

Almost Mary – by Claudia Haas; all rights reserved

CAST: 6 (3f, 3m)

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

Mary Anning (f); age 13; 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 10; 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

Henry de la Beche (m); age 15; A close friend of Mary's. Will become a geologist and illustrator; also intrigued by the science

Philippa Austen (f); age 15; 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. An opening to the home is seen.

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.

Projections of the cliffs and Mary's and/or Henry's drawing would work beautifully.

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. Sets should be simple.

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 Summer 1810

The Lyme Regis Cliffs are viewed. Below we see MARY digging around a rock pool. RICHARD comes running on with a belemnite (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 many more on the cliff. There’s a lot of chiseling in our future. I have quite a few of them out. They will fetch a good number of shillings.

MARY

Take me to them!

RICHARD

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

MARY

Not much. A few devil’s fingers – one is broken. It will never be sold.

RICHARD

You never know what people want. Be pleased with all of your findings.

MARY

I only find the easy ones. The ones in the rock pools. I’ll never be as good as you.

RICHARD

You’ll be better. You have the eye. You can spot the difference between fossil bones and rocks. It’s a gift that will serve you well.

MARY

I don't think I could ever find anything without you by my side. You show me where to look. How to look. Otherwise, I'd give up.

RICHARD

Teaching you keeps me going. Whenever I think there's nothing left to be found, you ask questions and give me new energy. It's tough work to be sure. But your curiosity keeps me hunting.

MARY

But you have a nose for them. You seem to know where to dig. Where to chisel. I don't have that.

RICHARD

One step at a time. One breath at a time. There's no secret. If you chisel in enough places, you will find something!

MARY

I'd love to find a thunderclap. Yours is in almost perfect condition.

RICHARD

I had a little luck and a lot of chiseling. This thunderclap was determined to stay in the rock. See? There's a lot more chiseling to do when we get home.

MARY

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

RICHARD

That's what our buyers call them. Would you argue with someone offering you money?

MARY

That would not be sensible.

RICHARD

“Mary, Mary, my sensible fairy, how does your garden grow?”

MARY

“With thunderclaps and snakey-stones and pretty fossils all in a row.”

RICHARD

Maybe it's a squid - from long ago. Every time I clean them, I think to myself, “Richard, that's a squid!”

MARY

But – squids have soft bodies. This is as hard as a horse's hoof. And squids have tentacles. Your thunderclap does not.

RICHARD

What a good eye you have! The thunderclap probably had tentacles. How else could it find food and eat? But if they were soft like the squid's, they dissolved long ago.

MARY

Does that mean that squids once had shells?

RICHARD

It's possible. We find so many fossils from the sea high up on the cliffs that I think it's possible that the sea came up to the top of the cliffs.

MARY

Oh Papa! That would flood the town!

RICHARD

Maybe there wasn't a town back then. Maybe everything was different – maybe the trees were grander and the bushes were fatter.

MARY

Were the trees green then?

RICHARD

Maybe – they were pink!

MARY

Now you're being a silly. It's a wonder that a living thing could change. Squids, thunderclaps ... once very different. How is that possible?

RICHARD

I don't have an answer - yet. That's why we search, Mary. You know what we are?

MARY

Explorers!

RICHARD

Seekers!

MARY

Pirates!

RICHARD

Pirates?

MARY

Because we seek treasure – buried in the seas. Only instead of gold, we look for fossils which are better.

RICHARD

I don't know. I wouldn't mind finding gold...

MARY

We find life.

RICHARD

But fossils aren't alive.

MARY

But they were! We are buccaneers with fossils as our booty!

RICHARD

Aye, aye, Matey!

(Thunder is heard.)

RICHARD (cont'd)

A real thunderclap. You better head back.

MARY

Not without you.

RICHARD

I'll only be a minute. I'll just retrieve my tools before they are washed 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 to you.

(Thunder is louder and closer.)

MARY

Papa!

RICHARD

I'll be right behind you. Now - quick! Like a bunny! Go!

