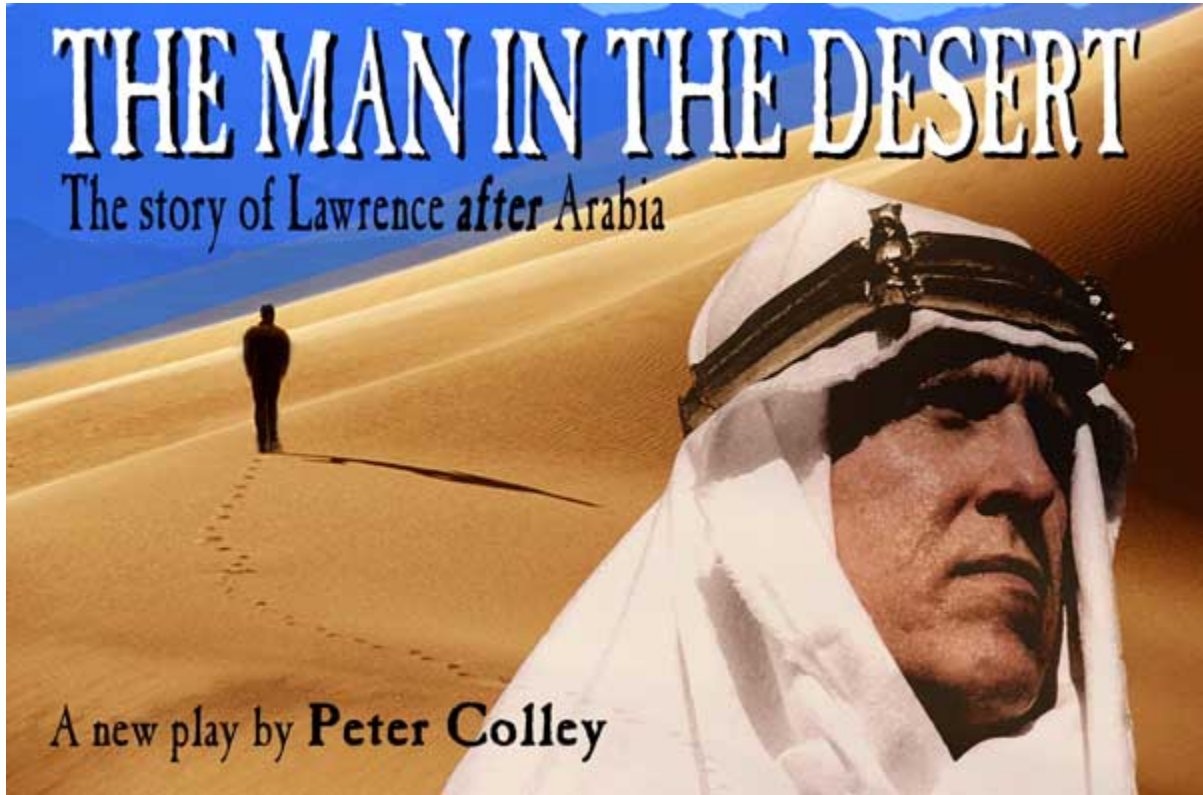


THE MAN IN THE DESERT

The story of Lawrence *after* Arabia

A new play by **Peter Colley**



THE MAN IN THE DESERT

The Story of Lawrence *after* Arabia

A Play in Two Acts

By

Peter Colley

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SETTING:

Airmen's Mess, Royal Air Force Basrah, Iraq

TIME:

Early 1930's

CHARACTERS:

Lowell Thomas – American newsman, 40's

Aircraftman Second Class (A/C2) Ned Shaw – British airman, mid-40's

Leading Aircraftman (LAC) “Tam” Walden – British airman, early 20's

Charlotte Shaw (wife of George Bernard Shaw) – British, 50's to 60's

Clare Sydney Smith – British, mid 20's to mid 30's

Prince Faisal – Arab, mid 30's to mid-40's

Corporal “Crasher” Dunstone – British airman, 40's
(can double with Lowell Thomas)

Dedicated to my father, Squadron Leader Thomas Colley, whose journals, photographs and friendship with T. E. Lawrence formed the inspiration for this play.

This is based on real incidents, and was also inspired by the writings of Clare Sydney Smith, and the letters of Charlotte Shaw, George Bernard Shaw and T. E. Lawrence.

"All men dream, but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find that it was vanity: but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dream with open eyes, to make it possible."

T. E. Lawrence

SCRIPT AVAILABLE IN MANUSCRIPT FORMAT
IF REQUIRED

NOTES ON THE CASTING OF T. E. LAWRENCE

This is a play about the creation (and deconstruction) of mythic characters, and Lawrence of Arabia is certainly one of the greatest myth-characters of recent history. The real Lawrence, known mainly from black-and-white newspaper photos showing him in Arab dress, was an iconic image from his discovery by the media in 1917 until the release of the David Lean film "Lawrence of Arabia" in 1962. After that film a new myth-character was created, which built upon but was quite different from the original one. The dazzling image of a young Peter O'Toole, now in full wide screen technicolor and sweeping epic motion, took over completely from the earlier icon. O'Toole was a controversial choice as he was quite different from the real Lawrence. O'Toole was much taller, more handsome and more dynamic than the small, quiet, enigmatic Lawrence, but the O'Toole image has now passed into the collective unconscious as Lawrence and the casting of this play has to deal with that reality. Casting someone who looked like the real T. E. Lawrence would today create a jarring disconnect in the minds of the audience, many of whom would never have seen the original images of him.

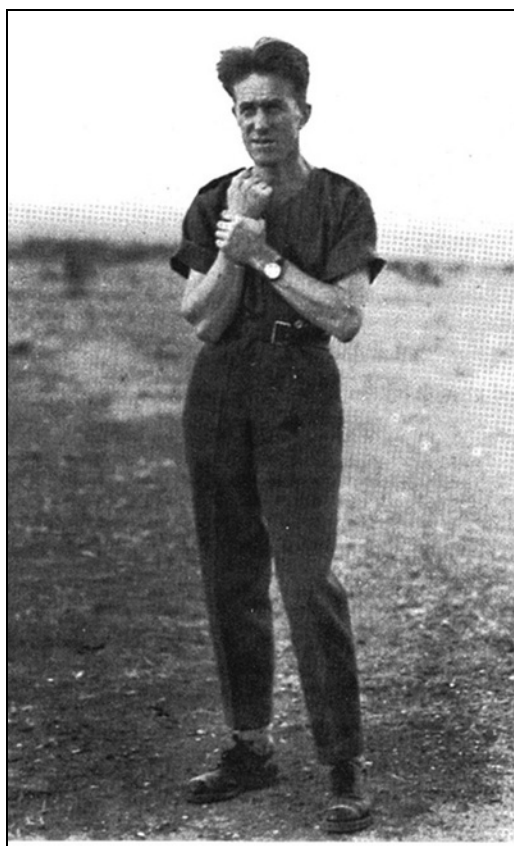
Actors researching the real Lawrence will discover that he was a short, soft-spoken man whose charisma came from some mysterious internal dynamism. This quality, as David Lean obviously surmised, is very hard to reproduce dramatically. The Lawrence presented in this play tries to fuse the inner struggles of the real Lawrence with the external dramatic dynamism of the modern film-generated myth-image of Lawrence.

