

DARWIN'S DIARIES

'The present is the key to the past.'

Charles Lyell
(*The Principles of Geology*)

The following play is dynamic; jumping through stages of a lifetime one after another. Therefore, the stage transforms often; and the combination of deliberate staging and music is necessary to communicate each new space as it appears.

1. A Question of Creation

Blackout.

A bold strong voice exclaims in the dark -

Father Samuel In the beginning there was darkness.
And in the darkness the spirit of God said –
'Let there be light!'

And God saw that it was good.
He called the light Day and the darkness Night.

On the second day, God said –
'Let there be a Sky to hold the Heavens above.'

On the third day, God said –
'Let there be Lands and Seas and call this place the Earth'

On the fourth day, God said –
'In the Heavens above, let there always be Light.
Let the Sun rule the Day and the Moon watch the Night.'

On the fifth day, God said –
'Let the seas fill with Fish and the skies swarm with Birds.'

On the sixth day, God said -
'Let the land bring forth all other living creature.'

Father S. On the sixth day, the Lord God looked around at all He had created and He saw that it was good.

God There's just one thing missing.

God mimes with his hand, as **Charles** (playing **Adam**) drags himself up from the ground. He uncurls his body, heavy and slow, like a snail rising from its shell.

Father S. God formed man from the dust of the ground. And breathed into his nostrils the breath of life –

Adam inhales the first breath of humankind -

Father S. And the Lord God was very proud of his creation. He created for the man a beautiful garden in Eden, and told him –

God Take care of the garden, and everything in it.

God You may eat from every tree in this garden, but you must never eat from this tree.

God presents the tree to **Adam**.

God This is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And if you eat from this tree, you will certainly die

God Now go. Be fruitful and multiply, fill the Earth and control it, Have dominion over the Fish of the Sea, the Birds of the Sky, Every living thing that moves. Every plant, every Beast, Everything that has the breath of Life, I have given to you.'

Adam and Eve eat the fruit.

Father S. He banished them from the garden of Eden and cursed them, never to return.

2. A Question of Death

The light returns on a classroom. Represented by a couple of desks, chairs and a chalkboard. A half-asleep teenager is slouched over his desk, muttering in his dreams –

1. what are you doing here/nice to see you
2. why are you sleeping in class / I had this dream / what does it mean / ..
3. I have a present for you

Doctor Munro:

4. Girls are not supposed to be here

Doctor Munro enters.

Charles What are you doing here?

Emma Surprise! I am with my family to do some sight-seeing

Charles Oh, well, it's lovely to see you, I didn't expect to see you here in Edinburgh

Awkward handshake.

Emma Are you alright? Why are you sleeping in class? You look pale.

Charles I've been having strange dreams lately.

Emma About what?

Charles I keep thinking I am in the church, I am a little kid, I was Adam, you were naked, I mean, you were Eve, there was a priest... What do you think this means?

Explanation of the dream

Giving the present

Emma Relax, I'm just here with the family to do some sightseeing. Besides, I promised your father I'd give you something.

Emma *hands Charles a parcel. He unwraps it, and holds up a scary-looking pair of scissors.*

Emma He told me that your practical exam is next week.

Charles *reads the card attached to the gift.*

Charles *(reading)* Dear Charles, these surgical scissors have been loyal to me over the years. A best friend in many situations.

Emma Its like he's describing a dog.

Charles *(reading)* They cut through a man's skin like a hot knife through butter. Use them well. With all my love, Dad.

The shrill grating voice of Professor Munro calls from outside the classroom.

Munro Students I'll be right in for the class, Nurse...

Charles Emma, you have to go. Girls aren't meant to be here. If they catch you, it will be my neck on the line.

Emma Charming – I come all the way to Edinburgh to say hello and this is your reaction?

Charles The school makes the rules, not me.

Charles *(standing)* You better go.

Professor Munro enters.

Munro Darwin, nice to see you've joined us. We missed you last week. What's your excuse this time? Hunting beetles again?

Charles I don't hunt beetles. I collect them.

Munro That's the same thing, isn't it?

Charles I don't kill them for the sake of a collection. I just take the dead ones that I find.

Munro And what do you do with these dead bodies?

Charles Nothing. I just look at them, study them.

Munro You *look* at them?

You're training to be a doctor, young man – you shouldn't just look at them have cut them into pieces so you can discover how those pieces work. (*He sees the scissors*) Well, at least you came prepared today, prepared for DEATH, as it is today's topic. What are you doing over there?

Charles Nothing, I just...

Munro Take your seat

D. E. A. T. H – Death! D stands for Dissection: to cut open a body.

So that we can perform E.

Examination: to inspect and observe carefully.

Then we have A –

Amputation: to remove a body part from the body.

And T-

Charles Transfusion?

Munro Exactly. Transfusion: to transfer blood from one body into another body.

And all of this, in the name of H-

Charles Hiding. Sorry, healing.

Munro Exactly. Because, first and foremost, we are healers. Here to help the sick, to cure them, and where possible to prevent this.

Where are you going? And who are you?

Emma?

The volunteer for today?

Munro It is no accident that this board spells death.

It is a reminder of the relationship doctors and surgeons must have with death if they hope to be successful. Many of your patients will die and there will be nothing you can do. You must learn to accept this. Death is both our enemy and our friend; whilst we work to stop it, just remember that without it, we'd all be out of a job!

Though, I imagine you wouldn't have the stomach for dissection. Do not think I didn't hear about last week, Darwin. You went to the hospital to watch the surgery and ran out before they could finish!

Charles They were operating on a child.

Munro Just think what your father must have thought. If you ever want to be like him, you're going to have to wear a tougher skin.

Munro *returns his attention to the board, tapping at the 'A' for –*

Munro Amputation. That's what we're talking about today. Amputation is an often-necessary procedure. I always like to remind my patients that there's a reason we say a trip to the doctors will

cost you an arm and a leg!

Today, we are going to go through the process of amputation. Let us imagine we have a patient. Let's call our patient Lucky. Lucky has developed a nasty infection in his arm. The only solution is to completely chop the arm off. What equipment are we going to need?

Charles a scalpel?

Munro Yes, our scalpels, then?

Charles Knives?

Munro Yes. What else?

Charles Alcohol.

Munro Why?

Charles To give the patient courage.

Munro Yes – Lucky will feel everything as we remove his arm. There is no magic medicine to stop such pain. Get him as drunk as possible.

And Darwin, what about you? Any ideas as to what else we might need?

Darwin An apron.

Munro That's obvious. Can you be a bit more specific?

Darwin A *clean* apron?

Munro Clean? Ha – don't be absurd! The mark of a good surgeon is a *bloody* apron. Hasn't your father told you this?

Darwin My father is a physician; he doesn't perform surgeries.

Munro Listen closely, boys. Wear your blood-soaked aprons as badges of honour. The crustier and redder your apron is, with blood old and new, the better a surgeon you are.