(MARY runs off. RICHARD heads to the cliffs.
Rain. Darkness. We quickly go to black. Rain fades.
Quiet. We may hear a funeral hymn.)

SCENE 1 – February, 1811

AT RISE we are again below the cliffs. JOSEPH is seen staring at a large fossil head. (About four feet long, crocodile-like in appearance.)

It is embedded in a large rock. The details of the discovery are sketchy. JOSEPH has a hammer and chisel but is just staring at the gigantic head in wonder. We hear MARY who appears.

MARY

JOOOOO-SEPH! ANSWER ME! JOSEPH! Mama's going to skin your hide if she knew you were here.

JOSEPH

I know. I just wanted to visit ...

MARY

(Beat.) Papa?

JOSEPH

Yes. This was the last place he was strong ... remember?

MARY

Yes. (Beat.) Oh mercy me! What have you found?

JOSEPH

A dragon?

MARY

I'm in love!

JOSEPH

With a dragon head?

MARY

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

JOSEPH

Mary's in love with a dragon head!

MARY

Look into those eyes!

JOSEPH

Look at that large mouth. 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

Fooled you!

MARY

Almost fooled me. The scientist inside me knew better. He is amazing. I want to know everything about him – his world, his family/his – maybe it's a her – maybe/

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!* One of those big lizards!

MARY

A crocodile?

JOSEPH

Yes! Look.

MARY

It does look like the crocodile drawing in Papa's book. These fossils are clues to a big, grand mystery. And guess what we are?

Dragon finders!
JOSEPH

Try harder.
MARY

Crocodile hunters!
JOSEPH

Explorers – of the past.
MARY

Let's get Papa's book right now and look it up!
JOSEPH

First, we need to get the crocodile free from the rock.
MARY

We should use Papa's tools for this. You do still have them?
JOSEPH

I have everything. Except his hammer. Mama guards that. I even have the last thunderclap....
MARY

He was holding the thunderclap when we found him. He was protecting it.
JOSEPH

I remember. We shouldn't be here. We promised Mama we wouldn't come to these parts.
MARY

I was only going to stay a minute but this was waiting for me. I couldn't leave it!
JOSEPH

But it's not safe. I know! I'll have Papa protect us. I'm sure he can see us from heaven. I'm going to show Papa where we are. Remember when we would put our initials in the sand after a big find?
MARY

And then the sea washed it away. It washes everything away.
JOSEPH

I like the tradition.
MARY

(MARY draws a circle in the sand and puts her name and Joseph's initials inside it. The lights change. RICHARD appears above.)

MARY

Now, we must stop being lazy lay-about and chisel!

(JOSEPH goes at it with too much enthusiasm.)

MARY

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

JOSEPH

She's dead.

MARY

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

(They chisel.)

JOSEPH

Maybe Papa left this here. Maybe he's still walking the cliffs looking to help us.

MARY

I like that. Papa thought that a long time ago the ocean came up to the top of the cliffs! He said all of our fossils came from the sea.

JOSEPH

It's a sea-dragon! With such a large head – I wonder how gigantic the body was!

MARY

And if the head is here –

JOSEPH

Where is the body?

MARY

What did Papa say? "One step at a time. One breath at a time."

JOSEPH

This head could make us rich!

MARY

Such dreams! But *maybe* – it will go to a fancy museum and people will study it and learn from it. And I, Mary Anning, will be a famous scientist/

JOSEPH

/Now you're being a silly dreamer.

MARY

I dream every time I come down here.

JOSEPH

My dreams are about buying food and eating until my tummy aches.

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.)

JOSEPH (cont'd)

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! 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?” *May I see it? Please!*

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 wide-awake and moving in the wee hours – even as a babe!

HENRY

/Mrs. Anning! This is the most exciting thing to happen in Lyme Regis/

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?

(MRS. ANNING notices Philippa.)

Oh! Hello! And who are you?

