

The Last Explorer
(part of a 60 min teleplay)

by
Drew Castalia

Drew Castalia
castalia@interchange.ubc.ca
07747493925

EXT. FREEZING QUAY - KING'S LYNN - DAY

A thick bank of mist clings low to cement port holdings and the stalls of morning marketeers doing solemn business in the chill. A handful of MODERN SCHOONERS slip into and out of the harbor. They dwarf the hawkers and two figures, a tweedy HISTORIAN and his STUDENT, on the seawall looking out.

STUDENT

You're sure this is the place,
professor? It looks kind of...

HISTORIAN

Dismal? Dangerous? Legends come
from places like this.

STUDENT

...dull.

HISTORIAN

...and they disappear here as well.

STUDENT

I think my contacts are frozen.

He withdraws deep into his jacket, blinks uncomfortably.

STUDENT (CONT'D)

Maybe he's not coming today?

HISTORIAN

He'll be here. This is his town.

STUDENT

You don't really believe...?

HISTORIAN

You don't really believe.

The two of them look at each other and laugh, turning the icy air into mist.

STUDENT

Look -

HISTORIAN

No, look.

The historian points towards the head of the harbor. The mist pushes away, fading before an OLD SAILED SCHOONER and on its deck, the suntanned figure of THE LAST EXPLORER

EXT. THE EXPLORER'S SHIP - KING'S LYNN - DAY

Swaggering the length of his ship, he LAUGHS - a crackling sound that echoes profoundly.

THE EXPLORER

Floating above and not below,
that's me!

(MORE)

THE EXPLORER (CONT'D)
 Another voyage, another return to
 my home away from home. King's
 Lynn, the lake on the sea!

He blows kisses to the HARBOURMEN as his ship glides towards
 the narrow quay.

EXT. FREEZING QUAY - KING'S LYNN - DAY

The student rolls his eyes, but can't keep them away for
 long.

EXT. THE EXPLORER'S SHIP - KING'S LYNN - DAY

The Explorer bounds across the deck and picks up a glittering
 stone.

THE EXPLORER
 I've been to the corner of the
 Earth and cut it like a diamond, to
 the oceanic ridge where the bones
 of the world lie exposed to the
 winds of time.

He tosses it carelessly over his shoulder, seizing instead: a
 whalebone.

THE EXPLORER (CONT'D)
 I have wine made from the Rhine and
 the rind of Adam's apple.
 Treasures from around the world!
 Stories to tell of capture and
 escape, maps and charts to make
 your journeys safe!

EXT. FREEZING QUAY - KING'S LYNN - DAY

The HISTORIAN grins at the STUDENT.

HISTORIAN
 Well?

STUDENT
 All I see is some old sailor who's
 clearly been round the bend.

HISTORIAN
 (his smile deepening)
 He's been round many.

HARBORMEN tie up the Explorer's little ship. The Explorer
 climbs unsteadily up onto the pier before a small CROWD and
 wobbles on sea legs.

THE EXPLORER
 The ship's in! The Ship's Inn!
 Take me to the Ship's Inn!
 (MORE)

THE EXPLORER (CONT'D)
 Now that I'm on land I find I want
 to get wet!

INT. THE SHIP'S INN - KING'S LYNN - THAT NIGHT

Out of happy revelry and songs, like for a holiday, staggers
 The Explorer, drunk.

He collapses into an overstuffed chair by the lit fire, and
 gazes marvelously at the ongoing celebrations.

DRUNK SAILOR
 Another story!

ANOTHER DRUNK SAILOR
 Another beer!

CHEERS.

THE EXPLORER
 No, no. Friends, no. I just want
 to listen to the songs for a while,
 here by myself. I haven't spoken
 to so many fish for hours!

A few laughs give way to resumed music and the uneven lyrics
 of the Singing Postman's "You Can't Keep Livin' in the Past".
 The singers form a wheel, spinning too quickly for the drunk
 Historian.

He stumbles out of it and plops into the chair next to the
 Explorer. The Historian frowns deeply.

THE EXPLORER (CONT'D)
 Ha, ha! Don't worry.
 (hiccups)
 You'll get back in.

HISTORIAN
 It's the wheel of time.

