

Almost Mary – by Claudia I. Haas

CAST: 5 (3f, 2m)

Richard Anning (m); mid forties, Mary's father and first teacher

Mary Anning (f); age 12; will become the first female paleontologist; although she had little schooling she was gifted at finding fossils at an early age; industrious with a lively mind

Joseph Anning (m); age 9; Mary's brother; already apprenticed to an upholsterer and often Mary's partner in fossil hunting; the search for fossils is a means to an end – eating and he is not as sparked by the science of it as Mary is

Henry de la Beche (m); age 14; A close friend of Mary's. Will become a geologist and illustrator; also intrigued by the science

Philippa Austen (f); age 14; friend of Mary's; impoverished, minor aristocrat; wants to do something meaningful in her life

Molly Anning (f); about age 40; Mary and Joseph's mother; protective

TIME: 1811

RUNNING TIME: 60 minutes (approximate)

SETTING:

The cliffs of Lyme Regis, England; and a setting above the cliffs that has a table where Mary and her mother sold fossils. A small setting of a bed and table inside the home is set. It should be very sparse.

The set can be imaginatively created. It can be as simple as levels. It can be as fantastical as an imagined etched drawing of the Jurassic period. Mary's story is real but the population often found her fossils to be fantastical. Scrim, projections would also work.

SYNOPSIS: Mary Anning is considered the first female paleontologist. She lived in Lyme Regis which is still a hotbed of fossils. She learned to find fossils at her father's knee. After her father died, she continued to find fossils and sell them to help her family earn a meager living. This play chronicles her first big discovery at the age of twelve: an ichthyosaur (fish lizard). Mary had little schooling but was a learner. She read incessantly, carefully chronicled and drew all of her findings. Her thirst for knowledge began at an early age (and was attributed to being hit struck by lightning although that is more lore than fact).

Mary's brother Joseph (at age 9!) found a large (4 feet) fossil head. Mary believes that the entire fossil could be found and the play is about her efforts – against all odds – to do so.

A soundscape of the sea and gulls could be used to transition the scenes.

ALMOST MARY

NOTE: The sound of children singing “She Sells Sea Shells by the Seashore” could open the play. It was probably written for Mary Anning – but was not written until 1908.

PROLOGUE 1810

The Lyme Regis Cliffs are viewed. High atop one of them is RICHARD ANNING. He is near the edge and is digging. The sky darkens. Thunder is heard in the distance. Sudden rain pours down. RICHARD is gone. In the distance we hear MARY.

MARY

Papa? PAPA!

SCENE 1 – February, 1811

AT RISE we are below the cliffs. It is about one year later. JOSEPH is seen staring at a large fossil head. (About four feet long and crocodile-like in appearance.)

It is in a large rock that had fallen off of the cliff. It could also be simply embedded in soft rock on the ground. The details of the discovery are sketchy. JOSEPH has a hammer and chisel but is just staring at the gigantic head in wonder. MARY appears.

MARY

JO-SEPH! ANSWER ME!

(MARY sees JOSEPH who is very still.)

JOSEPH! Mom’s going to skin your hide if she knew you were - oh mercy me! Look at that gorgeous skull! I think I’m in love!

JOSEPH

Mary’s smitten with a dragon!

MARY

Dragon?

JOSEPH

Maybe.

MARY

Whatever it is, it's positively smashing! I bet it's over a meter long!

JOSEPH

Mary's in love with a dragon skull!

MARY

Imagine the eyes! That magnificent head/

JOSEPH

Look at that jaw. It could bite my head off!

(JOSEPH mimes getting his hand stuck in the rock.)

MARY! HELP! *It's got my fingers!*

MARY

JOSEPH!

(Abrupt change from fear to stern.)

Jo-seph.

JOSEPH

You're such an easy target.

MARY

I am a serious geologist who looks at every possibility.

JOSEPH

You are a serious geologist who fancies a dragon head.

MARY

Because he's amazing. I want to know everything about him – his world, his eating habits, his family/his – maybe it's a her – maybe/

JOSEPH

/You're crackers.

MARY

You have to be crackers to do this work.

JOSEPH

Mary! We found a dragon! People will sing songs about us!

MARY

If this were a dragon, wouldn't the skull be black from breathing out all that fire and smoke?

JOSEPH

What else could it be? *I know!* A crocodile.

MARY

No!

JOSEPH

Yes! Look.

MARY

It does look like a crocodile. I thought they were only in Africa. These fossils are clues to a big, grand mystery. And guess what we are?

JOSEPH

Two children!

MARY

Try harder.

JOSEPH

Crocodile hunters!

MARY

Detectives – of the past.

JOSEPH

We'll have to look the head up. You do still have Papa's books?

MARY

All two of them. And I kept his tools, tools, his clothes...