Now, time to prepare Lucky for his operation. How do we do this?

DARWIN We lay Lucky on the operating table and warn him to keep very still. Because if he moves, even just a little, he will ruin the operation and die.

MUNRO Lovely.

DARWIN Step number two – we strap him down tight. This is mostly to stop him from losing too much blood, but it also helps to stop him from running away.

MUNRO Lucky will be terrified. And I would like to add as most of your patients will be too poor to pay for their surgery, the operation will take place in full view of the paying public; so it's common that patients experience some 'stage fright.'

And what's next?

DARWIN We make the first cut. We slice around the bone in a circular motion, cutting through the flesh and muscles.

Munro Make sure you close... cover your eyes and close your mouth. Lucky will be spraying blood everywhere by this point.

Then we make the second cut on the other side of the arm.
This step is known as the turn of the master.
Because it must be done as fast as possible.
Yes, the faster the better. But be careful to pay close attention. In my early days, I once chopped off a leg in exactly two and half minutes. An incredible time. The only problem was that I'd also accidentally chopped off one of the poor chap's testicles!

Charles *gags. Munro laughs a little too hard; Liston joins him.*
Charles *can't handle it: he escapes the classroom at once.*

A Question of Birth

We are transported to a new location; (possibly with a musical interlude through the talented Mr. Gobbo.)

Professor. Grant *squats by the riverside, looking over the rock-pools, with a stick he pokes and inspects the water.*

He is searching for sea-sponges.

Charles *enters.*

Charles I'm pathetic; only the mention of blood and I go weak at the knees.

Grant You're not pathetic, Charles. You can't help your parents.

Charles What does that mean?

Grant It means that despite your father's reputation as an incredible doctor - he *also* hates the sight of blood.

Charles How did you know that?

Grant Let me tell you something about the scientific community. When we get together, we're no better than a group of gossiping teenage girls.

Charles You think my father gave me the fear of blood?

Grant Maybe so. It's not a coincidence that children resemble their parents.

Grant *raises his stick; from the rockpool, he has fished out a pink sea-sponge.*

Grant Do you know what this is?

Charles A sea-sponge.

Grant Yes. But it is much more than that. It is my belief that this sponge is the parent of all other living beings.

Charles *squats by Grant to inspect the animal; both fascinated and surprised at Grant's bold statement.*

Charles (*chuckles*) I hope you're not trying to tell me that my grandfather was a sea-sponge, Professor Grant.

Grant Of course not. Your grandfather, Erasmus, was infinitely more interesting than a sponge.

Charles That's a relief.

Grant Erasmus was one of the most intelligent men I knew. A man ahead of his time. He taught me many things. The most important of which was to question *everything*.

Beat.

Charles Even God himself.

Grant Especially God. Answer me this – when God created the animals, what do you think was going through his head when he created this?

Grant *presents the sponge at the end of the stick once again.*

Charles I have no idea.

Grant He creates the ant. A creature that can lift objects as heavy as fifty times its own body weight. He creates the chameleon, a creature that can change the colour of its own skin.

And then he creates the sponge. A creature that remains stuck in the same spot for its entire life, feeding itself by sucking in water just to pump it out again.

Was God having a bad day? Was he feeling lazy or had he run out of ideas?

Charles (*laughs*) Maybe he was tired.

Grant Maybe. Or maybe the sponge was the starting point. Maybe the sponge deserves more credit.

For it is my belief, that despite its faceless appearance and unremarkable existence, the sponge was the key step between simple organisms like bacteria and complex organisms like snakes and monkeys and ... well, us.

Charles You're saying that the sponge grew into humans and all animals?

Grant Kind of.

Charles That's quite a thing to say.

Grant I'm aware some of the world might think me mad to say so.

However, the world has thought of me as mad before. When I told them that the sponge was not a plant, but an animal; they laughed at me. Yet, I proved them wrong.

I have no doubt that they will laugh again. But give it time, and maybe someone just prove them wrong *again*.

Charles It is a dangerous idea.

Grant All the best ideas are dangerous ideas.

Charles How could you even prove something like that?

Grant I don't know if I ever could. I don't have a time machine. All I have is the talent of my brain

and the power of observation. Make no mistake, I am an expert on creatures like this. I have studied them for years. This idea is not a random one.

Charles Still, random or not – does it not sound strange to you?

Grant Stranger than the idea that we were all created by an invisible man in the clouds?

Listen to me Charles. We have been fed fairy tales since we were children, so that we can sleep at night comfortably thinking that we are the masters of this Earth.

But what if we are not? What if we are just an animal like any other animal?

Grant *takes out a book and hands it to Charles.*

Charles What is this?

Grant It is your grandfather's book, Charles.

Charles *(reading)* Zoonomia.

Grant *places a hand on his shoulder.*

Grant The people who change the world are the ones who dare to question it.

Do as your grandfather taught me; make judgments on the evidence that you can see and observe, and not on these stories the Church brainwashes us with since day one -

Charles I am not brainwashed.

Grant Then that's a good start.

Charles But I see nothing that says God doesn't exist.
I also see nothing that say He does.
And I definitely don't see anything that says how we all grew up from sponges.

Grant Then look a little closer.

The world is always changing. The animal kingdom, human beings, societies, cultures, all of it. And as we change, we grow – and get rid of everything that we no longer need; including the church.

Charles You should be careful, sir. You don't want to be found guilty of blasphemy.

Grant I won't say anything if you don't say anything.
I should get back to class.
Make sure you read that book.

Charles *nods, goes to make his exit.*

Grant And Charles –

Charles Yes?

Grant You have a choice. You can choose to be a sponge, stick to the same spot with the rest of the world, breathing in and out the same ideas. Or you can choose to remove yourself from your sticking

spot, find new territory ... and *grow*.

Charles *exits*.

Grant *places the sponge inside his specimen box, exits*.

As he leaves, Emma enters; thumbing through the pages of the book.

Charles *dogs her heels; anxious*.

The space transforms into the Darwin family home.

Emma If I didn't know better, I would say that your grandfather was crazy.

Charles Crazy? Emma, I know the man was a little eccentric but -

Emma Charley, what he's saying here ... it's a stretch of the imagination to say the least.

(reading) 'God has created a certain similarity on the features of nature, that demonstrates to us, that we are one family of one parent.'

What does that mean?

Charles He is saying that despite our differences, everything in this world is related. We are all part of the same family.

Emma So, the man and the worm, the whale and the hummingbird, we are all brothers and sisters? All you have to do is use your eyes to see that it is complete nonsense.

Charles He is not saying a worm is *literally* my brother – but merely suggesting that maybe, possibly, a long long time ago, we could have all been born from one parent.

Emma We *were* all born from one parent. His name is God.

Charles I'm not denying the existence of God, Emma. I'm just curious as to how –

Emma Where are *you* going with all of this?

Charles What?

