

Almost Mary
(5.0)
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CAST: 12 or more (6 female, 4 male, 2 male or female); extras welcome

TOWNSPEOPLE: 6 or more (3 female, 1 male, 2 male or female)

The following act as Mary's contemporaries in Lyme-Regis as well as customers at her makeshift fossil stand. They can be 13-early 20's. Extras are welcome.

AGNES HOUGHTON (f)

WILLIAM/WILLA (m or f)

MARIE (f)

JOHN NELSON (m)

JANE (f)

CHARLES/CHARLOTTE (m or f)

MARY ANNING (f) age 12; will become the first female paleontologist; scruffy, determined, has the science-smarts even at her tender age (sources vary about her age when she discovered the ichthyosaur – anywhere from age 11-13)

RICHARD ANNING (m) 40's; Mary's father. A cabinet maker, a gifted fossil-hunter, a dreamer

JOSEPH ANNING (m) 14-15; Mary's brother. Also a fossil hunter but not as determined as Mary

MOLLY ANNING (f) 40; MARY and JOSEPH'S mother; a woman who has lost most of her children and is fiercely protective of the two she has left

HENRY DE LA BECHE (M) 15; A close friend of Mary's. Higher up on the social scale, educated, kind, as curious about the natural world as Mary

PHILIPPA AUSTEN (f) 15; friend of Mary. Of noble birth but impoverished. This character is fictional but based partially on Elizabeth Philpot who became a friend of Mary's even though she was 20 years older.

TIME: 1810-1811

SYNOPSIS: The play chronicles Mary Anning's first big fossil discovery at the age of 12. Unschooled, but curious and determined, Mary paved the way for the study of paleontology.

SETTING: Lyme-Regis, U.K. Easy or complicated

A LITTLE COMPLICATED: The set could have 2 levels: a lower level which is the beach and where MARY checks out the cliffs for fossils. And an upper level which has MARY'S home and the town. The tops of the cliffs were also combed for fossils.

EASY SET: If you do not want to do two levels, consider using projections – one showing the bottom of the cliffs and the beach and one showing the top of the cliffs.

For the "montage" at the end, the stage directions are suggestions. MARY can discover her skeleton in the cliffs (as I have), below the cliffs or even on the beach as was the case for the "fossil head."

The ANNING'S "makeshift shop" was on top of the cliffs but you can insert it wherever it is easiest. It's just a table, a bench and the fossils.

FOSSILS: Be creative. Styrofoam? (not earth-friendly), paper-maiche? A stone?

COSTUMES: The entire play takes place outside. Coats, jacket or cloaks and bonnets are all you need.

PROLOGUE

TOWNSPEOPLE

(You can do this in unison. Or divide it among the towns people.)

She sells seashells by the seashore.
The shells she sells are surely seashells.
So if she sells shells on the seashore,
I'm sure she sells seashore shells.

(They laugh and run off.)

SCENE 1 – Summer 1810;

Lights up on MARY digging around a rock pool.
RICHARD enters holding a “thunderclap” (a fossil that was the precursor to the squid.) It is a stick-like shell embedded in a rock.

RICHARD

Mary, look!

MARY

A thunderclap!

RICHARD

And more on the cliff. There's a lot of chiseling in our future. I have already hammered out five. They will fetch a few shillings each.

MARY

I want to chisel!

RICHARD

One step at a time. One breath at a time. What have you found?

MARY

Just a few devil's fingers. I broke one. It will never be sold.

RICHARD

People are quirky. You never know what they want. Be grateful for everything you find.

MARY

I only find the easy ones. I'll never be as good as you.

RICHARD

You'll be better. Already, you can spot the difference between fossil bones and rocks. It's a gift that will serve you well.

MARY

I couldn't find anything without you. You show me where to look ... how to look.

RICHARD

I couldn't find anything without you! Teaching you keeps me going. Whenever I think there's nothing left to be found, you are next to me with all your questions. It's your curiosity that keeps me hunting.

MARY

How do you know where to dig?

RICHARD

I'll tell you my secret. Nobody knows this and you mustn't tell anyone. Promise?

MARY

Of course.

RICHARD

You give me your solemn word?

MARY

I do.

RICHARD

I dig everywhere! If you chisel in a hundred places, you will find something.

MARY

You are a great big silly. I would love to find a thunderclap.

RICHARD

It's nothing but luck and a lot of chiseling. This one – is determined to stay in the rock. There's still a lot of delicate picking to do before I can free it.

MARY

Why do we call it a thunderclap? You hear thunderclaps – you don't see them. Why do we name something we can see after something we can only hear?

RICHARD

That's what our buyers call them. I don't argue with anything our buyers say – if they pay me. Look at it, Mary. I think it may be a squid from long ago. Every time I clean one, I say to myself, "Richard, this looks like a squid."

MARY

But squids have soft bodies. And squids have tentacles. The thunderclap is hard as a horse's hoof and has no tentacles.

RICHARD

What a good eye you have! Don't you think the thunderclap once had tentacles? How else could it find food and eat? But if the tentacles were soft – they likely dissolved long ago.

MARY

Does that mean that squid used to have shells?

RICHARD

It's possible.

MARY

But how could a living thing change?

RICHARD

I don't have an answer – yet. This is why we dig and chisel – for answers. We find so many fossils on top of the cliffs, it's possible that the sea once reached the very top and the cliffs were the beach.