The Explorer pauses, frowns up at the celebrations.

THE EXPLORER
 Is that what they call it these
 days?

HISTORIAN
 Isn't it beautiful?

THE EXPLORER
 Well, yes.

HISTORIAN
 It's horrible.

The Historian snuffles drunkenly, a damp sound underneath the
 revelry.

THE EXPLORER

Hey - now! You're drunk.

HISTORIAN

Listen to me. Listen to me! I'm an historian, a modern man. I have to go back in there. But you don't have to. Keep exploring the small, the hidden places. They think there's nothing else out there to discover, but you know better. Modern men like me can only see the mundane in you, but I know who you are! You're the last explorer!

The Explorer LAUGHS uproariously.

THE EXPLORER

The last! You're drunk, my friend!

HISTORIAN

All the better.

THE EXPLORER

I'm not the last! There are thousands more like me. All it takes to be an explorer is an open mind.

HISTORIAN

All the others have vanished. They came from their ports of call; they sailed, they walked, they flew from all the secret places to the city, the Dean's lure dangled before them.

THE EXPLORER

The Dean? Who?

The two drunk SAILORS disembark from the circle and, laughing, pick up the Historian by the arms.

DRUNK SAILOR 1

Come on, fella!

DRUNK SAILOR 2

You're missing out on all the fun!

DRUNK SAILOR 1

Come have one on me!

THE EXPLORER

Wait! Who's the Dean? The Dean of what?

HISTORIAN

The Dean -

The sailors haul him out of the chair and towards the circle. The Historian cranes his head around and looks back at the Explorer, his face a picture of TERROR. The sailors laugh and laugh.

THE EXPLORER

At least tell me where they went!

He tries to get up, but the Historian's gone, vanished among the dancing and the songs.

EXT. FREEZING QUAY - KING'S LYNN - NIGHT

A quick BLACK FIGURE slips on the frozen pier then, more carefully, crawls into the Explorer's ship.

INT. THE EXPLORER'S SHIP - KING'S LYNN - NIGHT

The figure opens one of the many chests and trunks in the Explorer's hold. It is the student, a torch jammed into his mouth.

He examines the contents: a hollow stone egg - hatched, a faerie wand, an alchemist's beaker still filled with gold... He stuffs each one into his backpack.

STUDENT

Fake. Fake. What rubbish. Maybe you can fool these backwards people and my backwards professor, but not me. I'll prove you for a fake. I'll prove you for a liar!

THE EXPLORER (O.S.)

I'll prove him wrong! Says I'm the last. I can't be the last, he'll see.

The student slips behind a TOTEM POLE just as the Explorer lights a lamp in the open doorway. He walks right past the student and the open chest. Luckily, he's concentrating too hard to notice.

THE EXPLORER (CONT'D)

I'll find them out there. On the waves. In the secret places modern men don't dare. An explorer exploring for explorers, there's a first. Not a last!

He grabs a push-pole from a stack of equipment then heads back on deck.

EXT. THE EXPLORER'S SHIP - KING'S LYNN - NIGHT

At the side of the boat, the Explorer unties the mooring, then pushes off with the pole.

Behind him, in the dim lantern light from the open door of the hold, the student leaps off the ship onto the pier.

EXT. THE EXPLORER'S SHIP - KING'S LYNN - NIGHT

As The Explorer pushes his sailing ship along, he turns to watch the lights of King's Lynn retreat down the river - the lanterns of the Inn, the docking lights, the signals on the tall cranes, the stars reflected in the water.

Among them all glitters two more pins of light. He doesn't notice them - but up close they are unmistakable. They're the contact lenses in the Student's EYES.

EXT. KING'S LYNN - DAY

Early morning over King's Lynn. Fog grows on the city like mold on bread. Shouts and conversation, cars in the street making rivers to the sea.

EXT. FREEZING QUAY - KING'S LYNN - NIGHT

The student struggles against a current of sailors and harbourmen carrying tools and rope. He's clumsy under his bulging backpack, sometimes bumping into people as he squints up at each face he passes.

STUDENT

Professor? Have you seen my history professor? He went to the inn last night with..