Emma You miss your classes and neglect your studies to bury yourself in books that talk about great explosions that started all life and how we are all in fact animals. Do you ever ask yourself why?

Charles Why what?

Emma Why do you go to medical school if you really have no interest in it at all?

Charles My father believes that –

Emma It doesn't matter what your father believes. You're not living his life. You're living your own. Everyone has the right to find the correct path for their soul. And your soul is troubled, Charley, because maybe you're not following the correct path at all.

Charles What would you have me do?

Emma You have always asked the question – what does it all mean? What is God's great plan?

If you're so interested in God, then why don't you bloody well go and study him?

Charles It's not that simple.

Emma It *is* that simple. You are not made to be a doctor. You are not made to study death. You are made to study life.

Emma *exits.*

LIFE

Celebratory music begins transports us further through time.

A sign perhaps reads 'FIVE YEARS LATER'.

Giorgio **Gli adulti sembrano sapere sempre cosa fare, soprattutto sembrano sapere sempre cosa dovresti fare tu.** Ma decisioni come queste non sono facili da prendere, richiedono tempo, passano 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 lunghi anni, e Charles Darwin si laurea all'università di Cambridge, nel 1831.

Charles Thank you ... thank you very much.

I cannot quite believe that already my time here at Cambridge has come to an end. It was not so long ago that I was in Edinburgh, studying to be a doctor. I have to thank my father for allowing me to come and study here instead. That leap of faith has meant that my training here has been truly eye-opening.

And last but not least, I would also like to thank someone who is ... a very special person to me. She made me realise that we all only have one life and we owe it ourselves to make the most of it. Thank you, to my ... best friend, Emma. I leave today with a burning hunger to see and study all of God's creations the world has to offer. It is my humble hope that I can add something to the noble study of natural science, just as many have before me. Thank you.

Charles *stands down, and another round of applause sounds.*

Fitzroy *follows, slowly clapping after his footstep.*

Charles *turns to face him.*

Fitzroy Bravo, man, bravo.

Charles Thank you, sir.

Fitzroy I hear that you came tenth in your final exam. That's quite an achievement.

Charles Well, it's not first place.

Fitzroy You're every bit as modest as they told me you would be.

Charles Who?

Fitzroy I've heard glowing reports about you from your teachers, Charles. During your time in Edinburgh, I heard you helped a Professor Grant collect and study marine animals. He describes you as a bright cookie; most keen and open-minded.

Charles Professor Grant is much too kind.

Fitzroy My name is Captain Robert Fitzroy, but you can call me the Captain.

Fitzroy *shakes Charles' hand and doesn't let go.*

Charles A pleasure to meet you, the Captain.

Fitzroy Is it true what you have said? That you cannot wait to study all of God's creations?

Charles Of course.

Fitzroy Then ask, and it will be given. Seek, and you will find it.

Charles Captain, I'm sorry –

Fitzroy Whatever for?

Charles I can't feel my hand anymore.

Fitzroy *releases –*

Fitzroy Aha yes, sorry – a gentleman's hands are delicate things.

Charles Sorry?

Fitzroy You are a gentleman, are you not?

Charles I suppose so.

Fitzroy That's exactly what I'm looking for. I need a gentleman for this voyage, not just some mere collector of beasts and bugs and whatever else crawls upon this earth.

Charles A voyage?

Fitzroy Yes, a voyage to South America, aboard my ship, the Beagle. Our mission is to help create a better map of the world so the world might know itself a little better. That is where you come in.

Charles What will I do exactly?

Fitzroy You will be the ship's naturalist

Charles you want me to take my clothes off?

Fitzroy No, sorry, naturalist. I always get the two confused. You have to make notes of everything in nature that we may discover.

Charles How long would you need me for?

Fitzroy Only two years.

Charles Two years?

Fitzroy It's nothing, man. Two years will pass in the blink of an eye.

Trust in your faith, Charles. There are no coincidences in God's kingdom.
We set sail in a month. I hope to see you there.

Fitzroy *leaves* –

Charles *takes a moment; he sits on the edge of the stage, wrestling with the big decision.*

A short time passes, and Emma enters; sits beside him.

Emma Doctor Darwin, who was that? A job offer already?

Charles Actually yes. To go on a voyage to South America.

Emma Wow, will you take it.

Charles My brain tells me one thing, my heart tells me another. What do you think I should do?
Do you want me to go?

Beat.

Emma No, I don't *want* you to go – but you need to do this.

Charles Do I really?

Beat.

Emma What's wrong?

Charles Life moves too fast.
The moments you don't enjoy, they last forever. And the moments that you do – they go so quickly.

Emma *takes his hands.*

Emma I wish I could stay in this moment a little longer too. But you have to go.

Charles If you asked me to stay, I would.

Emma If I stopped you, that would be selfish. It's okay to be scared.

Charles I am scared.

Emma Everyone gets scared. Especially when they're about to leave home. It's not an easy thing,
growing up.

Beat.

Charles I will miss you.

Emma I will miss you too.

Charles Gosh – can I just take your head with me please?

Emma You want to take my head with you?

Charles Two years without talking to you, I'm not sure how I'll do that.

Emma Don't even think you can get away without writing to me.

Charles Oh don't you worry. I'll write to you every day. You'll get sick and tired of it.

Fitzroy (*off-stage*) Come on Lover Boy! It's time to go!

Charles and Emma *stand up together. A moment of trepidation; an unwillingness to separate.*

Emma Go ... and remember Charley; today is the first day of your life.

Charles (*nodding*) Look after yourself, Emma. Goodbye.

Emma It's not a goodbye. It's a see you later.

They kiss. Embrace, and hold the squeeze, before eventually parting.

Emma *stops, and calls over her shoulder.*

Emma When you return, I'll be in this exact same spot, waiting for you.

They exit in opposite directions.

Fitzroy *enters, soon followed by Charles pulling in a cart on wheels.*

Fitzroy Puppy love! It's enough to make a man sick.

Let me introduce you to some of the crew: McCormick is a ship's naturalist, you too will be working closely together. That man is Conrad, he is a musician and a painter. Those clouds up ahead don't look so friendly.

McCormick We should leave immediately.

Fitzroy May God guide us on this journey.

The Voyage

(The voyage itself is a sequence of scenes that are presented in a similar fashion to a montage; we witness the characters jumping through time as usual but also over great distances. Darwin's notes and his letters home to Emma act as our time machine; pinpointing each new location as they appear, as well as the state of his mind. The actors should work together solidly here to help paint each new environment for the audience as clearly and as quickly as possible. Think of it as a tightly choreographed dance.)

A motion on the stage, a rocking back and forth; the simulation of waves.

Charles *makes his way to the top deck; he peers over the side of the ship. He holds a bucket and his notebook. Steadying himself, he sits on his ass, slouches against the side, and clutches his stomach for a moment – before writing on to a fresh page.*

Charles January, 1832.