HENRY

So sorry! I should have introduced you right away! Philippa Austen, this is Mrs. Anning, Mary’s mother. Philippa just moved here last week with her brother. We’re neighbors.

PHILIPPA

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

MRS. ANNING

The fossil-face? Is that what it’s called?

HENRY

/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. But it was kind of him to

MRS. ANNING

help the children bring the large fossil head home. I'm afraid Old John told a white lie. The head is only about one and a half meters long.

HENRY

Only! That's still huge. I would love to see it.

MRS. ANNING

Let's wait for Mary. She shouldn't be much longer. And how is your father, Henry?

HENRY

Same.

MRS. ANNING

And your mother?

HENRY

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 pleased to finally meet you. I've heard so much about your exciting work.

MARY

You mean my "muddy-nasty work that no respectable young girl should do?"

PHILIPPA

Yes, that work. It's exhilarating!

HENRY

Mary – are you ignoring me?

PHILIPPA

I think fossil hunting is a noble profession!

MARY

And for saying that - you are now a trusted friend.

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. It will help keep your belly full!

MARY

I'll have them cleaned up in no time.

HENRY

Mary! One quick peek?

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?

JOSEPH

I'll help you, Mama.

HENRY

Thank-you!

MARY

Come on, Henry. I'll show it to you. I shouldn't tease.

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

MRS. ANNING

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

JOSEPH

/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. 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

Cross my heart and hope to die –

MRS. ANNING

No! Not in my lifetime.

JOSEPH

And when I am done with my apprenticeship, I'll come home and fix everything in our home! I will make everything fancy!

(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

Not yet! It needs to be cleaned, catalogued, framed. I haven't even drawn its likeness!

PHILIPPA

Do you draw all of your fossils?

HENRY

Beautifully. And then she has the drawings engraved. Her drawings should be studied.

MARY

Thank-you for that. I like to keep a catalogue of our findings. Papa said it was important. 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

She wouldn't cost any money. She 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 under the sea.

MARY

We need to look for it! If you think the head will fetch a pretty price, imagine if I found the entire body! 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. I know you were there yesterday. I won't have you on – *or under* those soft cliffs again– they're 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?

MRS. ANNING

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.”

MRS. ANNING

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, Mama's right. We need to find you some boots. Let's see what I have in the house.

HENRY

While you try on boots, do you mind if I visit your fossil head? I would 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 it's teeth –

HENRY

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

MARY

Come on. Inspect our odd head. But please don't touch it! It's delicate.

HENRY

Aye, aye, Captain Mary!

(The children exit into the house as MRS. ANNING puts away the wares on 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." She is having a difficult time.

MARY

Why won't you come off?

(MARY scrapes harder. RICHARD appears. MARY never sees him or hears him. Maybe she is thinking about him. Maybe not. The lights change.)

RICHARD

Go gently. You don't want to slip.

(MARY scrapes softly.)

RICHARD

Be patient. One step at a time.

MARY and RICHARD

One breath at a time.

RICHARD

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

MARY

Sand from when the oceans came up to the cliffs. So much sand. It's as if the sand is in love with you and doesn't want to say good-bye.

RICHARD

Saying good-bye is hard.

(MARY scrapes harder.)

RICHARD (cont'd)

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

(MARY slows down.)

RICHARD (cont'd)

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

RICHARD (cont'd)

Brush it now. With care. Take care, my little fairy.

(RICHARD exits. The lights change. MRS. ANNING enters.)

MRS. ANNING

How are things with your dragon-head?

MARY

Algae! Sand! Broken sea shells! I'll never get it off.

MRS. ANNING

It's best to stop then. Start again tomorrow when you're refreshed.

MARY

It's so much harder now with Papa gone.

MRS. ANNING

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

MARY

I just don't remember such – (she scrapes) stubborn – (she scrapes harder) – sand! (Huge scrape.)

MRS. ANNING

Would you like the sand to just fall off with a simple brushing and have your dragon head presented to you all wrapped up nice and tidy?

