

EXCLUSIVE: Why did Charles Darwin suppress his Secret Diaries? You might be surprised.

Later Victorian images make Darwin look like an extravagantly bearded Old Testament Patriarch. But he was only 22 when he began a 6 year voyage around the world in 1831 on the HMS Beagle. What he discovered helped to change the World.

But what was young Darwin really like? Fortunately we now have a full set of his Diaries from those years. Extracts are presented below.

“Going to sea for the first time is strangely disturbing...”

27/12/31

The Bay of Biscay! Like many before me I lose a few lunches to these choppy waters before I get a taste for Cook's mushroom stew and find my sea legs. But at last I am able to venture on deck and meet the ship's Company.

Officers and men alike are a forgiving, jovial and welcoming bunch. The quaintly-named Beagle also boasts a Surgeon, Chaplain, Poet, and Astrologer. Who are the same Man! He wears one of 4 different hats to denote his current role. I look forward to conversing with Poet and Chaplain but it may well be the Surgeon I see most often!

30/1/32

The Head Gunner, aptly enough, offers to school me in the art of discharging a chamber pot over the side. Wind direction, as with everything at sea, is most important. My first attempt bedecks a large white seagull. The poor bird promptly plunges beneath the waves. I stare at the spot until a voice behind me clearly says *Clumsy b*st*rd lubber!* I turn and there is the same gull, now white once more, perched on the other gunwale, and casting a scornful eye on me. It must have swum under the hull to cleanse itself. But a talking bird? A sea-going parrot?

2/02/32

I see a Winged Unicorn pass my cabin window. A dream? I throw off my sheets and run up to the deck to be sure I didn't imagine Her. So pretty she was...

NO! But... YES! There She is, perched on the Crow's Nest, stamping the mast with her hooves.

Then She flaps her wings to FLY. The whole ship shimmers as if made of ice. How dazzling She is!

9/03/32

No sign of Her for a week. I must have been mistaken. And am bereft. How I miss Her...

12/03/32

“Spring comes early to the Mediterranean,” says the Surgeon. But... surely our orders were to head straight for the Pacific around Tierra del Fuego. Why are we here? The Captain himself whispers to me that some naval customs are best kept secret. We are for special cannon practice in the east where no one will notice. He recommends extra mushroom stew to calm my nerves.

13/3/32

I wake from more vivid dreams to find a cat on my chest with a mouse dangling from its jaws.

“What do you want, Puss?” I ask. “My name is Cat,” says the Cat, “not Puss. And I want a cuddle.”

Seizing its moment the mouse leaps to the floor and runs off. I hug Cat to cheer her up for the loss.

She purrs in English. Which is strangely comforting...

15/3/32

AM: Uproar on deck as the Poet is attacked by two gigantic Albatrosses. They screech 'WE HATE BRITISH POETS!' Sweep him high up above the Crow's Nest and... Drop him - SPLASH! - in the sea. He is rescued, muttering bitterly: *Never wearing **that** b***d* hat again.*

PM: After grog n'mushroom the Crew disappear below deck leaving me alone. So I am the only one to see the Great Wooden Horse that floats past a'starboard. No one on it, but a deal of knocking and roaring coming from within. Is that how it attracts a Wooden mate?

The Horse is followed by a craft of somewhat antique design. "Pentekonsteretmos," says the Omnibus seaman returning with his Surgeon hat. "Look it up in Lempriere." (He is tetchy, still dripping from the Albatross assault.) He offers me his spyglass to see a crew pulling their oars while a Bearded Man tied to the mast shouts incoherently. "He's Greek," says the Surgeon. "But look." Our Crew has silently returned on deck. They form lines and begin to sing a song that goes "I know a lass called Sue, And these are things she likes to do..."

I try not to listen, suspecting indecency, but the Bearded Man stares wide-eyed at us. When the Crew's song finishes he shouts at his oarsmen: "*Oh how the perfume of those Sirens thrills the hairs of my nostrils! How the treacle of their voices fills my ears... Such beauty. SUCH BEAUTY!*"

"Has he never been to Portsmouth?" says the Surgeon, as he translates for me.

I ask him what the heck is going on. He gestures to where half the Crew are now dressed as Women's clothes with wigs made from frayed rope. They dance rhythmically to the hornpipe, lines weaving in out of each other. To mimic the making of a ship's rope? "They Celebrate Crossing the Line," says the Surgeon, When I ask, *Which Line?* He shrugs, *Doesn't matter.*

Now the Bearded Man is screaming: "I want more! More! More Beauty! More Music! More Joy! Pull closer. Why do you not obey me? I am your Lord Odysseus!! Oh, what kind of Idiot am I? Shame on me! Why did I fill your ears with wax? It seemed a good idea at the the time..."

16/3/32

But still his men row on while ours still sing and throw dance shapes in pairs and foursomes, their bare horny feet slapping the deck to create a powerful rhythm. "Look," says the Surgeon. "See great Troy burn." And indeed the evening sky is scorched red and yellow under plumes of smoke. "Best go to your Cabin and take this with you," he says, offering me a wooden cup of MushGrog. I take his advice, and beverage, and go below to study my Bible while bare feet slap on the deck above. I sleep. And dream of Albatrosses, Horses, Burning Cities and Sirens.

When I wake we are shooting through the Straits of Gibraltar at an impossible speed. How long have I slept? How can this be? What is going on?

17/3/32

Everyone on deck stands idly by as we tear along. Impervious to our inexplicable acceleration. No driving wind? Our sails furled? Yet still we move? How? HOW?

"Hello, Charles," says a soft-voiced woman behind me. "Quite the sleepy head, aren't you? Forgive the familiarity. We haven't been introduced yet. But stranger things happen at sea. Call me Sandra." I turn eagerly to see her. But...

TO BE CONCLUDED.

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