Dearest Emma,
We are about to arrive at the Cape Verde islands.
I cannot wait to walk on land again. Seasickness is my constant companion.
I'm glued to a bucket, for with the swell of every wave I – I –

Octopus scene

McCormick The octopus is an evil and strange creature. With eight long tentacles, it darts fast through the water and can hide itself in small spaces. Isn't it strange that God would create such a fascinating creature and hide it away underwater?

Charles Maybe it's because this octopus lives deep in the sea and so it needs longer tentacles. Isn't that strange that God should make two different versions of Octopus, like this one and the one who lives in the English Channel. Perhaps Professor Grant was right - that animals can change over time?

Fitzroy Who knows? God works in mysterious ways - who knows what he got up to over six thousand years?

Charles But it's not six thousand years, come on. For example, Lyell believes the world could be almost several hundred thousand years old.

Fitzroy Who is Lyell?

Charles He wrote the book which I'm reading now: The Principles of Geology. It is a fascinating read. And just think that the first place which I have examined shows quite clearly the wonderful intelligence of that man.

Fitzroy Slow down, Darwin.
Yes, assume I'm stupid –

Charles Let me tell you something about Charles Lyell.
Lyell travelled all the way to the east coast of Sicily. Between the cities of Messina and Catania.
And why did he go there?

McCormick Because he adored Cannoli?

Charles No – he went there to climb the volcano. I am talking about Mount Etna, or as the Italians say – Montebello.

Fitzroy A man who climbs volcanoes doesn't live so long.

Charles Well, fortunately for Lyell, the volcano wasn't erupting at the time he visited. But these eruptions were exactly the reason he went there. He noticed that every time Mount Etna had erupted, she would spit out a new layer of lava that would be added on top of the previous one.

McCormick Meaning Mount Etna grows taller every time she erupts?

Charles Precisely – and Lyell knew this. And so, using her height and the frequency of how often she erupted, Lyell realised it would be possible to figure out just how old Mount Etna truly is.

Fitzroy And how old is she?

Charles According to Lyell's calculations: several hundred thousand years old.

Fitzroy Aha – no way!

McCormick That's a very old lady.

Charles While this was a revelation in itself, the question remained – if Etna was so old, then how old is our planet? Has Etna been around since the world began or was she a recent phenomenon?

Fitzroy And what did Lyell decide?

McCormick and Conrad *are drawn into Charles in storyteller mode.*

Fitzroy *keeps his distance; disturbed by what he hears.*

Charles At the edge of the volcano, Lyell found fossilised shells that were basically identical to the shells of creatures swimming in the Mediterranean at that time.

McCormick Which means that although several hundred thousand years is a very long time to us

Charles To the world, it is nothing. It's like it happened yesterday.
And This cliff; it is our very own time machine.

Fitzroy A time machine?

Charles It's quite simple. You see all of these layers of rocks? How they're stacked on top of one another? You see how they're all slightly different colours and textures?

Fitzroy Yes.

Charles This layer of rock at the very top is the youngest and most recent period of time, and the layer of the rock at the very bottom is the oldest. It all works by the power of gravity.
And Well ... this is the crazy part, but these rocks could be millions and millions and millions and –

Fitzroy That's enough! McCormick, can you give us a moment?

McCormick I'm sorry?

Fitzroy I'd like to have a word with Charles. In private.

McCormick Ah ... yes, very well, of course.

McCormick *exits.*

Charles Is everything alright?

Fitzroy Today has certainly set your mind racing.

Charles Today has been a glorious day.

I feel like ... a blind man who has been given eyes; I am overwhelmed with what I see, and perhaps I cannot fully understand it –

Fitzroy That's true. None of us can *fully* understand everything.

Charles What do you mean?

Fitzroy We are all blind men. In a way. We see some of the world, but not *all* of it.

It is only God who can see everything.

Charles What?

Fitzroy It is only God who knows everything. Therefore, we must have faith in Him – as the sheep trusts the Shepard.

Charles Why are you telling me this?

Fitzroy What difference does it make that God chose to place such beauty in the ocean hidden from our sight? We must not question Him but simply celebrate His creation.

Charles It was only a thought.

Fitzroy And if left to grow, the wrong thought can eat up the entire brain.

Charles This is about what I said before, isn't it? About the fossils in the cliffs.

Fitzroy I fear your imagination is making you jump to extreme conclusions.

Charles Sir, I cannot deny the evidence I can see and observe.

Fitzroy I'm simply saying be careful. The mind sees what it *wants* to see.

Charles I believe you are completely right.

Fitzroy It is no joke. Such ideas are dangerous.

Charles Someone once told me that the best ideas are the dangerous ones.

Fitzroy Oh yes, I'm sure such a way of thinking has been handed down to you. I'm well aware of who your grandfather was.

Charles He was a free-thinker –

Fitzroy He was a radical, Darwin. A philosopher and a poet, but a radical, nonetheless.

Charles Those who change the world dare to question it.

Fitzroy And so ask yourself this: are you going to change the world for the better, or for the worse?

Fitzroy *makes to leave.*

Fitzroy I'm happy for you to flirt with ideas. That is in your blood. All I'm saying is: watch yourself.

Fitzroy exits; **Charles** soaks in his words.

Charles What do you mean – it is in my blood? *What is in my blood?*

Charles pauses; takes out his notebook, writes.

Charles What is in my blood that makes me question God? If He did not want me to question Him, then why he make me this way?

Did He make me this way?

The lights transform around him; the music changes to a different pace; there is something in it that echoes of jungle drums.

We are transported once again; to the tropical rainforests of Brazil.

BRAZIL

Charles writes in his notebook; and his companions contribute their thoughts.

Charles May 1832. Dearest Emma,

We have spent the last few months wandering through Brazil. There is no place in the world like it.

We now stand in the tropical rainforests of Rio do Janeiro, to witness the rare union between poetry and science.

Our eyes cannot sit still in their sockets.

As we explore these virgin forests untouched by man.

The mind is a chaos of delight.

The eye finds itself following the flight of a bright and beautiful butterfly –

Only to then be distracted by some strange tree or fruit.

Coconuts, bananas, mangos, jackfruits –

(writing a more personal note) That's right Emma, next time you stain your fingers with picking blackberries, just think of me picking oranges and pineapples.

But the fruits are not the only aliens here ... Just picture the vampire bat

Or the bearded monkey

And let us not forget the tarantulas that crawl the jungle floor.

The fireflies who glow bright at night and dance in the dark.

But be careful where you walk in the dead of night. For if you don't, you might just step on the snout of an alligator. And those jaws are like a spring-loaded bear-trap; by the time you realise your mistake, it will be too late. *qui*

Lovely.

Charles finishes up writing and closes the book.

Giorgio: Darwin passa molto tempo in viaggio nelle terre del sud America, osserva animali e piante mai visti prima, e poco prima di far ritorno, si ritrova nelle terre di un potente latifondista, circondato da schiavi.

Some music in the background.