MARY

That would be very nice, thank you.

MRS. ANNING

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.

MRS. ANNING

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

MARY

That won't get the work done.

MRS. ANNING

But it will take away your black mood.

(MRS. ANNING exits. MARY starts brushing harder then stops and gathers her skull and follows. We go to blackout.)

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 doing a dance. She looks a bit silly. 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. After the Viking King, Ragnar. You know the stories! I decided our dragon is a "she" so I christened her "Ragnara."

HENRY

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

JOSEPH

We found the head on the northern cliffs. But/

MARY

/North it is!

JOSEPH

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

MARY

Did not! I merely said that I knew why she didn't want me there.

JOSEPH

You're twisting words.

MARY

In an honest way! Fine! We'll start here and make our way north. The head and the body could have gotten separated. *Philippa!* Whatever are you doing?

PHILIPPA

I'm using my powers of persuasion to have the sea bring the skeleton to me! Give me a task! I love these boots – I can walk anywhere! Even in the Mud! What do we do?

HENRY

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

PHILIPPA

Look! *I'm dirty!* How wonderful! What's next?

HENRY

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

PHILIPPA

I can do that! What will all of 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 died a few weeks later.

PHILIPPA

I am sorry. Are we safe down here?

MARY

As long as there's no rain. Let's start you off with something small. At high tide, the sea deposits rocks. Sometimes the fossils are stuck to them. Why don't you search the shoreline for rocks?

PHILIPPA

Any particular type of rock?

MARY

You're looking for a rock that has something hard stuck to them. That doesn't look like it belongs.

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

PHILIPPA

Oh look! Here's something stuck to a rock. Is it a fossil, Mary? *Is it?*

MARY

No. Sorry. It's a seashell.

PHILIPPA

How about this one? Never mind. It looks like a seashell.

MARY

But it's pretty. I remember bringing my father every seashell I found. They'd catch the light and I'd think, "*It's a fossil.*" It took some time for me to learn the difference. Keep searching. You'll find one.

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 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 will you. I never saw anyone with such a keen eye for fossils as you.

MARY

They say I find fossils because I was struck by lightening as a babe and now I am strange. Is that true? Am I strange?

MRS. ANNING

Some people have a hard time believing that girls know as much as boys. You do have the talent. Your father thought so.

MARY

I feel like the past is a puzzle. These 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 talking as if you were “touched!”

MARY

I am - touched by the past. And since I can’t go to 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

You may have to wait for a long time for your answers. We don’t know how your dragon-head came to be here. 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 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. But her father had to do it.” 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 gossip about my child! You are only twelve!

MARY

I love you, Mama.

MRS. ANNING

And I, you. Forever.

MARY

Look out there. The clouds are gone.

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 becoming 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. No wonder he fell asleep easily. (Beat.) I wish he was here.

MRS. ANNING

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. Sometimes you'd stumble in the sand and I'd grab you and keep 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 lullaby.

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.

MRS. ANNING (cont'd)

Sleep, pretty Mary, do not cry,
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 scraping. A storm is coming.

PHILIPPA

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

MARY

Two weeks of rain. It certainly has made the cliffs soft. We must be extra careful.

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 open because of the danger. It is thrilling!

MARY

You need to stop loving the dangerous part of it!

PHILIPPA

What I love is being outside in the air. I finally feel like I'm alive.

MARY

Weren't you alive in London?

PHILIPPA

London is stuffy – especially for a girl. So far my life has been about getting into stuffy clothes, sitting in stuffy rooms on stuffy chairs, being still and quiet like I was stuffed! That's why I like it better here. Meeting you and learning this work has a purpose – a reason for being. That's been missing in my life.

MARY

Still, it would be nice to live the life of an aristocrat and have a purpose.

PHILIPPA

True. But if you have to be poor, it's better being poor in Lyme Regis where you have the ocean and cliffs for comfort. (Beat as they work.) It's quiet with just the two of us. I miss Henry and Joseph.

