

Arabia, Arabia!

(or, How To Be Forgotten)

A semi-existential quasi-historical comedy
by Alexander Attea

Characters: (3M, 3W, or NB)

THE NARRATOR	A narrator. (W/Enby, 20-50s)
VON HAVEN (von HAY-ven)	A linguist. Lazy, arrogant. (M/Enby, 20s-40s)
FORSSKAL (FORCE-kal)	A botanist. Determined, arrogant. (M/Enby, 20s-40s)
NIEBUHR (NEE-bur)	An astronomer. Hardworking, understated. (W/Enby, 20s-30s)
BAURENFEIND (BORE-in-faynd)	An artist. Jovial, talented, drunk. (W/Enby, 20s-30s)
KRAMER (KRAY-mer)	A doctor. Incompetent. (M/Enby, 20s-50s)
Time:	1761-1767, sort of.
Place:	Various, along the route from Denmark to Arabia Felix (Yemen).

Notes on the text:

- ➔ This play must be cast with diversity in mind.
- ➔ Pronouns may be changed to reflect actors' gender identities.
- ➔ The playing space should be almost bare, with scene locations being suggested minimally through the use of chairs, props, and potentially maps/projections.
- ➔ If performed outdoors, make use of the playing space. Perform traveling, or in the round, or with the action surrounding the audience. Have fun with it!

ACT 1

One

Lights up on the NARRATOR, with a stack of books. They're flipping through the books, looking for something.

NARRATOR

No... no... no. Ugh.

They find a book titled "Arabia Felix". They look at both covers.

Arabia Felix. Hm.

They look at the index toward the back of the book.

Al-Hudaydah. That's promising.

They open to the middle of the book. VON HAVEN, FORSSKAL, NIEBUHR, KRAMER, and BAURENFEIND appear on a boat. VON HAVEN is lying down, clearly not well. He groans.

FORSSKAL

Get him some water!

KRAMER

We're surrounded by water!

FORSSKAL

Fresh water, you imbecile! We're in the middle of the ocean!

NIEBUHR

I have some left in my canteen.

NIEBUHR hands FORSSKAL the canteen. FORSSKAL forces VON HAVEN to drink. VON HAVEN tries to swallow but ends up spitting it out.

FORSSKAL

Come on, Von Haven, come on.

BAURENFEIND

Maybe he wants some gin?

FORSSKAL

Give that to me.

BAURENFEIND

I'm helping!

BAURENFEIND gives FORSSKAL a flask. FORSSKAL takes a drink from it and throws it offstage.

Hey!

BAURENFEIND exits to retrieve the flask, and quickly returns.

NIEBUHR

What should we do?

FORSSKAL

It's a cold. He needs rest and water. Our *doctor* should know that.

KRAMER

Can I have some of that gin?

NIEBUHR

You're sure it's a cold?

FORSSKAL

I'm sure. He'll get better.

Pause. They all take a second to look around.

BAURENFEIND

Um. Where are we?

KRAMER

The middle of the ocean!

NIEBUHR

Not this again. Okay, where is it?

VON HAVEN

Why'd we all stop paying attention to me?

BAURENFEIND *re: the NARRATOR*

If we're in the ocean, they're walking on water.

VON HAVEN

Am I dead? Is this heaven?

KRAMER

Welcome to heaven, von Haven!

VON HAVEN

Oh no, it's hell.

NIEBUHR *to the NARRATOR*

You, with the book. Come here. Why are you reading this?

NARRATOR

Um — for fun?

FORSSKAL

Neibuhr, don't accost strangers about books.

KRAMER and BAURENFEIND try touching the ground. They're surprised it's not water.

NIEBUHR *to the NARRATOR*

Don't pay attention to them. They don't know what's happening.

NARRATOR

What *is* happening??

NIEBUHR

You displaced us. It happens when someone reads this book. Which isn't very often.

NARRATOR

Oh — I'm sorry. I didn't mean to.

NIEBUHR

Just skip to the end, and we'll go back where we're supposed to be.

NEIBUHR reaches for the book. The NARRATOR withholds it and looks at the back cover.

NARRATOR

But this says all but one of you will die by the end.

VON HAVEN

So I *am* dead.

KRAMER

Welcome to hell, von Haven!

NARRATOR

If you're here, maybe I'm supposed to make that *not* happen.

BAURENFEIND

You think you can save us?

NARRATOR

I picked up a book and you all appeared, so — I guess anything's possible.

NIEBUHR

Just flip to the end, please. It's for the best.

NARRATOR

No. I'm going to flip to the beginning.

NIEBUHR

Wait —

The NARRATOR flips to the beginning. Time starts to shift.

KRAMER

Ooo, what's happening?

FORSSKAL

This feels weird.

VON HAVEN

I don't feel sick!

BAURENFEIND

I feel — hungover.

FORSSKAL

You probably are.

NIEBUHR

Here we go, I guess. See you all at the beginning.

NARRATOR

Okay, magic book — From the top!

The time shift is over.

Transition.

Two

The NARRATOR stands center, with the book. They look around.

NARRATOR

Okay. Weird. Let's see what happens.

The NARRATOR reads:

Arabia Felix! "Happy Arabia!" A mysterious land where there is happiness! Exotic treasures and pleasures abound — you can find your fortune, change the world, cement your place in history! It's 1761. King Frederick of Denmark has put together a world-class expedition — the first of its kind — to Arabia Felix. The brave explorers on this mission will be sent to learn all they can about this strange land. Arabia Felix. Happy Arabia. Why is it so damn happy? Can these Europeans find out, and be happy too? Only time will tell. Ooo — keeping us on the edge of our seats! Okay, it goes on like this for a while. Let's skip ahead.

The NARRATOR skips ahead. All except VON HAVEN enter.

Oh — you're still here! I guess it's time to meet the scientists! Hello!!

KRAMER

Hi!!

FORSSKAL

Hello — what are we all doing here?

NARRATOR

Meeting! The king has arranged a dinner to get you all together.

KRAMER

Great. I'm starving. Where's the food?

NARRATOR *looking around*

Um, I — don't know.

BAURENFEIND

What about drinks?

NARRATOR

Why don't we all introduce ourselves?

NIEBUHR

Aren't we missing someone?

NARRATOR *counting*

Oh — right. Where is he?

VON HAVEN *off*

I'm studying in Rome, be there soon!

NARRATOR

He's — on his way. Let's introduce ourselves!

FORSSKAL

Great! You first.

NARRATOR

You know me, we just met.

FORSSKAL

I don't know who you are.

NIEBUHR

You went to the beginning. They don't remember.

NARRATOR

But you do?

NIEBUHR *nodding*

Yep. You're in the story now.

NARRATOR *referring to the book*

I'm in the story. Fun! Ookay, so — I'm Baron von Bernstorff! I'm representing King Frederick. Very fancy. Who's next?

FORSSKAL

I'll go. Hello, everyone. I'm Peter Forsskal.

ALL

Hi, Peter.

FORSSKAL

I was recommended by Carl Linnaeus to join this expedition.

NARRATOR

Linnaeus?

FORSSKAL

You don't know Linnaeus? The "Father of Taxology" —?

Really? Nothing? Strange. Anyway, he thinks I'm pretty great, which is true, I am. I enrolled at the University of Uppsala at age ten. I studied theology, philosophy, oriental languages, zoology, and of course biology, my greatest passion. At age 24, I was the youngest person to be elected to the German Academy of Science.

NARRATOR

Quite the resume.

FORSSKAL

I'm not finished. I also published a dissertation called "Thoughts on Civil Liberty," criticizing the Swedish government's censorship of the press and advocating for free speech.

BAURENFEIND

What happened?

FORSSKAL

It was censored.

BAURENFEIND

Figures.

NARRATOR

Any fun facts about yourself?

FORSSKAL

The national flower of Sweden, the Linnaeus Borealis, is named after my mentor Carl Linnaeus.

NARRATOR

Not a fun fact about botany, a fun fact about yourself.

FORSSKAL

Oh. My favorite plant is mullein —

NARRATOR

Alright, moving on!

To BAURENFEIND:

How about you?

BAURENFEIND

I'm Baurenfeind. I'm an artist.

ALL

Hi, Baurenfeind.

BAURENFEIND

You can call me Barry, if you want.

NARRATOR

Barry. Tell us a bit about yourself!

BAURENFEIND

I attended the Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen, they gave me a couple of medals for my work, and now I do portraits of rich aristocrats because it pays the bills. So yeah, that's me!

FORSSKAL

Can you draw us something?

BAURENFEIND finds her sketchbook and pencil and begins to draw quickly. After a moment, she finishes and reveals her drawing, an intricate sketch of the word "No."

Point taken.

NARRATOR

Who's next?

To NIEBUHR.

How about you?

NIEBUHR

I'm not really great at public speaking.

NARRATOR

It's fine. Go ahead.

NIEBUHR *to audience*

Hi. I'm — um — Niebuhr. Carsten. Not in that order. I'm Carsten Niebuhr. I like — science. And space. Science about space.

— Maps too. Of space. And land.

FORSSKAL *sarcastic*

Impressive.

NIEBUHR

I also served in the army, I'm a lieutenant.

FORSSKAL

Very well, Lieutenant. Where did you study?

NIEBUHR

Gottingen.

FORSSKAL

— And?

NIEBUHR

That's all.

FORSSKAL

Hm. I see. Nothing — better?

NARRATOR

This isn't an interview, Forsskal.

FORSSKAL

Am I the most qualified person here? Who's next?

NARRATOR

It's my job to ask who's next. You need to calm down, my guy.

FORSSKAL

I'm perfectly composed.

NARRATOR

Who's next?

KRAMER

Me!

NARRATOR

You! Tell everyone who you are!

KRAMER *confused*

— I'm me!

NARRATOR

No, like your name and what you do.

KRAMER

Oh! I'm Christian Carl Kramer, and I'm a doctor!

ALL

Hi, Kramer.

NIEBUHR

How long have you been practicing?

KRAMER

Practicing —?

FORSSKAL *is this guy serious?*

Medicine.

KRAMER

Oh. I haven't. I only received my degree last week. Want to see my thesis?

KRAMER shows a research paper.

NIEBUHR

"Canaries and Their Care."

KRAMER

That's right. I studied how to care for —

FORSSKAL

Canaries, yes.

BAURENFEIND

Cute!

KRAMER

I wrote that, and now I'm a doctor!

NARRATOR *to audience*

1761, everyone.

FORSSKAL

So I'm definitely the most qualified here.

NARRATOR

You. Shh. Who's up for a team-building exercise?

VON HAVEN *entering*

Everybody shut up and look over here! The Professor Frederick Christian von Haven is arriving from Rome!

ALL *clumsily*

Hi, Professor Frederick Christian von Haven arriving from Rome.

NARRATOR

Well, we're all finally here! A botanist, a doctor, an artist, an astronomer, and a linguist!

VON HAVEN

Philologist, thank you.

NARRATOR

Why don't we go around and say what we're most excited about?

NIEBUHR

I'm really looking forward to seeing other parts of the world, new cities and landscapes —

FORSSKAL

Yes, imagine all the plants there are to discover!

NIEBUHR

Right, that too —

BAURENFEIND

I want to learn another culture, see how people live. And just — *draw* it, you know?

VON HAVEN

How eloquent.

BAURENFEIND

I'm so tired of drawing rich Europeans and their weird little dogs. I want to draw something — raw. Honest. Connected with the earth. *Sensual. Raw.* — Did I already say raw?

FORSSKAL

Yes.

BAURENFEIND

Nobody's going to make me paint fruit bowls in Arabia Felix.

KRAMER

Speaking of, where's the food?

NARRATOR

The food is still being prepared. What about you, von Haven? I'm sure you're excited to immerse yourself in the language. That's what you were studying in Rome, right?

VON HAVEN

Yes, I was studying Arabic manuscripts.

FORSSKAL

Impressive. I study with Carl Linnaeus.

VON HAVEN

Ah, Linnaeus, yes. I'd have great respect for him if he wasn't Swedish.

FORSSKAL and VON HAVEN laugh.

FORSSKAL

I'm Swedish too.

VON HAVEN

— Oh.

FORSSKAL

Anyway, I'm sure your Arabic is fluent by now. Let's hear some!

VON HAVEN

Well — you see, my Arabic tutor could only teach me in the mornings. And there was a bit of conflict because the manuscript library was only open from nine o'clock until noon.

FORSSKAL

I'm confused. Do you speak Arabic or not?

VON HAVEN

I do! I'm just — still learning.

FORSSKAL

Ah. The "esteemed linguist," everyone!

VON HAVEN

Philologist!

FORSSKAL

I thought this was supposed to be a prestigious group.

VON HAVEN

I thought this was a Danish expedition, and yet here I am looking at an ugly Swede!
I hope the rest of us are Danish.

NARRATOR

Does it really matter that much?

VON HAVEN

Raise your hand if you're Danish!
VON HAVEN and KRAMER raise their hands.
What??

FORSSKAL

Swedish.

NIEBUHR

German.