This Lawrence – shown 15 years after his heroics in the desert – still has the same piercing eyes, the same obsessive intensity, but is now a more brittle character, sick with malaria and haunted by personal demons. He has found ways to cope, but whatever calmness he shows is a thin veneer. When he smiles, it is usually ironic; when he laughs it rings with bitterness. The one thing he *cannot* do is relax, much though he may try. He is on the verge of a breakdown and nothing is more vital to the success of the play than finding an actor who can portray that quality.

It is also worth noting that well-educated, upper-class English people of the 1930's spoke in a polite code which masked, but did not completely hide, their true feelings. Understatement is a very British reaction to matters of great import. North American actors can sometimes mistake this politeness for a lack of passion. The passion is there, but in this play it is often presented subtextually. Where the surface intent of a line differs significantly from the subtext, I have noted that in parentheses.



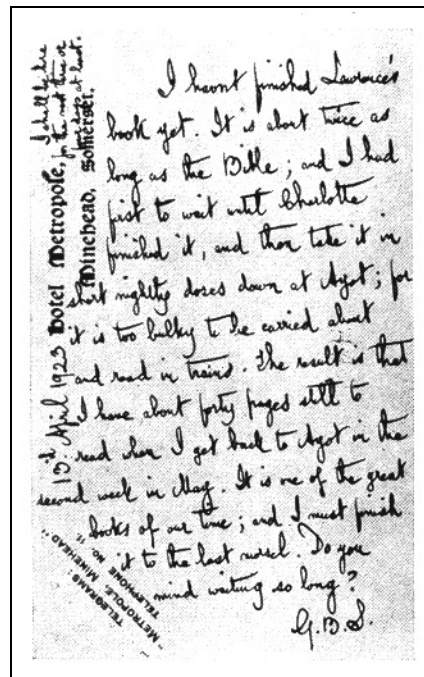
Lawrence as Aircraftman Shaw in his barracks near the Afghan border.



Lawrence serving overseas in the Royal Air Force.



Charlotte and George Bernard Shaw in London during the time of their friendship with T. E. Lawrence.



The back of a postcard sent by George Bernard Shaw to a friend about Lawrence's book "The Seven Pillars of Wisdom", which Shaw describes as "twice as long as the bible". He also admits that he had to wait for Charlotte to read the book first.



Mrs. Clare Sydney Smith.



*Clare and Lawrence at the wheel of Lawrence's motor boat
"Biscuit" in Plymouth Sound.*



Clare with Lawrence at Royal Air Force Mount Batten.



Charlotte Shaw visiting Lawrence's air base.



Desert Police.



Royal Air Force Base Basrah, Iraq showing a troopship supplying 203 Flying Boat (Seaplane) Squadron.



Aerial gunnery over Iraq, from the nose turret of a flying boat. Shows a Lewis gun in its "aircraft mount" configuration.



Royal Air Force Basrah, Iraq.

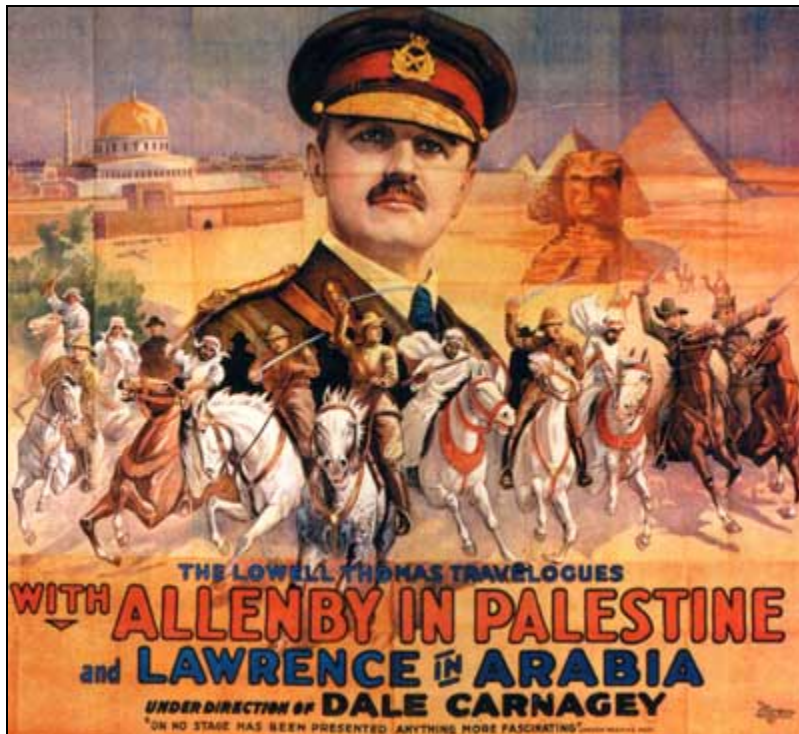


Royal Air Force barracks in Basrah, Iraq.

© Photo copyright Squadron Leader Thomas Colley.



Lawrence as Aircraftman Shaw.



The original poster for Lowell Thomas' stage show before the "With Allenby in Palestine" was dropped in favour of: "With Lawrence in Arabia".



T. E. Lawrence with Lowell Thomas

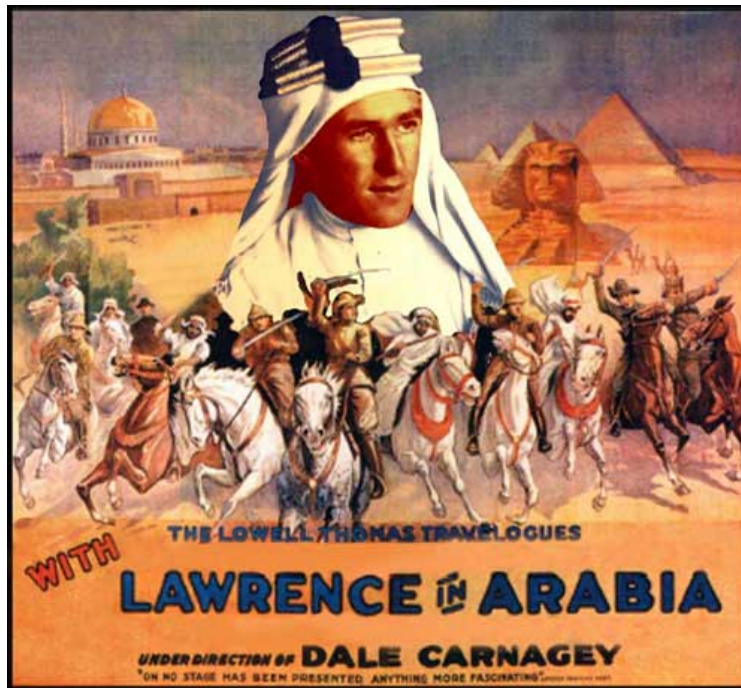
THE MAN IN THE DESERT

PROLOGUE

SETTING:

The stage is dark except for a spotlight which illuminates a lectern with a poster. The poster reads:

*TONIGHT'S PRESENTATION:
"WITH LAWRENCE IN ARABIA"*



*The renowned illustrated
Magic Lantern Lecture
by
LOWELL THOMAS
Presented with
MOVING PICTURES
and
an Orchestra
and
Arabian Dancing Girls*

Pre-show MUSIC of an offstage orchestra playing romanticized Arabian-style music.