MARY

With Joseph working and Henry in school, I can work 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. (Beat.) I miss them, too.

PHILIPPA

Mary! Come here right away!

MARY

What's wrong?

PHILIPPA

Is this a fossil?

MARY

Sorry, no.

PHILIPPA

But it's not a seashell – look – it's stuck to the rock as if it's been there for a long time.

MARY

It has. And it's a rock – stuck to a rock. It happens.

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. 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! I must study. Do you have books?

MARY

Only one from Papa. I learned at my father's knee. Henry has quite a lot and he would probably lend you some. He has one with detailed drawings of shells – it was very helpful to me. 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. A collector called it an ammonite. But we just call them snake-stones. People think they are snakes with shells. Papa thought they were fish.

PHILIPPA

It’s – a fossil?

MARY

It’s a fossil!

PHILIPPA

I found a fossil! *I found a fossil! Philippa Austen is a fossil finder!* What do I do next?

MARY

Put it into your sack and later I will show you how to clean it so it sparkles like new.

PHILIPPA

This is so amazing! That I could ... I should Here. Take it.

MARY

I don’t think so! You found it!

PHILIPPA

But – you can sell it!

MARY

As can you.

PHILIPPA

I never would have found it without you. You show me where to look. How to look. You have given me a new way to life my life. I am very grateful.

MARY

Helping you helps me stay on task.

PHILIPPA

And now I have a fossil!

MARY

The first of many more discoveries!

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 an ancient 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.

PHILIPPA

I wonder if Ragnara was a sea monster. Maybe there still are sea monsters out there. It's a mystery.

MARY

A mystery we are trying to solve.

PHILIPPA

Maybe we are on the brink of something.

(Rumblings of thunder.)

MARY

The brink of a storm!

PHILIPPA

We should go.

MARY

In a minute. I think I found something.

(There is the sound of a rock falling.)

PHILIPPA

What was that? Mary!

MARY

Wait!

(Thunder!)

PHILIPPA

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

MARY

No! There's something/

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!

PHILIPPA

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

(Thunder)

MARY

I need one more second - to see – two more seconds! *If this is it – If this is it, I won't be "Almost Mary" anymore!*

PHILIPPA

-/what good will it do you if you're drowned! We're going.

MARY

Go without me!

(Lights change. RICHARD appears above them.)

RICHARD

Don't be a fool, Mary! You can't find a fossil if you're dead!

PHILIPPA

We are leaving!

RICHARD

Go!

(Lightening illuminates MARY.
PHILIPPA grabs MARY. THEY run.
Waves crash. Blackout. Rain pounds.)

SCENE 7, the next morning

Rain sounds die down. The sounds of gulls may be heard. It is the next morning. MARY is by her table drawing her fossil head.

MRS. ANNING

What are you doing outside?

MARY

I needed air.

MRS. ANNING

You came home soaked and freezing yesterday. You need to stay warm.

MARY

How's Philippa?

MRS. ANNING

A bit feverish. But she has the sense to stay inside.

MARY

I can't breathe inside!

MRS. ANNING

You are to stay inside until I say you may come out. And you are to stay away from the cliffs until the rainy season ends. I had ten children. Ten. Eight gone. I can't suffer any more losses. No more. Do you understand?

MARY

But - Ragnara – I may have found her – she'll be washed away/

MRS. ANNING

/Go sit by the fire. I'll bring your tools inside. (Beat.) Oh. Your Papa's tools.

MARY

Yes. Everything but the hammer.

MRS. ANNING

I'm bringing everything in. If you must work, you will work inside.

(MRS. ANNING gathers the drawing and tools and exits. MARY holds on to Ragnara. RICHARD appears.)

RICHARD
Listen to your, Mother. Go inside.

(MARY cradles RAGNARA.)

RICHARD (cont'd)
You can't comb the cliffs if you are ill.

(MARY looks out for a moment, makes a decision
and exits.)