(JOSEPH smashes his fist into the rock.)

JOSEPH

/Owwww!

MARY

Joseph! Why'd you do that?

JOSEPH

I didn't want to cry.

(Beat.)

MARY

I think when you lose your father, you're allowed to cry.

JOSEPH

Even boys?

MARY

Even boys.

(Beat)

JOSEPH

We haven't been here since -

MARY

- Papa's fall.

JOSEPH

I miss him.

MARY

We were always underfoot, showing him our treasures.

JOSEPH

Which were usually seashells.

MARY

(Loudly to the sky.)

Look, Papa! Look! Your children found something that is not a giant seashell!

JOSEPH

Mary ...

MARY

He's smiling at us. I can feel his huge, toothy grin smiling all the way from heaven. He would have loved your dragon head!

JOSEPH

Almost as much as you do!

MARY

I'm going to show Papa where we are. Remember when we would put our initials in the sand after a big find?

JOSEPH

And then the sea washed it away.

MARY

Still - I like the tradition.

(MARY draws a circle in the sand and puts her name and Joseph's initials inside it.)

MARY (cont'd)

Maybe Papa can see this from heaven. There! Now, I must stop being a lazy lay-about and chisel!

(JOSEPH goes at it with too much enthusiasm.)

MARY (cont'd)

Don't hammer her! You'll hurt her!

JOSEPH

I hate to break it to you, but she's dead.

MARY

But we want her in one piece. You get more money that way.

(They chisel.)

JOSEPH

Papa said that a long time ago the ocean came up to the top of the cliffs!

MARY

All of our fossils seem to have come from the sea.

JOSEPH

Maybe it was a sea-dragon! 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

What did Papa say, "First things first, my dears." And you know what comes first, Joseph?

JOSEPH

Work. Always work.

(They chisel.)

JOSEPH (cont'd)

This head could make our fortune.

MARY

Such dreams! But maybe it is worth more than sterling. *Maybe* – it will go to a fancy museum and people will study it and learn from it. And I, Mary Anning, will be a fancy geologist/

JOSEPH

/Now who's dreaming?

MARY

I dream every time I come down here.

JOSEPH

My dreams are usually about eating.

MARY

I daresay, we could buy a little rice and treacle if we sell this!

JOSEPH

(JOSEPH starts speaking the Nursery Rhyme which turns into song.)

Half a pound of two-penny rice; half a pound of treacle;
That's the way the money goes!

(MARY joins in.)

Pop! Goes the weasel!

JOSEPH and MARY

Up and down the City Road; In and out the Eagle;
That's the way the money goes! Pop! Goes the weasel!

(The lights will dim at the end of the song as we fade to black.)

SCENE 2, February, 1811

AT RISE it is a few days later. MOLLY ANNING is setting up her table of small fossils to sell outside her tiny cottage on top of the cliffs. HENRY and PHILIPPA enter.

HENRY

Mrs. Anning! *Mrs. Anning! Where's the big head?*

MRS. ANNING

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

HENRY

Oh! Sorry! “Good-Morning,-Mrs.-Anning. How-are-you-today?” *Where's the big head?*

MRS. ANNING

I think we'll wait for Mary.

HENRY

Where is she?

MRS. ANNING

Combing the beach with Joseph.

HENRY

But it's early!

MRS. ANNING

She was always was wide-awake and moving in the wee hours – even as a babe! Always squirming and yearning and/

HENRY

/Mrs. Anning! Can I see it!/
/

MRS. ANNING

/I don't think I've had a good night's sleep since she was born. And now she's off to the North End where she has been forbidden to go but does she listen? Of course not.

(Pause. MRS. ANNING notices Philippa.)

Oh! Hello! And who are you?

HENRY

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

PHILIPPA

A pleasure. I am so excited about the fossil-face!

MRS. ANNING

The fossil-face? Is that what it's called? Joseph calls it a dragon. Mary just refers to it as the "Beautiful Skull"

HENRY

/Mrs. Anning – *where is it?*

MRS. ANNING

The "fossil face?"

HENRY

Yes! Old John said it was one-story high!

MRS. ANNING

Old John is quite the talker! Why, when he comes to look at my wares, I cannot get a word in – just talks of the townspeople and all the goings-on – he's quite the gossip. But it was kind of him to help the children bring the fossil head home. I'm afraid Old John exaggerated. The head is only about one and a half meters long.

HENRY

May I see it? *Please!*

MRS. ANNING

Let's wait for Mary. And how is your father, Henry?

HENRY

Same as always.

MRS. ANNING

And your mother?

HENRY

Same, same, same.

MRS. ANNING

I see. And Philippa, tell me about/

HENRY

/There she is! Mary!

(MARY and JOSEPH enter with a few small fossils.)