AT RISE:

The pre-show MUSIC ends and after a dramatic pause a MUSICAL fanfare accompanies the entrance of LOWELL THOMAS. HE is greeted by the sound of enthusiastic APPLAUSE from the audience. THOMAS is a natural showman in his forties, at ease, confident and charismatic. HE has a dapper moustache, and wears a practical, baggy light-colored suit, the type used by

western newspapermen in hot climates in 1919 and a white Panama hat. HE commands the stage like the great performer he is.

LOWELL THOMAS: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Lowell Thomas. My story begins in 1917. That was the year my country, America, joined the European war and I received a summons to go to Washington. President Wilson said to me: "Mr. Thomas, I have a job for you. You're a newspaperman – you know a good story when you see one. I want you to go to Europe and find some uplifting stories for the folks back home. There's tough fighting going on and we need something to inspire the country. We need some heroes". So I went to France to look for heroes.

(THOMAS cues an offstage technician.)

(SLIDES: Black and white photos of trench warfare.)

Instead, I found nothing but mud and death.

SLIDE:



SLIDE:



(MUSIC: The orchestra plays a somber melody.)

There were heroes, of course. Plenty of 'em. But few survived long enough to leave a mark. And dead heroes make depressing reading. Mud. Gas. Men huddled in trenches like rats. And when the boys did go "over the top" whole battalions were slaughtered in minutes. I was getting depressed too. There was no story.

(SLIDES: The pictures of the trenches fade.)

Then a friend told me of these strange rumors coming out of Arabia.

(SLIDES: The Arabian desert.)

(MUSIC: Arabian-style "desert" music.)



Like most people I scarcely knew what was going on there. The Allies were trying to get the Arabs to revolt against the Turks, who had sided with the Germans – well, it's all just too complicated, I said. Not at all what I'm looking for. "No, no", my friend insisted: "There are stories of a man – a man in the desert."

SLIDE:



A most peculiar character. He was just a mapmaker with British Intelligence in Cairo, he knew Arabic, so they sent him off to interview Prince Faisal – just a routine sort of thing. Next they heard, he was leading an Arab army against the Turks. Riding across the desert on a camel, wearing the white and gold robes of a Sharif!

He captured the Turkish fortress of Aqaba. The British thought that was impossible, but he led the Arabs across the Nafud Desert – a waterless horror where even the Bedouin fear to tread – and took the Turks by surprise.

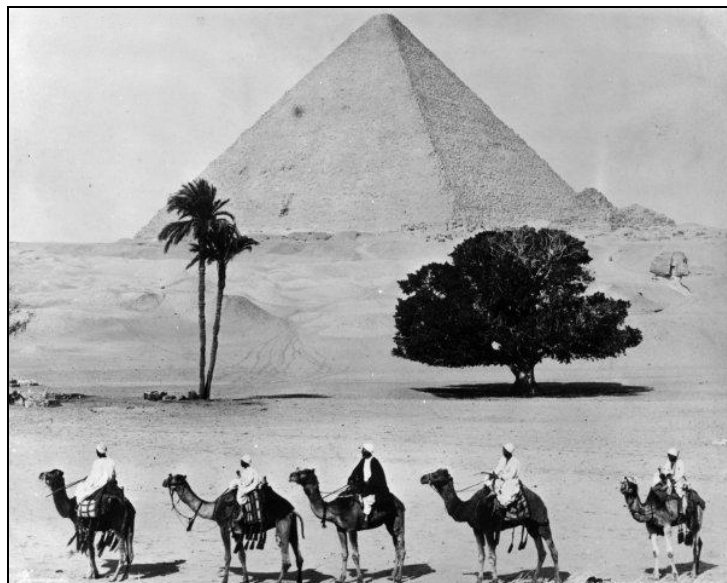
(SLIDE: Arabs on camels charging across the desert.)



He's mad they say – mad as a hatter – but the Arabs follow him! Well, it started to sound like a story. So I left for Cairo.

(MUSIC: The orchestra plays more romanticized Arabian-style music.)

In Cairo I hired guides and camels and set out to find this madman.



*(FILM FOOTAGE: A small caravan crosses the desert [*NOTE: just slides can be used if necessary].)*



I crossed many miles of the most brutal landscape I have ever set eyes on. But everywhere the desert people knew him. They called him "Orense". His English name was Lawrence. The British troops called him: "The Uncrowned King Of Arabia".

(SLIDE: Lawrence in the desert.)



At last I found him in a remote encampment. He was the most extraordinary man I ever met. Yes, he wore the flowing robes of the Bedouin, but he was not mad. The day we met he was about to lead an attack on a Turkish troop train, yet he was completely calm. He was one of those men you never forget – he seemed to burn with an inner flame.

(SLIDE: Photo of Lawrence.)



And the people around him saw it as plainly as I. He had filled their heads with dreams of an independent Arabia – free from the oppression of the Turks who had ruled them for centuries – free to choose their own ways and govern their own lives. I asked Lawrence what his plans were. He said simply: "I want to set the desert on fire!"

Who was this man, I wondered? Nobody knew much about him – it was as though he had sprung fully-formed from nowhere. As a newsman I was used to digging up clues, but out in the desert there was little to go on. He lived in a sparse tent with few possessions.

(SLIDE: Lawrence by his tent in the desert.)



He had a golden dagger given to him by Prince Faisal, and a German Mauser pistol. He had a few books: a Bible, a Quran in Arabic – and a copy of Sir Thomas Malory's "Morte D'Arthur".

This last book intrigued me. Written in the 1400's it was the story of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Was this how Lawrence saw himself – a knight errant from the age of chivalry?

(SLIDE: Lawrence in Arab headdress.)



A true knight lived a sparse austere life, and needed a great cause – a quest. A true knight's actions were of blood and iron, but his manner was demure and chaste. Lawrence's manner was certainly demure – I was eager to see the blood and iron. I told my cameraman to film the attack on the railway.

(GRAINY BLACK AND WHITE FILM FOOTAGE of the attack. A huge explosion under the locomotive stops the train. A line of Bedouin on camels races towards the train. Or SLIDE of Bedouin on camels lined up to attack.)



(MUSIC: The orchestra plays stirring martial music.)



He led his men into battle as calmly as if on a Sunday outing. The bullets kicked up the sand around him, but he paid no mind to them. It was as if dying held no fear for him. I couldn't tell if he had a death-wish or felt he was divine. Perhaps he believed that Merlin had given him some magic powers. Whatever it was, the Arabs followed him as if he was divine. And in that one moment – I confess I believed it too.

(SLIDE: Lawrence's face in Arab headdress.)



(MUSIC: The orchestra moves towards a crescendo.)

That day I saw the creation of a man who will live forever whenever tales of bravery and heroism are told – a man they now call Lawrence of Arabia.

(MUSIC: The orchestra reaches a stirring crescendo.

The SLIDE of Lawrence's face and the light on LOWELL THOMAS snap off.

The MUSIC ends with a crashing chord.

Blackout.

A deep silence, made more profound by the overblown cacophony that preceded it.

SLIDE: In the blackout there is a final slide that says:

"15 YEARS LATER"

SOUND: A quiet desert wind.