*The actors of **Fitzroy** and **McCormick** assume different roles: **Manu** (a slave) and **Mr. Lawrie** (her owner).*

Manu enters, and sets to work sweeping the ground.

*A stillness reigns as we watch her.
Then, in the silence, she slowly starts to sing.*

Mr. Lawrie enters.

Mr. Lawrie Shut your bloody mouth this second.

Manu obeys.

Mr. Lawrie You don't sing here unless I tell you to.

Mr. Lawrie There's nothing wrong with your voice, darling. But Carnival's over now.

Manu nods; setting still as stone.

Mr. Lawrie Did I tell you to stop sweeping?

Manu resumes her sweeping.

Mr. Lawrie There's a good girl.

Ah – how charming to have the company of Englishmen again. Always so polite and kind. One forgets that sort of thing when you're surrounded by animals.

Charles Animals?

Lawrie Animals, yes. Brutes. Savages. Whatever you want to call them. Enough time with them and you forget there's such a thing as a civilised mind.

Charles Quite a large plantation you have here, Mr. Lawrie.

Lawrie Oh yes – *(He indicates in one direction)*. Coffee over there. *(Indicates)* Rice over in the swamp there. *(Indicates)* the sugar cane is grown over there. And all in all, I have around one hundred and ten slaves on this plantation alone. Speaking of sugar!

Manu enters, she carries trays of food –

Lawrie She's my favourite one. She's young. And strong. The best money can buy really.

Manu lays the food down on the table. **Lawrie** watches her every move; undressing her with his eyes, examining and waiting.

Manu nods and heads back –

Lawrie Wait – *Giorgio stops playing* - you didn't say hello to our guests.

Manu stops and turns to them.

Manu Hello.

Charles nods, barely able to look at her in the eye.

Lawrie Go on now.

Giorgio *starts again.*

Lawrie That one over there (*indicates Giorgio*) It looks as strong as an ox, but really it's just a gentle giant. Only thing its hands are good for are drumming up a good beat.

Still, he's well liked here. If you wake early, before the light opens the dawn, you can hear the negroes sing their hymns – it's quite enchanting. And he always leads the song.

It's a beautiful country, Charles. Wouldn't you agree?

Charles I think it would be a perfect retirement and independence from the rest of the world.

Lawrie That it is.

Charles *It would be ... if it had not been stained and polluted by slavery.*

Lawrie *eyes Charles,*
Conrad's *eyes ping-pong ball between the two ..*

Lawrie Oh yes, I've heard about you. Seems you're starting to make a little of a reputation for yourself. The controversialist, the radical thinker.

Charles It is not radical thinking. I simply believe that enslaving another human being is wrong –

Lawrie Things are different here.

Charles Maybe one day they'll change.

Lawrie Maybe. Maybe not. Tell me – is it true what they are saying? That in your sleep you can be heard whispering – God is dead. God is dead.

Charles Who told you that?

Lawrie Well, you know how it is – the locals' gossip, facts are exaggerated, rumours spread like disease – the point is, your group is making quite the impression. Stories about the white man from England walking through and questioning the existence of God.

Manu *enters; holding the plate of deer flesh.*

Lawrie I'll admit to you one thing. It would be easier if God were dead. Then, we'd only have to answer to ourselves.

Manu *stumbles as she serves the meat; spilling some.*

Lawrie *explodes; with a roar he stands upright, smacking the tray of food out of Manu's hands.*
The music stops.

Manu *hesitates; frozen.*

Lawrie Where is your mind today?

Manu *bends down to clean up the mess –*

Lawrie Stay where you are. (*To Giorgio.*) Did I tell you to stop playing?

Giorgio *carefully resumes.*

Lawrie This one is called Manu. The name Manu, it means ‘ruler of the earth.’

The irony is not lost on me. If there is a God, it seems He has a cruel sense of humour.

(*To Giorgio.*) Play that song from before The one she sang to.

Giorgio *obeys.*

Lawrie See, Manu here – she’s distracted lately. It’s not been so long since the carnival, and in Brazil we celebrate like it’s the last day on Earth. Let me tell you – the spirit of carnival lives in the blood long after it’s over.

So, we’re going to try a little experiment.

We’re going to try and exorcise that spirit of Carnival out from Manu’s body.

Smile, Manu, don’t worry. It’s going to be fun.

All I will ask you to do is dance. Dance for us three gentlemen.

And by the end of the song, the spirit which distracts you ... it will be gone.

Lawrie *presses a hand on Giorgio’s shoulder.*

Lawrie Sing.

Giorgio *begins to sing the song.*

Lawrie Manu, don’t be shy ... dance for us now.

Lawrie *positions himself over Charles and Conrad.*

Lawrie Dance.

Manu *begins to dance as Giorgio sings.*

Halfway through the verse, Lawrie commands.

Lawrie Faster.

Again, a little later –

Lawrie Faster.

As the song goes on, Lawrie frequently calls out with more commands of –

Lawrie Faster!

Manu *goes through the motions as fast as she can; sweat pickling her skin –*

Lawrie Faster.

Manu *pushes, muscles strain and pop –*

Lawrie Faster.

Lawrie *gets closer to her now; the space she has in which to dance is suffocating as he closes in on her; her hair matted with sweat to her forehead, her bones cracking; the distinctness of her moves fade-*

Lawrie Faster.

As she moves at an impossible speed –

Lawrie Faster. Faster. Faster.

Her body begins to break; drained and limp –

Lawrie *cracks his whip –*

Lawrie Faster Faster Faster.

Her body's final act of defiance; she pushes herself as far as she can go; there is no shape to her routine anymore; an exhausted body spasming and seizing like a fish out of water –

Until eventually, no more – she collapses into a heap.

*The song quietens, **Giorgio** has nothing left to say; between his notes, all we hear is the ragged pained breath of **Manu**.*

The lights fade to black.

-

A Return to England

*In the darkness, we hear **Charles** speak.*

*As his voice carries on the light returns, illuminating **Emma** who reads his letter.*

Charles September 1835,

Dearest Emma

I write this to you from the Galapagos islands.

By the time you read this letter, I might already be home.

It has been four years since I left England.

Four years and yet some things still stick in the mind like splinters.

I still think of those days in Brazil - days spent in a hurricane of terror and delight; days in which I saw beasts pretending to be men.

There's a little more to the story I didn't tell you.

Call me soft – I suppose I didn't want to worry you.

Emma reads the rest aloud; **Charles'** voice stops.

Emma After we left Mr. Lawrie, we climbed the Corcovado: the mountain that watches over the city of Rio as it sleeps.

The mountain is home to many different and endangered species – including a man-made animal: the run-away slave.

The Corcovado is the perfect spot for any slave wishing to hide from their natural predator – the slave-hunter.

During our climb, we met many of these slave-hunters.

They grin like villains and hold knives in their teeth.

They are paid more if they return a slave alive; less if the slave ends up dead. Although, in this case, they only need to chop off the ears as proof of death.