HENRY

Mary! May I see it? Please?

MARY

Good Morning, Henry! Lovely day, isn't it? Who is your friend?

PHILIPPA

Philippa. I am so pleased to finally meet you. Henry has told me about your exciting work.

HENRY

Mary!

MARY

You mean my "back-breaking-dirty work that no young girl should ever do?"

PHILIPPA

I mean – exhilarating! You discover the past!

MARY

It's a meager way to earn a living.

(HENRY may do a somersault or stand on his head – he wants to get MARY'S attention!)

HENRY

Mary – are you ignoring me?

PHILIPPA

I think fossil hunting is a noble profession!

MARY

Thank-you Philippa – you just became my friend forever.

HENRY

Mary! Please! I've done nothing but think about your fossil face since Old John mentioned it last night!

MARY

Patience is a virtue.

(MARY and JOSEPH put a few fossilized rocks
down on the table.)

JOSEPH

Just some snake-stones and devils' fingers.

MRS. ANNING

They will still fetch a few shillings. Help keep your belly full!

JOSEPH

That's important!

MARY

I'll have them cleaned up in no time.

HENRY

(HENRY takes some rocks and attempts to juggle –
desperate for MARY'S attention.)

Mary!

MRS. ANNING

After all, it's not every day that one brings home a giant fossil face, isn't that right,
Henry?

HENRY

But will I ever see it? *Please!*

MRS. ANNING

Put the poor boy out of his misery, Mary. Show him the fossil.

MARY

Don't you need help setting up the table?

HENRY

You're torturing me!

JOSEPH

I'll help you, Mama.

HENRY

Thank-you!

MARY

Come, Henry. I'll put you out of your misery.

(MARY brings HENRY and PHILIPPA into the house. JOSEPH helps his mother with the table.)

MRS. ANNING

You've been such a blessing, Joseph. So like your father - I don't know what -

JOSEPH

(Interrupting) - Mama! Don't get all sad-eyes on me! I'll just be down the road.

MRS. ANNING

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

JOSEPH

Mama! Stop!

MRS. ANNING

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.

MRS. ANNING

Promise?

JOSEPH

Hope to die –

MRS. ANNING

No! Not in my lifetime.

JOSEPH

And when I am done with my apprenticeship, I'll come home and reupholster everything in our cottage! It will be an aristocrat's home!

(MARY enters from the cottage followed by HENRY and PHILIPPA.)

HENRY

It's *absolutely* extraordinary! Don't you think Mrs. Anning?

MRS. ANNING

It's an odd thing to see when you first wake up – that large mouth ... smiling at me. We should fetch a few pounds for it!

MARY

On no – not yet. It needs to be cleaned and properly catalogued. And I haven't drawn its likeness yet!

PHILIPPA

Do you draw all of your fossils?

MRS. ANNING

Just like her father, she is! When her father worked on the cabinets for customers, he was forever sawing, sanding, painting. And now my Mary spends her hours brushing, washing, chiseling ... and finally when she is satisfied, she illustrates them.

HENRY

Her drawings should be studied.

MARY

I like to keep accurate records of what we find. This is the greatest one yet!

MRS. ANNING

No time like the present to get all of that in order! When the tourists start arriving in the spring, this will be our calling card.

MARY

I'd - like to keep it for a bit.

MRS. ANNING

Are you thinking of having a fossil head for a pet then?

MARY

He wouldn't cost any money! He doesn't eat.

MRS. ANNING

Or are you thinking it a lovely addition to our cottage home?

PHILLIPA

All the posh people in London do – they love fossils! There was a big fuss in London with the sale of this colossal leg bone. Everyone believes it belonged to a long-ago giant.

MRS. ANNING

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

MARY

Not yet!

MRS. ANNING

When then?

JOSEPH

Mama! We're thinking that if there's a head ... there must be a body!

MRS. ANNING

That's ridiculous – who knows how the head got there? It could have been washed up during high tide with the body lying deep beneath the sea.

MARY

But we should 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 – get a proper shop -

MRS. ANNING

- as long as you stay away from the North End – that's where your father fell. I've buried him and too many children. I won't have you on – *or under* those northern cliffs – they are too unstable. Do you understand?

MARY

I do.

MRS. ANNING

You understand but you don't listen.

MARY

I – try.

PHILIPPA

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

MARY

Not dressed like that! You'll need some proper boots and a dress you don't mind muddying.

PHILIPPA

I don't mind getting this dirty. I shall christen this my “muddy, fossil-hunting dress.”

MARY

Your mother won't mind?

PHILIPPA

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

MARY

Still, we need to find you some boots. Let's see what I have in the house. Mama, do you need me for anything?

MRS. ANNING

I don't appear to be surrounded by customers.