BAURENFEIND

I don't really believe in the whole "nationality" thing —

VON HAVEN

This is an outrage!

FORSSKAL

I think it's only an outrage for ugly Danes, von Haven.

VON HAVEN

Are you intent on insulting everyone here, Professor Forsskal?

FORSSKAL

Just the incompetent ones.

VON HAVEN *to the NARRATOR*

You can't allow him to speak to me, the expedition's leader, this way!

NARRATOR

Actually — about that. Everyone will rank equally.

KRAMER

Does that mean we're all doctors now?

BAURENFEIND

Sure, why not?

NARRATOR

No —

VON HAVEN

Rank equally? I can't believe it!

NIEBUHR

It's only fair, Professor.

FORSSKAL

And at the order of your king.

VON HAVEN

I'm not talking to you anymore.

FORSSKAL

Oh, thank god. I thought you'd never stop.

VON HAVEN

I will not suffer these indignities!

— I will not!!

Beat.

Do you understand?!!

NARRATOR

We'll see you tomorrow for the departure, Professor.

VON HAVEN

I am *not* happy, Baron. I want to be the leader. I want to be in charge.

NARRATOR

Don't we all. I think the Professor is tired from his travels. Goodnight.

VON HAVEN

I'm not tired! It's not my bedtime!

NARRATOR

Goodnight, von Haven.

VON HAVEN *exiting*

Come on, Kramer. Let's go.

KRAMER *exiting*

Bye everyone! See you later!

BAURENFEIND

Bye! Sweet dreams!

FORSSKAL

Rank equally with him? I'm the most capable of the lot. Put me in charge.

NARRATOR

Oh. Well, since you asked. Sure, you're in charge.

FORSSKAL

— Really?

NARRATOR

No! What don't you understand about "king's orders"?

FORSSKAL

You'll regret this, Baron von Bernstorff.

NARRATOR

I take it you'll be next in the line of people storming out of the room?

FORSSKAL

I — you don't — I am not like them!

FORSSKAL storms off.

NARRATOR

Called it.

NIEBUHR *to BAURENFEIND.*

Can I have some of that?

BAURENFEIND

Knock yourself out.

NARRATOR

Are these really the best people they could find for this trip?

BAURENFEIND

Hey, I'm right here.

NIEBUHR

It wasn't up to me.

NARRATOR

Well. When does the expedition actually begin?

NIEBUHR

Next chapter.

BAURENFEIND

The way I see it, all life is just chapters, beginning and ending, with lots of words in between —

NIEBUHR

Uh huh.

NARRATOR

Next chapter.

Here we go.

The NARRATOR flips ahead.

Transition.

Three

NARRATOR

So, our brave explorers began their journey aboard the Danish warship *Greenland*.
Fanfare! VON HAVEN, FORSSKAL, NIEBUHR, BAURENFEIND, and KRAMER enter one by one. They each carry a traveling bag.
 Let's get this party started! Okay, here are your assignments. Doctor Kramer will study the diseases of the region, their treatments, and will be responsible for all medicine on the expedition.

KRAMER

Ooh! Responsibilities!

NARRATOR

Professor von Haven will observe the customs and habits of the country, by collecting and studying historic manuscripts.

KRAMER

Ooh, you get some responsibilities too!

NARRATOR

Professor Forsskal will make zoological and botanical collections.

FORSSKAL

Don't say it, Kramer.

KRAMER

I'm just excited.

NARRATOR

Lieutenant Niebuhr will make a map of the region, and record the size of the population, the relations between the living and the dead, and the relations between men and women.

NIEBUHR

That last part seems a little invasive.

NARRATOR

It's what the king wants to know.

NIEBUHR

— Why?

BAURENFEIND

What about me? There wasn't anything for me.

NARRATOR

Oh! Right. Hold on. Baurenfeind, is to — um — assist the other members when help is required.

BAURENFEIND

— Great.

KRAMER

Vague responsibilities!

FORSSKAL

Kramer!

KRAMER

Sorry, I couldn't help myself.

FORSSKAL

I'm sure I'll need my botanical samples drawn as I catalog them, Barry.

VON HAVEN

But maybe I'll need Barry's help, too! You can't hog the artist, Professor Forsskal.

FORSSKAL

I'm not trying to hog — you know what? Never mind.

NARRATOR

Maybe we can try to be nice to each other? I'm sure the trip will go a lot smoother that way.

FORSSKAL *exiting*

Great. Let's just get on with it and get to work. I'm going to my cabin.

VON HAVEN *exiting*

As the appointed leader of this expedition, and the smartest, I must board first!

BAURENFEIND

This is going to be fun! Road trip! Or, boat trip, I guess.

NIEBUHR *to the NARRATOR*

"Be nice to each other." Yeah, you're never going to change the direction this is headed.

KRAMER

The boat? It can only go one direction, right? Whichever direction Arabia Felix is. — South?

NIEBUHR

East. And that's not what I meant, I —

KRAMER

Now which way's the ship?

Chanting as he exits..

Arabia Felix! Arabia Felix!

Okay, it doesn't make for a very good chant.

BAURENFEIND *exiting*

We can work on it.

NARRATOR

Being nice never hurt anyone.

NIEBUHR

No, but it's also not going to keep everyone from dying.

NARRATOR

You've done this before, right?

NIEBUHR

A few times.

NARRATOR

I'm curious — in any of those times, did you meet someone with the last name Attieh?

NIEBUHR

No. Or if I did, I don't remember. Why?

NARRATOR

Just wondering. And every time someone reads this book, the same things happen?

NIEBUHR

All but one of us die. But maybe that's because people usually only read to laugh at us.

NARRATOR

Maybe this time can be different.

NIEBUHR

You think so?

NARRATOR

I'm not here to laugh at you, I'm here to learn. Now let's get moving — time to get on the boat.

NIEBUHR

It leaves tonight. I'm not in a hurry.

NARRATOR

Get on the boat, Niebuhr. It leaves as soon as you board.

There is a strange, seismic shift in the air.

NIEBUHR

It doesn't leave this early. It never leaves this early.

NIEBUHR looks at the book.

— Oh, it leaves right now.

NARRATOR

Really, that worked? I mean, of course it leaves right now. Things are going to be different.

NIEBUHR

— Okay. Yeah. Different.

NIEBUHR looks at the NARRATOR for a moment, then exits.

NARRATOR

Alright. Changing history.

The NARRATOR flips ahead.

The boat departs, en route to Constantinople!!

The NARRATOR attempts to make a foghorn type boat sound.

Our heroes settle into their cabins and begin to work. (Finally, I know.)

On the ship. FORSSKAL, alone in his cabin, writing in a journal. NIEBUHR approaches.

NIEBUHR

Knock knock.

FORSSKAL

I don't have time for jokes.

NIEBUHR

No, um, it's me, Niebuhr. I want to talk to you.

I hope I'm not interrupting.

FORSSKAL

You are.

NIEBUHR

How are you doing?

FORSSKAL

I've already discovered seven different types of seaweed since we departed from Copenhagen.

Have you started working on anything?

NIEBUHR

Venus is going to pass in front of the sun soon, so hopefully these clouds clear so I can observe it.

FORSSKAL

Why are you staring at me like that?

NIEBUHR

Things seem — different around here. Changed. Don't you think?

FORSSKAL

If you say so.

NIEBUHR

Like the boat is leaving earlier than we thought.

FORSSKAL

Is it? I didn't notice.

NIEBUHR

And Von Haven is calling himself the expedition leader again.

FORSSKAL

Let him. We both know he'll tire himself out eventually.

NIEBUHR

That doesn't upset you?

FORSSKAL

I don't care to be distracted by petty matters the way Von Haven is.

NIEBUHR

You seem more focused on your work now than when we first met.

FORSSKAL

Because the expedition has actually started now.

NIEBUHR

No other reason? You haven't noticed any other weird changes?

FORSSKAL

What are you talking about?

NIEBUHR

Nothing. Never mind.

Are you worried we might die on this trip?

FORSSKAL

Well, now I am. I have to work. Please leave.

NIEBUHR

Sorry. Bye.

NIEBUHR, exiting, accidentally steps on a plant sample.

FORSSKAL

My seaweed!

NIEBUHR

Ah! Sorry!

The NARRATOR turns a page and the scene shifts. VON HAVEN is with KRAMER.

VON HAVEN

Who does this Swede think he is? At every turn, he disrespects me!

KRAMER

Do you think he means to?

VON HAVEN

Of course he does! He wants me removed from the expedition! He wants to be leader! It's a coup!

KRAMER

I thought we all ranked equally.

VON HAVEN

Oh, my sweet simple Kramer, you are too thick to see it. He's plotting against us. It's clear as day.

NIEBUHR *entering*

Knock knock, hope I'm not interrupting —

VON HAVEN

You are!

NIEBUHR

Does the world feel different to you?

VON HAVEN

Of course — I'm not leading this expedition! Now get out, we're in the middle of something.

NIEBUHR *exiting*

Right, sorry!

VON HAVEN

Enough of this madness. I'm going to confront Forsskal.

KRAMER

Now?

VON HAVEN

Things don't change unless you change them, Kramer.

KRAMER

Me? Why me?

VON HAVEN

Not you specifically, the general "you". Do I really have to explain what that means?

Things don't change unless *one* changes them, okay? We must strike while the iron is —

KRAMER

Iron.

VON HAVEN

Precisely. Now, let's go put this Swede in his place. For Denmark!

KRAMER *chanting*

Denmark! Denmark!

Oh, this is a great chant! Denmark! Denmark!

*VON HAVEN and KRAMER exit. The NARRATOR turns a page and the scene shifts again.
BAURENFEIND is drinking and drawing. NIEBUHR enters with an astrolabe.*

BAURENFEIND

Whatcha got there?

NIEBUHR

An astrolabe.

BAURENFEIND

Right, cool, right. I totally know what that is.

NIEBUHR

Venus is going to eclipse the sun, and I want to make sure I can take measurements.

Are you working?

BAURENFEIND

Working? We're on a boat, Niebuhr. Let's enjoy it.

NIEBUHR

Do you feel like something has changed, like in the air — ?

KRAMER *off*
Denmark! Denmark!

BAURENFEIND
Is somebody chanting?

KRAMER *off*
Denmark! Denmark!

VON HAVEN and KRAMER enter.

BAURENFEIND
Hey, great chant, Kramer! Are you going to war or something?

VON HAVEN
We are preventing a coup!

BAURENFEIND
Cool, can I come?

KRAMER
Okay!

KRAMER / BAURENFEIND
Denmark! Denmark!

NIEBUHR
This is new.

*VON HAVEN, KRAMER, and BAURENFEIND approach FORSSKAL working.
NIEBUHR continues setting up the astrolabe.*

VON HAVEN
Knock knock.

FORSSKAL
Not now, Niebuhr —

NIEBUHR
Oh, he doesn't want to be disturbed —

VON HAVEN
Forsskal, I'd like a word.

NIEBUHR
Oh boy.

VON HAVEN, KRAMER, and BAURENFEIND confront FORSSKAL.

FORSSKAL
What are you all doing? I'm trying to work.

VON HAVEN
I will not allow you to throw a coup and take my place as leader!

FORSSKAL

You're not the leader. We don't have a leader.

VON HAVEN

But I want to be!

FORSSKAL

Alright, please leave now. I'm working.

VON HAVEN

You can't tell me what to do!

FORSSKAL starts to push VON HAVEN away.

FORSSKAL

I asked you nicely.

VON HAVEN

You can't push me! This crazed man is pushing *me*, the leader of the expedition!

NARRATOR

Should we do something?

NIEBUHR

Do you want to get in the middle of that?

NARRATOR

Not really.

FORSSKAL

I don't want any trouble, just leave me in peace.

VON HAVEN

I know how jealous you are of me and my accomplishments!

KRAMER

Danish accomplishments!

FORSSKAL

Is that what this is about? Nationality? I thought we were past that.

VON HAVEN

You thought wrong! Now do the honorable thing and take your leave of this expedition.

FORSSKAL

Why would I do that?

VON HAVEN

— Because I don't want you here.

FORSSKAL

I can't believe this.

FORSSKAL starts to leave.

VON HAVEN

Don't walk away from me!

FORSSKAL

Watch me!

FORSSKAL walks away.

VON HAVEN

I hope you disappear up your own ass!

FORSSKAL

Right back at you!

VON HAVEN

I say we write a letter to the king and demand his removal. Who's with me?

Pause. No response.

Kramer?

KRAMER

— I don't think that's the best idea.

VON HAVEN

But he's trying to —

FORSSKAL

I'm trying to work. That's what we're here to do, right?

NIEBUHR *noticing something above*

Look — Venus.

They all look. NIEBUHR begins taking measurements with the astrolabe.

BAURENFEIND

That's another planet? It looks just like a blip in front of the sun.

KRAMER

I've never seen anything like it. It's like — a weird dot.

FORSSKAL

It's almost as impressive as my seaweed.

VON HAVEN

I have no words.