Most slaves will throw themselves from the mountainside rather than face capture again.

It seems to me that every living thing on this planet is trapped; trapped in a constant struggle to survive.

Well, Thomas Malthus says that the population of human beings on this planet is always increasing whilst the amount of available food is not. At some point, there is never enough food to feed everyone and so unfortunately some will die.

There will be famine, meaning there will be competition for food - just in the same way as the beggar survives. The rat in the street. The worm in the ground. Everything – every living being. You only need to look at the animal kingdom to see that it's true. Nature is not the work of God; nature is a battlefield.

I do not believe that God is dead; though perhaps he abandoned this place a long time ago.

Emma stops reading, trembles.

She gets to her knees, closes her eyes and begins to pray –

The shrill scream of a boat's horn interrupts her.

She jumps to her feet, takes a breath and runs to the exit.

Charles enters, dragging on a cart of books behind him as he crosses the stage.

He stops in his tracks halfway; catching sight of an old face.

Emma slowly enters from the other side. *She walks to meet him and stops about an arm's reach from him.*

Beat.

Charles You're exactly where I left you.

Emma Of course I am.

Charles I hope I didn't leave you waiting long.

Emma No, not long. Only four years. My legs are killing me.

They laugh.

Charles You look exactly how I remember you – you haven't aged a day.

Emma You look like you've aged twenty years.

Another laugh, and they embrace; holding each other to soak up all the time lost.

Emma holds his face in her hands.

Emma It's true. You look different; something's changed.

Charles I've seen a lot.

Emma Is everything alright?

Charles Things could not be better.

Emma Did you arrive safely?

Charles Yes, we made very good time. I've already said my goodbyes to the crew.

Emma Will you see them again?

Charles I hope so. Although, I'm not so sure about the Captain and I.

Emma Why not?

Charles Let's just say as the trip went on, we rarely saw eye to eye.

Emma What's in the box?

Charles Treasure.

Emma You left a gentleman and returned a pirate. What is it – gold?

Charles Better than that. Take a look.

Emma opens the cart – we see a few items; many books, some tortoise shells; fossilised bones.

Emma What are these?

She lifts the bones.

Charles These are the bones of Megatherium.

Emma Mega theory what?

Charles Megatherium. An ancient giant. A creature that lived thirty-five million years ago.

Emma That's impossible.

Charles No – it's the truth; extraordinary but true. There are so many things in this world we still know so little about.

Emma I thought the world was meant to be six thousand years old.

Charles Oh don't start with that –

Emma Don't start with what?

Charles You sound like Captain Fitzroy. 'The devil placed the bones of dinosaurs and ancient creatures in the ground to trick us.'

Emma *picks up the tortoise shells.*

Emma And these?

Charles Tortoise shells.

Emma Where are the tortoises?

Charles That's not important. Look at them both. Go on. What do you see?

Emma They're different from one another.

Charles That's because the tortoises who used to wear these shells lived on different islands from one another.

He takes one of the shells from her.

Charles The tortoise who wore this shell lived on an island where all of his food was on the ground. That's why the shell is shaped this way, because the tortoise never needed to lift its head to eat. But your shell is shaped like ... like –

Emma Like a horse's saddle.

Charles Yes! And that's because the tortoise who wore this shell lived on an island where all of his food was above the ground. And so, the shell is shaped this way because –

Emma Because the tortoise *needed* to lift its head to eat.

Charles You've got it, brilliant.

Emma Don't patronise me.

Charles What?

Emma So the shells are shaped differently to suit the tortoises' needs – what's the point?

Charles That *is* the point. The different shapes prove that the bodies of animals change to adapt to their environments.

I saw the same thing with the birds there as well. All of them looked as if they could be family but their beaks changed in shape and size depending on the island they chose for a home.

Beaks. Shells. Skeletons, bodies, everything – it all changes.

Emma Why don't we see it change?

Charles Some changes happen so slowly that we don't even notice them. Like hair. We know that hair grows and yet if you were to watch my hair right now, you probably

couldn't see it growing.

Emma I'm not sure your hair does grow anymore, Charley. Especially on the top.

Charles Very funny. The point is that with enough time, - (*he lifts the bones majestically*) – say a few million years, rivers create canyons, jungles become deserts, and animals can grow into completely different animals.

Emma The impossible becomes possible.

Charles Exactly.

Emma You've got a lot of books in here, Charley - I don't see any Bible.

Charles The Bible has given me everything it can.

Emma Your travels have made you arrogant.

Charles Arrogant?

Charles I mean ... when you observe the brutality of nature, and the struggle to survive, it can be hard to see God in the design.

Emma So what are you telling me? God does not exist?

Charles Yes, He's not necessary.

Emma You run away to study God's creations, only to return and say, 'I looked, and I studied but I did not find God.'

Charles I didn't run away. You told me I should go.

Emma So, it's my fault?

Charles What? No.

Emma It is – it is my fault. It's all my fault.

Charles What's going on?

Emma Before I came to see you, I sat on my knees to pray. For you and your soul. You have no idea how often I have prayed ... and yet it seems that my prayers have not been answered. Here you return saying that God is a ghost. No, worse – that God was *never* here. He was just some figment of our imagination.

Charles I'm not saying that at all. All I'm saying is that the hand he had to play in creating life as we know it ... it might be a little different from what we think.

Emma How different?

Charles Alright, if we accept this need to survive. (*He nods to the book.*) If we accept that this world is ancient. (*He holds up the bones*) And if we accept that everything changes. (*He taps on the shells*) If we accept all of these ingredients and add them together, then what do we get?

Emma A recipe for disaster.

Charles Emma, please.

Emma You're playing with fire.

Charles Listen -

Emma You're playing with fire Charley, and I don't want to see you burn.

Charles That's a little dramatic.

Emma *opens the book to find a note folded between the pages.*

Charles Emma, no.

Emma What is this?

Charles Emma, don't -

Charles *is too late; Emma's eyes scan the note.*

Emma (reading) To Marry or Not to Marry.

Emma *stops; looks at him.*

Charles It's ... a joke?

Emma (reading) Reasons *against* marrying:

Freedom to travel anywhere you want at any time.

Not forced to visit boring relatives.

Children are expensive.

Less money for books; less time for reading.

(To **Charles**) You're such an old romantic.

Charles (extremely nervous) You have to understand – it's purely theoretical; a brain-exercise.

Emma (reading) Reasons *for* marrying:

Children - if it please God.

Good for your health.

It will please Dad.

Charms of female conversation.

A constant companion, a friend in your old age – better than a dog anyway.

(To **Charles**) Better than a dog?

Charles It's a compliment. A dog is a man's best friend; if one was able to find company better than a best friend then ...

Emma Then what?

Charles Then ...then ...you'd be a fool not to propose to that person.

Emma A fool indeed. Women like that are rare. One who ‘will please Dad’ and be better company ‘than a dog.’