HENRY

While you try on boots, do you mind if I visit your fossil head?

MARY

Joseph thinks it's a dragon.

HENRY

Fossil-head! Dragon! I'd just like a visit! I would also like to draw it. I'm wondering about its skin color. How did your dragon move? What were its surroundings?

MARY

You look for the art while I try to discover its species, classify the number of bones in its head, number its teeth –

HENRY

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

MARY

Come then. Inspect our odd head. But I will have Joseph accompany you – I know you Henry – you'll want to touch it and it's fragile!

HENRY

Aye, aye, Captain Mary!

(The children exit into the house and MRS. ANNING checks on the wares of her table. Ocean sounds are heard as the lights go to black.)

Scene 3, Later that night

AT RISE MARY is outside gently scraping the "dragon skull." (RICHARD is behind her. She doesn't make eye contact in the scene.)

MARY

Can you see, Papa? I hope you can. She's beautiful, isn't she? So – aristocratic.

RICHARD

Chisel. Scrape. Brush.

(As RICHARD speaks, MARY goes through the motions.)

Chisel ... scrape ... brush.

MARY

It would be so much easier if I could chisel for a bit and then scrape for awhile and brush all away.

RICHARD

Too messy. If you don't constantly scrape and brush what you have chiseled, you might chisel too much and ruin the fossil. And this one is extraordinary. Chisel ... scrape ... brush. Gently. You don't want to slip. See where you are in the crevice? Slow down. It's easy to scrape there. Easy to make a dent. Even slower. Slower...

MARY

I feel like I'm moving through sand!

RICHARD

As it should be. Think of the years of sand you are scraping away. Sand from before you were born. Before I was born.

MARY

Hundreds of years of sand!

RICHARD

Maybe thousands.

MARY

No wonder it's so stubborn. It's as if it loves being attached to the skull! It doesn't want to leave.

RICHARD

Sometimes leaving is hard.

(Beat.)

MARY

I miss you, Papa.

RICHARD

Mary, Mary, my fossil-finding fairy, how does your curious mind grow?

MARY

With snakestones and fossil bones and pretty, little seashells all in a row.

RICHARD

Brush it now. With care.

(RICHARD exits.)

MARY

Always, Papa. Papa? (To herself.) I love you.

(She turns around but he is gone. MARY continues brushing the fossil as the lights dim to black.)

SCENE 4, the next day

AT RISE MARY, JOSEPH, HENRY and PHILIPPA are on the beach. PHILIPPA is skipping in the surf with her arms outstretched to the water. MARY and JOSEPH have cloth bags for collecting fossils and are scoping the area out for a good place to dig. HENRY is combing the sand and rock pools.

HENRY

You found your dragon-head here?

MARY

Ragnara.

HENRY

You named your fossil?

MARY

I did.

HENRY

Rag-nara?

MARY

After the Viking King and great explorer "Ragnar." But I decided our dragon is a "she" so I christened her "Ragnara."

HENRY

And you're thinking the rest of "Ragnara" is nearby?

MARY

That would be too easy! Joseph and I were born under a dark star – nothing's ever simple. Sometimes I think the fossils like to stay hidden to make the hunt for them more exciting.

JOSEPH

I could do with less excitement. It's more work.

MARY

So, do we go north or south?

JOSEPH

The winds blow north.

MARY

North it is!

JOSEPH

Mary! You promised Mama we wouldn't go to the northern cliffs!

MARY

I did no such thing. I merely said that I would try not to go. You did find the head on the forbidden north cliffs.

JOSEPH

You're twisting words.

MARY

In an honest way. *Philippa!* Whatever are you doing?

PHILIPPA

I'm using my powers of persuasion to have the sea bring the skeleton to me!

MARY

It's low tide! Nothing washes to shore during low tide. It's why we're here now. To see if there are any gifts from the high tide. Didn't they teach you anything in London?

PHILIPPA

No. It's just all expensive, stuffy-stuff. Which is why we moved here. So far, my life has been about getting into stuffy clothes, sitting in stuffy rooms on stuffy chairs and trying to be still – like I was stuffed!

MARY

That's awful!

PHILIPPA

I know! I love these boots – I can walk anywhere! In the Mud! Sand! Ocean! Now, give me a task.

HENRY

Kneel by the rock pools. Now, gently wave your hand through the wet sand –

PHILIPPA

Oh! Cold!

HENRY

Yes.

PHILIPPA

Muddy!

HENRY

Very.

PHILIPPA

I'm ... dirty. Look at my hand ... my dress ... muddy ... This is so wonderful! *I'm dirty!* I've always wanted to play in the mud! Now that I'm a mudpie, what do I do?

HENRY

Sift and see if you can pull up something strong and solid.

