

Almost Mary
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SCENE: Mary (age 12), Philippa (age 15) looking for fossils. Mary is teaching Philippa.

(LIGHTS change to the beach. PHILIPPA and MARY are searching for fossils.)

PHILIPPA

I love being outside! Although it is quiet with just the two of us.

MARY

With Joseph working and Henry in school, we can get more word done. They can be distracting.

(THEY work. PHILIPPA finds “something.”)

PHILIPPA

Mary! Come here!

MARY

What’s wrong?

PHILIPPA

Is this a fossil?

MARY

No. (Beat.) Sorry.

PHILIPPA

I’ll never find one!

MARY

It’s only your second outing. You need to be patient. Fossils are not like jumping fish that land in your lap. They’re shy. Like pearls in an oyster. They’re very protective of their treasure.

PHILIPPA

I want to be good at something. My needlepoint is a disaster.

MARY

Do you care about needlepoint?

PHILIPPA

No. That’s more stuffy-stuff.

MARY

I think to be good at something – you need to care about it. So even when it isn't easy – you forge ahead.

PHILIPPA

I always loved singing and dancing. But apparently young women from certain families do not sing and dance in public.

MARY

Are you an aristocrat?

PHILIPPA

A minor branch, I assure you. Nothing impressive. Even less so because we are poor. That's why we left London. *Mary?* What's this?

MARY

A seashell. A lovely seashell.

PHILIPPA

I must study – to know what I am looking for. Do you have any books on fossils?

MARY

Just one. Henry has quite a few. He lends me some from time to time. Now search! You won't find anything chatting away with me!

(THEY work. PHILIPPA picks up something very "gloppy" and just stares.)

PHILIPPA

This is different. Very – gloppy. Can this be an actual fossil? It's shaped like a snake.

MARY

That is indeed a fossil. The scientific name is ammonite. But people just call them snake-stones. They actually look impressive when they are all cleaned up.

PHILIPPA

I should – here. Take it.

MARY

No. You found it.

PHILIPPA

But – you can sell it.

MARY

For a shilling or two. But this is very special. It's your very first fossil. It's the beginning of new discoveries!

PHILIPPA

It's from another world, isn't it?

MARY

That's what we're trying to find out.

PHILIPPA

It's as if we're exploring a new world – that's actually an old world. Similar to those who go to the Americas for exploration. They call it the “new world” but it probably is quite old.

MARY

That's exactly how I feel! People think I search these cliffs to bring in some shillings. But I feel that we are explorers trying to make sense of another time. I believe the work is important – even if we never figure out everything. We're discovering a new understanding of the past.

PHILIPPA

Do you think you'll ever find the rest of “Elizabeth?”

MARY

I think I have good odds. Of course, it could have appeared on the beach during the night and then the greedy tide took it back.

PHILIPPA

Do you think she was a sea monster?

MARY

I don't know. But I want to find out.

PHILIPPA

I wonder if there are sea monsters out there. Perhaps they are not mean and hateful but actually quite bashful and simply don't wish to be found. What do you think? Mary?

(MARY has stopped working and is wiping a small area of the cliff with just her hands.)

PHILIPPA (cont'd)

Mary!

(Lightning.)

Oh no! Mary! A storm is coming.

MARY

In a minute.

(Thunder.)

PHILIPPA

There's no time to waste.

MARY

There's something here.

(Thunder. Maybe sound of a rock falling.)

PHILIPPA

We're going!

MARY

In a minute!

(Thunder.)

PHILIPPA

I will drag out of here!

MARY

There's something here!

PHILIPPA

Then it will be here tomorrow. Let's go!

MARY

That's not how it works. If I can expose it – I can see if it's worthwhile.

(Thunder. Lightning.)

PHILIPPA

The waves are coming in fast and furious. Nothing is worth being dragged out to sea. Not even Elizabeth.

MARY

This could be it! I'm almost there –

PHILIPPA

It will do you no good if you're dead!

MARY

Almost... almost...just one more pass with the chisel. One more time to see what I found. One more chance to see if I count.

PHILIPPA

You count to me! We've just become friends. And I want a long friendship. We're going!

(More thunder continuously now. PHILIPPA grabs MARY.
Perhaps the lightning illuminates them.)

PHILIPPA

NOW!