

# SIR RONALD DEMIMSY, ESQ., DESERT EXPLORER

by  
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## CHARACTERS

Sir. Ronald DeMimsy Esq. .... A famed, but lonesome explorer.

Johnson ..... An apprentice with a big heart.

Mule ..... A soft-spoken intellectual mule.

## SETTING

Lost in the desert.

LIGHTS UP on a desert with a painted cardboard cactus and a tumbleweed in the middle of the stage, dragged on a string from stage left to stage right.

RONALD, a highfalutin explorer marches on stage, looking fit and trim for an expedition. He stares off into the distance then checks a map and compass.

RONALD

Ah, to be an explorer! Wandering the dunes for days without a sign of civilization.

JOHNSON enters behind him, panting like crazy, constantly pushing her glasses back up her sweat-covered nose.

JOHNSON

Sir...

RONALD

Depending on your definition of civilization.

He laughs heartily.

JOHNSON

(shakes her head)

I don't know how much further I can go without a bit of rest. Nor the mule.

Someone dressed as a mule starts to enter, but is cut short by Ronald.

RONALD

Johnson! Never mind the mule.

The mule looks dejected, and steps back offstage.

JOHNSON

But how will we transport our supplies? Our food ration?

RONALD

Oh, he's not carrying food, dear boy!

JOHNSON

He's not carrying food? We'll starve!

RONALD

We'd die of dehydration first.

JOHNSON

May I have a sip of water, sir?

Ronald hands Johnson a canteen.

RONALD

Certainly Johnson, here you are.

Johnson goes to take a sip, but immediately recoils in horror, spitting out sand, and scraping her tongue.

JOHNSON

This appears to be sand, sir.

RONALD

Should've checked it first.

Ronald pulls out another canteen that he hands to Johnson in exchange.

RONALD

That's the sand canteen. For samples. Must follow scientific protocol.

JOHNSON

Sand samples, sir? I figured all sand was the same.

RONALD

One would think, but that's one who's only been exploring for... what is it again, Johnson?

JOHNSON

Two weeks on Tuesday, sir.

RONALD

Someone who's only been exploring two weeks on Tuesday.

JOHNSON

If you don't mind my asking sir, what is the mule carrying if not food rations. Water?

RONALD

My dear boy, water falls from the sky! Why would I ever have a mule carrying water?

JOHNSON

Isn't rainfall quite scarce in the desert, sir?

RONALD

Not in the rainy season, Johnson.

JOHNSON

But I thought low precipitation was one of the defining characteristics of the --

RONALD

Who has been an explorer for twelve years, Johnson? You who have only been an explorer for..

JOHNSON

Two weeks Tuesday, sir.

RONALD

Two weeks Tuesday, or, I, Sir Ronald DeMimsy Esq, explorer for twelve years last Wednesday?

JOHNSON

You sir.

RONALD

Precisely. Besides, there's an oasis right there.

Ronald points off stage.

JOHNSON

I don't quite see it, sir.

RONALD

You will. Just look.

A green oasis is quickly pulled on by means of a clearly visible rope, and possibly by a visible stage hand. It hits Johnson in the shin, causing her to jump back in pain.

RONALD

See it?

JOHNSON

(rubbing her bruised ankle)

Yes sir. It struck me.

RONALD

Struck you? Struck you how? To write poetry?

JOHNSON

No sir. In the shin.

RONALD

There's nothing like good poetry Johnson. Particularly written while on the brink of death in the heart of danger.

JOHNSON

We aren't in the heart of danger, are we sir?

RONALD

One is always in the heart of danger when with me. It's the allure of exploring. That's what women love about me. The danger, and the poetry. Here sit by this oasis and I'll dictate a poem to you.

Johnson sits by the oasis.

RONALD

Ode to the desert: O, desert, hot and dry --

JOHNSON  
I haven't a pen sir. Nor paper.

RONALD  
Oh yes. Where is the mule?

JOHNSON  
You brought pen and paper, sir?

RONALD  
I didn't. The mule did though. Mule!

The mule walks on.

MULE  
Yes Ronald?

RONALD  
Would you mind loaning Johnson a pen and paper? I've been inspired by the desert.

MULE  
Of course Ronald.

The mule digs in its backpack.

MULE  
(to Johnson)  
Is blue ink alright?

JOHNSON  
You... you talk?

The mule looks quite insulted, and rightfully so. It hands Johnson a pen and paper.

RONALD  
Don't be rude Johnson. You don't see Mule going around acting surprised you can read and write. You can read and write, can't you? I've forgotten what skills you'd listed on your CV.

JOHNSON  
I can sir. My CV was written after all.

RONALD  
There's no need to be smart, Johnson. That's Mule's job.

JOHNSON  
Sorry sir.

RONALD  
Don't apologize to me, apologize to Mule.

JOHNSON  
Sorry, Mule.

RONALD  
Now, where was I?

MULE  
The desert.

RONALD  
I'm aware of that. I'm surrounded by wise-acres today, aren't I?

MULE  
An ode to the desert.

RONALD  
Ah, right. Ode to the desert: O, desert, hot and dry... Should I slow down, Johnson? O... desert... hot and dry...

JOHNSON  
I've got it sir.

RONALD  
"...You would make me cry, were there water in my eye, but I can only sigh, knowing it is time to die."  
You've written that all, yes?

JOHNSON  
Yes sir.

RONALD  
Wonderful, now leave me here.

Ronald swoons dramatically. The mule starts to head off.

JOHNSON  
Sir?

RONALD  
I wish to be left here to die nobly. You heard the poem.

JOHNSON  
Sir, I couldn't leave you to die in the desert. It wouldn't be fitting.