LIGHTS DIM TO BLACK

BLACKOUT

SCENE 8, a few weeks later

MARY is sitting outside drawing her fossils.
HENRY enters carrying a picture and some books
that are hidden in a satchel.

HENRY
Good Morning, Mary!

MARY
Henry!

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 is Mary.

HENRY
Who is being contrary. But I have something to fix all that. What do you think?

(HENRY hands MARY his drawing.)

HENRY (cont'd)

It's your Ragnara .

MARY

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

HENRY

It's an – imagining. An artist rendering.

MARY

Everything's so - green!

HENRY

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

MARY

I think her jaw is too small. Ragnara 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. Just an observation. I love it. Although you could alter the setting of the jaw to make it more scientifically accurate.

HENRY

... I could ...

MARY

I'm sorry. You started my mind racing. It's perfect. Truly. (Beat.) How's school?

HENRY

I had to buy quite a lot of books for my classes. And Father bought me three new books not realizing ... he already had two of those books at home!

MARY

How – wonderful – you have a spare.

HENRY

Two spares. I did say to myself, "Mary might like these."

MARY

What?

HENRY

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 it's a starting point.

MARY

They're mine!

HENRY

Yes.

MARY

They're mine!

HENRY

That's what I'm trying to tell you.

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. Look at all the trees and bushes. That's where I got the idea for my painting. Of course the rendering may not be "accurate" – but what do you think?

MARY

This is so kind. Two books! Mary Anning has two books! I will read them and write down questions. And I will copy the drawings to learn how to make mine more detailed. What treasures you have given me! I can never repay you.

HENRY

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

MARY

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

HENRY

You're not unschooled. You're "self-educated."

MARY

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

(MARY sits and reads.)

HENRY

And so it starts! You're already replacing me with one of the books!

MARY

If I can't be on the cliffs, I want to be in the books.

HENRY

I'll leave so you can have one more day of rest to get stronger and bully me.

MARY

I don't know how much resting I'll be doing. My heart beats fast – just to hold these.

HENRY

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

MARY

And I'm allowed to be back on the cliffs tomorrow. You are coming, aren't you? Mama will only let me go to the cliffs in a crowd. Philippa is coming. And Joseph is home for the day.

HENRY

I wouldn't miss it. Until tomorrow.

MARY

Tomorrow.

(HENRY exits as MARY scrolls through a book.)

Thank-you. Thank-you so much.

(The lights fade to black.)

SCENE 9 A few hours later

MARY is still reading. PHILIPPA enters.

PHILIPPA

Mary! You're looking right as rain. Perhaps I shouldn't mention rain. Right as - what?

MARY

Day! Although in England most days are rainy ones. You're looking well. Ready to the comb the cliffs?

PHILIPPA

I am. And/

MARY

/Look! I have a book. Two books actually! And take a look at that drawing – it's a leopard – every spot is so defined, so intricate. I have a lot to learn.

PHILIPPA

It's wonderful. I'd love to read them when you're done. I've come because/

MARY

And the trees – they even have the lines in every leaf /

PHILIPPA

Mary! Look up. I've come to ask you something.

MARY

Of course.

PHILIPPA

Mary! Pay attention.

(MARY closes the book.)

MARY

I'm sorry. What may I do for you?

PHILIPPA

Remember when I found my first fossil and you said you would teach me how to clean it? Will you? Can you?

MARY

Now?

PHILIPPA

If it's not too inconvenient. Look! Old John found me some tools – a chisel, a scraper and a brush. I've been soaking them forever. But it doesn't exactly sparkle.

MARY

So – that's perfect that you gave it a long soak. Now you will scrape a bit. Like so. Then brush, scrape, brush, scrape, brush. When the scraping gets too hard, soak it again. Be patient. It takes days.

PHILIPPA

Do I scrape like I'm peeling potatoes? Or dig in a bit as if I am getting the dirt out of the potatoes.

MARY

Let me see. I think that's just some algae that's attached. You might be able to flip it out—no I'm wrong. It could break. Sometimes you need to feel the process. Scrape here.