PHILIPPA

I can do that! What will you do?

MARY

Examine the bottom of the cliffs. Pieces of them are always falling off and sometimes fossils are exposed. It usually happens in the winter when everything's wet.

PHILIPPA

Should we climb up them? To get a closer look?

MARY, JOSEPH and HENRY

NO!

JOSEPH

The cliffs – fall. Our father was standing up on the northern ledge and the land came apart and he fell to the beach. He never recovered.

PHILIPPA

I am sorry. But we're not on top so we should be safe.

MARY

Not if a piece of the cliff falls on top of you!

PHILIPPA

Oh! That would truly muddy-me!

HENRY

It would kill you.

PHILIPPA

I wouldn't like that.

MARY

Let's start you off with something small. At high tide, the sea deposits rocks. Sometimes the rocks contain fossils. Why don't you dig near the shore?

PHILIPPA

But I want to go cliff climbing!

HENRY

I think for your first outing, we'll just try to keep you alive!

PHILIPPA

That's not fun!

HENRY

It's more fun than being dead!

PHILIPPA

Unless you're a ghost! Do you think ghosts have fun?

HENRY

No, they are wretched creatures – hands outstretched to snatch you into the spirit world!

MARY

Is anybody going fossil hunting or are we telling ghost stories? Because those are better told after dark.

HENRY

Captain Mary's back on her high horse. Time to work!

(MARY and JOSEPH immediately go to a rock pool. PHILIPPA and HENRY do the same. PHILIPPA finds some lovely seashells.)

Ohhh! A fish!

PHILIPPA

Catch it!

MARY

It's dead.

PHILIPPA

Good. Bring it to me.

MARY

Do you also collect dead fish?

PHILIPPA

Mary dissects them.

HENRY

Oh. Different.

PHILIPPA

I like to compare the fossils I find to the creatures we live with now. It's helpful to understand their structure.

MARY

Should I

PHILIPPA

Just put it in your bag.

MARY

All ... right.

PHILIPPA

(PHILIPPA has a bit of trouble doing so. The fish may be dead but it's slippery.)

Oh! OH! Slippery.

Should I?

MARY

PHILIPPA

No! I can do this. I can do this. I can – did it! I did it!

MARY

Good. Now back to work.

(And they work.)

PHILIPPA

Oh look! Isn't that pretty? Is it a fossil, Mary? *Is it?*

MARY

No. Sorry.

PHILIPPA

How about this one?

MARY

No. (Beat.) But it's pretty.

PHILIPPA

This?

MARY

No.

PHILIPPA

Are you sure?

MARY

Yes.

PHILIPPA

I'll never find one!

MARY

You'll never find one if you give up!

PHILIPPA

I, Philippa will never, ever give up!

MARY

That's the spirit!

PHILIPPA (singing)

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

(The others join in at various intervals.)

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

PHILIPPA (alone)

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

ALL (as they hunt for fossils)

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

HENRY

We'll catch a fish and put him 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 and never let her go!

(The children are holding up rocks, skipping in the sand and humming as the lights fade to black. Sounds of the sea are heard in the blackout.)

SCENE 5, Later than night

AT RISE MARY and MRS. ANNING are by their table packing up their wares. Night has fallen.

MRS. ANNING

You and Joseph certainly outdid yourselves today. We will have so many new curiosities for the tourists.

MARY

I had a lot of help! Where is Joseph?

MRS. ANNING

Sleeping. The apprenticeship starts tomorrow. I hope Mr. Miller is good to him.

MARY

Don't worry, Mama. Joseph is a hard worker. Especially if you feed him.

MRS. ANNING

As are you. I never saw anyone with such a keen eye for fossils as you. Not even your father.

MARY

People in town say I am “touched.”

MRS. ANNING

People say a lot of things.

MARY

They say I find fossils because I was struck by lightning as a babe and so have a strange “gift.” Is that true?

MRS. ANNING

Some people have a hard time believing that girls are as intelligent as boys. They find a “supernatural” reason for a woman’s knowledge. You do have the talent. Believe in it.

MARY

I feel like the past is a puzzle. These skeletal remains are clues to another world that we know nothing about. But it wants to be known. It wants to be remembered.

MRS. ANNING

Now you are starting to talk as if you were “touched!”

MARY

I am - touched by the past. And since I can’t go to a proper school, I will let the world teach me.

MRS. ANNING

The world teaches hard lessons.

MARY

I will learn them all. I have so many questions. What was Lyme Regis like years ago? What sort of creature was my beautiful dragon? What did the rest of her look like?

MRS. ANNING

We may never know. We don’t know how your dragon-head came to be here. Nothing more may come of it.

