.

They followed the trail until they could see the Wildboar ahead. Some of the knights rushed to the attack, but it charged at them, killing a few and wounding others.

It was a terrible fight. The squealing made by Silverbristle and Greybristle made the Wildboar even wilder, while Arthur was adamant that he would not budge an inch until he had the razor, scissors and comb. There had never before been such a bloody conflict. At last, four young boars had been slain, and Silverbristle and Greybristle fled for their lives, pursued by a group of the men and hounds. Only the Wildboar was left – and it too escaped at a gallop.

But this time, Arthur and his best knights were pressing on its heels, and when they reached the river Severn, they could see that the Wildboar was getting weaker. One final effort, and it would be over. Their chance came on the river bank, where the Wildboar had been forced to retreat to the water-side. The men surrounded it, and grabbed hold of its hind legs.

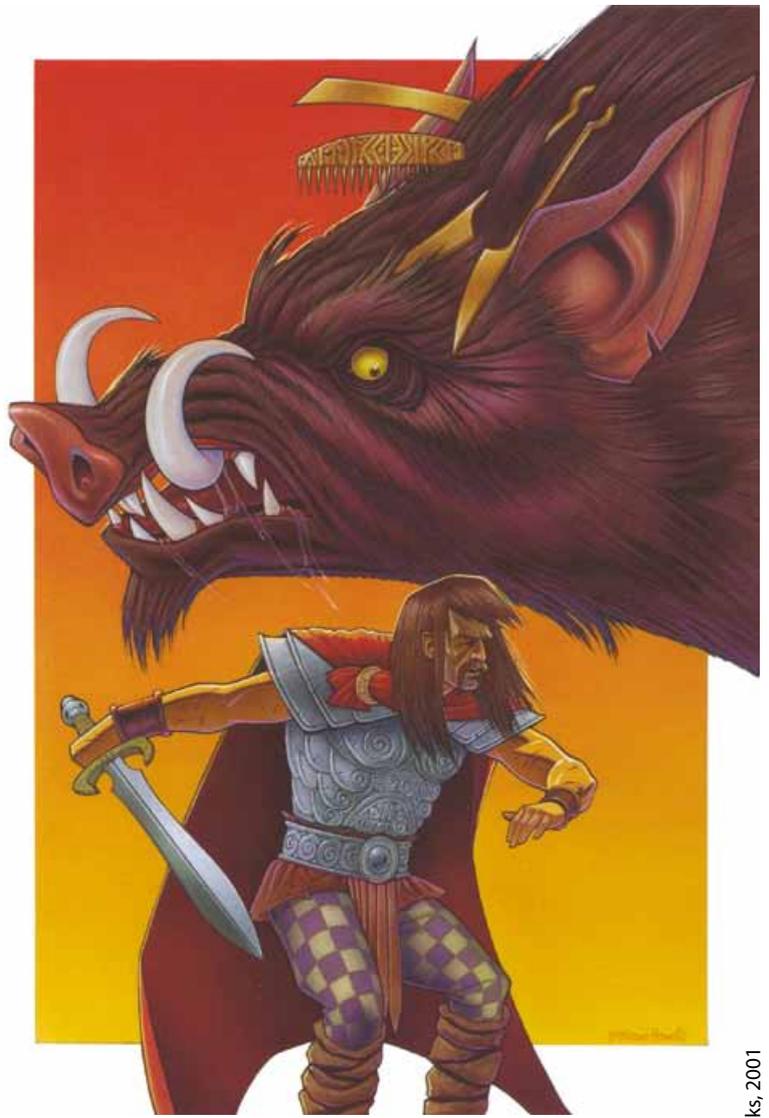
'Fling it in – fling it into the river!' shouted Arthur.

With a huge SPLASH, the Wildboar was thrown into the water, drenching everyone to the skin with a great shower of spray.

'Hold it down – down under the water!' yelled someone.

'Get the razor! The scissors! The comb! Get them!' roared Arthur.

The Wildboar lost its footing in the strong current, and could not defend itself. Mabon, son of Modron, spurred his horse into the flood and grabbed the



razor. At the same time, Culider the Wild rushed his horse to the other side and snatched the scissors, waving them in the air in triumph.

'The comb! Remember the comb!' thundered the king.

But it was too late. That very instant, the Wildboar had reached dry ground on the other side. Dripping wet, it bolted ashore and disappeared into the distance in a cloud of steaming dust.