(PHILIPPA does so.)

See how the small pieces fall off?

PHILIPPA

But the chunk in the middle won't budge.

MARY

One step at a time. Scrape ten times. No! Five. It's too delicate for ten. Now brush it away. Good. Repeat a few times. Then soak it over night and continue the process tomorrow.

PHILIPPA

Old John said something about using a vinegar rinse. He says it speeds up the process.

MARY

But the vinegar rinse will eat away at your fossil. Yes, it will be clean but your fossil will have holes.

PHILIPPA

Oh! No holes for my fossil! I shall observe the "scrape, brush, soak" rule. This isn't hard at all.

MARY

A bit tedious but not difficult. The hardest part is figuring out what needs to be chiseled and what you should only scrape. I have broken a few fossils in my time.

PHILIPPA

I shall run home now and give it a good soak and tomorrow will scrape again! I'm getting fond of my little snakestone. Wouldn't want to hurt it.

MARY

It's the first of many! Remember we're fossil hunting tomorrow!

PHILIPPA

At the same place?

MARY

Yes.

PHILIPPA

Mary ... how do you know? ... I mean ... what if? ...never mind.

MARY
What if I never find Ragnara?

PHILIPPA
How do you know when to stop?

MARY
You don't.

PHILIPPA
Stop?

MARY
Know. You don't know when to stop. Maybe I'm searching for something that never was there. (Beat.) That thought haunts me.

PHILIPPA
It's still important to do the work, right?

MARY
I don't know what else to do.

PHILIPPA
An honest answer. Enjoy your books.

MARY
Philippa, about the books ... they're very detailed – which I love – but there are passages that –

PHILIPPA
Are confusing?

MARY
Yes. I read, of course, but some things are new to me. Henry said he would answer any questions but he goes back to school soon and/

PHILIPPA
/Ask away! What I don't know we can discover together!

MARY
Thank-you!

PHILIPPA
Here's to us finding Ragnara's hiding place! Till tomorrow!

(They hug and PHILIPPA exits. MARY settles down to read but can't concentrate. RICHARD enters.)

MARY

Am I a fool? Searching for something that isn't there.

RICHARD

Where was the head? Think, Mary. Remember where you found the head.

(MARY closes the book.)

RICHARD (cont'd)

Yes, it's possible that the head and body are miles apart. But it's more probable that they are close. Focus on where you should be. Don't let the doubts cripple you. Trust what you know.

RICHARD and MARY

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

MARY (thinking out loud – not to RICHARD)

It could be there and I'm not seeing it. Or it could be gone. I may never know.

RICHARD

If it's there, you will see it. You're uncanny in how you can spot the difference between bone and rock. And if you can't see it, use your fingers. You have the touch. You can feel what is rock and what is bone. Remember that 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 its pores. Trust your eyes. Trust your fingers. Trust your instincts.

(RICHARD exits.)

MARY

I'm almost there. Almost, Mary. You're almost there.

(Lights fade to black.)

SCENE 10 The next day

Gulls are heard. AT RISE we are beneath the cliffs. It is early March. HENRY, PHILIPPA, JOSEPH and MARY enter.

ALL

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

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

MARY

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

ALL

Hey! Hey! And never let her go!

MARY

I'm already suspicious that I won't get any work done with the lot of you here. I must listen to the sea. Listen! The waves are singing to me –

They call out! "Come hither, Mary!" Come close! I am waiting. Wait-ing..."

HENRY

Mary – have you gone soft in the brain?

MARY

That's always a possibility. Now that we're here, we must work. Where were we before the rains came?

PHILIPPA

Somewhere around here. It's starting to all look alike.

MARY

There are so many new mounds of mud. Philippa, can you comb the mound by the rock pool? And Henry – that one to the left is also new. Would you kindly work there? Joseph, I need you to scrape down here. Now, I must find the exact spot where I thought I was making my big discovery!