MARY

This head – my Ragnara - set off a spark inside me. I wish there was a treasure map – sending me to the correct cliff. In town today, there were people noting that it was Joseph who found the fossil head. “Mary almost got it up the cliff but needed help.” “Mary almost sold the fossil bone to the collector for one pound sterling.” “Mary *almost* dug out the large ammonite shell.” I want to be Mary Anning, Fossil Hunter. Not “Almost Mary.”

MRS. ANNING

Don't you be listening to the town biddies. It amazes me that they have nothing better to do than to discuss my child! You are only twelve! There is time for all that you want!

MARY

I love you, Mama.

MRS. ANNING

And I, you. Forever.

MARY

Look out there. What a beautiful night. The clouds have lifted.

MRS. ANNING

Stars as far as the eye can see.

MARY

What's out there?

MRS. ANNING

I don't know. But one starts to feel very small when you consider the sky.

MARY

It's an amazing time to be alive.

MRS. ANNING

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

MARY

Sing me one. The way you used to.

MRS. ANNING

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

MARY

Papa worked so hard – building cabinets until the wee hours of the morning and then combing the cliffs during the day. No wonder he fell asleep easily. I wish he was here.

MRS. ANNING

As do I. When the sadness takes hold, I create pictures in my mind. My favorite is remembering you and Joseph – following your Papa on the sandy beach – those chubby, little legs trying to keep up with him. Sometimes you'd stumble in the sand and I'd grab you and hold you tight in my arms – keeping you in a hug for as long as you'd let me.

MARY

You always made us feel safe. Maybe that's why I have no fear of the cliffs. (Pause.) I'm waiting. For the lullabye.

MRS. ANNING

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

MARY

Yes.

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

MRS. ANNING

Golden slumbers kiss your eyes,
Smiles awake you when you rise.
Sleep, pretty Mary, do not cry,

MRS. ANNING (cont'd)

And I will sing a lullaby:
Rock you, rock you, lullabye.

(The lights dim to black. Ocean sounds are heard.)

SCENE 6, Early March

AT RISE it is two weeks later. MARY and PHILIPPA are fossil hunting by the cliffs. PHILIPPA is near a rock pool and MARY is meticulously checking rocks by the lower portion of a cliff. A storm is coming.

PHILIPPA

I *love* being outside! I have missed it so!

MARY

Two weeks of rain. It certainly has made the cliffs soft.

PHILIPPA

Is there the possibility of a landslide?

MARY

Yes.

PHILIPPA

It's difficult to decide when to hunt. You want the cliffs soft so they can break apart and show you their treasures. But you don't want to be near them when they crack because of

PHILIPPA (cont'd)

the danger. But if you're not near them right after a landslide, the tide will come and take your fossils out to sea. It's a muddle.

MARY

You're learning.

PHILIPPA

It is thrilling!

MARY

You need to stop loving the dangerous part of it! I don't want to lose you.

PHILIPPA

This is safer than needlepoint. I'd get all twitchy and prick my fingers and then they would bleed all over the canvas.

MARY

I had no idea that being a "lady" was so treacherous.

PHIPPA

It's painful.

(Beat.)

Your Mum didn't look pleased that we were coming down to the beach.

MARY

She'll be pleased if I find the skeleton!

PHILIPPA

It's quiet with just the two of us.

MARY

With Joseph working and Henry in school, I can focus more on finding fossils. Henry can be distracting – all hijinks and games. We've known each other since our earliest days – he's like another brother you must keep in line. But I do miss them.

PHILIPPA

Mary! Come here right away!

MARY

What's wrong?

PHILIPPA

Is this a fossil?

MARY

Sorry, no.

PHILIPPA

Couldn't you just say "yes" once in a while to make me feel good?

MARY

But then you'll never find a real one. Fossils aren't like fish jumping into your lap. For one thing – they're dead. And - they're shy - like pearls in oyster shells only opening up to those who care about them.

PHILIPPA

I want to be good at something! *Mary?* What is this?

MARY

A lovely seashell.

PHILIPPA

This is all so tricky! I must study – to know what I am looking for. Do you have books?

MARY

Only two. I learned at my father's knee. Henry has quite a lot and he occasionally lends me some. Now search! You won't find anything chatting with me!

PHILIPPA

Wait! Is this – it's kind of gloppy – but can this be *an actual fossil?* Look! It's shaped like a snake!

MARY

That is indeed a fossil. The scientific name is ammonite. But we just call them snake-stones.

PHILIPPA

I should here. Take it.

MARY

I don't think so! You found it!

PHILIPPA

But – you can sell it!

MARY

For a mere shilling or two. Keep it – it's your very first fossil - the first of many more discoveries! Later, I will show you how to clean it properly so that it sparkles like new.

PHILIPPA

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

MARY

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

PHILIPPA

We are exploring an old world to discover a new world – that's old.