(doesn't know what to say)

Excuse me. Have you seen...? He was wearing a kind of tweed coat, so tall, brown eyes...

One of the drunk sailors from last night frowns at him, shakes his head.

DRUNK SAILOR

Sorry. Haven't seen anyone like that.

The student stumbles out of the way. He blinks miserably, puts contact solution in his eyes from a bottle. It streams down his face. He brushes the drops away irritably.

STUDENT

The fool!

INT. THE SHIP'S INN - KING'S LYNN - DAY

The student wanders into the cozy room looking for his tutor. It's empty save for an ANCIENT MAN in tweeds in an overstuffed chair near the fire.

STUDENT

Excuse me, have you seen..

He stops, peers at the man, who looks back uncomprehendingly. Despite the wrinkled skin and the vacant expression, it's clearly the HISTORIAN. The student doesn't recognize him.

STUDENT (CONT'D)

Where did you get that jacket?

HISTORIAN

I don't remember. I used to be quite good with history, you know. Is it yours?

STUDENT

It belongs to my professor. He was here last night. He must have left it behind.

The student reaches out to take it from him, but the old man recoils.

HISTORIAN

It's cold!

STUDENT

Well... if you find him, would you tell him that I've gone back to the University alone? And that I've got some stuff that proves he's been wasting his time with all this explorer nonsense. And... oh, never mind!

HISTORIAN

Never mind! Wasting time! He he he.

The student digs around in his pocket and produces some change. He puts it in front of the old man.

STUDENT

Here. Have a beer to warm yourself up if you like.

The student steps out into the cold while the old man, once the historian, now history itself, stares sadly at the coins on the table.

HISTORIAN

Just one more, maybe.

EXT. THE EXPLORER'S SHIP - THE OPEN SEA - DAY

The Explorer wakes with a start to a BLUE BLUE SKY. He groans under the light, rolls over, then crawls his way along the salt-stained deck towards the hold where the lantern hangs exhausted.

INT. THE EXPLORER'S SHIP - THE OPEN SEA - DAY

The Explorer drags himself up to the open chest. Reaching in, he extracts a bottle of whiskey, half full.

With an injured moan, he tosses it away. He reaches in again, this time producing a

RUSSIAN DOLL painted like a chicken instead of like a little girl. He removes shell after shell until at the very center - an EGG. He picks it out.

EXT. THE EXPLORER'S SHIP - THE OPEN SEA - LATER

Eating scrambled egg out of a frying pan made of solar panels, The Explorer peers out to sea with a pair of binoculars.

He looks down at a map marked at either end with "the ends of the earth". In the space between each end, mountains (or are they waves?) stretch in little scribbles, and among them destinations such as "Trouble", "Youth", "Never the Same", and "Portugal" are calligraphed alongside very precise lines and figures.

EXT. THE EXPLORER'S SHIP - THE OPEN SEA - DAY

At the prow of the ship, he peers ahead through a rainy wind then down again at a compass.

EXT. THE EXPLORER'S SHIP - THE OPEN SEA - NIGHT

The sea swells up before the ship and tosses it aside. The Explorer falls out of a hammock with a gasp as the horn from a cargo ship swoops past, doppler.

He runs, half naked and wet from water surging over the gunwale onto the deck. A SPOTLIGHT pins him down from a tower on the passing ship.

WATCHMAN

Out of the way you lummox! This is a shipping lane!

THE EXPLORER

Lummox! Do you know what I am?!

WATCHMAN

An old squat, by the looks of you!

EXT. THE EXPLORER'S SHIP - THE OPEN SEA - DAY

The Explorer scans the horizon, still looking. He glares at another panful of eggs.

EXT. THE EXPLORER'S SHIP - THE OPEN SEA - NIGHT

Sleeping deeply, The Explorer snores over the sound of footsteps on the deck. They come closer and LIGHT flicks across his face. He stirs.

MUMMY FORTUNA (O.S.)

Well, what have we here? Bless me for a witch, I'd told myself I'd seen the last of them. Here! You two! Come over here!

MUMMY FORTUNA, a proud-faced woman in a suit, at the end of her life, beckons to her two companions.