One by one, they exit. NIEBUHR and the NARRATOR remain.

NIEBUHR

Don't look too long, you'll hurt your eyes.

NARRATOR

Thanks.

NIEBUHR

This usually doesn't happen. It's usually cloudy.

NARRATOR

Big changes already.

NIEBUHR

So, you like history?

NARRATOR

I guess, sure.

NIEBUHR

Because even people who *really* like history don't find us often. How did you?

NARRATOR

Just happened across the book.

NIEBUHR

Uh huh. You know — by making our ship leave early, you made Forsskal obsessed with his work, Von Haven paranoid about his status, Venus visible — a lot of changes.

NARRATOR

A lot of changes. Should we see if it's saved a life?

The NARRATOR flips ahead. Same as Scene One. VON HAVEN is coughing.

FORSSKAL

Get him some water!

KRAMER

We're surrounded by water!

FORSSKAL

Fresh water, you imbecile!

NIEBUHR

Nope.

FORSSKAL

— What?

The NARRATOR flips back again.

NIEBUHR

He's still dying.

NARRATOR

Bigger changes, then. Do you trust me?

NIEBUHR

Let's see how this goes.

NARRATOR

Great. A ringing endorsement. Here goes nothing!

The NARRATOR flips ahead.

Transition.

Four

NARRATOR

The expedition arrives at its first major stop: Constantinople! Welcome welcome!

FORSSKAL, NIEBUHR, BAURENFEIND, and KRAMER enter.

The NARRATOR refers to the book, to find a name.

I am Von Gahler, the Danish ambassador here, and I'm so happy to see an expedition from Denmark to Arabia Felix! What a wonderful achievement for King Frederick!

FORSSKAL

And for science.

NARRATOR

That too, sure. Now, aren't there supposed to be five of you? Where's Von Haven?

KRAMER

He said he had to stop by the apothecary.

FORSSKAL

For what?

KRAMER

I don't know, medicine? Apothecary stuff?

NARRATOR

He thought he could skip out on meeting me, *the* Ambassador von Gahler??

KRAMER

Um, I guess?

NARRATOR

How rude! I'll be right back.

The NARRATOR flips ahead and the others are gone. VON HAVEN is there.

Excuse me — Von Haven?

VON HAVEN

Ah, hello! I see my intelligence has garnered me admirers as far afield as Constantinople! A fan! What would you like me to sign?

NARRATOR

Actually, I'm the apothecary. Can I help you find something?

VON HAVEN

Yes, I'm looking for some arsenic?

NARRATOR

Arsenic, like poison arsenic?

VON HAVEN

Are you an idiot? Yes, poison arsenic!

NARRATOR *getting arsenic*

Coming right up. I saw Ambassador von Gahler the other day, he was very excited to meet you.

VON HAVEN

I'm sure he was.

NARRATOR

Have you seen him yet, since arriving in the city?

VON HAVEN

Not yet — I'm on my way there now.

NARRATOR *handing VON HAVEN the arsenic*

Terribly rude to keep your host waiting.

VON HAVEN *paying*

I'm on my way there now. Keep the change.

NARRATOR

Have a great day!

VON HAVEN

Byeee.

NARRATOR flips the book back, and is back with the others..

NARRATOR

I'm back! Von Haven was at the apothecary.

FORSSKAL

How'd you get there and back so quickly?

NARRATOR

I run fast. He bought arsenic. A lot of arsenic. And now he's on his way here.

KRAMER

Arsenic as in poison arsenic? That doesn't sound good.

BAURENFEIND

Is he going to poison us?

NIEBUHR

You didn't stop him??

NARRATOR

He's not going to use it, right?

Wait, this doesn't usually happen?

NIEBUHR

No!!

FORSSKAL

He's going to kill us. Probably mostly me.

BAURENFEIND

It's been nice knowing you.

NIEBUHR

What are we going to do??

VON HAVEN *entering*

Sorry I'm late.

NARRATOR

Oh! Professor von Haven. Hello. Um. It's an honor to meet you.

VON HAVEN

Hello, yes, it is.

They're all staring at VON HAVEN.

KRAMER

How was the apothecary? Find what you were looking for?

VON HAVEN

Yes.

Silence.

KRAMER

That's — good.

VON HAVEN

Yes. Well. Thank you for hosting us, Ambassador, but I'm going to bed now. The next leg of the journey requires a well-rested leader.

NARRATOR

I thought you all ranked equally.

VON HAVEN

We do, in the end, don't we? Good night, all. Sleep well.

VON HAVEN exits.

NARRATOR

Oookay.

NIEBUHR

This isn't what I meant by bigger changes!

NARRATOR

It's fine! I've got it under control!

NIEBUHR

So what do we do?

NARRATOR

Let me think. Maybe it won't actually end up being a problem.

The NARRATOR flips ahead. NIEBUHR, FORSSKAL, BAURENFEIND, and KRAMER are dead, poisoned. VON HAVEN stands over them, laughing.

VON HAVEN

Who's the leader now??

Sees the NARRATOR.

Von Gahler! You've seen too much!

NARRATOR

Ahhh!!!

The NARRATOR flips back. Everyone is alive again.

So it doesn't end well with the arsenic.

NIEBUHR

No kidding!!

FORSSKAL

We should tell the king, right? They'll have to remove him from the expedition.

BAURENFEIND

It'll take weeks for a response.

KRAMER

And arsenic kills faster than that, I'm pretty sure.

NARRATOR

Let's write a letter anyway.

KRAMER

Letter! Letter! Letter!

FORSSKAL

I'm going to die.

NIEBUHR

Nobody's going to die.

BAURENFEIND

What should we write?

NARRATOR

"Dear King Frederick." Start there.

BAURENFEIND *writing*

"We are writing to inform you of a matter which has caused us all great fear."

FORSSKAL

Von Haven's trying to poison us!

BAURENFEIND

Easy does it, now. Geez.

"While in Constantinople, Professor von Haven purchased an astonishing amount of arsenic. The amount is so large, it would easily serve as the last meal for over twenty men. When we consider this in conjunction with the arrogance and temper he has always shown, we can imagine only the most horrible of intentions."

FORSSKAL

We. Are. Going. To. Die. Out. Here. Please. Help.

BAURENFEIND

"Please put our minds at ease and remove Professor von Haven from this expedition, for the safety of all of us."

NIEBUHR

Here, give me that pen.

BAURENFEIND

No, I'm writing! Hey!

NIEBUHR *taking the pen*

"If he should attempt to poison us, I will as a soldier know how to avenge it. To be sure a bullet isn't much comfort, but more honorable for him to die a gentleman than a coward."

BAURENFEIND

Did you just offer to shoot him?

NIEBUHR

Only if we need to.

BAURENFEIND *taking the pen back*

Give me that. "With deepest respect, we remain your majesty's humble servants."
Let's sign it and get this over with.

BAURENFEIND, NIEBUHR, and FORSSKAL sign the letter.

NARRATOR

Great letter. Let's send it.

The NARRATOR takes the letter and hurls it offstage. It hits VON HAVEN, who is entering.

VON HAVEN

Ow! What was that for?

NARRATOR

Oops! Sorry. I'll take that.

The NARRATOR throws the letter offstage again.

FORSSKAL

I thought you were going to bed.

VON HAVEN

I got thirsty.

Pause. They're all staring in fear again.

So I'm just going to get some water.

NIEBUHR mouths "What do we do?" to the NARRATOR.

NARRATOR

New plan.

VON HAVEN
What?

NARRATOR
I know about the arsenic, von Haven.

VON HAVEN
Arsenic? What arsenic?

NARRATOR
I know about the arsenic.

Another strange, seismic shift in the air. VON HAVEN holds out the arsenic, almost against his own will.

VON HAVEN
Oh — this arsenic?

KRAMER
What is happening?

NARRATOR
You're not going to use that, right?

VON HAVEN
No.

NARRATOR
Not even to poison your fellow expedition members?

VON HAVEN
No, why would I do that?

NARRATOR
Then why did you buy it?

VON HAVEN
For fun.

NARRATOR
Fun. Yes. Fun. We're just going to forget all this happened, okay?

VON HAVEN
Okay.

NARRATOR
Excellent. All fixed. Nobody was poisoned and nobody died. I think I'm getting pretty good at this!

VON HAVEN
Well, I'm exhausted. Think I'm going to turn in for the night. Nice seeing you all.

FORSSKAL
Are you going to poison me?

VON HAVEN

No, silly. What would I even poison you with?

FORSSKAL

— The arsenic you're holding.

VON HAVEN

Oh, this arsenic? I forgot I even had this. How embarrassing.

Why don't you hold onto this, Kramer? Since you're the doctor here.

KRAMER *taking the arsenic*

Ooo, dangerous responsibilities. Thank you.

VON HAVEN

No, thank *you*. See you all tomorrow!

VON HAVEN exits.

BAURENFEIND

— Okay. Um.

NIEBUHR

Can we trust him?

KRAMER

He handed over the poison.

FORSSKAL

I've never seen him that — innocent before.

NIEBUHR

Big changes, I guess.

NARRATOR

That's right.

NIEBUHR

Except no more arsenic scares, please.

NARRATOR

You got it. My bad on that one.

What's next?

The NARRATOR flips ahead.

Transition.

Five

NARRATOR

Here we go. Onward to Cairo! There are things to learn!

A shift, and they are all in Cairo.

VON HAVEN

Cairo!

NIEBUHR

The Nile!

FORSSKAL

The Pyramids at Giza!

BAURENFEIND

The Sphinx!

KRAMER

The Library of Alexandria!

NARRATOR

Um, that isn't in Cairo. That's Alexandria. It's literally in the name.

FORSSKAL

And it was famously destroyed. Like, centuries ago.

KRAMER

Huh. Bummer.

BAURENFEIND *to the NARRATOR*

Hold on, who are you?

NARRATOR

Oh, I'm your — guide. Here in Cairo. Welcome.

BAURENFEIND

Oh, that's cool. Hi.

NARRATOR

Anyway, I'm sure you will find plenty here to research and keep you occupied before you continue your journey.

FORSSKAL

Yes, I'm off to find botanical samples for my collection!

NIEBUHR

I'll make a map of the town. Then I can talk to locals and find out how their irrigation system works!

BAURENFEIND

That sounds, just — so boring.

VON HAVEN

Where will we be staying?

NARRATOR

You're looking at it. You'll be staying in this house, purchased specially for you by the king!.

VON HAVEN

This dump? Bought by the king? There's barely enough space for me, let alone everyone else!

NARRATOR

Well, ideally you'll be spending most of your time outside the house, researching.

VON HAVEN

I can't work like this. We are here representing the king of Denmark. Surely you can do better.

FORSSKAL *exiting*

I'm fine with it. I'm going to get to work.

NIEBUHR *exiting*

Same here. Thanks!

VON HAVEN

I am not "fine with it." I demand different accommodations be made!

NARRATOR

— Alright. Fine. There's a French businessman in town who may be able to host you.

VON HAVEN

French? God forbid!

NARRATOR

I swear to god, von Haven — It's either that, or you stay here.

VON HAVEN

— Fine.

The NARRATOR and VON HAVEN exit.

KRAMER

So.

BAURENFEIND

So.

KRAMER

I mean, it's a good thing he won't be staying with us.

BAURENFEIND

Yeah, no poisoning our food!

KRAMER

Oh right, yeah. I just meant he was getting kind of annoying. He never wanted to talk about canaries with me.

BAURENFEIND

And their care?

KRAMER

See, you understand. What you want to do, when caring for domestic canaries especially, is —

BAURENFEIND

Actually, hate to interrupt, but I should probably go draw — something. Talk later!

BAURENFEIND exits, leaving KRAMER alone.

KRAMER

Get real, Kramer. Nobody ever wants to talk about canaries.

The NARRATOR reenters. KRAMER sees them, tries to make eye contact so they might start a conversation about canaries. The NARRATOR avoids KRAMER's eyes; they don't want to talk about canaries. A beat.

NARRATOR

I wonder what Niebuhr and Forsskal are up to.

The NARRATOR flips ahead. Shift. FORSSKAL and NIEBUHR are at the Pyramids of Giza. FORSSKAL is collecting samples, NIEBUHR is measuring the pyramids with her astrolabe.

FORSSKAL

What are you doing?

NIEBUHR

Measuring the Pyramids.

FORSSKAL

I thought you use that thing to map stars.

NIEBUHR

I do.

FORSSKAL *re: the Pyramids*

— Those aren't stars.

NIEBUHR

I know that.

FORSSKAL

Right. So what are you doing?

NIEBUHR

Measuring.

FORSSKAL

Forget it.

Pause. They get a bit lost in their work — NIEBUHR in the Pyramids, FORSSKAL in his plants.

NIEBUHR

They're so big, up close. It's incredible. I've never seen anything like it.

FORSSKAL *looking at a plant*

Neither have I.

NIEBUHR

So perfectly constructed.

FORSSKAL

Yes.

NIEBUHR

Geometric.

FORSSKAL

Yes.