Beat.

Charles I have found one. She has always been my friend ... and I believe she would be my friend even when I am old and wrinkled. And when I think of her; I cannot think of anyone else that I would want to grow old and wrinkled with. To have children with.

Emma Even if children are awfully expensive?

Charles Even so.

Will you marry me, Emma?

Beat.

Emma I’m not sure. Let me write a pros and cons list and I’ll get back to you.

Charles Please.

Emma *walks up to him; takes his face again and whispers –*

Emma Of course.

They embrace; time slows, music tuned to the frequency of love underscores the moment.

Another moment in the dark; as we jump through time.

We hear a cacophony of sound mingling into one; church bells ringing; babies screaming, the first wail of fresh lungs; children laughing and playing; birds tweeting; human sounds blending with nature.

-

The light comes to the stage; as children’s voices cry –

Horace (off-stage) Daddy!

The light reveals Charles hunched over his desk, writing furiously. As is his habit now; he has retreated into his study, his own hole in which to escape.

Charles *coughs violently for a moment, before resuming writing.*

Charles (reading aloud as he writes) The year is 1858. It has been twenty years already since I left the H.M.S beagle.

Charles *coughs again; a pause to regain his strength –*

Charles How quickly time can pass by, how quickly things can change.

Children’s falling footsteps increase in volume as they approach –

Horace (*off-stage*) Daddy!

Charles I believe I shall call the book 'On the Origin of Species'. In honour of my grandfather.

Horace (*off-stage*) Daddy!

Charles Of course, that's if I ever manage to finish the damned book. These hands can barely hold the pen these days. It's as if God himself is doing all he can to stop me –

Horace *bang against the door of his study.*

Charles What is it?

Horace Let me in Daddy!
I have something for you.

Charles Give me a moment.

*He sorts the things on his desk to the side; stands and heads to the door.
Halfway, he is seized by a coughing fit.*

He opens the door.

Horace *enter.*

Horace Are you feeling well, daddy?

Charles I'm just having one of my bad days.

Horace I've got a present for you.

Charles A present?

Horace *holds out a letter.*

Charles Who's it from?

Charles *goes to take the letter, but Elizabeth keeps it from him.*

Horace You have to tell me a story first!

Charles I'm not sure I'm able to this afternoon.

Horace You have to!
That's the deal. No story; no letter.

Charles You're just like your mother, you know.

Horace Story! Story! Story! Story! Story! –

Charles Alright, Horace, alright – you'll get your story. Calm down. Goodness, have you been eating chocolate for breakfast again?

Horace Chocolate is my friend, chocolate is my lover, chocolate keeps me company even under

covers!

Charles Where on earth have you learnt that?

Horace I taught it him.

Charles Why did you – oh for goodness sake, never mind. Sit down, both of you.

They do, and Charles returns to his side of the desk.

Charles Now, what story do you want?

Horace I want the one about the earthquake in Chile!

Charles That's a horrible story.

Horace When you chased ostriches in Argentina!

Charles Maybe, or what about -

Horace Jenny the ape!

Charles You love Jenny.

Emma enters, unnoticed, and watches them the door.

Horace Can I play Jenny?

Charles (to **Emma**) Hello dear.

Emma How are you feeling?

Charles I've felt better.

Emma I'll have to nurse you back to good spirits.

Horace *make 'throw up' gestures.*

Horace Mum, don't be gross.
Let's play already!

Horace *gets to all fours, supporting himself on his fists and feet; transforming into a monkey.*

Charles And who should mummy play?

Horace Conrad, the painter.

Emma Alright.

Emma *sits on the desk and watches them act. She slowly changes a few things with her outfit here and there, preparing for her entrance as Conrad.*

Elizabeth *as the Keeper takes Horace as Jenny on a string around his neck – the zookeeper leading the monkey.*

Charles *steps forward; he coughs a little more, Emma pats his back some before he eventually narrates –*

Charles It was March 1838, twenty years ago exactly –

Emma Believe it or not children, we used to be young as well.

Horace Shhhh!

Emma Sorry.

Charles I arrived to the London Zoo to meet and observe a captured orangutan by the name of Jenny.

Jenny *bounds behind Keeper, affecting monkey sounds.*

Keeper Orangutan – it means ‘man of the forest.’

Charles I wonder why.

Keeper Oh you’ll see. Say hello, Jenny.

Jenny *pokes her head out timidly, but her eyes don’t leave Charles.*

Charles *waves to Jenny; she blows a raspberry in return.*

Charles (narrating) It was hard to believe my eyes. I jumped into Jenny’s cage and for months, I carried out all sorts of experiments.

Charles *hands Jenny a mirror.*

Jenny *takes it, catches her reflection and drops it in shock. She studies it with surprise. She looks behind the mirror, attempting to understand it.*

Charles At first she inspected the mirror, confused by the puzzle it presented.

Charles *writes down notes as Jenny begins to pose for the mirror.*

Charles But eventually, Jenny began to understand that the monkey she saw in the mirror was her own reflection.

She sticks out her lips as if to kiss the glass. She rubs and taps at the glass, smiling widely, fascinated.

Charles And eventually so did I begin to understand that the monkey in front of me could be a reflection of myself.

Charles *lifts a hand up to the air, and Jenny mirrors his movements. Then he places his hand against hers*

Keeper (narrating) For months, Jenny astonished Mr. Darwin.

Charles *smiles wide and Jenny smiles wide –*

Keeper Just like a human, Jenny would smile and laugh when she was happy.

Charles *laughs and Jenny laughs –*

Charles (writing) She has a flexibility in communicating positive emotion –

As Charles writes in his notebook; Jenny perfectly imitates him.

Charles (writing) That until now I thought was only human.

Jenny jumps upwards and snatches the notebook, Charles chases her in a circle.

Keeper (narrating) Just like us, the orangutan liked to play.

Charles Jenny!

Jenny laughs as Charles chases her.

Keeper And just like us she could misbehave.

Charles Give me my book back or there'll be trouble.

Jenny stops with the book, looks to Charles with testing eyes.

Charles I mean it.

Jenny waddles to him and returns his book.

Charles Good girl.

Charles nods to the Keeper, and he plays music as a reward for good behaviour.

Charles and Jenny dance together. Once again, except for her hunched gait, they are the perfect mirror of each other.

Conrad enters.

Conrad Good day, I'm here to see Charles – my goodness, is that monkey dancing?

Keeper Mr. Darwin, your guest has arrived.

Charles looks, stops dancing. Jenny copies.

Charles Conrad – what a pleasure to see you.

Conrad Teaching monkeys to dance these days?

Keeper Jenny has always loved dancing to music ever since we met.

Conrad Really?

Charles Yes, she finds pleasure in music as we do, she understands our language. Her whole anatomy and behaviour is almost identical to us. The only thing it seems she cannot do is to walk upright like us. That's why I asked you to come here, I'd like you to take a photograph of her stance.