The lights come up on the rest of the stage to reveal:

ACT ONE

SETTING:

The Airmen's Mess, a primitive outdoor bar next to a military barracks on the edge of a desert. Only part of the barracks, made of rough mud brick is visible, upstage right. The barracks building has a dirty window and a doorway with an open door, the inside being deep in shadow. Attached to the front of the barracks is a verandah with a sun-bleached wooden portico with a canvas roof which gives some much-needed shade to the bar area. The verandah looks out on the flat endless desert that stretches away stage left. Stage right, a dusty path leads to the rest of the military base. It is early evening on a hot summer day.

The bar has a military telephone with a hand crank, a gramophone and some records, cupboards, and some utility chairs and tables. A set of padlocked wooden lockers stands against the barracks. Most of the tables are pushed into one corner, the chairs are stacked up, and the bar cupboards locked tight. There is a stray table and chair on the edge of the verandah. All of the bottles have been put away and are out of sight. There are some duty notes on a bulletin board, and a few girlie pin-up pictures and a shelf with the men's personal beer mugs. A straggly palm tree sits in a large clay pot, the only patch of green in an otherwise barren scene.

Nailed onto a post holding up the portico is a crude wooden sign that reads:

*"AIRMEN'S MESS"
"203 FLYING BOAT SQUADRON
BASRAH*

Under this is painted a squadron crest consisting of a gold seahorse in a circle of blue, topped by a crown, and underneath a scroll with the words:

"OCCIDENS ORIENSQUE".

AT RISE:

A gentle WIND blows across the desert.

AIRCRAFTMAN (A/C) SHAW ENTERS. A/C SHAW is in his mid-forties – his face is tanned and weathered. He wears a simple khaki uniform – it is the tropical kit of a low-ranking Royal Air Force serviceman, a shirt, long pants, and a belt. The uniform is creased and sloppily put together. HE carries a canvas kit bag with the name "A/C SHAW" stenciled on the side.

HE looks around. There is an edginess to his actions – even something as simple as a glance shows a suppressed nervous energy. HE speaks with a mild Oxford accent – it's actually an upper-class Oxford which he is trying to cover up.

A/C SHAW: Hello!

(There is silence. SHAW looks at his watch.)

Hello?

(HE sees a chair and table on the edge of the verandah. HE goes over and puts his kit bag on the table.

HE notices something offstage left, far off. HE stares at it for a moment, concerned.

His concentration is broken by the SOUND OF A SHIP'S HORN, stage right, which punctures the quiet. The sound comes from about half a mile away.

HE sits down on the chair as though he's not feeling well. HE rummages through his kit bag, taking some items out – a badly folded shirt, a military cap, a book – until HE finds a small pill box. HE opens the pill box and swallows a pill. After a moment he appears to recover.

The SOUND of a MAN singing is heard offstage (tune: up tempo "Irish Lullaby".)

VOICE: (Sings) "See her sailing round the bend with a band of blue / She won't be coming back again for a month or two".

(LEADING AIRCRAFTMAN (L/A/C) WALDEN ENTERS. HE is around twenty years old, dressed in an almost identical uniform as the older man's, except for the insignia of a propeller on his arm, but his uniform is much more meticulously kept. HE wears a pith helmet [topi], has a canvas satchel slung from one shoulder and a service revolver in a holster. Focusing on the bar, he does not see SHAW who sits quietly at the edge of the verandah, partly hidden from Walden's view by the palm tree.)

L/A/C WALDEN: (Sings) "Come on back you Trooper / We're stuck here waitin' for you / We're all browned off with frigging sand and feeling mighty blue."

(WALDEN looks at the locked bar in disgust; puts his pith helmet on the bar and tries to open the cupboard under the bar.)

(Mutters to himself) Bloody Mustapha! (WALDEN has a rough working-class Yorkshire accent which gets milder when around others)

(WALDEN wrestles with the locked cupboard.)

(Sings) "We're tired of flies and mozzies / Had enough of Prickly Heat."

(After a few grunts and heaves, HE gives up and kicks the cupboard.)

(Sings) "This place is much too bleeding hot, the squadron's all dead beat."

(WALDEN comes out from behind the bar and sees SHAW.)

(Jumps) Who the hell are you?

A/C SHAW: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to scare you.

L/A/C WALDEN: You didn't scare me, I just didn't see you – sitting there like a lizard on a bleeding rock! You just in on the troopship, are you?

A/C SHAW: No, I flew in with 202 this afternoon.

L/A/C WALDEN: Ah! From Karachi, eh? Homeward bound?

A/C SHAW: I don't know.

L/A/C WALDEN: Don't know? 202's time-expired, ain't it?

A/C SHAW: I put in for a transfer to Rangoon.

L/A/C WALDEN: Rangoon! Jeez! Something in England you don't want to go back to – like a wife and kids? *(Laughs)*

A/C SHAW: No. Nothing like that.

(WALDEN goes back to the bar.)

L/A/C WALDEN: Bloody Mustapha's supposed to have the mess open by now. *(Sees a long-handled bottle opener)* Aha!

(WALDEN takes the bottle opener and pries the cupboard door until it opens with a crack.)

Here we go!

(The ship's HORN SOUNDS again.)

A/C SHAW: When's the outbound boat due?

L/A/C WALDEN: Four days. Expecting some mail, are you?

A/C SHAW: Yes. I was hoping to grab it before it went on to Karachi. R.A.F. mail always seems to be one base behind on its deliveries.

L/A/C WALDEN: The Imperial flight from Cairo just landed – they bring mail. Got a girl writing to you?

A/C SHAW: Yes.

L/A/C WALDEN: Let me get you a drink, sport! Not as good as a girl in your arms, but it helps.

A/C SHAW: No thanks.

L/A/C WALDEN: No? This is the frigging desert, mate, you gotta drink something.

(HE gets a beer from the bar.)

A/C SHAW: Water will be fine.

L/A/C WALDEN: Water! You're not coming down with Prickly Heat are you? You know, you look awful familiar. What's your name?

A/C SHAW: Shaw.

(WALDEN takes out the "Mess Book" and writes the beer on his tab.)

L/A/C WALDEN: No first name?

A/C SHAW: Don't like my first name. Shaw's nice and simple.

L/A/C WALDEN: What about a nickname?

A/C SHAW: No. I don't think I'm the nickname type.

L/A/C WALDEN: You can't be in 203 without a nickname. I'll call you – *(Looks him over as he hands him a bottle of water)* – Dusty. *(Lifts his bottle of beer)* Cheers! To our wives and sweethearts! May they never meet!

A/C SHAW: Amen to that. *(Drinks)* Why Dusty?

L/A/C WALDEN: 'Cos you look like you been dipped in sand. You've been out in the sun too long.

A/C SHAW: That much is true. I don't think I like Dusty. All right, I confess. I do have a nickname.

(WALDEN goes to the gramophone and looks through a box of records for something to play.)

L/A/C WALDEN: I knew it.

A/C SHAW: "Broughie". *(Pronounced "Bruffie")*

L/A/C WALDEN: Broughie! What's that from?

A/C SHAW: I have a Brough motorbike back home.

L/A/C WALDEN: That's a nice bike. Fast. Broughie – that'll do just fine. *(WALDEN rifles through the gramophone records)* Who the hell brought this all the way from England? "Land of Hope and Glory". "Jerusalem".

A/C SHAW: Official issue, I imagine. Boost morale and all that.

