



**NARRATOR:** In the summer of 1838, in his rented rooms on Great Marlborough Street, London, Charles Darwin drew a line down the middle of a piece of scrap paper. He had been back in England for almost two years, after a monumental voyage around the world. He was in his late twenties. It was time to decide. Across the top of the left-hand side, he wrote:

**CHARLES:** Marry.

**NARRATOR:** On the right he wrote:

**CHARLES:** Not Marry.

**NARRATOR:** and in the middle:

**CHARLES:** This is the question.

**NARRATOR:** It was easy for Charles to think of things to write under "Not Marry."

**CHARLES:** Freedom to go where one liked.

**NARRATOR:** Charles loved to travel. His voyage had lasted almost five years; he had been the naturalist on the *HMS Beagle*, a British surveying ship. He now lived in London with his servant from the *Beagle*, Syms Covington.

**SYMS:** We are surrounded by wooden crates, casks, and barrels—

**CHARLES, interrupting:** —neatly stacked!

**SYMS:** Filled with treasures from Patagonia, Brazil, Chile, and Tierra del Fuego: fossil bones, skins, shells, fish in spirits of wine, mammalia in spirits of wine, insects, reptiles, and birds in spirits of wine; plants, rocks, carcasses of dead animals, and beetles.

**NARRATOR:** What if Charles wanted to go on another adventure and collect more specimens? How could he do that if he got married? Next, under “Not Marry,” he wrote:

**CHARLES:** Choice of society and little of it. Conversation of clever men at clubs—

**NARRATOR:** Charles lived just a few doors away from his older brother, Erasmus, and he was spending much of his time with Eras and his circle of intellectual friends. Talking with them was what mattered to him. Not going to dinner parties, teas, and other torturous social occasions where people inundated him with seemingly

endless questions about his travels. If he were to marry he could see the obligations ahead. Whereas if he remained single, he would be freer to pursue his science.

**CHARLES:** Not forced to visit relatives & bend in every trifle.

**NARRATOR:** To marry would also mean worries:

**CHARLES:** To have the expense & anxiety of children—perhaps quarreling.

**NARRATOR:** Taking care of children, worrying about them, and the diseases that could kill them . . . all of this would be distracting and would take up so much time. He wrote on his list, and underlined it twice:

**CHARLES:** LOSS OF TIME.

**NARRATOR:** Charles needed as many hours a day as he could have to do his work. He had—

**SYMS:** —specimens to classify!

**NARRATOR:** And he was writing in secret notebooks the beginnings of a new theory—a theory that would explain the transmutation, or evolution, of species. He felt sure that if he could work it through, he would change the way the world thought about creation. He had started the great project already, and he was consumed by it, giving it hours and hours every day.

**CHARLES:** A man who dares to waste one hour of time has not discovered the value of life!

**NARRATOR:** But Charles Darwin was not just about the science. And so he began the “Marry” side of his list.

**CHARLES:** Children—if it please God.

**NARRATOR:** Charles did enjoy other people’s children. He played with them, and he, ever the scientist, also observed them. He wrote in one of his secret notebooks:

**CHARLES:** Children have an uncommon pleasure in hiding themselves & skulking about in shrubbery when other people are about. This is analogous to young pigs hiding themselves.

**NARRATOR:** He liked grown-ups, too. Including women! He continued on the “Marry” side of his list:

**CHARLES:** Constant companion (& friend in old age) who will feel interested in one . . . object to be beloved & played with.

**NARRATOR:** And then—

**CHARLES:** —better than a dog anyhow.

**NARRATOR:** Charles really liked dogs. So this wasn’t as bad as it sounds.

**CHARLES:** Dogs can be easier than people!

**NARRATOR:** Charles listed more positives on the “Marry” side of his list.

**CHARLES:** Home, and someone to take care of house. Charms of music and female chitchat. These things good for one’s health.

**NARRATOR:** And then again . . .

**CHARLES:** Terrible loss of time.

**NARRATOR:** But . . .

**CHARLES:** My God, it is intolerable to think of spending one’s whole life, like a neuter bee, working, working, & nothing after all. No, no won’t do. Imagine living all one’s day solitarily in smoky dirty London House.

Only picture to yourself a nice soft wife on a sofa with good fire, & books & music perhaps . . .

**NARRATOR:** The lists on the left and right side of the page looked about the same length. But Charles felt that he had found more reasons to marry than not. He wrote on the left side, squeezed at the bottom, the answer to his question:

**CHARLES:** Marry, Marry, Marry. Q.E.D.

**NARRATOR:** But he had one fear that was too big to even write down. To confront that fear he would have to talk to his father, Dr. Robert Darwin. His father had strong

opinions and felt he was always right. When Charles was a boy his father had said to him:

**DR. DARWIN:** You care for nothing but shooting, dogs, and rat-catching, and you will be a disgrace to yourself and all of your family.

**NARRATOR:** OK, so Charles's father wasn't always right. But Charles respected him and knew that in his father had seen a lot in his medical practice. He felt certain he could go to his father with his big worry: God. For as Charles worked out his theory of evolution by natural selection, he knew he was taking God out of creation. And he knew that most women in England in 1838 would not be happy about that. So he went home, told his father, and asked him what to do.