MARY

That would flood the town!

RICHARD

Maybe ... there wasn't a town back then. It's possible that everything was different. The trees were taller and the bushes were fatter – and ... pink!

MARY

Now you are being a silly.

RICHARD

Actually, I am serious. Maybe things were different many years ago. And we are going to find out because we are explorers!

MARY

Seekers!

RICHARD

Truth-finders!

MARY

Pirates!

Pirates?
RICHARD

MARY
We seek treasure buried in the cliffs. Only instead of gold, we search for fossils which are better.

RICHARD
I wouldn't mind finding gold.

MARY
We find life.

RICHARD
But fossils aren't alive.

MARY
But they were and we're to discover why. We are buccaneers with fossils as our booty!

RICHARD
Aye-aye, Matey!

(Thunder.)

RICHARD (cont'd)
A real thunderclap. You had better head back.

MARY
Not without you.

RICHARD
I need to get my tools before they are washed out to sea.

MARY
I'll help.

(Thunder.)

RICHARD
No. Go home. Your mother will have my hide if I let you get soaked. I'll grab my tools and catch up.

(Thunder is closer and louder.)

MARY
PAPA!

Quick! Like a bunny! Go!

RICHARD

(MARY runs off. RICHARD heads to the cliffs. Rain. Lights out. Quiet. A funeral hymn may be heard.)

SCENE 2 – February 1811

Lights up on the TOWNSPEOPLE.

Muddy Mary.

AGNES

Scruffy Mary.

JOHN

Covered with sand

MARIE

From head to toe.

WILLIAM

Smelling of saltwater.

JANE

Looking like a beggar.

CHARLES

She'll never amount to anything.

AGNES

THEY exit.

Lights up on the beach – similar to Scene 1. JOSEPH is staring at a huge rock that contains a fossil head. It is about four feet long with a crocodile-like appearance. JOSEPH has a hammer but is just staring at the head in wonder.

JO-SEPH! ANSWER ME!

MARY O.S.

(MARY enters.)

MARY

You could answer me. We are not supposed to separate. Joseph!

JOSEPH

Look! It could be a dragon.

MARY

Don't be a – (beat) oh my – it does. Look at that head. It's over a meter long!

JOSEPH

Maybe it 's St. George's slain dragon! Look at that mouth. It's perfect for eating children.

MARY

If it was a dragon, the skull would be black from breathing fire.

JOSEPH

So, Miss Know-it-All," what is it? A crocodile?

MARY

I don't think Lyme Regis ever had crocodiles. In Papa's book, they live in Africa. It does look like a giant lizard.

JOSEPH

Papa would know.

MARY

We shouldn't be here. This is where –

JOSEPH

- I know. But maybe Papa brought us back here to find this.

MARY

It is extraordinary.

JOSEPH

I think it just fell from the cliff.

MARY

Like Papa. Which means we aren't safe here.

JOSEPH

We can't leave it!

MARY

Goodness, no! We have to find some help and get it home.

JOSEPH

Can you imagine – with such a large head – how gigantic the body must have been?

MARY

And if the head is here –

JOSEPH

Where is the body?

MARY

It could be anywhere.

JOSEPH

It could be here.

MARY

First things first. And you know what comes first?

JOSEPH

We chisel.

MARY

It will lighten the load if we can break off some rock.

(And they do.)

JOSEPH

This could make our fortune.

MARY

Such dreams! But you know what I'm thinking – maybe it is worth more than sterling. Maybe... it will be important. Maybe – it will influence scholars and go to a museum and people will study it and –

JOSEPH

- Now who's dreaming?

MARY

I dream every time I come down here.

JOSEPH

I dream of eating. Which I will be doing when my apprenticeship starts next week.

MARY

I'll miss your company.

JOSEPH

You'll miss bossing me around.

MARY

That, too. Stop being a lay-about! Chisel!

(THEY chisel as the lights fade to black.)

END OF SCENE

SCENE 3

February 3, 1811

Lights up on MOLLY ANNING setting up her fossils on a table. RICHARD is above her. MOLLY speaks to RICHARD as is the habit of some widows. But she doesn't see him.

MOLLY

It is interesting, Richard. How the children never fail to find something in the cliffs. And Mary – she always comes with a bag filled with fossils. It's that fossil-eye she has. You taught her well. But sometimes ... I wish she never saw a fossil.

(AGNES, JOHN, and MARIE enter.)

AGNES

Good Morning, Mrs. Anning.

MARIE

It's a beautiful day, isn't it?

MOLLY

Indeed. It's not too bad for February.

JOHN

Can we help you set up?

MOLLY

I can manage.

AGNES

We understand that Mary found a monster.

MOLLY

Really? Is that what the town is saying now?

MARIE

Probably just a rumor.

MOLLY

Yes. (Beat.) I think you know something about rumors.

JOHN

Have a good day.

MOLLY

I always do.

(AGNES, MARIE, and JOHN exit as HENRY and PHILIPPA come rushing on.)

HENRY

Mrs. Anning! Where's the big head?

MOLLY

“Good Morning, Mrs. Anning. How are you today?”

HENRY

Oh! Sorry! “Good morning, Mrs. Anning. How are you today?” *May I see it? Please!*

MOLLY

I think we'll wait for Mary. She's combing the beach with Joseph.

