



Lightning Mary

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Andersen Press (Sep 1, 2020)

Softcover \$9.99 (272pp)

978-1-78344-829-6

Lightning Mary is a rewarding novelization of how Mary Anning became one of the first people to discover dinosaurs.

In 1810, Mary, an eleven-year-old girl, made a world-changing discovery on a muddy English beach. Here, Mary bursts with life and personality: she isn't interested in looking pretty or keeping her stockings clean, and storms don't keep her from searching beaches for "curiosities and treasures," like tiny shells and fossils that stir her fierce curiosity.

Solitary by nature, Mary draws the interest of a lonely local boy. Mary has never had a friend of her own, and watching sensitive, well-brought up Henry rub away some of Mary's rough spots is one of the book's pleasures. Meanwhile, her mother, who is overburdened with children, is everything that Mary is sure that she doesn't want to be, while conversations between Mary and her father reflect their close relationship; he teaches her how to spot a possible treasure hidden in a dried clod of mud, and how to use a small silver hammer to tap the mud away without damage.

Full, imaginative writing opens up Mary's world, which is too small to satisfy her thirst for knowledge. In her era, there's no theory of evolution and scant awareness of Earth's history. The idea that giant beasts once roamed the land is considered mere folklore. All that Mary wonders about, and the information that she craves, is locked away in the future. But Mary's curiosity is not to be denied. Her discovery of a boulder-sized skull makes waves, both for Mary and in the world that she lives in.

Lightning Mary covers one year of Mary Anning's life, and is an appealing introduction to her fascinating story.

SUSAN WAGGONER (September / October 2020)

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