L/A/C WALDEN: If the idea is to make us want to kill, this record'll do it. *(Throws it aside in disgust)* What we need is some boogie-woogie or jazz.

A/C SHAW: So what's your name?

L/A/C WALDEN: "Tam" Walden. Used to be "Tom", 'til we had a bunch of Yank oil drillers come through. They couldn't say "Tom" – always came out as "Tam". I've been Tam ever since.

A/C SHAW: Pleased to meet you, Tam.

(SHAW shakes his hand. WALDEN looks at SHAW closely.)

L/A/C WALDEN: Did'ya ship through here on the way out?

A/C SHAW: No.

L/A/C WALDEN: Huh. That face... ? Mind if I ask you something? How old are you? *(SHAW does not reply)* It's just you're a bit old for an A/c. 'Specially an A/c2.

A/C SHAW: I was out of the service for a while. I rejoined.

L/A/C WALDEN: You rejoined at the lowest rank?

(WALDEN puts on a jaunty record from an English popular band and sways to the music.)

A/C SHAW: I was in the army before.

L/A/C WALDEN: Is that where you picked up that posh accent?

A/C SHAW: I don't think it's particularly posh.

L/A/C WALDEN: Not in the Officer's Mess, maybe, but I never heard one like that in the Airmen's Mess.

A/C SHAW: It's an Oxford accent. It may sound a little posh, but that's just where I grew up.

L/A/C WALDEN: And you gussied it up a bit, didn't you? Nothing wrong with that, we all do it. Mine was coal-pit Yorkshire once, as thick as pitch. Can't get promoted with that kind of jabber. Army, eh? Fought in the war, did you?

A/C SHAW: Briefly.

L/A/C WALDEN: See any action?

A/C SHAW: Nothing worth mentioning. I was in Cairo during the war – far from the trenches.

L/A/C WALDEN: Well, you'll make up for it here. The natives are restless, Mussolini's trying to grab Ethiopia, and them Persians 'ave their beady eyes on that oil oozing out of Abadan.

(Casually) So, Broughie, what d'you think of that tractor-pusher setup on those new Singapore III's 202's been flying?

A/C SHAW: I beg your pardon?

L/A/C WALDEN: Must be tricky servicing that double nacelle arrangement. Where'd they put the radiator for the aft engine?

A/C SHAW: I'm sorry, I really don't know what you're...

(WALDEN abruptly takes off the record, pulls his service pistol from its holster and aims it at SHAW.)

L/A/C WALDEN: Get your bleedin' 'ands in the air! *(SHAW looks at Walden with surprise)* You heard me! Go on! Get 'em up! You must think I've got nothing but sand between my ears. You're way too old for an A/c, and in case you've forgotten "A/c" happens to stand for "aircraftman" and you're the first aircraftman I ever met who knows dick-all about the machine he just flew in on. I bet you were snooping around when I surprised you, didn't I? Who's paying you off? The Iraqis? The I-talians? The Persians? *(SHAW smiles)* And wipe that smirk off your face! I've already killed a few of you bastards, one more ain't going to keep me up at night! On your knees!

A/C SHAW: *(SHAW complies, with a smile)* Well – at least this is livening up what was turning out to be a very dull evening.

L/A/C WALDEN: Don't you move!

(Still aiming the pistol at SHAW, HE goes to the phone by the bar, lifts the phone off the cradle, and turns the crank – it's a direct line to HQ.)

(Into phone) LAC Walden here. I got a live one, sir! Caught him by the Airmen's Mess. Says 'is name is Shaw, but he's all wrong. Says he's an A/c but he's way too old, talks funny – claims he flew in with 202 this afternoon, but he knows bugger all about planes, pardon my French, sir. Don't even know how to service the machine he says he flew in on.

(HE listens; it looks like he's being given an earful.)

Ah. Yes sir.

(HE puts the phone down and puts the gun back in the holster. An uncomfortable silence. WALDEN gets a jar of pickled eggs from under the bar and puts them on the bar)

Pickled egg?

A/C SHAW: No thanks.

L/A/C WALDEN: Sorry about that. I'd heard about gentleman rankers like you, but never met one before.

(SHAW goes over to the phone and picks it up.)

A/C SHAW: *(To Walden)* Is this a direct line to HQ?

L/A/C WALDEN: *(Nervously)* Yeah.

A/C SHAW: *(Cranks the phone)* Hello. Is Wing Commander Strickland there?

L/A/C WALDEN: Honest – I'm sorry – I didn't know —

A/C SHAW: *(Into phone)* Hello, Wing Commander. A/c Shaw here. *(Listens)* Yes, settling in just fine, thanks. I'd like to commend young Walden for his actions. He was absolutely correct to suspect me under the circumstances. He's good officer material – sharp as a tack. You should keep an eye on him – I think he'll go far. *(Beat)* Yes, sir.

(SHAW puts the phone down.)

L/A/C WALDEN: (*Relieved*) Thanks. I mean, really! Nobody ever did that for me before. 'Specially a toff. I owe you one.

A/C SHAW: The British Empire will be safe with lads like you around.

L/A/C WALDEN: What sort of "special assignment" are you on? Or ain't you allowed to talk about it?

A/C SHAW: It's not that special. And I'm not allowed to talk about it.

L/A/C WALDEN: (*Smiles*) You're a strange one, Broughie. But you're all right. Sure you don't want a beer, mate? You look like you need one.

A/C SHAW: Sure. Give me one.

(WALDEN goes to the bar and gets him a beer - a Newcastle Brown. [NOTE: Shaw does not drink the beer])

L/A/C WALDEN: You probably ain't set up a tab yet.

A/C SHAW: No.

L/A/C WALDEN: I'll write it in. Just let Mustapha know when he gets here.

(WALDEN scribbles Shaw's name into the mess tab book.)

A/C SHAW: (*Suppressing irritation*) Is that his real name?

L/A/C WALDEN: Who?

A/C SHAW: Mustapha.

L/A/C WALDEN: I dunno – we call 'em all Mustapha. Cairo during the war, eh? Hey, do you know Corporal Dunstone? He served in Cairo with the R.F.C. Craig "Crasher" Dunstone?

A/C SHAW: I don't think so.

L/A/C WALDEN: He's an old Arabia hand from way back. Knows everything that goes on around here. Dangerous bastard, though, so don't cross him. Been wounded three times by Arabs so he's got no love for them. But if you have any trouble with the locals, send for Crasher and he'll sort it out.

(Suddenly SHAW staggers slightly, as if he is unwell. Then A VOICE can be heard, but it is unclear whether the voice is real or just something in Shaw's mind. There is also a SOUND like a desert wind jangling the harnesses of camels and Arab music – this is a recurring "Desert Motif", there is also a slight change in lighting.)

ARAB VOICE: (*Prince Faisal*): 'Orense! 'Orense!

A/C SHAW: (*Looks around, feverish*) Who's that?

ARAB VOICE: 'Orense, I must talk to you.

A/C SHAW: (*Alarmed; looks towards the desert*) Faisal? Is that you?

(The SOUNDS fade and the lights return to normal. SHAW sees WALDEN staring at him.)

L/A/C WALDEN: You all right? You look like you got camp fever.

(SHAW pulls himself out of it.)

A/C SHAW: Did you hear something?

L/A/C WALDEN: Hear something?