HENRY

This early?

MOLLY

She always was wide-awake and moving in the wee hours – even as a babe. I don't think I've had a good night's sleep since she was born. And who is this?

HENRY

Sorry. I should have introduced you two right away. Philippa Austen, this is Mrs. Anning, Mary's mother.

PHILIPPA

A pleasure. I am so excited! Everyone's talking about the giant “fossil-face.”

MOLLY

My land! Word does get around.

HENRY

Old Sam said it was one-story high!

MOLLY

Old Sam is quite the talker! I'm afraid he exaggerated a bit. The "fossil face" is only about one-and-a-half meters long.

HENRY

That's still huge. (Beat.) I would *love* to see it.

MOLLY

Let's wait for Mary. (Beat.) How is your father?

HENRY

Same.

MOLLY

And your mother?

HENRY

Same, same.

(MARY and JOSEPH appear.)

There she is! Mary? May I see it? *Please!*

MARY

Good morning, Mother. Lovely day, isn't it?

HENRY

Mary!

MARY

And hello! Who may you be?

PHILIPPA

Philippa. I am so pleased to finally meet you.

MARY

I'm – honored. This is my brother, Joseph.

(A curtsey and a nod.)

HENRY

Are you ignoring me?

PHILIPPA

Henry has told me about your exciting work.

MARY

Which part is exciting? The dirty part? The damp part or the danger?

PHILIPPA

You have the ability to find relics from the past! That is so exciting.

MARY

It's a meager way to earn a living!

HENRY

Mary!

JOSEPH

We found some devils' fingers. They don't fetch much.

MOLLY

It's enough. We'll manage.

HENRY

Mary, please! I have done nothing but think about your remarkable fossil face since Old Sam mentioned it last night.

MARY

Patience is a virtue.

(HENRY may take a few fossils and juggle or just play with them. He wants attention!)

MARY

Henry! Please. This is our living. I don't want them broken.

MOLLY

Put the poor boy out of his misery and show him the fossil.

MARY

Don't you need help setting up the table?

MOLLY

It's almost done. Joseph can help.

MARY

Come, Henry. I'll let you have a peek. You're also welcome, Philippa.

(HENRY and PHILIPPA follow MARY into her home or exit. JOSEPH finishes setting up the table.)

MOLLY

You are such a blessing, Joseph. I don't know what –

JOSEPH

- Mama! Don't get all sad-eyes at me. I'll just be down the road.

MOLLY

I know. I appreciate that you will be learning a trade and will be able to take care of yourself. I hope that you will look after Mary when I'm gone –

JOSEPH

Mama! Stop!

MOLLY

Mothers do these things. They look into the future. What a quirky family we are! I plan for the future while my children hunt for the past.

JOSEPH

I'll be home every Sunday. For dinner.

MOLLY

Promise?

JOSEPH

- Hope to die!

MOLLY

No! Not in my lifetime! I've lost enough children.

JOSEPH

When I am done with my apprenticeship, I'll come home and reupholster everything in our cottage. It will be magnificent!

(MARY, HENRY, and PHILIPPA enter.)

HENRY

It's magnificent! Don't you think, Mrs. Anning?

MOLLY

It's an odd thing to see when you first wake up – that huge mouth – those gaping teeth. It does spark the imagination. We should fetch a few pounds for it.

MARY

No! Not yet. It needs to be cleaned, catalogued... framed. And I haven't drawn its likeness yet.

PHILIPPA

You draw your fossils?

MARY

Of course. I need to keep a detailed catalogue of our findings. This is the best one yet.

HENRY

Mary's drawings are quite professional. They should be in books.

MOLLY

The winter is a good time to get all that in order. I hope it will be ready soon. It will be our calling card.

MARY

I'm not ready to let go of it.

MOLLY

Are you thinking of keeping it as a pet?

MARY

It wouldn't cost any money. It doesn't eat. I like having it about. It brings some "wonder" into our lives.

MOLLY

Do you fancy it as a lovely addition to our cottage?

PHILIPPA

All the posh people in London display fossils. There was a big fuss in London with the sale of a huge leg bone. Everyone believes it belonged to a giant.

MOLLY

Truly? Then we should get a nice amount of sterling for this "fossil-face."

MARY

Not yet!

MOLLY

When then?

MARY

When I find the body.

MOLLY

Who knows how the head got on the beach? It could have been washed up during high tide and its body still lies deep in the sea.

MARY

I need to at least look for it! If you think the head will fetch a pretty price, imagine if I found the entire skeleton. Why, Mama! We could make our way in the world – be respected.

MOLLY

As long as you stay away from the North End.

JOSEPH

But that's –

MARY

- A reasonable request.

JOSEPH

Mary?

MOLLY

I won't have you climbing and digging on the cliffs where your father fell. They are too unstable. Do you understand?

MARY

I do.

PHILIPPA

Would you mind if I joined you on your next fossil outing?

MARY

Not dressed like that! You'll need some proper boots to stay steady in the mud. And a coat you don't mind getting dirty.

PHILIPPA

This can get dirty! I'll christen it my "muddy, fossil-hunting clothes."

MOLLY

Your mother won't mind?

PHILIPPA

Sadly, there's no mother or father. Just an older brother who doesn't care what I do.