**DR. DARWIN:** CONCEAL YOUR DOUBTS! You should get married! Just don't tell her you're doing away with—

**NARRATOR:** Charles did not listen.

**EMMA WEDGWOOD:** He is the most open, transparent man I ever saw, and every word expresses his real thoughts.

**NARRATOR:** That is what his first cousin Emma Wedgwood said about Charles Darwin. Charles and Emma had started spending time together. Emma herself was a very sincere person, and also very much a straight shooter. And so she prized what she called Charles's "transparency." She liked him. A lot. So when Charles asked her to marry him, she said:

**EMMA:** Yes.

**CHARLES:** I was shocked.

**EMMA:** We both got headaches!

**CHARLES AND EMMA:** But once we told everyone, we were very happy.

**NARRATOR:** Their families were thrilled! Charles and Emma had grown up together and were well suited in many ways.

**EMMA:** But not all—

**CHARLES:** I am very neat.

**EMMA:** I am a slob! My nickname as a child was “Little Miss Slip Slop.”

**NARRATOR:** This difference could be overcome. But it was in the area of religion that they strongly disagreed. Emma’s sister Fanny had died a few years earlier while Charles was on his voyage . . .

**EMMA:** Oh Lord, help me to become more like her, and grant that I may join with Thee never to part again . . . I try to keep my mind fixed upon the hope of being with her again in heaven.

**CHARLES:** At the same time Emma got more religious, I was becoming less so.

**EMMA:** What if Charles does not believe in God? Would he go to hell and I to heaven after we die?

**NARRATOR:** Emma could not stand the thought of being separated from him for all eternity. After proposing to Emma in the house she grew up in, Charles went back to London. Without his charm, his wit, and his very presence to remind her of all she loved about him, the problem of their religious differences loomed large. So Emma wrote Charles a letter.

**EMMA:** Dear Charles, When I am with you I think all melancholy thoughts keep out of my head, but since you are gone some sad ones have forced themselves in, of fear that our opinions on the most important subject should differ widely.

I thank you from my heart for your openness with me & I should dread the feeling that you were concealing your opinions from the fear of giving me pain.

**NARRATOR:** Emma asked Charles to read her favorite part of the New Testament, which he did. And although his letter back to her does not survive, we know that something reassured her.

**EMMA:** On January 29, 1839, we made a leap of faith and got married.

**NARRATOR:** They were immediately happy, settling into a routine, which included Emma playing the piano and reading to Charles in the evenings.

**CHARLES:** I often bless all novelists. A surprising number of novels have been read aloud to me . . . by Emma! And I like all if moderately good, and if they do not end unhappily—against which a law ought to be passed. A novel, according to my taste, does not come into the first class unless it contains some person whom one can thoroughly love, and if it be a pretty woman all the better.

**NARRATOR:** Soon Emma was pregnant. And although they were both happy about that, Emma grew even more worried. Childbirth was dangerous. What if she died? Would she ever see Charles again? Emma wrote him another letter. This was the continuation of a conversation they would have their entire lives—about the role of religion and science. Charles treasured each of the letters Emma wrote to him, as painful as he found them. He kept the letters with him always. On one he wrote:

**CHARLES:** When I am dead, know that many times, I have kissed and cried over this.

**NARRATOR:** Although they could never quite see eye-to-eye on religion, they did understand each other's point of view.

**CHARLES AND EMMA:** Because we talked about it!

**NARRATOR:** This conversation lasted throughout their marriage, through joys and through tragedy. They had a close and loving marriage.

**EMMA:** I gave birth to ten children.

**CHARLES:** Three of our children died.

**NARRATOR:** The death of their beloved ten-year-old daughter, Annie, on April 23, 1851, was heartbreaking, and could have wrecked their marriage forever.

**EMMA:** She pass'd away, like morning dew  
Before the sun was high  
So brief her time, she scarcely knew  
The meaning of a sigh.

Charles: We have lost the joy of our household.

**NARRATOR:** The religious gulf between Charles and Emma could have opened up so wide as to separate them forever. Each looked at Annie's death differently: Emma knew she would see Annie again, in heaven; Charles knew he would not. But right after Annie died, Charles wrote to Emma:

**CHARLES:** We must be more and more to each other, my dear wife.

**EMMA:** You must remember that you are my prime treasure (and always have been).

**NARRATOR:** Their marriage survived.

**EMMA:** And being married to me was a big influence on his writing!

**CHARLES:** As I wrote *The Origin of Species*, I kept in mind

Emma and other religious people. I did not want to offend anyone.

**EMMA:** He is very polite in that book.

**CHARLES:** She was my best editor.

**EMMA:** I made sure he was clear in his arguments. I fixed his spelling and commas, too.

**NARRATOR:** In the last paragraph, he wrote about a spot near their home, Down House, where he and Emma often walked together.

**CHARLES:** It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us . . . .

**NARRATOR:** So different from each other, but dependent on each other in so complex a manner. He could have been writing about his marriage.

**CHARLES AND EMMA:** The End.