NIEBUHR

Like they're growing out of the Earth.

FORSSKAL

And so prickly!

NIEBUHR

— What?

FORSSKAL

This plant!

— That's what you were talking about, right?

NIEBUHR

Um, sure. Let me see. What kind of plant is it?

FORSSKAL

I don't know, I've never seen it before.

It's a tough one — growing out of stones and sand. Relentless.

FORSSKAL imitates the plant.

"I don't care what conditions I'm under, I'll flourish anywhere. I'll make it work"

NIEBUHR

Sounds familiar. You should call it the Forsskal.

FORSSKAL

You flatter me. But I like the sound of that. It needs to be Latin, though — the Forsskalea.

NIEBUHR

That sounds like a disease.

FORSSKAL

Thank you! I can't wait to send a sample of it back to Linnaeus.

NIEBUHR

Do you ever think about how lucky we are, to be chosen to come here and do this work?

The NARRATOR runs over, accidentally stepping on FORSSKAL's plant.

NARRATOR

Watch out!

The NARRATOR whacks FORSSKAL with a fly swatter.

FORSSKAL

Ow! What was that about? And who are you?

NARRATOR

You had a mosquito on you! You don't want to get malaria. No biggie, but I probably just saved your life. You're welcome.

FORSSKAL

You step on my plant and then hit me with that thing?? You're the one who's going to need saving!

FORSSKAL lunges at the NARRATOR, about to attack them.

NIEBUHR

Woah there!

NIEBUHR restrains FORSSKAL.

NARRATOR

Wow, sorry! I was just trying to help — I didn't realize you were that aggressive! Let's adjust.

The NARRATOR flips back a page. A change in FORSSKAL.

FORSSKAL

Owie — you hit me with that thing and it hurt.

NARRATOR

Sorry about that. I was looking out for your safety.

FORSSKAL

Can you kiss the booboo to make it better?

NARRATOR

— Ookay. I think I went too far in the other direction. Take two.

The NARRATOR flips back again. Another change in FORSSKAL.

NIEBUHR

Is this really necessary?

NARRATOR

Yes.

To FORSSKAL.

How do you feel?

FORSSKAL *blank*

I feel nothing.

NIEBUHR
That's not good.

NARRATOR
One more try.

NIEBUHR
Maybe you should stop changing people —

The NARRATOR flips back again. Another change in FORSSKAL.

NARRATOR
How bout now, Forsskal? Feel better?

FORSSKAL
I feel alive! I feel the sun on my face and the wind in my hair and I hear the music of *life*, pure *life*, happening all around me! Isn't everything just incredible???

FORSSKAL hugs NIEBUHR.

NIEBUHR
Fix him. Now.

NARRATOR
Sorry, sorry.

The NARRATOR flips back again. Another change in FORSSKAL. He lets go of NIEBUHR.

NIEBUHR
Please tell me he's back to normal.

FORSSKAL
What are you talking about? And why are we all just standing around? I have plans to research. Come on, Niebuhr.

FORSSKAL exits.

NIEBUHR
One second.

FORSSKAL *off*
Don't get upset if I make an amazing discovery without you!

NARRATOR
There he is. Good as new.

NIEBUHR
Alright, no more of that. You're going too far. Doing things like that won't help the expedition.

NARRATOR
I'm keeping you all out of harm's way —

NIEBUHR
We can get through this without you meddling in our personalities.

NARRATOR

I wouldn't call it meddling.

NIEBUHR

What would you call it, then?

NARRATOR

— Dabbling. With good intentions.

NIEBUHR

Fine. No more dabbling. Agreed?

NARRATOR

Even if it's to save your lives?

NIEBUHR

How about you save our lives in a normal way, without meddling?

NARRATOR

Dabbling. And okay. Yeah. I can do that.

NIEBUHR

Thank you.

NARRATOR

Like, "Hey, Niebuhr, just so you know there's a mosquito on you."

NIEBUHR

There you go. That's better.

NARRATOR

Seriously, there's a mosquito on you.

NIEBUHR *swatting the mosquito*

Oh, thanks. And thanks for saving his life, by the way. That's usually when he catches malaria.

NARRATOR

No problem. Sorry about getting carried away. Want to see if we're on the right track?

NIEBUHR

Sure.

The NARRATOR flips ahead. Same as Scene One.

FORSSKAL

Get him some water!

KRAMER

We're surrounded by water!

FORSSKAL

Fresh water, you imbecile!

VON HAVEN

Why are we shouting? It's not urgent, it's not like I'm dying.

FORSSKAL

Because we've become good friends recently, and you said you're thirsty, so I want to help you!

VON HAVEN

Thank you!

BAURENFEIND

Here's my flask.

The NARRATOR flips back. Shift. The NARRATOR and NIEBUHR are alone again.

NARRATOR

Starting to look good. Want me to skip to the end for you?

NIEBUHR

Not yet. I want to experience those good moments for real. Those don't usually happen.
I want to be there at the end, when we all make it back home alive.

NARRATOR

So we'll keep going.

NIEBUHR

What made you want to read this book, out of all the books you could've read?

NARRATOR

I thought I might learn something.

NIEBUHR

What do you want to learn? Maybe I could teach you.

NARRATOR

I don't know how to put it — I guess I want to learn about the people. Their history.

NIEBUHR

Okay. I can help with that.

NARRATOR

Thank you.

NIEBUHR

I'll hold onto the book for now, though. We're on the right track and I don't want to mess it up.

NARRATOR

Hold on there. We're helping each other. You help me and I get you all home alive. That's the deal.

NIEBUHR

— Fine.

*The NARRATOR flips ahead.
Transition.*

Six

NARRATOR

Back in Cairo, the expedition waited on a response from the king, about what to do with von Haven and his arsenic. In the meantime, a lot of work was being done.

The NARRATOR finds VON HAVEN and BAURENFEIND lounging and drinking.

VON HAVEN

This is the life, isn't it? I'm so glad I asked to stay with this lovely Frenchman. I don't care what you say about them, Baurenfeind, the French are a fine people. Excellent hosts.

BAURENFEIND

I never said anything about the French.

VON HAVEN *noticing the NARRATOR*

— Who are you?

NARRATOR

Oh! I'm — your host. Hi.

VON HAVEN

Ah, Monsieur Papillon, of course! Sorry, the sun was in my eyes. Could you get me a refill?

NARRATOR

Yeah, let me get you a refill from — somewhere.

VON HAVEN

Thank you. I think we've earned ourselves a break, don't you?

BAURENFEIND

— From doing nothing?

VON HAVEN *referring to a stack of papers*

I bought these the other day!

BAURENFEIND

Papers?

VON HAVEN

Manuscripts, my dear Barry, manuscripts! Very rare too, according to the salesman. You wouldn't believe how much money I spent.

BAURENFEIND

Cool. Have you started translating them?

VON HAVEN

Another time, another time.

The NARRATOR starts discreetly looking at the manuscripts.

Why are we staying in Cairo for so long? — Not that I mind, I'm very much enjoying myself.

BAURENFEIND

We're waiting on word from the king.

VON HAVEN

Word about what?

BAURENFEIND

Um — just a response to a letter we sent.

VON HAVEN

What letter?

BAURENFEIND

— Some of us needed clarification on what to do when we get to Arabia Felix.

VON HAVEN

But it was all laid out for us! This really is a team of nitwits, isn't it?

VON HAVEN picks up a manuscript and looks at it for a moment.

I have no idea what this says.

BAURENFEIND

What?

VON HAVEN

What?

FORSSKAL and NIEBUHR enter.

FORSSKAL

Any response yet?

BAURENFEIND

None.

VON HAVEN

Hello, Forsskal.

FORSSKAL

Professor.

NIEBUHR

Want to see my sketches of the Pyramids? Using triangulations, I could calculate their height —

VON HAVEN

Wonderful, yes, they're very tall, good job.

BAURENFEIND

Let me see those sketches.

Yeah, I can fix those for you.

FORSSKAL

How have you both been? Keeping busy with research?

VON HAVEN

I'm going to miss Cairo.

You know, I was just speaking with my host last night — the Frenchman, Monsieur Papillon — about Voltaire's new tragedy, *Tancrède*. You've seen it? Anyone? No? Well, it was a marvelous

work. I saw it in Marseilles during my travels to — from? — Rome, before we departed. What a show. I'll remember it forever. I can't remember the specifics of the story but they'll come to me. Mademoiselle Clairon was enchanting. A horrifyingly talented woman. Are you familiar? Mademoiselle Clarion? No? Well, you need to get out more, I'd say. Or my mother would say, she was always saying things like that. Quite the woman, my mother — not as talented as Mademoiselle Clairon, but she did give birth to me, which is a notable achievement itself — Anyway, my host and I were speaking about the play — my host, the Frenchman, Monsieur Papillon — and wouldn't you know it, we had seen the same performance! Can you believe it? In Marseilles. What a coincidence! We laughed and laughed — Not at the play, it was a tragedy, but we laughed last night, about the coincidence. Of us both being at the same performance. And now here we both are again, in Cairo, crossing paths on our separate journeys through this thing we call life. Makes you think, doesn't it?

FORSSKAL

— About what?

KRAMER *entering with letters*

We've gotten letters from Copenhagen. This one's for you, Von Haven.

VON HAVEN

For me? How exciting! Read it to me, Kramer.

KRAMER

Um — okay. My mouth is kind of dry, can I have a drink first?

VON HAVEN

Absolutely not.

KRAMER

Cool. Cool. Sorry.

"To the esteemed Professor von Haven,

With all the respect I bear for you and your intelligence, I must write you now with the one small thing that worries me. It concerns the unity, harmony of character, and bond of common interest that should exist among you and the members of your expedition. This bond will bring you all to the great achievements that your king, and the world, expect from this expedition."

VON HAVEN

I'd say we're succeeding so far. I just spent an insane amount of money on these — papers!

BAURENFEIND

Manuscripts.

VON HAVEN

Manuscripts!

KRAMER

"I have received a letter from the other members expressing a few concerns, namely about the purchase of arsenic. Do I need to tell you, Von Haven, that they have given me some ground for concern that there is some incompatibility between you all?"

VON HAVEN

So you *did* send a letter about me? What could possibly make you want to do that?

NIEBUHR

The arsenic, Von Haven.

VON HAVEN

Oh, that? That was just a misunderstanding. Right, Kramer?

KRAMER

Oh, me? I — um —

FORSSKAL

Keep reading.

KRAMER *struggling from thirst now*

"Remember, Professor, this is a very honorable task, to be able to work for the glory of your King and your country. Think of the honor and acclaim that awaits you on your return, and keep in mind the consequences of any ill-advised deed that would destroy the purpose of the expedition. Read this as the sincere advice of a friend. I only have your best interest in heart. And please keep this letter confidential from the others."

VON HAVEN

Well, too late for that. Keep going, Kramer.

NIEBUHR

Okay, he clearly needs something to drink.

BAURENFEIND *handing over her flask*

Here. Take this.

VON HAVEN

You ruined it! I wanted to see how long he could go.

NIEBUHR

Why?

VON HAVEN

— For science? I don't know. Whatever. Keep going, Kramer.

KRAMER

"Finally, we are impatiently awaiting your results from Mount Sinai and from St. Catherine's Monastery. Please send your results as soon as you are able."

NIEBUHR

Mount Sinai?

VON HAVEN

Right, of course. How could I forget? Silly me.

One of my tasks is to visit some hill near Mount Sinai with ancient Biblical inscriptions that probably don't even exist, and transcribe them for interpretation.

Also, I'm supposed to visit the library at St. Catherine's. Apparently they've got a lot of rare manuscripts. But we don't know for sure, no European has ever been there.

FORSSKAL

A very prestigious task. Why haven't you mentioned it before?

VON HAVEN

Must have slipped my mind. Oops!

KRAMER

"You have been putting off this task for far too many months during your stay in Cairo. Please do not waste any more time."

VON HAVEN

Okay, Kramer, stop reading, that's enough.

FORSSKAL

You've been putting it off??

VON HAVEN

I'm scared. It's hot and dangerous out there.

FORSSKAL

It's hot and dangerous everywhere!

VON HAVEN

Will somebody go with me? Baurenfeind?

BAURENFEIND

Oh — I would, but I've got things to draw.

BAURENFEIND coughs.

Plus, I think I'm getting sick. Sorry, but it's a no from me.

VON HAVEN

Kramer? My fellow Dane!

KRAMER

I'm honored —

VON HAVEN

Wonderful!

KRAMER

But no. I'm a doctor, not a linguist. Plus, if Baurenfeind's getting sick, I should stay here.

VON HAVEN

Kramer, please.

KRAMER

I'm sorry.

VON HAVEN

Fine. Forsskal?

FORSSKAL

Me? Ha. My instructions never mentioned joining you on a trip to see inscriptions. So, no.

VON HAVEN

Niebuhr. What about you? Please? Don't make me do this alone.

NIEBUHR looks at the NARRATOR, who shrugs.

NIEBUHR

I have no problem with joining you.

VON HAVEN

— Really?

