

Almost Mary
By Claudia Haas
Claudiah12@gmail.com

Henry de la Beche is 15. He will become a well-respected geologist. Mary Anning is 12 (but mature for her age.)

HENRY

I was told you had been sick but here you are looking as strong as an ox.

MARY

Thank-you. I've always wanted to be compared to an ox.

HENRY

Oxen are noble workhorses.

MARY

As I apparently am.

HENRY

You are being contrary. But I have something to fix all that. What do you think?

HENRY (cont'd)

(HENRY hands MARY a drawing.)

It's your Elizabeth.

MARY

It's ... very pretty. Do you think the cliffs had that much color? And that many trees?

HENRY

It's – an imagining. An artist rendering.

MARY

Everything's so green!

HENRY

I was thinking that if – as you say – the fossils are from a different world – Lyme Regis must have looked different.

MARY

That's what my father thought. I think – her jaw is too small. Elizabeth has a lot of teeth. They wouldn't all fit in that mouth.

HENRY

If you don't like it –

MARY

- Don't be a silly. It's just an observation. I love it. I love how much care and thought you put into it. (Beat.) Although you could alter the set of the jaw to make it more scientifically accurate.

HENRY

... I could ...

MARY

I'm sorry. I've just been cooped up for so long and your drawing got my mind racing ... it's perfect. Truly. I thank you and Elizabeth thanks you.

HENRY

I understand about being cooped up. I live in classrooms with tiny windows and have been longing for the sea and to breathe in its goodness.

MARY

It must be exciting to be in a place of knowledge.

HENRY

It is. And speaking of knowledge... I bought these books -

MARY

- Books are wonderful.

HENRY

Of course. And Father bought these books for me -

MARY

- He's such a good man.

HENRY

Yes. He is. But my point -

MARY

- And now you can spend your holiday reading in the sea air.

HENRY

Mary! Can I finish?

(And he speeds through his "missive.")

Father bought me two books that I had already bought for myself and I thought you might like them.

MARY

What?

HENRY

Here. They're yours. One is on geology and the other is about the origins of the world – a bit convoluted – and possibly not scientifically accurate – but if you would like –

MARY

- Like? *Like!* They're mine? Truly mine?

HENRY

Yes.

MARY

Mary Anning has two books?

HENRY

Yes.

MARY

I'm – speechless.

HENRY

Mary is speechless! What a delightful change. Look. This one has detailed drawings of what they think the earth looked like years ago. That's how I got the idea for my drawing. Look at all the trees and bushes. The rendering may not be “accurate” but what do you think?

MARY

I have two books!

HENRY

Yes.

MARY

I will read them and write down questions. And I will copy the drawings to learn how to make my renderings more detailed. What treasures you have given me! I can never repay you.

HENRY

You just keep unearthing your fossils. That is payment enough. Who knows? Maybe there will be a time when you will be teaching the world about your discoveries.

MARY

I'm trying to picture me – an unschooled child – teaching the world anything.

HENRY

You are not unschooled. You're "self-schooled."

MARY

I like that. And I love the books. And your picture – is really quite lovely. You are a true friend.

(MARY sits and reads.)

HENRY

And so it starts. You're already replacing my company for a book.

MARY

I'm sorry. I shouldn't –

HENRY

I'll leave you to your reading. You may have one more day of rest to get stronger and bully me.

MARY

I don't know how much resting I will do. My heart beats fast – just to hold these.

HENRY

My mission for the day is done. Mary is happy.

MARY

And I'm allowed back on the cliffs tomorrow. If someone is with me. You'll be there, won't you?

HENRY

I wouldn't miss it. Until tomorrow.

(But MARY is reading.)

MARY

... tomorrow.

(HENRY exits.)

MARY (cont'd)

.... Thank-you so much.