A/C SHAW: A voice. An Arab voice.

L/A/C WALDEN: No.

A/C SHAW: I get the shakes from an old bout of malaria now and then. Sends things buzzing through my head. It's nothing. I'm fine now.

L/A/C WALDEN: *(Concerned)* You sure?

A/C SHAW: I'm sure. Thanks.

L/A/C WALDEN: Get that beer down your gullet. Newcastle Brown cures everything.

(WALDEN sees something in the distance, stage left.)

Hey! We got visitors!

(WALDEN takes a pair of binoculars out of his satchel and scans the distance.)

Huh! That's a bloody big load of fuzzy-wuzzies heading our way.

(Anxiously WALDEN picks up the phone and cranks the handle. There is no response. HE cranks it again.)

Blasted phone ain't working all of a sudden. The line may have been cut. I got a bad feeling about this – I'm nipping over to HQ. Keep an eye on 'em, will you? You got a gun?

A/C SHAW: Not on me.

L/A/C WALDEN: I'll get you one, mate. Sure you're OK? You still look a bit woozy.

A/C SHAW: *(Without conviction)* Don't worry about me.

(WALDEN EXITS stage right, back towards the base. SHAW goes over to the edge of the verandah and looks out stage left. He does not seem particularly concerned about the distant horde, but seems lost in thought. His bout with malaria has worried him.)

Behind him two WOMEN ENTER from offstage right. The younger woman, CLARE SYDNEY SMITH, is a very glamorous fashionable Englishwoman in her twenties or thirties. SHE wears the garb of an adventurous British traveler of the 1930's – jodhpurs, a jacket and a pith helmet (topi), and carries a package. They both carry suitcases. The older woman, CHARLOTTE SHAW, is in her fifties or sixties and is conservatively dressed in dark clothes and a pith helmet. CLARE is light-hearted with an easy laugh, while CHARLOTTE gives the first impression of a tough battle-ax although she does show glimpses of a more motherly side.)

A/C SHAW: *(Turns and sees them)* Can I help you? *(THEY look at him with enigmatic smiles)* This is the Airmen's Mess. You're probably looking for the Officers' Mess – *(Points offstage right)* – it's past that white building.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: You look a complete idiot in that outfit.

(HE stares at them in shock.)

A/C SHAW: Oh, hell – it's happening again!

(HE turns away from them and tries to clear his head.)

(To himself) Damned malaria! Snap out of it! Snap out of it!

(SHAW looks back at the women hoping the "vision" has gone – but to his dismay they are still there. CHARLOTTE turns to CLARE.)

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Well, there's a welcome for you! I'm no doctor, but I think I can safely say we're not malaria. What do you think, Clare?

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: *(With a smile)* No. I don't feel very malarial at all.

(SHE goes to him and kisses him on the cheek. SHAW stares at her in shock.)

A/C SHAW: Good God, you *are* real! *(Regains his composure)* What in the devil's name are you doing here?

CHARLOTTE SHAW: You're a hard man to track down, "Aircraftman Shaw".

A/C SHAW: *(Looks around; concerned)* Please, nobody around here knows...

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Of course they know.

A/C SHAW: They don't. I just arrived.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Your C.O. knows. And so does GHQ. How do you think we found you? But don't worry, Tes, your secret is safe with us.

A/C SHAW: You knew I was arriving today?

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Right down to the time of your flight. Clare has some well-placed connections.

A/C SHAW: I should have known you two would get up to some mischief, but I never expected you'd go this far...

CHARLOTTE SHAW: It was our only chance – apparently you're to be transferred again.

A/C SHAW: I've put in a request. I had to leave India in a hurry as you obviously heard.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Yes. Nasty business.

A/C SHAW: And to what do I owe the honor of this visit? And why do I suspect some scheming has been going on?

CHARLOTTE SHAW: We'll get to all that later, but first I have a bone to pick with you, young man.

A/C SHAW: What have I done this time?

CHARLOTTE SHAW: What have you done? The name!

A/C SHAW: The name?

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Don't look so innocent! What possessed you? Out of a million names in the English language...

A/C SHAW: Oh, "Shaw". Well, I knew another Shaw once. In Jeddah. Nice chap.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Oh, stop it! You know perfectly well that's not why you chose the name. And George Bernard is not at all happy about it.

A/C SHAW: I thought he'd be flattered.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: George is a very liberal man, but we already have far too many relations without being adopted by people. You could have chosen "Smith" or "Brown" or anything but "Shaw"! Now there are rumors all over London that you're our illegitimate son, for Heaven's sake.

A/C SHAW: That mob would believe anything. Anyway, he owes me one. You think I don't know his new play is based on me? A play about a crackpot who specializes in exotic tribes – who joins the military at the lowest rank and refuses all promotions...

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Come now, it was very loosely based...

A/C SHAW: Loosely! The fellow arrives on a noisy motorbike, is called "Lord of the Western Isles" by natives who worship him, and is a thoroughly annoying son-of-a-bitch. Of course it's based on me!

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Well you can't expect to be the friend of a playwright and not show up in a play or two.

A/C SHAW: Being the friend of a playwright has become a distinct liability – especially as I didn't want the press to know I've joined up again.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: They all know you've joined up.

A/C SHAW: Yes! Thanks to that damn play the whole of London knows! But at least they don't know *where* I am. The R.A.F. has told me that if I'm discovered by the press again I'll have to leave the service permanently. No third chances.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: It's silly. Why should it matter if the press knows where you are?

A/C SHAW: Politics. I'm a dangerous commodity, it seems. So if I'm not gushing with enthusiasm at seeing you both, I hope you'll understand. My past is like a tin can tied to a dog's tail – it rattles wherever I go. So remember, I'm Aircraftman Ned Shaw. Not a mention of that past nonsense around the men. Do I have your word on that?

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Of course.

A/C SHAW: Good. (*Curtly*) And you can't stay here in the Airmen's Mess – it would be far too obvious! Come on! Off you go!

(HE tries to hustle them out of the mess.)

CHARLOTTE SHAW: You haven't lost your charm, I see. Besides, I'm too hot to move right now. I need to sit down.

(CHARLOTTE sits down on a chair, takes out a fan and fans herself.)

A/C SHAW: (*HE sees she's not going to move*) All right, out with it – what *are* you doing here? Or more to the point – who sent you?

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Need we be sent?

A/C SHAW: This is not tourist country.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Oh, I don't know – George and I motored through the Tigris and Euphrates valley six years ago.

A/C SHAW: That was before the current unpleasantness. There's very few tourists here now. And Clare...?

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Sydney just got posted as C.O. of R.A.F. Aboukir, so it seemed...

A/C SHAW: That's still nearly a thousand miles away.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: (*To Clare*) I think we've been sniffed out. (*Back to Shaw*) Well – to business later. (*Warmly*) How are you, my boy?

A/C SHAW: You shouldn't stay here in Basrah. There may be trouble.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: We're booked on the next flight back to Cairo, so you're stuck with us for two days.

(SHAW glances towards the distant Bedouin, but decides not to tell the women about them.)

A/C SHAW: Your stay may be shorter than you think. Was it Winston who sent you?

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Winston! My God, you've been away from England for too long. He's out of politics now.