Conrad Your wish is my command.

Charles Are you finished with painting?

Conrad Not at all – but one must keep up with modern times. Where do you want her?

Charles (To **Keeper**) Could you stay with her? So she doesn't run away.

Keeper Certainly.

*The **Keeper** squats low to comfort **Jenny**, who by her physical nature squats even lower.*

Charles Here is perfect.

***Conrad** bends slightly to frame **Jenny** in the shot. **Charles** observes from behind **Conrad's** shoulder, standing completely upright.*

Inadvertently, they form a horizontal line, presented to the audience as the iconic evolution of monkey into man.

***Conrad** captures the shot; a large flash of light from the bulb. The line of them are almost frozen in time.*

***Charles** takes note of his position in the line, and narrates –*

Charles And in that moment, I saw how monkey and man could be part of the same family. After all of my travels and all I had seen, the realisation settled into my mind like a missing jigsaw piece completing a puzzle – a puzzle I'd been trying to solve this whole time.

***Elizabeth** turns to her father, breaking character.*

Horace And what puzzle was that?

Charles That great mystery of mysteries – the origin of species. Why do we have such different and wonderful forms of life on this planet? And I think I have an idea of the answer.

Horace What's the idea?

*The line is broken now; the characters return to themselves. **Emma** regains her posture and removes **Conrad's** affects.*

Charles An idea that has grown out of control.

Horace Tell us Daddy.

Charles looks to **Emma**.

Charles I can't.

Horace Please.

Charles Another time. Now, hand me the letter.

Horace Not until you tell us!

Charles I told you the story of Jenny, now give me the letter. That was the deal.

Horace But there's more to the story!

Charles Elizabeth –

He reaches for her, she evades and he collapses in on himself; seized by more coughing.

Emma takes his arm and rubs his back, soothing him.

Emma Tell them, Charley.

Charles What?

Emma Tell them. They want to know what their father is working on when he hides himself away in his office.

Charles But –

Emma You can't keep them in the dark for ever.

Beat.

Emma Go on. Tell them.

Charles Very well.

He stands to present his case, the children sit and watch him.

Charles Let us say that Jenny and I are part of the same family.

Horace Like brother and sister?

Charles More like distant cousins. We may have been brother and sister once, but that would have been many years ago.

Horace How many years? Hundreds? Thousands!

Charles Millions.

Horace Phwoar!

Charles So let us picture a family tree. A tree with many branches.

Charles demonstrates with his hands.

Charles At the end of one branch is us as we are today. And at the end of another branch is the orangutan. Maybe another branch is the gorilla. Another the chimpanzee.

And if we are to follow each of these branches back through time, we might find they all meet – in one branch – where we shared a common ancestor.

Horace Like a parent?

Charles Yes, pretty much.

Horace But why did the monkeys grow one way and we grew another?

Charles Because all life ... is in a battle to survive. And it finds many different ways to do so. Some survive, some do not. We don't get a choice as to the bodies we're born into – just as the poor don't choose to be poor; just as the slave never chose to be a slave – but sometimes our bodies are the things which help us to survive.

The octopus with the best camouflage.
The polar bear with the thickest coat.
The monkey with the longest arms to swing from tree to tree –

Emma And the man with a different way of looking at the world.

Charles *smiles, unsure but touched.*

Charles Now, the world is constantly changing and constantly growing – and if an animal doesn't change with it, then it will disappear. So imagine that tree again. But not just of monkey and man, but a tree that connects all living beings.

Horace The Tree of Life!

Charles Exactly. A huge tree with many branches; the branches of existing species are still green and growing, and the branches of extinct species are withered and decayed. And so it is with the great Tree of Life, which fills the crust of the Earth with its dead and broken branches, and covers the surface with its ever wonderful and beautiful creations.

Horace *clap their hands.*

Emma Very well children. You've heard your story. Give your father the letter.

Horace *stands and hands Charles the letter.*

Emma Now, can you please give me and your father a moment.

Horace Can we play outside?

Emma Yes sure, but not too close to the pond.

Charles And don't bother the pigeons!

Horace *exit.*

Emma You spend more time with those pigeons than me.

Charles They're important to the study.

Emma Are you not going to open it?

Charles *opens the envelope.*

Charles Who's it from?

Emma A Mr. Alfred Russell Wallace.

Charles I've been talking with him for some time. He's out studying specimens in Indonesia – a fine young naturalist.

Charles *reads the letter. His eyes widen.*

Charles Do you know this letter says?

Emma Yes. Mr. Wallace is explaining to you about his theory of evolution.

Charles So you've already read this.

Emma Of course. Why do you think I told you to tell the children about your theory. You'll have to get used to talking about it, you'll have to tell the whole world soon.

Charles What are you talking about?

Emma Someone else has made the same discovery than you. It cannot be a coincidence. Now do you want him to take all the credit for it?

Charles I cannot try to take away the man's accomplishments from him.

Emma I'm not saying you should. But the fact is that your life has been bent around this for the past twenty years – if receiving a letter like this isn't a sign from God that you should publish, then I don't know what is.

Charles Well, that's the problem.

Emma The problem?

Charles The problem of God. Emma, for the last twenty years it feels like I have been confessing a murder.

Emma What on Earth makes you think that?

Charles I've been sick as long as I can remember. Sometimes, I think it is God's way of testing me, punishing me for what I am doing.

Emma Or maybe you've been sick because you've driven yourself sick. You need to let go now, Charley - that's what today is about. What was it you said? That the animal that doesn't change with the world it disappears.

Charles Releasing this will cause an earthquake.

Emma So let it shake the world. It is better to be hit with the truth than kissed with a lie.

Charles You believe it is true?

Emma I do not know what to believe. But it is your truth, Charley, and you need to let it go.

Charles Some will not be happy.

Emma So it is with all dangerous ideas –

Charles I don't want to be known as the man who killed God -

Emma I hate to burst your bubble. But not even you can kill God. Even your great Tree of Life had to start somewhere. A single seed to begin all life. The question still remains – who or what planted that seed?

Charles My theory doesn't kill God.

Emma It doesn't need to. You have answered how animals might change and grow over time. But not how life itself began.

Charles I am afraid that my theory requires death to work.

Emma And you have always been haunted by the shadow of death. And yet you have shown that death is a necessary component in this machine of life. You fear it or you accept it. But Charley, when you have found yourself on the other side of fear, when you have not resisted change but accepted it; there it is that you have grown so much. There you have learnt so much.

Emma *stands by him, a hand and head on his shoulders.*

Charles Can I really do this Emma?

Emma Yes. In a moment I will leave, and you will sit down at the desk one more, and do what you need to to finish your life's work.

When I first heard your idea, I did not want to believe my ears.
But that's because I wasn't listening, Charley.

There is grandeur in your view of life, that whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.

Emma *exits.*

Charles *sits by his desk, opens the book, takes a deep breath and writes.*

End.