FORSSKAL

— Really?

NIEBUHR

Why not? It might be interesting.

VON HAVEN

Wonderful. Of course I get stuck with the German peasant. I'll go prepare. No time to waste!

VON HAVEN exits.

FORSSKAL

Have you lost your mind?

BAURENFEIND

He might poison you out there.

NIEBUHR

I'll be fine. I'm not worried.

KRAMER

There's a letter for the rest of us, too.

FORSSKAL takes it and reads.

FORSSKAL

"Dear Forsskal, Baurenfeind, and Niebuhr:"

KRAMER

And Kramer?

FORSSKAL

No, it's not addressed to you.

KRAMER

Oh.

FORSSKAL

"Your thoughts and fears concerning the arsenic are based on sheer imagination and misunderstanding. Please have no fear. The world is not as evil as one might think. You may now continue your travels to Arabia Felix"

BAURENFEIND

Hold on, they're just saying "don't worry"??

FORSSKAL

The whole thing is nothing, don't worry about it! Just chill out, they say! Are they insane?

BAURENFEIND

This is coming from a king, so, yes.

KRAMER

If it makes you all feel better, I still have the arsenic.

FORSSKAL

Right, that makes me feel so much better.

KRAMER *exiting*

But at least he doesn't have it. And he's going away to Mount Sinai for now.

We'll be safe. Most of us, that is. See you later, Niebuhr!

BAURENFEIND *exiting*

Have fun out there, bud.

FORSSKAL *exiting*

Don't die, okay?

They are gone.

NARRATOR

So, you're going with him. Fun!

NIEBUHR

It'll be interesting, at least. And maybe we'll find something about the people and their history for you!

NARRATOR

Good point! I'm excited to see what happens next.

NIEBUHR *grabbing the book from the NARRATOR*

Me too! Let's find out!

NARRATOR

What are you doing?

NIEBUHR

One more thing. I'm not taking any chances. Whatever you've done, it seems like we'll be okay.

I'm just going to ride it out until the end. Sound good? Good.

Next stop: Mount Sinai!

NARRATOR

Niebuhr, wait. Wait!

NIEBUHR flips ahead.

Blackout.

END OF ACT 1

ACT 2**Seven**

The expedition has entered the Arabian desert. FORSSKAL, BAURENFEIND, and KRAMER set up tents. VON HAVEN and NIEBUHR prepare for Mount Sinai. The NARRATOR enters.

NARRATOR

What's happening? What's everyone doing? I can't do my job if I don't know what's happening.

FORSSKAL

Worrying words to hear from our guide through the desert. We're going to Suez.

NARRATOR

Oh. Okay.

To audience.

Suez.

BAURENFEIND *swatting a mosquito on her neck*

Ow.

KRAMER

All good?

BAURENFEIND

I'm fine.

NARRATOR

What about Niebuhr and von Haven?

KRAMER

They're going to Mount Sinai. This guide asks a lot of questions.

NIEBUHR

Bye, everyone! See you soon.

NARRATOR

Niebuhr, wait!

NIEBUHR *exiting*

No time to lose.

NARRATOR *stopping VON HAVEN from exiting*

Hold on a second.

VON HAVEN

What do you want?

NARRATOR

Niebuhr has a book. Get it for me.

VON HAVEN

Niebuhr has a lot of books. And no, I'm not stealing for you.

NARRATOR

It was stolen from me!

VON HAVEN

I have to go.

VON HAVEN exits.

NARRATOR

Damn it, damn it.

BAURENFEIND *coughing*

Hey, y'all? I really don't feel so great.

FORSSKAL

I thought you were faking, so you didn't have to go with von Haven.

BAURENFEIND

I was, but it feels pretty real now.

BAURENFEIND lets out an ugly cough, then takes a drink from her flask.

KRAMER

Maybe you shouldn't be drinking right now.

BAURENFEIND

What do *you* know? I can handle myself.

KRAMER

I'm a doctor.

FORSSKAL

Hardly. What do you need from us, Barry?

BAURENFEIND *lying down*

You know, I think I'm just going to lie down for a minute.

FORSSKAL

Stay with us, though, okay?

I still have about a hundred new plant species for you to draw.

BAURENFEIND

Maybe I'll die just so I don't have to do that.

KRAMER *to FORSSKAL*

This doesn't look good.

BAURENFEIND

I can hear you.

KRAMER *quieter*

This doesn't look good.

FORSSKAL

What should we do?

KRAMER

Put her out of her misery?

BAURENFEIND

I've always been afraid I won't draw everything I want to draw.

FORSSKAL

What else do you want to draw?

BAURENFEIND

Everything.

FORSSKAL

Oh.

BAURENFEIND

It's okay. I'll get better. I always do.

FORSSKAL

Hey, don't say you always get better. When people say that, they die right away.
It's dramatic irony.

NARRATOR

Wait, you know about that? I thought that was a storytelling secret.

FORSSKAL

What are you talking about, storytelling secret? What kind of a guide are you?

NARRATOR

Guide? Nooo, um — I'm a camel. Here in the desert. Just a talking camel.
— I gotta go.

BAURENFEIND

I think I'm seeing things, y'all. That camel was just talking.

The scene shifts. The NARRATOR is lost.

NARRATOR

Okay, what's going on now? Where are we?

VON HAVEN and NIEBUHR are nearing Mount Sinai.

Oh! Von Haven and Niebuhr — they are, um, continuing their journey, I'm assuming.

The NARRATOR exits.

VON HAVEN

Do you think we brought enough food? I don't want to run out and go hungry. Or starve.

NIEBUHR

That means the same thing.

VON HAVEN

No it doesn't. Going hungry is being hungry and alive. Starving is being hungry and dead.
See, there's a reason I'm a linguist.

NIEBUHR

I thought you were a philologist.

VON HAVEN *looking around*

Close enough. How will we know when we're at the right hill?

NIEBUHR

We'll probably have to ask someone.

VON HAVEN

There are so many hills around. Too many.

NIEBUHR

What are you talking about?

VON HAVEN

They make me uneasy.

NIEBUHR

Okay. Um. That's weird. Let's find someone to show us the way.

VON HAVEN

These "inscriptions" are probably just made up. I bet you they don't exist.

NIEBUHR

I'm sure they do.

NIEBUHR sees the NARRATOR

Oh — hello there! Excuse me!

VON HAVEN

What are you doing?

NIEBUHR

Getting help.

VON HAVEN

I want to go home. Can they help me go home?

NARRATOR

Hi! Hello!

NIEBUHR

Oh — hi. Um. We need help. Can you guide us?

NARRATOR

I don't know, maybe there's a book I can use, or something?

NIEBUHR

Maybe we'll just continue alone.

NARRATOR

No, no, I'll help.

VON HAVEN

What's going on? Do you know each other?

NARRATOR *in "character" as the guide now*

No, friend, I am an Egyptian. I live in this area. And I watch over these hills.

VON HAVEN

I can't really understand what they're saying.

NIEBUHR

That's because your Arabic is — well, trash, to put it kindly.

VON HAVEN

I appreciate you putting it kindly.

NARRATOR

How can I help you fine folks?

NIEBUHR

We're looking for a hill near Mount Sinai, with some inscriptions we'd like to study.

NARRATOR

Yes, okay, right, yes, I totally know that hill.

NIEBUHR

Can you bring us there?

NARRATOR

Follow me.

VON HAVEN and NIEBUHR follow the NARRATOR, who is making it up as they go.

VON HAVEN

Do you ever think about how rich this expedition will make us when we get back?

NIEBUHR

Not really

VON HAVEN

I can't wait. The prestige of being on an expedition like this, the respect of making important discoveries here in Arabia, the influential circles we'll be accepted into when we return!

NIEBUHR

Is that what you think about all day?

VON HAVEN

How could you not? All this time in the desert will be worth the acclaim I'll get back home.

NIEBUHR

I like to think we're doing this for science.

VON HAVEN

You're a German peasant who got here on sheer luck, of course you think of it that way. Trust me, Niebuhr, the world's cruel. Better to play things to your own advantage while you can, and worry about everything else later. No use being selfless.

The NARRATOR stops them in front of a set of inscriptions.

NARRATOR

Here we are!

NIEBUHR

You found it!

NARRATOR

You said a hill with inscriptions, this is a hill with inscriptions. Not that hard.

VON HAVEN

This is wonderful. King Frederick will love these. Niebuhr, can I borrow your pencil?

NIEBUHR

You didn't bring one?

VON HAVEN

I forgot.

NIEBUHR *giving VON HAVEN a pencil*

Here.

VON HAVEN *copying the inscriptions*

Big squiggle — little squiggle — oh, big squiggle again —

NIEBUHR

How old are these?

NARRATOR

Incredibly ancient. It's said Moses himself wrote these.

NIEBUHR

Moses. Wow. Von Haven, weren't you saying something about this not existing?

VON HAVEN

I — um — read some conflicting accounts.

NARRATOR

You're lucky. You two are the first Europeans to see this sacred place. So study as much as you need. Honestly, spread the word in Europe, you know? I'm thinking we can monetize, really boost the tourism industry around here —

VON HAVEN

You know I'm a bit of a tourist myself.

NARRATOR

I gathered.

VON HAVEN

Really? How could you tell? Usually people think I'm a local.

NIEBUHR

How's the copying going?

VON HAVEN

I think I'm just about done.

NIEBUHR

Really? You got all of that down?

VON HAVEN

Yep!

To NARRATOR.

Thank you for your help.

NARRATOR

Let me know if there's anything else I can do for you.

VON HAVEN

Bye!!

VON HAVEN starts to leave, and NIEBUHR follows. The NARRATOR exits.

What a lovely person.

NIEBUHR

I'm impressed. You have the capacity to do good work, when you put your mind to it.

VON HAVEN

It's hot out here, let's find some shade.

NIEBUHR

I'm excited for you, von Haven! This must be your biggest accomplishment!

VON HAVEN

I don't see *any* shade.

NIEBUHR

Well, we are in a desert.

VON HAVEN

But where are we supposed to rest??

VON HAVEN, frustrated, opens his journal and holds it above his head for shade.

NIEBUHR

How do you feel?

VON HAVEN

Hot.

NIEBUHR

I mean, are you proud of yourself? Do you feel accomplished?

VON HAVEN

I was already very accomplished, so I guess I feel — the same.

NIEBUHR sees the inside of VON HAVEN's journal, and the copies he made.

NIEBUHR

Can I see that?

VON HAVEN

Get your own.

NIEBUHR

I want to see your work.

VON HAVEN

I'm using it.

NIEBUHR

It'll only take a second —

NIEBUHR grabs the journal and rips it out of VON HAVEN's hands.

VON HAVEN

Give it back!!!

NIEBUHR

This is gibberish. Is this supposed to be the inscriptions?

VON HAVEN

It is the inscriptions.

NIEBUHR

No it's not! It doesn't say anything! You just drew a bunch of lines and dots!

VON HAVEN

That's not true —

NIEBUHR

Okay, over here you wrote "My name is von Haven. I am words. The apple is on the table."
But that's the only actual Arabic here.

VON HAVEN

I beg to differ.

NIEBUHR

You don't know the language! And you're supposed to be our linguist!

VON HAVEN

I tried my best!

NIEBUHR

Well it wasn't good enough! Maybe if you actually tried to learn something, instead of sitting on your ass all day, you could do your job!

VON HAVEN

I don't need to listen to this. I respond better to positive affirmations.

NIEBUHR

Maybe we can go back and try again. Which way was it?

VON HAVEN *exiting*

Forget it. I'm going.

NIEBUHR

Von Haven, wait.

*NIEBUHR tries to flip backwards in the book to go back in time. It isn't working.
The NARRATOR enters.*

NARRATOR

Need some help?

NIEBUHR

It won't go back.

NARRATOR

Maybe because it's your life. You can only move yourself forward.

NIEBUHR

I want to get those inscriptions.

NARRATOR

I can help. Give me the book back.

NIEBUHR

— No. It's fine. This is fine. I can make this work.

NIEBUHR exits.

NARRATOR

Come on!

Transition.

Eight

The NARRATOR finds KRAMER, attending to the sick BAURENFEIND.

NARRATOR

Okay, now it looks like Kramer's taking care of Barry's illness. By which I mean Kramer is sitting and talking, doing no medical work whatsoever.

KRAMER

How are you feeling today? Better, I hope. You don't look better but I hope you feel better.

BAURENFEIND coughs.

Wow, that was a bad one. Hey, it has to get better before it gets worse! I'm pretty sure that's a rule of some sort. Oops, I mean it has to get worse before it gets better. Ha ha! That certainly changes the meaning of that. Sometimes words rearrange themselves in my head before they come out of my mouth, does that ever happen to you?

BAURENFEIND coughs.

I'll take that as a yes. I'm glad to know I'm not alone in that. Next time I mix up something I'm trying to say, I'll think, "It's alright, Baurenfeind does this too!" Or Barry. Baurenfeind, Barry. It's a cool name, I have to admit. Where did you get it from?