HUNCHMAN, a squat one-eyed goon, and SCHMENDRICK, a lanky man before his thirties, slide clumsily onto the deck from their own ship, a floating homestead with a motor puttering darkly adjacent to the schooner.

MUMMY FORTUNA (CONT'D)

(to Hunchman)

You have a good eye, tell me what you see lying there.

HUNCHMAN

Just a stupid old squat by the looks of him. Probably not even worth robbing.

MUMMY FORTUNA

The fool! But then I knew that. What about you, storyteller? What do you see with your true sight?

The man peers at the sleeping explorer. He frowns, then his eyes widen.

SCHMENDRICK

I uh... I see.. just a sad old man. Just a regular man. Like he said, not worth taking.

Mummy Fortuna chuckles to herself.

MUMMY FORTUNA

Some storyteller you are! What kind of stories do you know that you can't tell a bona-fide explorer from a modern man! I wonder why I pay you. I want him. I want him for the museum.

The Explorer stirs; his eyes roll, close to waking.

MUMMY FORTUNA (CONT'D)

Quickly!

Hunchman extracts a tranquilizer from his breast pocket and jabs the Explorer in the neck. The Explorer winces.

THE EXPLORER
(in his sleep)
Not the last! Not the last...

INT. FORTUNA'S MUSEUM - DAY

The Explorer's eyes open slowly and focus on a row of bars. He's in a cell, along a corridor of cells. He can hear timbers creak and the room sways slightly.

He squints to speed his recovery, then JUMPS. Across from him in another cell is a huge, savage islander dressed in countless bracelets made of woven veins, a loincloth, horribly scarred with cuts and brands, and ears that have been sewn back against his head.

The SAVAGE glares malevolently at all around him, especially at The Explorer. When their eyes meet, he GROWLS.

A door at the end of the corridor bursts open and a voice drifts down:

SCHMENDRICK (O.S.)
Behold! The lane of legends! In each of these cells rests not mere men, but the great figures of myth and story. Legends of the past, made real at last!

The Explorer creeps to his barred door and looks out. Schmendrick, watched by Hunchman, guides a crowd of MUSEUMGOERS down the passage. He stops occasionally to make remarks about one or another of the prisoners.

SCHMENDRICK (CONT'D)
This here is the barbaric crusader whose name he cannot tell. His tongue was cut out by infidels in the holy land after he slew a hundred of their number using the strength of a single prayer. Lost on the way back to England, he has returned centuries later to find it rife with heathens like those he has hated forever - you and I, ladies and gentlemen, who he would gladly slay if he could! Don't get too close, now!

He turns to a second prisoner, a BEAUTIFUL WOMAN in floral regalia.

SCHMENDRICK (CONT'D)
And this lovely beauty is the Icen princess Armella.
(MORE)

SCHMENDRICK (CONT'D)

The same blood runs through many of your veins as through hers, but hers is pure, like boiled snow. They say she was birthed from a flower, and the same powers have sustained her through the years: the very rats, with whom every ship's crew is plagued, bring her food and stolen jewelry. Tributes to the virgin flower of East Anglia.

Schmendrick deftly lifts a necklace from one of the gaping audience and pockets it. He catches the Explorer watching him and HESITATES. He puts finger to his mouth.

SCHMENDRICK (CONT'D)

And now, ladies and gentlemen, my colleague will entertain you with a witty joke.

HUNCHMAN

Um, er, um...

As the crowd closes in around Hunchman, Schmendrick slips over to The Explorer's cell on quick tip toes.

SCHMENDRICK

I'm not supposed to talk to the prisoners, so we have to be quick.

THE EXPLORER

Prisoners? Who are you people?

SCHMENDRICK

Shhh! You're in Mummy Fortuna's museum of the past. She kidnaps people and makes them up as legends for those who will pay good money to believe in them. And believe me, most people will. Look closer at your fellow legends - see? - the crusader's just a hateful fishmonger and Armella a prostitute. Illusions - deceptions. But I know who you are. If I were blind I would know a real explorer from the stories I read as a boy.

THE EXPLORER

And you are... ?

SCHMENDRICK

Forgive me, sir. My name is Schmendrick the storyteller. Alas, there's as much truth in my name as in the rest of this place.