MARY

You still need some proper boots. Let's see what I have. Mama, do you need anything?

MOLLY

I don't seem to be surrounded by customers.

HENRY

While you're inside, do you mind if I visit your fossil-face?

MARY

Joseph thinks it's a dragon.

JOSEPH

It's possible.

HENRY

Anything is possible. I'd just like a visit. I also want to draw it. What color was its skin? And did it have scales that were a different hue? How did it move? What were its surroundings like?

MARY

You look for the art while I try to catalogue its species, classify the number of bones, count its teeth ...

HENRY

Which is why we work so well together. We fill in each other's gaps.

MARY

Come, then. But I'm going to have Joseph keep an eye on you. I know you, Henry – you'll want to touch it and it's delicate.

HENRY

Aye, aye, Captain Mary!

SCENE 4, Later that night

LIGHTS UP on Mary outside. She is scraping the "fossil head." Remember it is embedded in rock. She is frustrated. She gives it one hard scrape.

MARY

Why won't you come off?

(RICHARD appears. MARY never sees or hears him but she is thinking of him. Something intuitive is happening.)

RICHARD

Whoa, child! Go gently. You don't want to have the chisel slip and make a mistake. Not on your biggest discovery.

(MARY slows down.)

RICHARD (cont'd)

There you go. Find a rhythm. Be patient. One scrape at a time.

MARY and RICHARD

One breath at a time.

RICHARD

Think of the years of sand you are scraping away. Sand that was there before you were born. Before I was born.

MARY

So much sand! Sand from when the oceans came up to the cliffs. The sand must love you, Miss Fossil-Face. It doesn't want to be separated from you. It's as if it doesn't want to say good-bye.

RICHARD

Good-byes are hard.

(MARY scrapes harder.)

Slow down. It will come loose when it is ready It's the soft scrapes that loosen it. Not the hard ones.

(MARY slows down.)

Mary, Mary, my fossil-finding fairy, how does your little mind grow?
With snakestones and fossil bones and pretty dragons all in a row.

Patience, daughter. Chisel and scrape with care. Take care, my daughter. Take care.

(RICHARD exits. Light change. MOLLY enters.)

MOLLY

How are things with your dragon head?

MARY

Algae! Sand! Look – broken sea shells! I'll never get them off.

MOLLY

Then stop for now. Start again tomorrow when you are refreshed.

MARY

It's so much harder now with Papa gone.

MOLLY

It was always hard. Your Papa made it seem easy.

MARY

I don't remember such – (scrapes) stubborn – (scrapes harder) – sand! (Hardest scrape yet.)

MOLLY

Would you prefer the sand to just fall off with a simple-brushing and have your fossil-head all wrapped up and tidy?

MARY

That would be nice, thank-you.

MOLLY

And I would like the soup pot to be filled with meat every morning and the bread to knead itself and the clothes to wash themselves -

MARY

- Mama, you are speaking nonsense.

MOLLY

As were you. Come inside and tell me tales of when the oceans came up to the cliffs.

MARY

That won't get the work done.

MOLLY

But it will take away your black mood.

SCENE 5: the next day

LIGHTS UP on MARY, HENRY, and PHILIPPA fossil-hunting. MARY, PHILIPPA and HENRY are by the sea near a "rock pool."

HENRY

You found your "dragon head" here?

MARY

Elizabeth. And yes. Actually, Joseph found her. One could say I "almost" found her if I had been with him.

HENRY

You named your fossil?

MARY

I did. After the greatest queen of them all. And why not? Her head is so large, her body must be gigantic. I think she ruled the past oceans just like Queen Elizabeth ruled the land.

PHILIPPA

Are you thinking the rest of “Elizabeth” is nearby?

MARY

That would be too easy. If you are an Anning, you know nothing is easy. But the wind was blowing south and we think the head broke loose from one of the northern cliffs and fell here.

HENRY

Didn't you promise your mother would stay away from the northern cliffs?

MARY

Not exactly. I said I “understood” why she didn't want me there. And I wouldn't comb the top of the cliffs.

HENRY

Your twisting words.

MARY

In an honest way!

HENRY

I never promised anything. Maybe I should go to the top and see if anything is loose.

MARY

Not a good idea.

HENRY

I won't go too high. If I fall, I'll just be bruised.

MARY

Henry de la Beche! If you climb those cliffs, you'll be in danger of being swallowed up by the earth and being turned into a fossil! You'll be set in limestone and sand.

HENRY

You're trying to scare me.

MARY

I hope it's working.

(Meanwhile, PHILIPPA has moved closer to the sea and is “communing” with it. She’s trying to coax the sea into giving up her fossils.)

MARY (cont’d)

Philippa! *What* are you doing?

PHILIPPA

I’m using my power of persuasion to make the sea give us the skeleton. Maybe it will wash to shore.

MARY

It’s low tide! Nothing comes to shore during low tide. What sort of stuff did they teach you in London?

PHILIPPA

Stuffy-stuff. So far my life has been about getting into stuffy clothes, sitting in stuffy rooms on stuffy chairs all while trying to stay still – like I was stuffed!

MARY

That’s awful!

PHILIPPA

I know! That’s why I love doing this. So, what can I do?

HENRY

We’ll start small. Kneel by the rock pool and gently swish your hand through it.