Pause.

That was a joke. Ha, ha. I know it comes from your dad. Probably. It was your dad, right? Did he go by Barry, too? Or was that a you thing? Do people call you Barry Baurenfeind? That can't be your full name, can it?

BAURENFEIND *with difficulty*

George Wilhelm.

KRAMER

George Wilhelm Baurenfeind. Interesting. Why Barry then? You could go by Georgie, instead. Or Willy. Ha ha, Willy.

BAURENFEIND

Stop —

KRAMER

What was that? Your voice is so faint and raspy I can barely hear you.

BAURENFEIND

Please stop talking.

KRAMER

Who, me?

FORSSKAL *entering*

How's everything in here? You're looking, um, really great, Barry. Need anything?

BAURENFEIND

A drink —

KRAMER

I'm alright, thank you.

FORSSKAL

Sounds good. Feel better!

BAURENFEIND
Wait —

FORSSKAL exits.

KRAMER

That was nice of him. Anyway, what was I saying? I don't remember.
You know, I was thinking earlier that taking care of you is just like taking care of a domestic canary. There's this really interesting technique that you can use with canaries —
BAURENFEIND groans loudly.
Hey, that was a loud one! Your voice is coming back! I told you you'd get better soon.
Where was I? That's right, canaries —

The scene shifts. VON HAVEN and NIEBUHR have left Djebel el-Mokateb.

NARRATOR

Oh, we're back here. Cool. Miles away — this was still happening.
I need to get that book back.

NIEBUHR

You're really giving up? A once in a lifetime opportunity, and you wrote "The apple is on the table."

VON HAVEN

It was probably the wrong hill, Niebuhr. That guide brought us to the wrong place.

NIEBUHR

That's not true at all.

VON HAVEN

You hurt my feelings. Do you think I'm doomed to fail?

NIEBUHR

No. I don't think that.
— Hey. We're pretty close to Mount Sinai and St. Catherine's Monastery, I'm sure we'll do well there. You won't have to write anything down, just collect some manuscripts. That's easy!

VON HAVEN

I don't want to.

NIEBUHR

I know you're upset, but we have to, right? For King Frederick.

VON HAVEN

Fine. Whatever.

NIEBUHR

Great. That's great. We're doing great.

St. Catherine's appears.

VON HAVEN

Is this it —?

NIEBUHR

I think so. It looks like a monastery.

VON HAVEN

I'm going in.

NIEBUHR

I'll go with you.

VON HAVEN

I can handle this myself. I'm a big boy.

NIEBUHR

Okay. I'll just sketch the building from over here, then.

VON HAVEN

But don't go too far.

NIEBUHR

I'll be right here.

VON HAVEN approaches the monastery. The NARRATOR appears.

NARRATOR

St. Catherine's Monastery, Sacred Monastery of the God-Trodden Mount Sinai, how can we help you today?

VON HAVEN

Hi, I'm Professor von Haven, I'm a philologist —

NARRATOR

Do you have a letter of introduction?

VON HAVEN

What do they want?

NIEBUHR

A letter of introduction. It's in your pocket.

VON HAVEN

Oh, right.

Giving the NARRATOR the letter.

Here you go. My introduction on behalf of King Frederick of Denmark.

The NARRATOR abruptly leaves.

NIEBUHR

Where'd they go?

VON HAVEN

I don't know. They took the letter.

NIEBUHR

Try again.

VON HAVEN approaches. The NARRATOR appears again, with a manuscript.

NARRATOR

St. Catherine's Monastery, Sacred Monastery of the God-Trodden Mount — Oh, it's you.

VON HAVEN

Can I have my letter back?

NARRATOR

Um, okay.

The NARRATOR casually tosses VON HAVEN the letter back.

Since you're a linguist, maybe you can help with this document? It seems to be birth and death records from Al-Hudaydah in Arabia Felix, and I'd love to get some help reading the names.

VON HAVEN

Niebuhr, they rudely threw my letter at me.

NIEBUHR

They're inviting you to work with them.

VON HAVEN

It was very rude.

NIEBUHR

You asked for the letter back, they gave it back.

VON HAVEN

Why is everyone being so mean to me today?

VON HAVEN starts crying.

NARRATOR

Come on now, don't cry. I'll show you any manuscript you want!

VON HAVEN

I don't know what they're saying!

NIEBUHR

Von Haven, you're freaking out. It's okay. Take a deep breath. They're saying we can go look.

VON HAVEN

I don't want to.

NIEBUHR

Don't you want to get those manuscripts? King Frederick would be very impressed if you did.

VON HAVEN

No. They're being mean.

NIEBUHR *to the NARRATOR*

Can you bring out some manuscripts for us?

NARRATOR

Um, yeah, sure, no problem.

VON HAVEN

Can you ask for some grapes, too?

NIEBUHR *to the NARRATOR.*

Grapes, too?

NARRATOR

In exchange for a certain book?

NIEBUHR

No.

NARRATOR

You'll help with these records when I get back, right?

NIEBUHR

Yes, sure.

NARRATOR *exiting*

Be right back.

NIEBUHR

One of the oldest libraries in the entire world and you ask for grapes??

VON HAVEN

I can't control when I get hungry. I have a fast metabolism. It's a curse.

NIEBUHR *exiting*

I can't do this.

VON HAVEN

Where are you going?

NIEBUHR

I need a minute. I'm going to climb this mountain, see if there are any other inscriptions to copy, something. Anything. When they come back, take the manuscripts. That's all you need to do. We're not coming back from this trip empty-handed.

NIEBUHR exits. The NARRATOR returns with manuscripts and grapes, surprising VON HAVEN

NARRATOR

Where'd Niebuhr go?

VON HAVEN, scared, takes the grapes and flees.

Wait! Take these too! Von Haven!

VON HAVEN *running off*

Ah! They're yelling at me again, Niebuhr!!

NARRATOR

Unbelievable. At the time Von Haven ran away from St. Catherine's Monastery, the library inside included over 3,500 rare manuscripts in Greek and Arabic, as well as the Codex Sinaiticus, one of the oldest bible manuscripts in the world, dating back to the 4th century. All that knowledge, all

that culture they could've brought back. I don't need the book for that fact. That's one I know by heart. They returned empty-handed. Well, mostly.

The scene shifts. FORSSKAL, BAURENFEIND, and KRAMER are together. VON HAVEN and NIEBUHR enter.

NIEBUHR
We're back.

FORSSKAL
How'd it go? What did you find? Anything good?

VON HAVEN *still holding grapes*
These grapes.

FORSSKAL
Oh.

NIEBUHR
How have things been here?

FORSSKAL
Barry almost died. But she's better now.

KRAMER
Thanks to my medicinal talents!

BAURENFEIND
Honestly, after having you as a doctor, it's a miracle I still have a will to live.

NIEBUHR
I'm sure there are better things ahead. Who's ready for the next leg of the journey?

VON HAVEN
Already? We just got back. And I'm tired.

NIEBUHR
Too bad! On to Arabia Felix!

NIEBUHR flips ahead. FORSSKAL, VON HAVEN, NIEBUHR, BAURENFEIND, and KRAMER are traveling in a boat. They see Arabia Felix on the horizon. Finally!

BAURENFEIND
On the horizon there, do you see it?

KRAMER
Land!

FORSSKAL
A bit more specific than that, Doctor.

KRAMER
Beach?

VON HAVEN

Here it is. Here is where all my hard work will pay off.

FORSSKAL

What hard work?

BAURENFEIND *drawing*

I should record this.

NIEBUHR

It's beautiful. Arabia Felix.

VON HAVEN coughs. Pause.

VON HAVEN

I'm alright, don't worry, don't worry.

NARRATOR

"Happy Arabia" awaits!

Transition.

Nine

They arrive in Arabia Felix.

NARRATOR

You have all made it here alive! Welcome to Al-Hudaydah, one of the major ports here in Arabia Felix! I will be your guide. We are happy and honored to have you with us. As a gesture of welcome, have a cup of coffee!

The NARRATOR gives them all coffee.

We're proud to be the first place in the world to have roasted the beans to make coffee. If you ask me, ours is still the best!

They all drink the coffee.

KRAMER

This is delicious.

VON HAVEN

I prefer it in Denmark. With lots of cream and sugar.

FORSSKAL

You don't know what you're talking about.

BAURENFEIND

My hands are shaking. I feel so powerful.

NIEBUHR

Let's get to work!

NARRATOR

The moment we've all been waiting for!

FORSSKAL

Finally! This is what we came here to do!

NIEBUHR

Time to make a map!

BAURENFEIND

Boring. Why is "Happy Arabia" happy, right?

VON HAVEN

Let's find out.

They all begin to work. Each separately.

KRAMER

Yes I'm a doctor, why do you ask?

FORSSKAL

Barry, I have dozens of new species we need to draw and catalog.

NIEBUHR *with the astrolabe*

It's called an astrolabe, it's used to make measurements for astronomy and navigation.

VON HAVEN

How much for this manuscript? Can you go any lower?

BAURENFEIND

Where's the nearest bar?

FORSSKAL

Not now, Barry.

KRAMER

Oh, I see. You're how old?

BAURENFEIND

You've never met a European before? I'm honored to be the first. Can I draw you?

NIEBUHR

Oh, you already know what an astrolabe is. Duh. Sorry.

VON HAVEN

I understand it's very old. Yes, I completely believe you.

BAURENFEIND

Can you turn a little for me? I want to get your profile. Beautiful. Absolutely stunning.

KRAMER

That's very old, you're very old. No offense. But that's probably why it isn't staying up.

BAURENFEIND

I strive to draw things that are — raw. Honest. *Sensual*.

— Sorry, I get worked up when I talk about art. Maybe I can draw you somewhere more private?

FORSSKAL

What a treasure trove! Linnaeus will love all these seeds. Barry, help me pack these samples up.

NIEBUHR

Right, no, of course you would know what an astrolabe is, I was just trying to look smart.
Which definitely backfired.

VON HAVEN

I'm sorry, I don't understand. Do you speak French by chance? I'm much better at French.

KRAMER

I don't have any medicine for that, I'm sorry.

BAURENFEIND

We could go back to your place. I'm living with a bunch of scientists right now.

FORSSKAL

Barry, I need help with these samples.

KRAMER

And what else? You can't see at night? Then light a lamp.

NIEBUHR

To be honest, I'm embarrassed by this whole astrolabe thing, can we change the subject?

VON HAVEN

Maybe you have some grapes I could buy?

FORSSKAL

Barry? Baurenfeind? Has anybody seen her?

BAURENFEIND *joining FORSSKAL and almost stepping on one of his plants*

I'm here, I'm here.

FORSSKAL

Okay, careful —

BAURENFEIND

What do you need?

FORSSKAL

I need you to draw these samples. Who was that you were with?

BAURENFEIND

Oh, a friend.

NIEBUHR joins them and almost steps on a plant, but FORSSKAL moves it out of the way just in time.

NIEBUHR

A friend, that's great! Everyone here is so nice, I can see why it's called "Happy Arabia."

BAURENFEIND

I can too.

KRAMER joins them and almost steps on a plant, but FORSSKAL moves it out of the way just in time.

KRAMER

Hello everyone!

FORSSKAL

Can we all look where we're walking, please?

KRAMER

I just helped a goat give birth! It was crazy!

FORSSKAL

You know how to do that?

KRAMER

You don't?

FORSSKAL

You confuse me.

VON HAVEN *joining them and stepping on some plants*
Look at this, it's a little party.

FORSSKAL
Oh come on —

NIEBUHR
We were just talking about how wonderful it is here. Friendly people, interesting things to research.

KRAMER
They gave me the goat as thanks!

VON HAVEN
What? Who? What are you talking about?

FORSSKAL
I've given up on asking Kramer any questions.

KRAMER
I have a goat now! His name will be Billy. No, wait, Willy. Ha.

FORSSKAL
Please don't name it that.

KRAMER
It's not your goat.

NARRATOR *entering*
How's everything going? Looks like you're enjoying yourselves!

VON HAVEN
It's going wonderfully. I'm doing my best work yet!

NARRATOR
That's a low bar. But great! The people are treating you well?
Have you met anyone with the last name Attieh?

FORSSKAL
— No, why?

NARRATOR
Oh. I thought you might. You haven't, Niebuhr?

NIEBUHR
No, but everyone I *have* met has been very kind! I wish we could stay here forever.

NARRATOR
Or, you could bring your research back to Europe! That would be cool too!

NIEBUHR
I'm going to have so much to send back.

FORSSKAL

I hope I'll still *have* things to send. People keep trying to steal the plants in my collection because they think I'm going to turn them to gold.

KRAMER

People are taking things from you? I keep getting gifts! — Well, goats, mainly.

BAURENFEIND

Maybe that's why it's "Happy Arabia."

NIEBUHR

It's happy because it's simple. The people, the way of life —

NARRATOR

Simple? No, it's happy because of the coffee. Arabia Felix made its wealth selling coffee to Europe. Easy as that. But now, Europeans are starting to grow coffee in the Caribbean, because it's cheaper, and slowly but surely, "Happy Arabia" is falling by the wayside.