MARY

Yes! People think I comb these cliffs just to add a few shillings to our till. But I feel that we are seekers of a mysterious world.

PHILIPPA

Do you think you'll ever find the rest of your dragon? Your "Ragnara?"

MARY

I wouldn't be here if I didn't believe that. Of course, it could have appeared on the beach in the last two weeks and then the greedy tide took it away. That would be my luck!

(MARY diligently goes back to work.)

PHILIPPA

I wonder if Ragnara was a sea monster – maybe there still are sea monsters out there. Perhaps they are bashful and don't want to meet people. What do you think, Mary?

(MARY has stopped hammering and is methodically clearing away a small area with just her hands.)

PHILIPPA (cont'd)

Mary? *What do you think?*

(Lightening.)

About the possibilities of sea monsters? Mary? *MARY!*

(Thunder.)

What is it?

MARY

Don't know.

PHILIPPA

A storm is coming. We should go.

In a minute.

MARY

(There is the sound of a rock falling. PHILIPPA jumps.)

What was that?

PHILIPPA

(Lightening)

Mary!

MARY

Wait!

(Thunder!)

PHILIPPA

We're going. If I have to drag you out of here!

MARY

No! There's something – whitish – hard.

PHILIPPA

If it's there now, it will be there tomorrow!

MARY

That's not how it works! It could be washed out to sea tomorrow! This could be it/

PHILIPPA

/The tide's marching in - nothing is worth being washed out to sea! Not even Ragnar!

(Thunder)

MARY

One more second –

PHILIPPA

- we could drown!

(Lightening.)

In a minute! MARY

We're going. PHILIPPA

Go without me! MARY

(RICHARD appears above them.)

Don't be a fool, Mary! RICHARD

What? MARY

You can't find a fossil if you're dead! RICHARD

Papa? MARY

Go! RICHARD

We are leaving! PHILIPPA

(Lightening illuminates MARY.
PHILIPPA grabs MARY.)

Now! PHILIPPA (cont'd)

(We hear the roar of the tide. Blackout. Rain. Rain sounds diminish. Gulls are heard.)

SCENE 6, the next morning

AT RISE it is Sunday, the following morning. MARY is by her table drawing her fossil head. MARY is slightly ill. RICHARD appears behind her. MARY listens when RICHARD speaks but again there is no eye contact.

RICHARD

Quite a good likeness.

MARY

I like being specific.

RICHARD

It's good you left the cliff/

MARY

/I know. I was just –

RICHARD

- being stubborn.

MARY

A little.

RICHARD

You've done a good job with the cleaning.

MARY

There are still so many spots. A bit of algae and that pesky oyster that won't let go. But I'll continue to chip away. Joseph thinks we should use a vinegar rinse.

RICHARD

No! It does make it easier to scrape the years of debris off. But it eats into the fossil and destroys its beauty. Better to have a few pieces of algae sticking to it than a fossil that's been burned.

MARY

There's so much to think about. The scraping, the cleaning, the cataloguing.

RICHARD

Your details in the drawing are impressive.

MARY

My hope is to compare my drawing to other living creatures that are alive. The dragon-head has a resemblance to a crocodile. But it's not a crocodile. Maybe it's related to one? I want to find out. (Pause.) I need to sit still for a minute.

RICHARD

Mary?

MARY

Just for a minute. It will pass. I don't know what's wrong. I should –

(MARY goes back to drawing.)

RICHARD

Stop. You should stop for a bit.

MARY

Can't/

RICHARD

Mary, Mary, quite contrary, how does your curious mind grow/

MARY

With little fossils ... many fossils sitting pretty ... all in a row....

RICHARD

Don't rush things. Things happen in their own time. Stay strong for it.

(JOSEPH enters and RICHARD disappears.)

MARY

JOSEPH! I was hoping you would make it home!

JOSEPH

I told you I'd come home on Sundays.

MARY

Are they treating you properly? Are you working too hard?

JOSEPH

No harder than when I am home! Where's Mama?

MARY

At services. I was feeling faint so stayed home.

JOSEPH

You're not looking well – you're whiter than a ghost!

MARY

Thanks for the compliment. What do you think?

JOSEPH

Did you get all the teeth?

MARY

Yes!

JOSEPH

There's a bit of algae stuck there. You really should use a vinegar rinse.

MARY

Papa always said, "no vinegar!" Four scrubs with the soapy water followed by some soft brushing and it shines.

JOSEPH

Old John uses vinegar.

MARY

Old John doesn't sell as many fossils as we do. I'm almost done with the drawing. Why does everything feel so hard today?

JOSEPH

You should rest.

MARY

You're sounding like Mama! I am resting. I just want to be out in the air.

JOSEPH

You're working.

MARY

Busywork.