PHILIPPA

Oh! Cold! And muddy! And positively dirty!

MARY

Told you!

PHILIPPA

I *love* this! Now what?

HENRY

Sift your hand through the sand and see if you can pick up something solid.

PHILIPPA

Nothing. Wait! Something! Oh look – isn’t it pretty? Is it a fossil?

HENRY

Just a seashell.

Worthless.
MARY

Oh.
PHILIPPA

But pretty.
MARY

PHILIPPA
I shall keep it. As a memory of my first day as a fossil-hunter. What else can I do?

HENRY
We shall visit all the rock pools and do the same thing.

PHILIPPA
What if we don't find anything?

MARY
Then we come back tomorrow to see if there's anything new.

PHILIPPA
I'm ready to work! Why are you all standing around looking at me? Get busy!

(And she starts a cheery song.)

A hunting we will go, a hunting we will go,
We'll catch a fox and put him in a box and then we'll let him go.

ALL
A hunting we will go, a hunting we will go,

HENRY
We'll catch a fish and put in a dish and then we'll let him go.

ALL
A hunting we will go, a hunting we will go.

MARY
We'll catch a fossil ... that's most colossal ...

ALL
And never let her go!

As they go to work, skimming rock pools and checking the cliffs, the lights fade to black.

SCENE 6, later that night

LIGHTS up on MARY and MOLLY packing up their wares.

MOLLY

The three of you outdid yourselves. We have so many new curiosities for the tourists. You do have the knack.

MARY

Or I'm just strange. That's what people say. They say I find fossils because I was struck by lightning as a babe and it made me strange. Am I strange?

MOLLY

Strange? Because you learned to read and write at an early age? Because you memorized the teachings of the church faster than anyone else in your class? You have had your nose in any book you could find for years. People have a hard time believing that girls can know as much or more than boys. Fossil hunting is a talent that you have. It's part of your natural curiosity about life.

MARY

I do want to know more. The past is like a mystery. These remains are clues to another world that we know nothing about. But I think it wants to be known. It wants to be remembered.

MOLLY

Now you are talking as if you are "touched."

MARY

I am – touched by the past. I have so many questions. What was Lyme Regis like years ago? What sort of creature was my beautiful fossil? What did the rest of her look like? Who knows? Maybe she was a dragon!

MOLLY

You may have to wait a long time for your answers. We don't know how your dragon-head came to be. Nothing more may come of it.

MARY

I wish there was a treasure map – sending me to the correct cliff. People know it was Joseph who found Elizabeth. "Mary *almost* got the fossil head up the cliff but needed help. Mary *almost* sold the group of snakestones for one pound sterling but then the collector went away. Mary *almost* dug out the large ammonite shell. But her father had to do it." I want to be Mary Anning – Fossil Hunter. Not "*Almost Mary.*"

MOLLY

Don't listen to the town biddies. It amazes me that they have nothing better to do than to gossip about my child. You are only twelve!

MARY

I love you, Mama.

MOLLY

And I love you. Forever.

MARY

Look at the sky. The clouds are gone.

MOLLY

Nothing but stars.

MARY

I wonder what's out there.

MOLLY

I don't know. But it does make you feel small when you consider the sky.

MARY

It's an amazing time to be alive.

MOLLY

It is. You are growing so much. I am proud of the young lady you are becoming but I do miss the little child to whom I sang lullabies.

MARY

Sing me one. The way you used to.

MOLLY

You never did fall asleep when I sang to you! Your father did – but not you!

MARY

Papa worked so hard. No wonder he fell asleep easily. (Beat.) I wish he was here.

MOLLY

When the sadness takes hold, I talk to him.

MARY

I do also. I wonder if he can hear us.

MOLLY

I'd like to think so.

MARY
I'm waiting. For the lullaby.

MOLLY
Out here on the street for all the biddies to hear?

MARY
Yes.

(MOLLY draws MARY to her. You may make up your own tune.)

MOLLY
Golden slumbers kiss your eyes
Smiles awake you when you rise.
Sleep, pretty Mary, do not cry,
And I will sing a lullaby:
Rock you, rock you, lullaby.

(The lights dim to black. Maybe we hear the ocean.)

SCENE 6: the next day

MOLLY is setting up shop. JANE HOUGHTON approaches.

JANE
Good morning, Mrs. Anning.

MOLLY
And a good morning to you, Mrs. Houghton.

JANE
It looks like we may get some rain.

MOLLY
It's certainly not unusual.

JANE
Your articles for sale are ... interesting.

MOLLY
I think so.

JANE

Even if Mr. Copper thinks they are artifacts of the devil.

MOLLY

He should know.

(JANE just stands there.)

MOLLY (cont'd)

Yes?

JANE

I saw that your daughter was up bright and early - already combing the cliffs. It looks like she has a new companion.

MOLLY

She's with a friend.

JANE

I see. (Beat.) I was surprised...

MOLLY

Were you?

JANE

... to see her by the North Cliffs. I mean they are unstable this time of year. With the loss of Mr. Anning not even a year ago – I thought she would stay away from that area.

MOLLY

She wasn't on top of the cliffs?

JANE

She and her – friend - were on the beach. Imagine if the cliffs gave up their rocks! But of course, she knows best – having run herself ragged over there since she was knee-high. I wouldn't venture there. But Mary is – headstrong – is she not?