Arthur was disappointed, but he would not give up. He already had the razor and scissors – only the comb was left. He had promised Culhwch that he would bring back the three things, and he could not let his cousin down. So, once the men and hounds were dry, they took up the Wildboar's trail again, this time to Cornwall. The enraged Wildboar fled for its life. In Cornwall, it caused more ruin and devastation than ever before, slaughtering cattle and sheep, churning up the crops and flattening everyone and everything in its way. Arthur could not catch it until he finally cornered it in Cornwall, where with one mighty tug, he plucked the comb from between its ears.

As he did so, he drove the Wildboar out to sea, where it disappeared. It never came back to Wales or Ireland either, and from that day to this, no one knows what happened to the fearsome Wildboar, the Twrch Trwyth.

The Red Dragon of Wales

Myrddin ap Dafydd

The Red Dragon is an impressive flag, don't you think? Most countries in the world have patterns on their flags, but the Welsh flag has a legendary creature and a plant. This is the oldest national flag in the world.

The white and green on the Welsh flag are the colours of the leek. The leek has been the national plant of Wales ever since Welsh soldiers wore leeks on their clothes, when they went to fight against the English army long ago. The leeks helped the Welshmen to recognise each other in the heat of battle. The Welsh won that battle and, ever since then, we have had great affection for the leek. The uniforms of the Welsh armies were once white and green too.

The legendary creature on the flag is, of course, the red dragon, and this book tells the story of that dragon. The two pictures merge to give the red, white and green of the Welsh – the flag that inspires us all, from sportsmen to poets and singers.

Many centuries ago, the Welsh lived in those areas we now call England and southern Scotland. There were no English people at that time, and the language spoken by everyone, from Edinburgh to London, was Old Welsh!

Gwrtheyrn, known as Vortigern in English, was one of the kings of the Welsh long ago, and during his lifetime he had to fight constantly against armies who were trying to steal his land. In the end Gwrtheyrn asked a gang of madcap soldiers from northern Germany to help him. The names of their leaders were Hors and Hengist. These two were so dangerous they had been driven out of their own country.

With their help, Gwrtheyrn managed to hang on to his land – but, when the fighting was done, what could he do with Hors and Hengist and their unruly mob? In the end he decided to give them some poor marshy land in the south-east of England as a reward for their help. These were the first Saxons, and Gwrtheyrn is blamed for giving them their first foothold on these islands.

Soon the Saxons weren't satisfied with the land that had been given them, and went looking for more.

The Saxons invited King Gwrtheyrn and three hundred leaders of the Old Welsh to a banquet in one of their splendid halls. The Welsh set off in their best clothes, thanked the Saxons for their welcome and left their arms outside the hall. In the middle of the banquet, one of the Saxons shouted, "Grab your sax!" The 'sax' was the long knife that each member of Hors and Hengist's mob carried with him. The Saxons grabbed their knives and launched a brutal attack on the leaders of the Old Welsh. The three hundred brave men were all killed. That night has been known to the Welsh ever since as 'The Treachery of the Long Knives'.



Gwrtheyrn's life was spared – but only because he agreed to give the whole of southern England to the Saxons. In addition, he had to leave his fine castle and most of his wealth, and flee for his life.

But where could he go? One thing was certain, he had to get as far away as possible from southern England and the dangerous mob that had settled there. He wanted to feel safe. He travelled for many long days and at last reached the mountains of Snowdonia in the north of our little country. He felt happier as soon as those mighty rocks closed around him.

Gwrtheyrn decided he would like to live in the mountains. Being a king, he had to build himself a castle, of course. He chose a steep slope near Beddgelert and ordered his architect and craftsmen to start work.

"The castle must be strong," he told them. "But it's also important to build it quickly, because my family and I have nowhere to live at present. I shall give each one of you a generous reward, if you finish the work before winter."

The men set to work with a will. By the end of the very first day, the walls had already reached a fair height.

But next morning, the architect and the workers were horrified to find all their hard work of the previous day lying in ruins. The walls had collapsed, and some of the stones had rolled right down to the foot of the hill.

"This is very strange," said the architect. "But don't let's waste time. Start rebuilding the walls at once."

Throughout the day the craftsmen worked hard to rebuild the castle. By sunset the walls were even higher than the day before.

"Well done," said the architect. "We can all sleep soundly tonight."

But the following day, it was the same story all over again. Not a single stone was left standing – the walls had completely collapsed.

"We must rebuild the walls yet again," said the architect in bewilderment. "But tonight we'll sleep in tents on the hill, so we can see what mischief is at work, destroying our castle."