JOSEPH

How's the hunt going for our fossil dragon?

MARY

Slow as molasses. I thought I found something yesterday. I was digging through the limestone when I came across something very hard. But then the storm came and Philippa was a great, big silly and dragged me home. I can show you where we were! Come to the cliffs with me. Before Mum gets back.

(MARY coughs.)

JOSEPH

Mary?

MARY

Winter is settling in my bones. If the sun would come out –

JOSEPH

You're shaking.

A slight chill.

MARY

Come inside.

JOSEPH

Too warm ...

MARY

You need warm.

JOSEPH

Air. I need air. Let's go down to the sea ... I could show you – Mama won't mind me going if you are there. Please-

MARY

(MARY stands and struggles.)

Sit, Mary! Please!

JOSEPH

(MARY sits and crumples onto the table.)

MARY!

JOSEPH

BLACKOUT

SCENE 7, Later that day

The sound of gulls or the music from Mrs. Anning's lullaby is heard. AT RISE, it is later in the day. PHILIPPA, JOSEPH and HENRY are outside the small cottage. MRS. ANNING enters. RICHARD hovers in the background.

How is she?

PHILIPPA

A bit of a fever. She took some soup. Thank-you for bringing it.

MRS. ANNING

Of course.

PHILIPPA

HENRY

I feel – so useless. Is there something - anything – I can do?

MRS. ANNING

I wish there was. I feel useless, too.

JOSEPH

Should I stay?

MRS. ANNING

No! If you stay – she'll think the worse. Everyone must go about the day as they would. Mary needs to rest. I wish I could keep her away from the cliffs!

JOSEPH

Please don't do that, Mama! It's part of her –

MRS. ANNING

- which will do her no good if she dies!

JOSEPH

You can't ban her from the cliffs. It's in her bones.

MRS. ANNING

The grippe is in her bones!

HENRY

Mary lives for the cliffs.

PHILIPPA

It would be like taking away a piece of her heart.

MRS. ANNING

I know. I couldn't keep her from the cliffs if I tried. I should ... go inside. In case she needs anything.

JOSEPH

And I need to go. Sorry, Mama. I'll just say good-bye to Mary.

(JOSEPH exits into home.)

HENRY

She'll be fine, Mrs. Anning. Mary's a tough little bird.

MRS. ANNING

Ten children. I had ten children. Eight gone. No more losses. Please. No more losses.

(JOSEPH rushes in.)

JOSEPH

She's burning up, Mama! It's like she's on fire!

(MRS. ANNING exits to MARY.)

HENRY

I'll fetch the doctor!

(HENRY exits.)

JOSEPH

I'm supposed to be back –

PHILIPPA

Go! If anything happens/

JOSEPH

/Nothing can happen/

PHILIPPA

/Go! She'll be fine. I'll give you a report in the morning.

JOSEPH

You'll come by the shop tomorrow?

PHILIPPA

Absolutely.

JOSEPH

Cross your heart?

PHILIPPA

And no one dies. Go!

(JOSEPH exits.)

(PHILIPPA starts to tidy up the table and just stops. She bows her head in prayer as the lights fade to black.)

SCENE 9, a dream in the night

AT RISE RICHARD and MARY are combing the cliffs. This is in the past and MARY is a wee bit younger. Lighting is a wee bit dreamier. Richard has some sea shells that he uses to make snapping noises at MARY. All is light and happiness.

MARY

Papa! Stop being such a goose!

RICHARD

Click-clack, clickity-clack, the oyster want to stick to your back!

MARY

Papa!

RICHARD

(Using the oyster shell as a puppet and in his best “oyster” voice.)

I love you fossil-fairy!

MARY

If you loved me, you’d make me a big, shiny pearl!

RICHARD

Do you think I’m a spider? Just spinning a web? A pearl is precious! It takes a long time to make one– sometimes years!

MARY

I can wait. Oyster?

RICHARD

Yes?

MARY

Why do you like to stick to fossils? It’s most annoying.

RICHARD

Look at me! Do you see flippers? I have to get around. Bobbing in the sea for months is no fun. I need a ship.

MARY

Did we get any ships today?

RICHARD

(Peering into his bag.)

A few. What do you think?

(Taking out a small fossil.)

MARY

They're beautiful! I love our treasures.

RICHARD

The treasure needs to be taken care of. We don't need to chisel much – but we certainly have some scraping to do.

MARY

When they're all tidy and sparkling, they shine like pearls!

RICHARD

They do, fossil-fairy. Indeed they do. The sun's going down. Let's not worry your mother.

MARY

I loved today. I wish every day could be like today and nothing would ever change.

RICHARD

Remember that, Mary. Remember that you loved today. Because every day brings change.

(LIGHTS swirl and change and go to black.)