MOLLY

Determined.

JANE

Yes. I am off to fill my basket with some chicken and pork while the bread bakes. I do love a hearty lunch.

(JANE just stands there.)

MOLLY

Is there anything else I can do for you? Would you like to take a look at some snakestones?

JANE

Oh no! A lady must be careful as to what she touches and what touches her.

MOLLY

I agree.

JANE

I hope the day is fruitful for you.

MOLLY

Thank-you. Enjoy - your eggs.

(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.)

Mary!

PHILIPPA (cont'd)

(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!

(RICHARD appears.)

RICHARD

Listen to her! Don't be a fool. GO HOME!

(PHILIPPA drags MARY away. Blackout. Rain.)

SCENE 8: a few days later

Gull sounds. MARY is by the table drawing her fossil head.

AGNES

Mary Anning is sick.

WILLIAM

From those fumes she breathes while digging in the earth.

MARIE

From touching bones of the dead.

JOHN

For making a mockery of God.

JANE

For trying to know too much.

CHARLES

Mary Anning is sick.

(MOLLY enters.)

MOLLY

What are you doing outside?

MARY

I needed air.

MOLLY

You have been feverish for days. Go inside and stay warm.

MARY

I can't breathe inside! My blood cries for the sea air.

MOLLY

You are to stay inside until I say you can come out. And you are to stay away from those North cliffs. Yes, a little birdie told me where you were! I had ten children! I buried eight of them. Eight children in the ground. My husband – in the ground. I cannot suffer any more losses. Do you understand?

MARY

I – understand. But I don't agree. I may have found Elizabeth. I need to see before she gets washed away.

MOLLY

You "may" have found her – it's not certain. Nothing is certain. Only death. And I'm not ready for that certainty.

(MARY exits. MOLLY starts to put things away.
JANE HOUGHTON enters.)

JANE

Mrs. Anning.

MOLLY

Mrs. Houghton.

JANE

I hear Mary's been ill.

MOLLY

She's recovering.

JANE

I am so glad to hear that. I brought – well – it’s just a little soup. I thought it might warm her up. The days are damp.

MOLLY

...

JANE

I do think things that are in the ground – should be left – in the ground. There’s a reason God buried them. But since she is still a child – maybe a bit willful –

MOLLY

Curious.

JANE

Yes. That, too. Here. I hope she recovers quickly. Maybe she will rethink her actions.

MOLLY

I doubt it.

JANE

I’ll be by for the pot tomorrow.

MOLLY

Ta.

JANE

No problem. Mr. Houghton doesn’t like this soup anyway.

(JANE exits. MOLLY looks inside and quietly sings to MARY.)

MOLLY

Care is heavy, therefore sleep you,
You are care and care must keep you.
Sleep, Pretty Mary, do not cry...
Do not cry..... do not cry...

(MOLLY hugs herself. She brings the soup in as the lights fade to black.)

SCENE 9

(A few days later. PHILIPPA is outside by the table. MARY enters.)

MARY

Morning, Ma- oh – you're not Mama.

PHILIPPA

Thank goodness for that. You're a handful! Your Mama's at Vespers. She asked me to wait with you.

MARY

Are you here to mind me, then?

PHILIPPA

I am! So you had better behave or I won't give you what I brought.

MARY

You didn't bring soup, did you? Because I've had days of soup. It's a wonder I don't look like a big soup pot.

PHILIPPA

Now that you mention it, there is a growing resemblance...

MARY

Be careful or I will put you to work chiseling. I haven't done any work all week.

PHILIPPA

Please do! My brother's home and I have been baking bread all week and fixing garments and all these things my brother thinks sisters should do. Now he's nagging me to go to some horrid ball in London next week.

MARY

It ... could be fun.

PHILIPPA

He means to marry me off. All I really want is to be outside on the cliffs.

MARY

Let's do that. Let's roam the cliffs and speak to the wind –

PHILIPPA

- I didn't mean today!

MARY

I'm feeling right as rain!

PHILIPPA

After all the rain we've had, the cliffs will be soft.

I taught you well.

MARY

Sit!

PHILIPPA

I'm fine!

MARY

I've had dogs that listened better than you! SIT! Eat!

PHILIPPA

(PHILIPPA gives her a tea cake. And they eat.)

Ohhh! A teacake. Where did that come from?

MARY

I can do a few things. It's stuffed with plum jam.

PHILIPPA

I thought you didn't like anything stuffed.

MARY

I make an exception for teacakes.

PHILIPPA

Elizabeth's there. I am sure. She's waiting for me. She wants her head back.

MARY

That's sensible of her. If I lost my head, I'd want it back.

PHILIPPA

But the cliffs refuse to give her up. They're greedy and like to keep the fossils to themselves.

MARY

Do your cliffs have a brain then? Because they don't seem to have a head – just a body.

PHILIPPA

I had these dreams – the cliffs were whispering, “Keep her away! Keep Mary away!” And then the trees bowed to the cliffs and far away in the ocean, there was a siren song – maybe one of your shy sea monsters – calling to me to come closer and closer -

MARY

Stop! You're scaring me!

PHILIPPA

MARY

It's just a dream. It does make me want to go – it makes me want to

(MARY sits. She has tired herself out.)