(MARY works. PHILIPPA and HENRY stay by the shoreline. PHILIPPA holds up a shell.)

PHILIPPA

Pretty, isn't it? I find a lot of worthless shells – but I do like their prettiness.

HENRY

You've learned a lot.

PHILIPPA

That's the idea. Look. The rock pools are empty. There's little to do here. We should move on.

HENRY

Mary, should we comb the beach further down?

MARY

No! This is where I felt something. This is where I need to be!

(HENRY puts a stick in the ground. MARY continues to scrape.)

HENRY

If we can't fossil hunt here – we can – loggits! Take your shells.

PHILIPPA

What?

HENRY

It's a game. Come here.

(HENRY draws a line in the sand.)

HENRY

Now – from here we try and throw the shells as close to the stick as possible. -without knocking the stick down. The person who has the shell closest to the stick is the winner.

PHILIPPA

And what does the winner win?

HENRY

The shells!

PHILIPPA

I'm in!

JOSEPH

Me, too!

(JOSEPH joins them. THEY play for a moment.)

JOSEPH

Hey! You knocked my shell away!

HENRY
That's the idea!

PHILIPPA
Watch me take revenge on him!

HENRY
Missed me! You missed me!

JOSEPH
Take that!

HENRY
Oh! Didn't miss me.

MARY
You lazy-lay-about! Come here!

HENRY
Uh oh. The Captain caught us playing.

MARY
Can you feel this bump? Through the shale? Feel how hard it is! And thin!

HENRY
Like – a bone.

MARY
Exactly. Can this be it?

PHILIPPA
What do we do? Dig? Hammer?

JOSEPH
Scrape!

MARY
If this is it, we don't want to destroy it!

PHILIPPA
This is so exciting!

MARY
We don't know – but yes – it is. It could be. It could almost be.

(There's another moment of scraping. MARY abruptly stops and turns away.)

HENRY

Mary? Do you want us to stop?

MARY

Yes. It's nothing. Look.

HENRY

A tree root.

MARY

How silly am I? Getting all worked up over a tree root! Ragnara isn't here! The fossil head is a fluke! It just – landed here. There's nothing more to be found.

HENRY

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

MARY

Or anywhere. I'm nothing but a curio collector: snake-stones, devil's fingers. Nothing of import. Just amusements for rich people. Mary Anning, Fossil Wisher!

HENRY

Is it so easy to give up?

MARY

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

HENRY

You find her.

MARY

Yes.

HENRY

And your dream didn't come true.

MARY

No.

HENRY

But you're a scientist, correct?

MARY

... almost.

HENRY

So do what scientists do. You failed here. Only here. 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! We haven't been near the Blue Lias cliffs all year. Isn't that where you found the head?

JOSEPH

Yes – but it's dangerous. And we promised to stay away.

HENRY

We'll search nearby. Safely in teams. Come on, Mary!

MARY

I'm done for the day.

HENRY

Stay here, then. Of course if I make the discovery – then Ragnar's mine ...

MARY

What?

HENRY

If I find her – she belongs to me! She's mine!

(HENRY runs off. PHILIPPA and JOSEPH follow. MARY hesitates. Lights change. RICHARD appears.)

RICHARD

I thought of giving up. Many times. It was cold and windy. My knees ached. There were days when I brought home nothing.

(MARY kicks the sand. Throws some rocks. And eventually stays still and thinks.)

You and Joseph kept me going. Your sweetness even if the day brought nothing. And then your joy when the days were good.

RICHARD (cont'd)

I should not go against your mother's wishes, but I would reconsider the Blue Lias cliffs. It's where the head was found after all. And yes, the sea likely washed it to shore and there may be no body but it's a sound idea. I would of course, stay on the beach and not on top of the cliffs.

And Mary, you may never find the rest of Ragnara. But just think of what you will discover along the way.

(That thought resonates and MARY runs off to join her friends. RICHARD watches as the lights fade to black.)

(BLACKOUT.)