

When Mary Anning was a baby she was struck by lightning. It split a huge elm tree and threw Mary right out of her nurse's arms.

Her father was in his carpenter's shop when he heard the terrible news. He dropped his hammer and ran through the stormy streets of Lyme Regis. Gently, he lifted the limp body of his little daughter and his tears flowed like rain.

But then, an extraordinary thing happened... Mary Anning slowly opened her eyes. She reached out a tiny hand and touched the amazed face of her father. And the little girl began to smile.

It was then her father realised - Mary Anning was no ordinary girl.



The years rolled by like waves. Mary grew into a clever girl. "A mind as quick as lightning!" her mother teased.

Mary had few friends, except her father, whom she adored. Like everyone else in the town, she called him "Pepper" because of his speckled beard.

One Saturday, Pepper closed his workshop early. He took Mary down to the cliffs by the crashing sea. She held tightly to his hand because she knew how dangerous it could be. The clay cliffs at Lyme Regis are soft as melting chocolate. Mary had sometimes seen huge slabs of land slipping and tumbling to the beach below.

Pepper had stories of whole fields on the cliff tops which had disappeared beneath the feet of grazing cattle. He knew a place, he said, where half a farmhouse sat balanced on the cliff edge. He and his quarrymen friends had peered over and seen the remains of the kitchen and even the garden gate, smashed to splinters on the rocks below.





When they came to the place called Black Ven, Pepper reached into his pocket and, to Mary's surprise, took out his best steel hammer. He knelt beside a large rock of dried clay and began carefully tapping away.

"What are you looking for?" asked Mary, dancing about on the sand.

"Just be patient," laughed Pepper.

He worked as carefully as if he were making a fine piece of furniture. Mary bent closer. There was something hidden there! Right inside the rock!

At last Pepper pulled it free and handed the thing to Mary.

"It... it's TREASURE!" she gasped.

"It's what we call a little Snakestone," smiled Pepper. "Just a Curiosity. A present for you, Mary girl."

It was the most beautiful thing Mary had ever seen. Back in the workshop, Pepper polished the Snakestone and hung it on a string for Mary - like a perfect necklace.



That night Mary couldn't sleep. Her head swirled with thoughts like the twisting golden stone. "The cliffs are full of treasure," she whispered over and over again.