(MORE)

SCHMENDRICK (CONT'D)
 Nothing here is as it seems, so
 wrapped up it's been in tales and
 tinsel.

Schmendrick trails off, noticing the Explorer looking past
 him, fearfully, at the savage.

THE EXPLORER
 Except for him... He's real. A
 native from the islands of Selena.
 I traveled there once.

The Explorer swallows.

SCHMENDRICK
 Yes you're right... Mummy
 Fortuna's favorite. One of these
 days he'll break free, and then...
 Oh, she never should have meddled
 with a real savage, or a real
 explorer for that matter!

HUNCHMAN
 Gah! Schmendrick! What are you
 doing? These people are here for
 stories, not jokes!

SCHMENDRICK
 Ah, but down here they are all the
 same!
 (to The Explorer)
 Don't worry, Schmendrick is with
 you!

Schmendrick puts on his performance face and turns back to
 the crowd.

SCHMENDRICK (CONT'D)
 Behold, ladies and gentlemen, the
 brave Explorer! The last of his
 kind ...

The Explorer shoots Schmendrick a startled look as the CROWD
 gathers round, gaping and oohing at him. One of the crowd,
 an OLD MAN, tears up.

INT. FORTUNA'S MUSEUM - THAT NIGHT

Hunchman, holding a flickering candle, cowers next to Mummy
 Fortuna outside the open cell where the savage sleeps. A RING
 OF KEYS jangles in his hand as he shakes.

HUNCHMAN
 I don't care how drugged he is, get
 rid of him, Mummy!

MUMMY FORTUNA

Don't be stupid. But then that's probably asking too much. Give me the tranquilizers and I'll do it myself.

HUNCHMAN

I can't sleep, thinking - what's he going to do to us!

MUMMY FORTUNA

Silence. No one else has such an immortal legend in captivity, and no one ever will. I'll keep him! He's mine.

The savage stirs, growls in his in-between sleep.

HUNCHMAN

Oh no! He's - He's waking!

He flees down the corridor and up the stairs.

MUMMY FORTUNA

Not yet. Not yet. You're mine!
If you kill me, you're still mine!

As the savage becomes conscious, she JABS him with the tranquilizer. He reaches up for her throat with heavy, murderous hands without fingernails. They claw at nothing. Then he COLLAPSES, defeated.

MUMMY FORTUNA (CONT'D)

(laughing)

Some savage! Some explorer!

She closes the cell. The lock on it clicks shut.

THE EXPLORER

He'll be the death of you one day.

MUMMY FORTUNA

So what if he kills me? He'll always remember that I, a modern woman, held him captive, humiliated him. So there's my immortality, eh!

THE EXPLORER

If that's all you want, then let me go.

MUMMY FORTUNA

Ha! So the Dean can lure you in like all the rest? I won't let him have you!

This gets The Explorer's attention.

THE EXPLORER

The Dean! Tell me where he is!

MUMMY FORTUNA

So you know him. Then you know you're better off. If I let you go, he'll find you soon enough, should you survive that long. Then you'll wish you'd never left your precious port, or this very cell, or never lived at all!

THE EXPLORER

What do you mean?

MUMMY FORTUNA

It's a rare woman who's taken for what she means. No. I'll not tell you. You're mine now. You belong to *me*.

Clucking, she returns up the stairs.

The Explorer gets up and pulls at his bars. Schmendrick emerges wearing a smug expression from the empty cell next door.

SCHMENDRICK

She's an old braggart, isn't she? Never mind. Schmendrick is here! Behold!

He produces the RING OF KEYS.

THE EXPLORER

How did you...?

SCHMENDRICK

I'm not all that I seem! What I mean is that I seem to be what I'm not. That is, I've been more in my dreams, but in between... ah... I give up.

THE EXPLORER

A tongue-tied storyteller...

Schmendrick sighs.

SCHMENDRICK

But a first rate pickpocket. I grabbed these off the hunchback when he ran past.

The Explorer laughs in spite of himself.

THE EXPLORER

Will you hurry up and let me out?
And the others, too.

Schmendrick, fiddling with the lock, stops.

SCHMENDRICK

...all of them?

THE EXPLORER

Of course.