Whoa – a bit of a dizzy spell. The cliffs might have to wait another day.

PHILIPPA

Do my ears deceive me? What did I hear? Is Mary being sensible?

(MOLLY enters.)

MOLLY

Mary, how are you feeling?

PHILIPPA

She's being sensible.

MOLLY

Oh that's not my Mary. Perhaps you should lie down until you feel like yourself.

MARY

I love you, Mama.

MOLLY

And I – you. Forever. As we are being sensible, I have given some thought about you and those dangerous cliffs.

MARY

You cannot keep me from hunting fossils.

MOLLY

I have no wish to do that.

MARY

She looks like my mother, doesn't she?

PHILIPPA

That she does.

MARY

And she sounds like my mother.

PHILLIPA

Indeed.

MARY

But those words cannot possibly be from my Mum!

MOLLY

Listen! While you are recovering, I do not want you near the cliffs without either Joseph, Henry or Philippa at your side.

MARY

But Philippa's going to London and Henry's at school and Joseph's at work.

PHILIPPA

Henry comes home in a few weeks for the Easter Holiday.

MOLLY

And Joseph will be home when his Master goes to London to visit family. Those are my rules. Do you understand?

MARY

Yes, Mama. What will I do with everyone gone?

PHILIPPA

Eat tea cakes?

(PHILIPPA stuffs her tea cake into MARY'S mouth as the lights fade to black.)

SCENE 10: A few weeks later

MARY is minding "the table of artifacts."
WILL (or WILLA) and CHARLES (or CHARLOTTE)
enter.

WILL

If it isn't Miss Mary and her table of curiosities.

MARY

Morning.

CHARLES

What oddities have you unearthed lately?

MARY

We have our usual number of ammonites and belemnites.

WILL
Ahh!

CHARLES
Ahh!

MARY
You have no idea what that means, do you?

WILL
Of course... they're fossils...

CHARLES
Fossils. Yes.. We know that.

MARY
Ammonites are often called snakestones because of the way their shells spiral. Belemnites remind people of a devil's finger –

WILL
And you know about devil's fingers, don't you, Mary? Digging as you do.

CHARLES
And snakes. Devils and snakes.

WILL
You shouldn't try to unearth what was dead and buried.

CHARLES
It's against nature.

WILL
It's a sin.

MARY
I know my commandments well and don't remember "Thou shall not dig."

CHARLES
We're just giving friendly advice.

WILL
Neighbors should care about each other.

MARY
Yes. They *should*.

(HENRY enters. He carries a satchel of books.)

HENRY

Mary! *Mary!* Oh! Good day.

CHARLES

Good day. How nice of you to grace us with your presence.

WILL

We were sure that now that you were at university, you would reside in London.

CHARLES

We are probably too uneducated for the likes of you.

HENRY

That's ... possible. May I help you purchase something?

CHARLES

Not today. Thank you.

WILL and CHARLES

Good day.

(WILL and CHARLES hurry off.)

HENRY

What did they want?

MARY

Either to tell me that I am partnering with the devil or to save me from the devil. It's hard to tell which.

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.

(The lights fade to black.)

SCENE 11

A few hours later. It is dusk. MARY is working. MOLLY enters.

MOLLY

Mary, will you ever stop working?

MARY

I haven't done much in weeks. It's time to get these polished and ready for sale. I've been soaking them forever. But the algae refuses to budge. First the sand. Now the algae.

MOLLY

Then you must soak it some more. You know it can take days. Soak, scrape, brush.

MARY

At least the sand finally came off. Algae can be so stubborn.

MOLLY

Try flipping it off with the scraper.

(MARY does so and a small piece comes off.)

MOLLY (cont'd)

You never know.

(MOLLY exits.)

MARY

Now to get that chunk in the middle!

(RICHARD appears.)

RICHARD

One step at a time. One scrape at a time. Try ten short scrapes. No! Five. Your middle is delicate. It might crack. Now, brush it away. And leave it. Give it another soak overnight and then continue.

MARY

Maybe Papa was wrong. Maybe a vinegar rinse will do the trick.

RICHARD

It will speed up the process. It will also eat away at your fossil.

(MARY stops trying to work.)

MARY

Maybe I should just stop all of this.

(She speaks to her challenging fossil.)

“Hello, Mr. Fossil. What good are you? You bring in tuppence. You are an awful lot of work for tuppence. Maybe I should just leave you in the earth to be consumed by sand and algae and time.”

(She puts the fossil down and steps away and looks at the sky as the sun sets. She speaks to her father, ur remains unaware of his presence.)

Are out there, Papa? Is this a life? Am I a fool? I stand here wanting to search for a headless body – which is strange and a bit spooky. Maybe what I search for isn't even here. Isn't there. Isn't anywhere.

RICHARD

Think about where you found the head. It is possible that the head and body are miles apart. But it's more probably that they are closer than you know. Brush away the doubts. Trust yourself

RICHARD and MARY

One step at a time ... one breath at a time.

MARY

Even if I chisel, I could find it and not even know. I could be staring at it but it has melted so far into the rock, my eyes won't notice.

RICHARD

If it's there, you will see it. You're uncanny how you can spot the difference between bone and rock. And if you are unsure, use your fingers. You have the touch. You can feel the difference between rock and bone. Glide your hands over the fossils you have.