A/C SHAW: He'll never be out of politics.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Well, he has no official position, although his bellows can be heard up and down England. He says he's the "voice in the wilderness" now.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: He's gone a little bonkers, they say, so it's for the best. He's ranting about another war with Germany. Not a popular subject these days.

A/C SHAW: I know. Moseley's boys came a-courtin' last time I was in England.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: You're not serious? Moseley!

A/C SHAW: Tried to convince me of the wonders of Fascism in the new England. Thought I'd make quite a leader in their cause. What do you think?

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Don't joke about it. Those "blackshirts" are a hideous lot. In fact that's something I must talk to you about. I hope you sent them packing?

A/C SHAW: I told them I'm a bit soft-spoken to be a Fascist. Anyway, I don't look good in black.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: (*Scolding*) Lawrence!

A/C SHAW: For Heaven's sake, Charlotte, you know I despise all politics. And please, the name's Shaw. If it's not Winston who sent you, is it the Colonial Office?

(*CLARE glances nervously at CHARLOTTE.*)

CHARLOTTE SHAW: We can talk about that later.

A/C SHAW: (*Overreacts*) I've told them a hundred times I just want to be left alone!

(*WALDEN ENTERS carrying two Lee Enfield .303 rifles and boxes of ammunition.*)

L/A/C WALDEN: H.Q. asked us to keep an eye on 'em. Let 'em know if the buggers change direction.

(*WALDEN sees Charlotte and Clare.*)

Oh! Begging your pardon, ma'am. (*Stands to attention*)

(*SHAW is annoyed that the women have been discovered in the mess, but tries to make the best of it.*)

A/C SHAW: This is Clare Sydney Smith and Charlotte Sh... (*HE tries to stop himself, but it's too late*) Shaw.

L/A/C WALDEN: (*Tips his hat to them*) Leading Aircraftman Walden, Ma'am. Shaw? (*Excited*) Ah! You must be his mum!

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Good God, no! We're not related.

L/A/C WALDEN: (*Confused*) Ah...

CHARLOTTE SHAW: (*A reproaching glance at Shaw*) It's a common name. We're just friends.

L/A/C WALDEN: Oh. Right. Well, it's nice to meet you. You just come in on the flight from Cairo?

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Yes. Rather a bumpy ride, wasn't it Clare?

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: That poor plane – for a moment I thought we weren't going to make it.

A/C SHAW: (*With obvious irony*) It's the hot desert air – didn't they warn you – it's always full of turbulence.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: (*Picking up on Shaw's intent*) They did warn us, but I'm sure the trip will be worthwhile.

L/A/C WALDEN: We don't see many civvy visitors nowadays. 'Specially women. Most of the Imperial planes refuel and buzz off as fast as they can.

A/C SHAW: And if I were you I'd get right back on your plane before it leaves. You may still have time. (*To Walden*) How long does it take to refuel?

L/A/C WALDEN: 'Alf an hour, maybe.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: We didn't come all this way just to turn around and leave. Well, I'm going to freshen up. We'll talk later, "Ned".

A/C SHAW: I'd ditch that pith helmet if I were you.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Oh?

A/C SHAW: It makes the locals suspicious. They think our pith helmets were designed to shade us infidels from the watchful eye of Allah. You'll be safer with a head scarf.

(CHARLOTTE takes off her helmet and tosses it into a waste bin by the bar.)

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Right, then.

(CHARLOTTE takes the scarf from around her neck and puts it over her head and goes to leave. She notices CLARE is not moving.)

You two probably have a little catching up to do. *(To Clare)* I'll see you later.

(CHARLOTTE picks up her bags and leaves, stage right, towards the base. WALDEN also senses he's in the way.)

L/A/C WALDEN: I'll go – ah – get some sandbags.

(WALDEN props the two rifles against a wall and EXITS, stage right.)

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: It's so nice to see you again, Tes.

A/C SHAW: Nobody's called me that for a long time. I do have rather a lot of names, don't I?

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: That's because you never seem happy with the one you've got. You don't mind me calling you Tes?

A/C SHAW: Not at all. T. E. Shaw is my legal name now so Tes won't raise any suspicions. But I've already been given a new name here: Broughie.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Ah, you told them about the motorbike. *(Beat)* I've missed you. *(Pause)* Did you miss me?

A/C SHAW: Why is it that those two sentences always follow each other? *(Beat)* How's Sydney?

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: He's fine. He sends his regards. As I said, he's been posted to Aboukir – seemed like the perfect opportunity to pop down and see you with Charlotte.

A/C SHAW: Ah, so it was Charlotte's idea. Just as I thought.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Now don't go and spoil it. I'm here, and that's all that matters. You don't think I could have come down here all on my own, do you? What would that have looked like?

A/C SHAW: It would have looked like my former C.O.'s wife coming a thousand miles to visit me.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Exactly.

A/C SHAW: People have such suspicious minds.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Don't they? *(Hands him a package)* I brought you some recordings. It's Bach's concerto for two violins and Boccherini's Sonata in A. I was worried that they'd melt in this heat.

A/C SHAW: *(Softening to her)* My favourite pieces. You remembered.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Of course. *(As if recalling an event)* How could I forget?

A/C SHAW: I'm not sure how well these will go down in the Airmen's Mess, but it will brighten many a quiet afternoon for me. It seems the lads are sick of "Land of Hope and Glory" and "Jerusalem".

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: *(Takes photo out of her bag)* Here's a picture of Biscuit with her new paint. I've kept her ship-shape so she'll be ready for your return.

A/C SHAW: *(Looks at photo)* She's beautiful!

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Still the fastest boat on the bay.

A/C SHAW: Happy days. Oh, and I did miss you. Very much.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: But you had to say it on your own time. You're impossible.

A/C SHAW: If I'd said it right away, you may have thought I was just being polite.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Since you're never polite there's no chance I would have thought that. Ah, you have a gramophone.

(CLARE puts one of the records on.)

A/C SHAW: Am I forgiven?

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Of course. You know I'd forgive you anything. You take advantage of me.

A/C SHAW: You'd forgive me anything?

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Within reason.

A/C SHAW: That's not fair – I've never lived within reason.

(SHE sways to the music, as if dancing.)

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: What wouldn't I forgive? *(Thinks)* Hmm? The only thing I could never forgive is a lie. I've always hated liars. But lying is the one thing you're not capable of. You're honest – brutally honest sometimes. That's what I love so much about you.

A/C SHAW: And if I did lie? Could you not love me?

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: But you wouldn't lie. That's who you are. It's woven into the fabric of whatever your soul is made of.

A/C SHAW: What if I'd sold my soul to the devil?

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Oh, the devil couldn't afford it.

(SHE moves seductively around SHAW, to the SOUND of the music.)

A/C SHAW: I'm not so sure about that.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: What could he possibly offer you in exchange?

A/C SHAW: Peace.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: The devil can't offer you that.

A/C SHAW: Anesthesia then? Something to dull the senses just enough to make it through one more night. Since I rarely sleep, there's a lot to be said for that.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Anesthetized? You! It would be a crime against nature. Don't you remember that wild man who took me speeding across Plymouth Sound with the throttle wide open and the spray in our faces. Weren't you happy then? You seemed happy.

A/C SHAW: I tried to be happy. And nobody got me closer to it than you.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: I was blissfully happy. And, oh, how I want to feel that way again.

A/C SHAW: You can take Biscuit out any time you like.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: You know that's not what I mean.