NIEBUHR

I was only saying it was charming. It's a charming place because it feels simple. Even though it's so different.

NARRATOR

Take any of the people here out of Arabia and bring them to Europe, and they'd say the same thing about your culture.

VON HAVEN

I doubt that.

NARRATOR

Of course. Why did I think you'd understand? You're Europeans from the 18th century.

VON HAVEN

Yes we are! It's the only place and time I'd want to be from!

NARRATOR

Okay. You know what? I'm done.

The NARRATOR exits.

NIEBUHR

Let's move on.

NIEBUHR flips ahead. VON HAVEN starts severely coughing.

What? No. You're not supposed to be coughing.

BAURENFEIND *to VON HAVEN*

Are you alright?

VON HAVEN

Just a bit of a stomach ache. And a fever. I don't think I've been eating well — too many grapes.

KRAMER

Yeah, speaking as a goat-winning doctor, it's probably diet-based.

FORSSKAL

We should get on the road, to speed up your recovery. Where's the next stop? Mokha?

NIEBUHR

Mokha. Yes.

FORSSKAL

Let's get moving.

NIEBUHR

Wait.

Holding the book, focuses all her energy on VON HAVEN.

Get better, von Haven. Stop being sick.

Pause. VON HAVEN coughs.

BAURENFEIND

— What was that?

KRAMER

Let me handle the treatment from now on, Niebuhr, okay?

NIEBUHR

Sorry, I thought — sorry.

FORSSKAL

Let's go. No time to waste.

VON HAVEN

To Mokha!

NIEBUHR

Fine. To Mokha.

NIEBUHR flips ahead. A shift. VON HAVEN, FORSSKAL, NIEBUHR, BAURENFEIND, and KRAMER are on a boat again. Same as Scene One. VON HAVEN coughs.

FORSSKAL

Get him some water!

KRAMER

We're surrounded by water!

FORSSKAL

Fresh water, you imbecile!

VON HAVEN

I don't feel so great.

NIEBUHR

No, no, no.

NIEBUHR flips ahead again.

Okay. Next stop. Mokha.

NARRATOR *entering, as a city guard*

Not so fast! I'll need to inspect your belongings first, before I can permit entrance to the city.

NIEBUHR

What? That hasn't been required before.

NARRATOR

That's how we do it in Mokha. It's for your own safety. Your belongings, please.

FORSSKAL

All we have is the clothes on our backs. And some pots and pans to cook with during our travels.
And our scientific equipment, of course.

NARRATOR

Scientific equipment?

BAURENFEIND

I have some drawings.

NARRATOR

Hand everything over for inspection, please.

VON HAVEN

These are my historic and rare manuscripts.

NIEBUHR

I have my astrolabe.

FORSSKAL *handing over a couple specimen jars*

Some of my plant and seed collection, which I still need to send to Sweden.

KRAMER

I've been carrying medications for the others.

The NARRATOR inspects FORSSKAL's specimens.

FORSSKAL

Please don't open those, they're being preserved —

NARRATOR *opening a jar and smelling it.*

What is this? It smells terrible!

FORSSKAL

Seaweed.

NARRATOR

Gross. You should label the smelly ones better.

FORSSKAL

Um — I'll consider it?

NARRATOR *re: the astrolabe*

What is this instrument?

NIEBUHR

It's an astrolabe. It takes measurements —

NARRATOR

It looks like witchcraft. It will require further inspection. And these medications. What's this one?

KRAMER

That's — um — arsenic. It was purchased by our linguist in Constantinople.

NIEBUHR *to KRAMER*

You didn't get rid of the arsenic??

NARRATOR

This is unacceptable. Your belongings will be held. By me.

To NIEBUHR.

You look like you're hiding something. Maybe a book?

NIEBUHR

I'm not.

NARRATOR

Hand it over.

NIEBUHR reluctantly hands the book over.

FORSSKAL

How can we get our things back?

NARRATOR

You can take the issue up with the Dola, our governor.

FORSSKAL

Where can we see them?

The NARRATOR flips ahead and becomes the Dola.

NARRATOR

Hello! I am the Dola!

KRAMER *bowing*

It is an honor and a pleasure to meet you.

NIEBUHR

Give us our stuff back!

FORSSKAL

Okay, Niebuhr, we just got here, maybe don't start yelling immediately.

BAURENFEIND

Yeah, Niebuhr, show some respect. This is the Dola.

NARRATOR

Yes, Niebuhr, show some respect. Now, there have been some difficulties with your belongings?

FORSSKAL

Can't anything be done?

VON HAVEN *coughing*

We're here on — orders from — the king of Denmark.

NARRATOR

Never heard of him.

KRAMER

You haven't?? He's the *king*!

FORSSKAL

We just want our stuff back, please.

NARRATOR

You brought arsenic into my city, trying to poison my people.

FORSSKAL

It was a misunderstanding. We don't want the arsenic. You can throw it out.

NARRATOR

Fine. The arsenic will be discarded. But I won't risk it with the rest of your things.
I'll have it all sent directly back to Copenhagen. It'll be easier that way.

FORSSKAL

Do it.

NIEBUHR

But —

FORSSKAL

It's fine. Now where's the nearest lodging with a proper bed?

NARRATOR

I can make special arrangements for you here in the palace —

FORSSKAL

Thank you. Lead the way.

NARRATOR

Follow me.

The others, impressed, clap for FORSSKAL. VON HAVEN is visibly distressed by this.

BAURENFEIND

Wow, that was great.

FORSSKAL

Really?

NIEBUHR

I mean, yeah, very leaderly.

KRAMER

I'm impressed.

FORSSKAL

Thank you.

VON HAVEN *quiet*

Nooooo.

BAURENFEIND

Are we starting to get the hang of this not-constantly-bickering thing? I'm proud of us!

FORSSKAL, NIEBUHR, BAURENFEIND, and KRAMER start exiting, proud of themselves.

NARRATOR

Onward and upward!

The NARRATOR flips ahead. VON HAVEN collapses.

Transition.

Ten

All except VON HAVEN. The NARRATOR has led VON HAVEN off.

NARRATOR *referring to the book*

Professor Frederik Christian von Haven died on May 25, 1763, of malaria.

NIEBUHR

I can't believe this. Things were going so well.

NARRATOR

I thought it was going to be fine. I got the book back. I thought he'd survive.

NIEBUHR

Well, he didn't. It's kind of sad. He only had one thought: getting home, right? He loved talking about the comfortable future he had laid out for himself. And he doesn't get to do that.

FORSSKAL

He also tried to poison us, remember.

BAURENFEIND *taking a drink*

I don't think he actually meant it. He was too much of a coward.

KRAMER

He still deserved better.

FORSSKAL

His death makes the expedition easier for the rest of us. He had a very — difficult disposition.

KRAMER

As if yours is any better? He had his issues, but I'm not going to listen to you disrespect him.

KRAMER exits.

FORSSKAL

Barry, do you have anything to drink?

BAURENFEIND

I'm not in a sharing mood right now. I don't have anything else to say about Von Haven.

BAURENFEIND exits.

NIEBUHR

What now?

FORSSKAL

We keep moving. Where to next?

NIEBUHR

Sana'a. It's in the mountains, out of the desert. We'll be able to rest and recover.

NARRATOR

Sana'a. Rest and recovery. Got it.

The NARRATOR flips ahead. Reads, does a double take.

— What's Yarim?

FORSSKAL

Yarim? It's halfway to Sana'a.

NIEBUHR

Not Yarim. Get us all the way to Sana'a.

NARRATOR

Let me check.

The NARRATOR flips ahead again. FORSSKAL starts coughing.

NIEBUHR

No, no, no. Not this.

NARRATOR

Where are we?

NIEBUHR

Still Yarim. Go back. Fix this.

The NARRATOR flips back. BAURENFEIND is there again.

FORSSKAL

Barry, do you have anything to drink?

BAURENFEIND

I'm not in a sharing mood right now.

BAURENFEIND exits.

NIEBUHR

What now?

FORSSKAL

We keep moving.

FORSSKAL coughs.

NIEBUHR

Stop coughing!

FORSSKAL

I would if I could!

NIEBUHR

Flip ahead. Please — Sana'a.

The NARRATOR flips ahead again.

NARRATOR

It's still Yarim.

NIEBUHR

Come on!!

BAURENFEIND

He'll pull through. I did.

NIEBUHR

Kramer, can you do anything?

KRAMER

I don't know what it is.

NIEBUHR

It's malaria!!

KRAMER

What's that??

FORSSKAL *coughing*

I am not — dying in — Yarim.

KRAMER

Niebuhr? It's not looking too good.

NIEBUHR *to the NARRATOR re: the book*

Anything in there?

NARRATOR

I don't want to risk it.

NIEBUHR

One more time. Please.

The NARRATOR flips ahead again. FORSSKAL coughs and falls into the NARRATOR's arms. The NARRATOR looks at NIEBUHR, apologetic, unsure.

No. No no no.

NIEBUHR rushes off.

NARRATOR

Okay. Okay, Forsskal. It's okay. Come with me.

The NARRATOR takes FORSSKAL offstage, then reenters.

The botanist Peter Forsskal died on July 13, 1763, of malaria.

BAURENFEIND takes a long drink.

KRAMER

I can't believe it.

BAURENFEIND *very drunk*

I'm going to say some words, a few words right now to say in his memory. Okay? Okay???

KRAMER

Okay, yeah, okay.

BAURENFEIND

Great.

Forsskal was a man. But not only a man, he was a plant man. You know? He was a, damn, um — he loved plants. He was always with them, digging in the ground, and —
Um. There were so many plants, man, I drew so many of the pants — plants — for him, he was always like “Thank you Barry, I can’t draw, Barry, wow these are some plants you’ve drawn here and wow great job.”

And seeds. He likes seeds too. A Swede who likes seeds. Ha.

Anyway, what a nerd.

I can’t think of — um — like in Copenhagen I was like “Damn I think I hate this guy, he’s a real jerk” and yeah. But he wasn’t, not that much. A little, maybe. A little bit of a jerk. But in a kinda good way. He was stubborn, wild, obstinate, angular.

But he’s dead now, so who cares.

You want to say words? About Forsskal? I’m done.

KRAMER

I think you summed it up.

BAURENFEIND

If he was a — um — a canary, you could’ve saved his life.

KRAMER

Maybe.

BAURENFEIND

At least his plants will live on. His samples of stuff being sent to Copenhagen. Those got sent, right?

KRAMER

I think so.

BAURENFEIND

Cool. I think we just lost someone who could have been one of the greatest scientists in the world.

NIEBUHR *entering*

I got us passage on a ship heading back.

We’re going home, and we’re going to live.

BAURENFEIND

Do you want to say anything? About Forsskal?

NIEBUHR

I’m okay. I’ll pass.

BAURENFEIND

Peter Forsskal? The plant guy on the trip with us?

I just said some stuff, I thought you might want to.

KRAMER

It was beautiful, Barry.

NIEBUHR

No. I don’t really want to.

BAURENFEIND

Pretty please?

NIEBUHR

You're drunk.

BAURENFEIND

Ugh. Fine. Whatever. Don't say anything.

NIEBUHR

He was my friend, okay? He was my friend. Can we move on, please? Flip ahead.

NARRATOR

I really don't want to risk it again.

NIEBUHR

Give me that.

NIEBUHR tries to take the book. The NARRATOR and NIEBUHR struggle with it. It's pulled back and forth. The pages are flipping everywhere. Time gets messy. We see fragments of the expedition.

KRAMER

It has to get better before it gets worse!

BAURENFEIND

Please stop talking.

FORSSKAL

I'm not finished. My mentor, Carl Linnaeus —

VON HAVEN

Everybody shut up and look over here!

BAURENFEIND

Papers?

VON HAVEN

Manuscripts, my dear Barry —

FORSSKAL

Manuscripts!

KRAMER

My seaweed!

BAURENFEIND

A once in a lifetime opportunity and you write —

ALL

"Canaries and Their Care?"

FORSSKAL

You may have heard of it?

KRAMER

Welcome to St Catherine's Monastery, Sacred Monastery of —

VON HAVEN
Hell!

BAURENFEIND
Big changes, big changes.

ALL
Hi, von Haven.

VON HAVEN
Byeee.

VON HAVEN collapses.

ALL
Hi, Peter.

FORSSKAL
I am not dying in Yarim.

FORSSKAL collapses.

ALL
Hi, Kramer.

KRAMER
Denmark! Denmark!

ALL
Hi, Barry.

BAURENFEIND
I feel alive! I feel the sun on my face and the wind in my hair!

NIEBUHR
Look — Venus.

The book flies into the air. The NARRATOR and NIEBUHR watch it. It falls open on the ground. BAURENFEIND and KRAMER start coughing.

NARRATOR
Follow me.

*They all follow the NARRATOR, except NIEBUHR.
Transition.*

Eleven

NIEBUHR sits and cries. The NARRATOR re-enters and sits with her.