Schmendrick looks over his shoulder at the savage.

SCHMENDRICK

Not him.

THE EXPLORER

We're two sides of the same legend.
I can't bear to see him caged.

SCHMENDRICK

But he'll kill you! He'll kill all
of us!

HUNCHMAN

(from the head of the
stairs)

Damn it. Where did I leave my...

He stops in his tracks, sees Schmendrick at the cell door.

HUNCHMAN (CONT'D)

Why you!

SCHMENDRICK

Let me explain!

HUNCHMAN

She'll kill you, or put you in a
cage and cut out your tongue like
the others! You're finished,
storyteller, a myth! Come here!

He LUNGES down onto Schmendrick, and the keys go flying. The two wrestle in the corridor while The Explorer grabs the keys and begins unlocking the other prisoners: the Princess, the crusader...

The commotion wakes the savage. His eyes stretch open.

Hunchman chokes Schmendrick against the bars of the empty cell. The storyteller gasps, his hands flopping uselessly on either side.

The savage, moving heavily under the drugs, sits up. He sees The Explorer walking to his cell with the keys, and an evil GRIN forms on his face.

Schmendrick spits and splutters, half-strangled when Hunchman sees what The Explorer is up to.

HUNCHMAN (CONT'D)
 What are you doing? Not him!
 Escape if you like, but don't free
 him!

Hunchman lets go. Schmendrick collapses, gulping air.

SCHMENDRICK
 He's right! Stop! Run! Anything,
 just don't...!

A terrified Hunchman can't pull The Explorer away before he
 TURNS THE KEY.

SCHMENDRICK (CONT'D)
 No!

The savage BURSTS out of his cell. Hunchman screams and
 cowers as the man-monster GRIPS The Explorer with one titanic
 hand and LIFTS HIM FROM THE GROUND.

THE SAVAGE
 Ha ha ha ha ha!

MUMMY FORTUNA
 (from the head of the
 stairs)
 Ha ha ha ha ha! You never could
 have freed yourselves alone!

The Savage DROPS the Explorer in an instant. He TURNS on
 Mummy Fortuna and BEARS DOWN on her.

She raises a fistful of tranquilizers and lets them clatter
 to the ground.

MUMMY FORTUNA (CONT'D)
 Ha ha ha ha ha! I held you! I
 held you!

Then he REACHES her, REACHES out - his nail-less hands GRIP
 and

Schmendrick has to turn away - behind him the savage seems to
 swell, growling and growling and tearing at her carcass.

SCHMENDRICK
 Come with me, I know another way
 out.

He tugs at The Explorer, who tears himself from the sight.
 He stumbles down the corridor after the storyteller.

(Continued: Schmendrick and The Explorer escape into Great Yarmouth, where the Museum is docked, but are arrested by the police there under suspicion of Mummy Fortuna's murder. Schmendrick, the incompetent storyteller, finds it in himself to tell a story that convinces the police to release them. The constable's wife, Molly, sees through the tale only to be enchanted by the truth: an adventuresome explorer out of legend.

She follows them on a trek to the University in Norwich where the student has gained great fame from the treasures he stole. They meet the Dean, a bored academic who entertains The Explorer and his friends as guests in his home, a tower so tall it has a view of the sea. To keep his identity secret, Schmendrick tells the Dean that The Explorer is a visiting scholar. As the days wear on, The Explorer slips deeper and deeper into his disguise. He begins to forget his quest and his nature, lose his immortality, and he and Molly fall in love.

Schmendrick's stories are so effective that soon the student's fame is eclipsed by this new visiting scholar. Bitter, the student decides to tell the Dean that he is The Explorer even though it will ruin his own reputation. The Dean explains to the student that he has had all the explorers driven into the sea so that he can watch them from his tower forever. It is the only thing in the world that inspires him.

Horrified, the student helps them escape through an old bomb shelter that emerges onto the beach. The Explorer, reluctant to return to his true self because he and Molly could never be together, is forced to when the Dean catches them. The two fight on the beach, and Molly sacrifices herself to protect The Explorer. Enraged, The Explorer wrestles the Dean into the water, where the arms of all the explorers that preceded him emerge from the depths and draw him under.)