RONALD  
What could be more fitting, Johnson? To grow old, and tire, and walk with a limp and a cane, telling stories of my exploits to young children who don't believe half the things I say?

JOHNSON  
Exactly that! To live!

RONALD

To live? Hah! To live as an explorer, is to die as an explorer! Haven't I always said that?

JOHNSON

I wouldn't know sir. I've only worked for you --

RONALD

Two weeks Tuesday, I know. I just say it frequently, so I assumed you'd overheard it at some point.

JOHNSON

Never, sir.

RONALD

You know, I used to be quite famous?

JOHNSON

Of course.

RONALD

I discovered... What was it I discovered?

MULE

The Matari Region.

RONALD

Ah, yes. The Matari. They killed everyone else in the party. I was a young explorer then, much like yourself. More dashing, of course. And right before my leader died, he grabbed me by the shirt and pressed his compass into my chest like so and said, "Go! Explore! I die now!" Then he died.

JOHNSON

That suddenly sir?

RONALD

Yes. His heart wasn't in it anymore.

JOHNSON

That's hardly a reason to die, though.

RONALD

Oh, you thought I meant metaphorically. No, the Matari had ripped his heart out of his body. Much like Evelyn ripped my heart out.

JOHNSON

You haven't a heart, sir?

RONALD

Not anymore.

JOHNSON

Just to be clear, you are now speaking metaphorically, correct?



RONALD

Yes, keep up Johnson, I haven't much time! Evelyn left me. I've nothing to live for.

JOHNSON

Certainly you can win her back. Further exploits, perhaps. Or your poetry. You said yourself, women love nothing more than a good exploit and a good poem.

RONALD

How dare you mention poetry to me! She left me for a poet!

JOHNSON

Quite sorry, sir. I couldn't have known.

RONALD

There's very much you couldn't have known. Whole books of it. I suggest you borrow some from Mule at some point. He has quite the selection. Now... Go! Explore!

He shoves his compass into Johnson's hand. Johnson looks down at the compass.

JOHNSON

Really sir? You mean it?

RONALD

What?

JOHNSON

You think I could become a famous explorer like you someday?

RONALD

Well, not just like me. Less manly, and less qualified. And... certainly less successful.

JOHNSON

Sir... is it really worth dying out here in the desert over her?

RONALD

Is it worth living with a broken heart?

JOHNSON

How else do you expect to continue making discoveries?

RONALD

Oh, what's left to be discovered really? This country's all been mapped! Virtually everything's been mapped.

JOHNSON

What about your sand catalog? Surely that must be important.

RONALD

Who cares how many varieties of sand there are?

JOHNSON

How many are there?

RONALD

Either several thousand, or just one. I still haven't figured it out.

Ronald starts to break down.

RONALD

I'm a failure. You know, all I've ever explored was this one desert?

JOHNSON

You could branch out. How about the Amazon? Or the depths of the ocean?

RONALD

Bah! The Amazon! That's half way around the world!

JOHNSON

Exactly! Uncharted territory on the other side of the globe. A man cutting through the depths of the mysterious jungles in search of El Dorado. What could be more romantic?

RONALD

Could I still write poetry?

JOHNSON

Certainly you could!

RONALD

About the desert?

JOHNSON

If you wanted to... Though I imagine you might gain even further inspiration from the rain forest, sir.

RONALD

Rain! I don't know if I could cut it.

JOHNSON

You've faced Matari warriors, and sandstorms miles wide, and quicksand that swallowed hundreds of expeditions before yours.

RONALD

You've heard of my adventures?

JOHNSON

I've read all about them sir.

RONALD

Don't believe everything you read, Johnson. I made the vast majority of them up.

JOHNSON

They weren't true sir?

RONALD

I'm a fraud. It was all to impress Evelyn, my sweet. And to get a Hollywood picture made about me.

JOHNSON

I saw that. It was quite good sir.

RONALD

You think so?

JOHNSON

It's what inspired me to become an explorer, sir.

RONALD

You don't know what that means to me. I inspired you?

JOHNSON

Yes, very much so. I couldn't wait to grow up to be as fearless as you were. Fighting the elements and fate itself, never giving up.

Ronald looks up at him, clearly moved.

RONALD

I always wanted someone to look up to me. My father, Ronald DeMimsy the Second, he was a wonderful explorer. I suppose I always wanted to make him proud. Probably wouldn't be very happy to see me like this.

JOHNSON

Sir?

RONALD

Yes Johnson?

JOHNSON

Can we head back now?

Ronald stands cautiously.

RONALD

It would be a shame to disappoint the children. We are quite low on water. Perhaps we should press on. Let me collect one sample of this sand first, though.

Ronald opens his canteen and turns it over to shove it into the sand. Water pours out all over the desert floor.

RONALD

Oh dear.

JOHNSON

Sir? Was that the water canteen?

I believe so, Johnson.

RONALD

Well, do we have any other water?

JOHNSON

No.

RONALD

The oasis!

JOHNSON

Johnson dives towards the water, but the entire oasis is pulled away.

RONALD

They're hallucinations. Don't you know anything about the desert?

JOHNSON

No sir.

RONALD

You'll learn.

JOHNSON

I'm sorry sir, but, will we die out here?

RONALD

Oh, Johnson, how little you know. Did I ever tell you the story of the time I wandered the deserts of the Sahara for six weeks without water?

JOHNSON

No sir. Is that a true story, or a fictional one?

RONALD

Fictional my dear boy. Fictional.

Ronald starts to head off into the desert, Johnson trudging along behind him.

RONALD

Mule! Come along.

Mule looks around sneakily, pulls out a canteen of water, takes a large swig, then hides it away again before heading off after them.