(MARY does so.)

Memorize the touch. Memorize the differences. The bones are just a touch spongier. If you dribble water on a rock, it will drip off. But if you put water on a bone, some will sink into their ancient pores. Trust yourself. You're almost there.

(MARY closes her eyes and as she glides her hands over the fossil she holds. The lights fade to black.)

SCENE 12

AT RISE we are on the beach. We hear MARY, HENRY, JOSEPH and PHILIPPA even before they enter. They are singing with gusto and joy.

ALL

A hunting we will go, a hunting we will go,
Heigh ho the derry-o, a hunting we will go.

A hunting we will go, a hunting we will go -

PHILIPPA

We'll catch a pig and dance a jig and then we'll let him go.

ALL

A hunting we will go, a hunting we will go -

HENRY

We'll catch a snake and.... And -

JOSEPH

Cure his aches -and then we'll let him go.

ALL

A hunting we will go, a hunting we will go -

(ALL look at MARY.)

MARY

We'll find the skeleton, a perfect specimen
And never let her go!

ALL

Heigh ho.
And never let her go!

(Except for MARY, ALL run to the water, to skip stones
and just play.)

MARY

I have a strong suspicion that I am not going to get much work done with all of you here.

HENRY

At your service, Captain Mary.

MARY

Could you all look for new mounds of mud? With all the rains, the cliffs may have released some gifts for us. Philippa, check the rock pools. I bet a lot has been washed ashore in the last few weeks. And Henry – that mound down there is new. Might be something there. Joseph – can you scrape down here.

(PHILIPPA goes to a rock pool and finds some specimens
which she pockets. HENRY goes to work. JOSEPH
scrapes enthusiastically.)

Gently.

JOSEPH

Do you want my help or not?

MARY

I always want your help. I can't think where I was when I thought I found something. Everything looks different.

(Watching PHILIPPA checking out her finds.)

Are you finding fossils?

PHILIPPA

Seashells. I know they are worthless. But they are pretty. (Beat.) I don't want to be a seashell.

HENRY

I don't think that will ever be a problem.

PHILIPPA

But it is! When I went to the dance in London, there were all sorts of gentlemen following me around, complimenting me on my hair and my dancing. They were all looking for a bauble to display in their home. They looked at me like I could be the next bauble.

JOSEPH

Being a bauble sounds easier than reupholstering furniture.

PHILIPPA

Easier but meaningless. My brother wasn't pleased when I mentioned that I intended to be a naturalist and spend my life outside learning and teaching about our amazing world.

HENRY

So, no marriage for you?

PHILIPPA

I am not against it. I would just prefer to be a partner in our mutual life and not a decoration.

MARY

Can we ponder the positives and negatives of matrimony later and do a little work? I still cannot remember exactly where I was a few weeks ago when I thought I found something but then *Philippa pulled me away!*

PHILIPPA

Or to be more accurate – *when Philippa saved your life!* You were further to the left. I remember you were right under where that low tree is on the cliff. I'm amazed that tree is still there.

MARY

This does look right. Everyone working?

HENRY

Aye, aye, Captain Mary.

JOSEPH

“Mary, Mary quite contrary, where do your fossils grow?”

PHILIPPA

... with cockle shells ... and rocks ... that fell ...
And ... and snakestones all in a row!

Got one!

Cockleshells?
JOSEPH

A snakestone!
PHILIPPA

MARY
This is the place! There's a bump! Through the limestone! This is what I found before I got sick.
This is what I was looking for! Come here and feel how hard it is. And thin!

Like a bone?
HENRY

Yes!
MARY

What do we do? Hammer Dig?
PHILIPPA

Scrape.
JOSEPH

Carefully. We don't want to destroy it.
MARY

(All try to go to work with various tools.)

Wait! I love your enthusiasm but maybe we don't need four people hammering away at this. It could be delicate.

This is so exciting.
PHILIPPA

MARY
We don't really know. But yes. It could be. It almost could be...

(MARY scrapes as all watch. She abruptly stops.)

Mary?
HENRY

MARY
It's nothing. A tree root. Mary Anning got fooled by a tree root. How silly am I? Elizabeth's not here. The fossil head was a fluke. It just ... landed here. There's nothing more to be found,

PHILIPPA

Here. There's nothing more to be found ... *here*.

MARY

Or anywhere. I'm nothing but a curio-collector: snakestones, devil's fingers, verteberries. Nothing of import. Just baubles. Amusements for rich people. Mary Anning: "Curio collector."

HENRY

Mary Anning: Fossil Finder. (Beat.) Is it so easy to give up?

MARY

Haven't I been doing this since I was knee-high? And what do I have to show for it? Trinkets to entertain the wealthy.

PHILIPPA

You showed me a new world with your fossil collecting.

JOSEPH

You are doing the work I wish to do.

MARY

I've been dreaming of getting back to this exact spot and chiseling and working until finally ...

HENRY

You would find her.

MARY

Yes.

HENRY

And your dream didn't come true.

MARY

No.

HENRY

But you're a scientist, correct?

MARY

No. Well ... almost.

HENRY

So do what scientists do. You failed here. Only here. There's time to find a new place to fail and another and another...

MARY

I may never find her.

HENRY

I can guarantee you won't find her if you stop looking.

MARY

I'm done.