NARRATOR

I'm sorry. I was really trying to —

NIEBUHR

Please don't talk to me.

NARRATOR

I'm sorry. I didn't want it to go this way.

NIEBUHR

That's news to me.

NARRATOR

You think I *wanted* them to die? I was trying to save you all.

NIEBUHR

How noble. I'm glad that worked out for everyone.

NARRATOR

Okay, I get it. You're mad.

NIEBUHR

Of course I'm mad! They died! You let them die!

NARRATOR

Hey, you had a part in all this too.

NIEBUHR

"This time will be different," you said. "Big changes."

NARRATOR

Having to narrate a doomed story isn't easy, okay?

NIEBUHR

Seems pretty easy to me.

Mock narrates.

Barry and Kramer also died of malaria. We had to bury them at sea. It sucked.

How's that? How'd I do?

NARRATOR

I said I was sorry.

NIEBUHR

Yeah. Great. Why did you even do this? What's the point?

NARRATOR

I'm just as upset as you are, you know.

NIEBUHR

Why? You're just the Narrator. It's not your actual life. It doesn't make a difference to you.

NARRATOR

Ha. Okay.

NIEBUHR

So, what am I supposed to do now?

NARRATOR

What you've done before.

NIEBUHR

Let's make it quick.

The NARRATOR picks up the book and quickly skims through.

NARRATOR

You'll go to Persepolis, Baghdad, Jerusalem, back through Constantinople, then north to Copenhagen.

NIEBUHR

Long way back. Will there be fanfare, when I get to Denmark?

NARRATOR

No. King Frederick's dead, his son Christian is king now. And he's more interested in brothels than in Arabia Felix.

Wait — so who's been in charge of everything you've been sending back? The diaries, the drawings, Forsskal's samples?

NIEBUHR

Oh, you mean the whole point of the expedition? Yeah, I've got some bad news for you. Remember how the Dola shipped everything back from Mokha?

NARRATOR

Yeah, I was there —

NIEBUHR

Guess how they arrived?

NIEBUHR shows the NARRATOR a pile of destroyed boxes.

NARRATOR

But — no. All your work, Forsskal's whole collection — What happened?

NIEBUHR

What year is it now, friend?

NARRATOR

1767.

NIEBUHR

Right. 1767. And these were shipped from Mokha to Denmark. See what I mean?

NARRATOR

It's a long way.

NIEBUHR

It's a long, long way. So while I was on my way home, these were getting —
NIEBUHR demonstrates.
Inspected. Dropped. Opened. And discarded.

NARRATOR

Did anything make it back?

NIEBUHR

A few boxes did, but nobody opened them. So they sat in there, forgotten, and then eventually—

NARRATOR

There's nothing left, is there?

NARRATOR *re: the book*

That's left. Years of work, thousands of miles, and all that's left is there in your hands.

NARRATOR

I wish more was left. I truly do.

NIEBUHR

Why? Why do you care? Why read about us in the first place?

NARRATOR

I thought I could learn something. I thought I'd find something I wanted to learn.

NIEBUHR

Did you?

NARRATOR

No.

NIEBUHR

Yeah. The only people doing any learning on this trip died along the way.

NARRATOR

Right.

NIEBUHR

It's too much. I mean, to think we did all this for nothing? They all died for nothing? To be a blip in history, a doomed footnote?

NARRATOR

I tried to help you.

NIEBUHR

And how did that work out?

NARRATOR

You know what, Niebuhr? You're right. It doesn't make a difference. It isn't my life.

The NARRATOR tosses the book at NIEBUHR and starts to exit.

NIEBUHR

So, what, you're done? Just like that?

NARRATOR

I was naive to think it'd work anyway.

NIEBUHR

Changing history? I'd say it was a good effort, but — it really wasn't.

NARRATOR

Please stop.

NIEBUHR

Oh, am I not allowed to be upset that you made me watch my friends die again?

No, you're the only one who's allowed to be upset. Because your little story didn't work out the way you wanted it to. Sorry our lives got in the way.

NARRATOR

My story didn't work out? Are you kidding? Be mad at me all you want, but I was trying to save you all. To get you back to Denmark alive. I thought — it's stupid, but I thought if I could get you back, the expedition would be remembered. You know? Respected. Everything you learned and brought back from Arabia Felix would be preserved, written down, passed down, studied. Can you imagine? Maybe Arabia Felix would've been taken seriously. Maybe people wouldn't only know this story for the failure. I thought, if I saved the expedition, I would save everything.

NIEBUHR

Why do you care? About preserving it.

NARRATOR

Same reason as you. I think it's worth learning about.

— My family's from that region. My ancestors, I guess. My grandma's family were the Attiehs of Al-Hudaydah. The name didn't make it to me. Neither did she. I guess there wasn't much that made it to me in terms of family history. I know the name and I eat the food, but other than that — I don't know. My own supposed heritage and — it's just not there. Like it never existed.

NIEBUHR

And you thought by saving us, you could —

NARRATOR

I could find it.

NIEBUHR

Oh.

NARRATOR

It was a stupid idea anyway.

You know, I've never even learned to speak Arabic. I feel like a fraud.

NIEBUHR *re: the book*

Well — at least there's still this. The story still exists.

NARRATOR

Yeah. I knew you wouldn't understand. The story exists for you, because it's *about* you. All of you. Forsskal, von Haven, Baurenfeind, Kramer. Your names get written down. Your every move is

recorded. But what about all the other people who were a part of your story? The guides, the locals, even the Dola. Can you name one native Arab you met during your travels?

NIEBUHR

— I can't.

NARRATOR

I know. It's stupid of me. I was trying to find the Attiehs in a story about the Niebuhrs. But this expedition was never really about Arabia Felix. It was about Europe. I was naive to think I could change that.

NIEBUHR

If you had told me, maybe I could've —

NARRATOR

What, helped? How?

NIEBUHR

— I don't know.

Okay. Yeah. I don't want to be part of the story anymore. There's no point. Everyone else is gone. I want to disappear. I don't want to be a European anymore. I'm going to dress like an Arab and live in anonymity for the rest of my life. I'll change my name. Will you start calling me Abdullah?

NARRATOR

Absolutely not.

NIEBUHR

Thought I'd ask.

— So, is that it? I'm done? No more story?

NARRATOR *re: the book*

Check.

NIEBUHR *flipping through*

All it says is I die in Meldorf. In 1815. Yeah, I wish I hadn't read that.

NARRATOR

You didn't know that already?

NIEBUHR

No.

NARRATOR

Well, there it is.

The NARRATOR gets ready to throw the book away.

NIEBUHR

Wait, one more thing. About the name Arabia Felix. Is it really — ?

NARRATOR

It is.

Re: the audience.

You can tell them.

NIEBUHR

Okay. Um. Right. Arabia Felix. "Happy Arabia." It's an error in translation. If Von Haven had actually learned Arabic, he might have seen it.

Today we call the place Yemen, a word which means the right hand, or right side. In Arabic culture, the right side is seen as being superior to the left. So the word "right" or, Yemen, can also mean "fortunate" — which gives us fortunate Arabia, "Arabia Felix."

The thing is, I discovered something when mapping those towns in Arabia. The Arabian people, when mapping, will typically orient themselves and their maps facing the east, like how Europeans orient to the north. This means their right side, when facing east, is really due south.

So the word Yemen, which originally meant "right," also came to mean "south." Yemen, therefore, is simply the land to the right, the land to the south.

It was never Happy Arabia. It was South Arabia all along.

NARRATOR

You'll share what you know, right? After this is done.

NIEBUHR

Everything I've learned. And, you'll keep trying? There are more books.

NARRATOR

I will. Of course I will.

NIEBUHR

If you want, I can help you learn Arabic. I don't want it going to waste while I wait to die in Meldorf.

NARRATOR

— I'd like that.

NIEBUHR

Just start with the basics. Like "marhaba." Hello.

NARRATOR

Marhaba.

NIEBUHR

Good. Now "wadaeean."

NARRATOR

Wadaeean.

NIEBUHR

That's goodbye.

NARRATOR

You're ready to go?

NIEBUHR

I am. Just — I'm sorry. What's your name?

NARRATOR

— Eli.

NIEBUHR

Eli.

NARRATOR *hearing their name for the first time in the play touches them*
Yeah.

NIEBUHR
Wadaeaaan, Eli.

NARRATOR
Wadaeaaan, Niebuhr.

The NARRATOR throws away the book, and NIEBUHR is gone.
Transition.

Twelve

NARRATOR

Allow me to indulge myself, with a happy thought.

The NARRATOR closes their eyes; imagines. VON HAVEN, FORSSKAL, BAURENFEIND, KRAMER, and NIEBUHR are there. It is sometime during the expedition. VON HAVEN reads a manuscript, FORSSKAL catalogs plant samples, BAURENFEIND draws, KRAMER is helping NIEBUHR take measurements with the astrolabe. A few moments of silence.

VON HAVEN

Did you say something?

BAURENFEIND

What? No.

VON HAVEN

Oh, I thought you said something.

FORSSKAL

Shhh.

Pause. Then, they all laugh.

KRAMER

Never quiet enough for Forsskal, is it?

BAURENFEIND

He's shushed my pencil scratching on paper before.

FORSSKAL

That was *one* time.

VON HAVEN

I don't mind a bit of noise. You know what I miss, more than I thought I would? European music.

NIEBUHR

Who's your favorite?

VON HAVEN

Bach.

FORSSKAL

Give me Vivaldi over Bach any day.

KRAMER

Okay you two, settle down. I don't want Von Haven to bring me arsenic again.
— Too soon?

BAURENFEIND

It's Vivaldi for me, too. Sorry, Von Haven.

VON HAVEN

I will never recover from the insult.

BAURENFEIND

(It sounds like he's joking, but he's not.)

FORSSKAL

I'm serious! Tell me this isn't brilliant music.

FORSSKAL begins humming or singing some Vivaldi.

VON HAVEN

No, no, no. Bach is superior.

*VON HAVEN begins humming or singing Bach, to drown FORSSKAL out.
The others join in one by one, starting with BAURENFEIND. It is a mess of sound.
Eventually they stop and laugh.*

FORSSKAL

Once we're back in Europe, we'll have to see a concert together.

VON HAVEN

Only a few weeks now.

KRAMER

I can't wait to be home.

FORSSKAL

Can you believe we survived?

BAURENFEIND

I'm shocked we survived each other's company.

VON HAVEN

I'd like to pick the concert we see together.

FORSSKAL

Ha. Of course.

KRAMER

Dinner first, of course?

BAURENFEIND

Do you ever think of anything else?

KRAMER

Why would I?

NIEBUHR

A concert sounds lovely. It will at least sound lovelier than our singing.

FORSSKAL

— Niebuhr, that was terrible!

VON HAVEN

This is why Germans shouldn't be allowed to make jokes. You just embarrass yourselves.

BAURENFEIND

Rude!

KRAMER

I won't be treating your injuries if you hurt each other.

FORSSKAL

As if you could.

KRAMER

Ha ha, yes, let's all laugh at Doctor Canary.

NIEBUHR

Can we be civil for just a moment?

BAURENFEIND

Sounds boring.

KRAMER

Yes, who needs to be civil?

Chanting.

Anarchy! Anarchy! Anarchy!

BAURENFEIND

That's a great chant.

KRAMER

Thank you.

VON HAVEN

Ooo, I found something interesting in this manuscript. A mystery of sorts.

Listen to this — "The Attieh family, who have lived in Al-Hudaydah for five generations, are famous in the region for..." — and then it's smudged! I can't read it!

NIEBUHR

What do you think they were?

FORSSKAL

Scientists. Famous for their discoveries.

VON HAVEN

Or merchants, famous for their grapes.

BAURENFEIND

Winemakers, famous for their wine.

KRAMER

Or goatherds, famous for their goats?

NIEBUHR

Or musicians, famous for their songs.

That's the concert I'd want to see back home. Arab music, played out under an open sky. Dancing. Good food. I'll miss it.

VON HAVEN

It's settled then. We're inviting these mysterious Attiehs to Denmark, to meet the king!

BAURENFEIND

To give the king wine!

KRAMER

And goats!

FORSSKAL

And tell him all about their world.

NIEBUHR

And to play him music.

BAURENFEIND

He'll pay for it all, of course.

VON HAVEN

Of course he will, he's the king!

They laugh.

FORSSKAL

Alright, I'm getting back to work.

BAURENFEIND *laughing*

That means everyone shush.

A silence falls over the group as they start working again. After a moment, they each individually start humming again, softly, to themselves. NIEBUHR sees the NARRATOR there and waves.

NIEBUHR

Marhaba.

NARRATOR

Marhaba.

Lights fade on the expedition. The NARRATOR is alone again.

I like to think that it could have gone so much differently.

I wanted it to go so much differently.

Well. Maybe next time.

The NARRATOR sees the book, considers opening it again. Decides not to. The NARRATOR puts the book away. Maybe they find a new book to open, instead. Blackout.

END OF PLAY