(She looks at him directly for a response, but he is evasive. WALDEN ENTERS with a sandbag – later he will build a rifle parapet. HE plops the sandbag down on the pile with a grunt, feels the tension in the air and EXITS for another.)

Remember how we left that boatload of reporters in our wake? Thought they could get a shot of the two of us for their sordid little rags. All they got was a good soaking.

A/C SHAW: They got what they wanted. They discovered me, and you know what happened then. *(Hits a nerve)* Damn newspapers! It's thanks to them I had to leave India. I had just found some small measure of peace there when they started spreading some nonsense about me leading that rebellion in Afghanistan. I'm trapped. If I'm abroad, I'm leading some uprising, if I'm home I'm the head of the fascist party, or George Bernard Shaw's illegitimate son. Christ

almighty! It's driving me insane. It's either that or the malaria. Or both. (*Genuinely worried*) I'm hearing voices, Clare. I see things too. And it's getting worse.

(*WALDEN ENTERS with another sandbag and plops it down on the pile as before – takes a swig of his beer – and EXITS, stage right, for another sandbag.*)

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: (*Looks at the sandbags*) You really are expecting trouble, aren't you?

A/C SHAW: Yes, and I should help young Walden.

(*A/C SHAW moves a sandbag, carefully looking for a proper place to start a rifle parapet.*)

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: What you need is a quiet out-of-the-way posting somewhere.

A/C SHAW: Like Aboukir?

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: It's the perfect spot. I could arrange it.

A/C SHAW: In Arabia? Impossible! The damn papers would have me leading another revolt in two minutes flat.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: I just miss you so much. It's been desperately hard going back to being an ordinary housewife.

(*SHE starts to sway to the music again.*)

A/C SHAW: (*He watched her dance admiringly*) You'll never be an ordinary housewife, Clare.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: I hope not, Tes. But life is so dull these days – so "normal". While you were on the base life seemed – elevated somehow. There was an exhilaration in simply waking up every day. Even the grayest, most dreary English day was filled with colour when I was with you. (*Earnestly*) What's going to happen to us, Tes?

(*SHE looks into his eyes.*)

A/C SHAW: I don't know.

(*HE averts his eyes and moves away. SHE watches him closely.*)

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Does this have anything to do with what was in "Seven Pillars"?

(*The mention of "Seven Pillars" evokes a reaction from SHAW.*)

A/C SHAW: Why should it? Have people been talking?

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: You gave Charlotte a copy.

A/C SHAW: Yes.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: But not me.

A/C SHAW: (*Tries to shrug it off*) I needed her criticism. She's critiques George Bernard's work all the time.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: But you've published it now.

A/C SHAW: That was a private subscription. Just 200 copies.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Why don't you want me to read it?

A/C SHAW: The truth is: you wouldn't like the book.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: How do you know?

A/C SHAW: It's about politics, and the wonderful thing about you, Clare, is that you have no interest in politics.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: It can't be *all* about politics...

A/C SHAW: No. There are a few "other" things in it... things I'd rather you didn't...

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Whatever it is, I can handle it.

A/C SHAW: Ah, but can I?

(Beat. The SOUND of a large four-engined propeller plane drones overhead. THEY look up.)

There goes your plane. You really are stuck now.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Good. Do you know your book is generating a lot of chatter in London? Your 200 subscribers have been very loose-lipped.

A/C SHAW: All the more reason for you not to read it.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: I read it. I read Charlotte's copy.

A/C SHAW: Did you? *(Beat)* And... ?

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: I love you even more – knowing how much you've suffered. Was it because of what happened to you in Dera'a? Because of what those horrible Turks did to you? Is that why you kept it from me?

A/C SHAW: Partly because of Dera'a. I don't want things between us to change, that's all. It's so perfect right now.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Perfect! We're a thousand miles apart! How is that perfect?

A/C SHAW: We live in our letters. In our memories. Sometimes that's better than real life.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Not for me. You gave me a taste of a life – of something glorious – unforgettable – and then you left!

A/C SHAW: I had to leave. Even if the press hadn't discovered me my posting was almost up. Clare, I'm in the military. We move.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Then move to Aboukir! I can arrange it.

A/C SHAW: You know I can't.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Damn it, Tes!

A/C SHAW: Don't be angry with me. You mean so much to me, Clare, but I don't live in the real world any more. We must create a different kind of love. One that lives on through our letters and the knowledge that our love exists – like the home you know is always there for you, even if you can't visit very often.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Sometimes I feel like I'm some kind of mythic woman to you.

Someone for you to write to – to dream about in the barracks at night. But I'm real! I feel pain, and love, and longing and loss. Letters are not enough!

(WALDEN ENTERS with another sandbag and looks at SHAW, trying to get a signal on whether he should stay or go. CLARE notices this.)

(To Shaw, with a sigh) We'll get to the bottom of this later. *(She takes the record off the gramophone, then turns to Walden)* You're working very hard for such a hot evening, Mr. Walden. Is that really necessary?

L/A/C WALDEN: It's good to be prepared, Ma'am.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: It's all rather exciting – guns – sandbags. You wouldn't think it was peacetime, would you? I thought we'd conquered Iraq. *(Beat)* So how are you enjoying the east, Mr. Walden?

L/A/C WALDEN: Me? Oh, it's great. Lots to see.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: They told me this was the cradle of civilization. *(Looks around)* It seems that the cradle is bare.

L/A/C WALDEN: There's not much around here, ma'am – just desert – but up the Euphrates a ways there's a place worth seeing.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Oh yes?

L/A/C WALDEN: They just discovered the remains of the city of Ur, where Abraham was born. It really makes you think. Abraham! All that stuff we learned in Sunday school, and I'm standing right there. I took some photos.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Really. I'd like to see them. *(To Shaw)* He's a bright young chap. What's your first name?

L/A/C WALDEN: Thomas. But everyone calls me Tam.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Where are you from, Tam?

L/A/C WALDEN: Yorkshire, ma'am.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: And how have you enjoyed working under Mr. Shaw?

L/A/C WALDEN: Actually he works under me. I know it's a bit odd – the age thing an' all – but I'm an L/A/C, see. *(Points to his insignia)*

A/C SHAW: And I'm a mere Ac/2. An erk, a plebe.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: There's nothing like a man in uniform, though, is there? Well, I'd better join Charlotte. I'll see you later. *(She puts on her pith helmet jauntily)* I think I'll hang onto my topi – it's good to live a little dangerously, don't you think?

(With a smile at Shaw, she picks up her bags and EXITS breezily. Was she trying to make him jealous by flirting with Walden?)

L/A/C WALDEN: *(In love)* Wow! What a doll!

A/C SHAW: She seems to have taken a shine to you.

L/A/C WALDEN: Nah! She's a lady – just being polite. 'Sides, she's your girl, ain't she?

A/C SHAW: Yes, she's my girl. But right now we're just friends.

L/A/C WALDEN: Is she married? I noticed a ring. Is that the problem?

(WALDEN moves a sandbag, SHAW helps him.)

A/C SHAW: It's my experience that the less you know about a woman, the better.

L/A/C WALDEN: OK, I get it! Just good friends. Hubby back home. Good for you! You'll fit right in in this squadron. Oh, imagine having a girl like that! Must be something.

A/C SHAW: Don't you have a girl back home?

L/A/C WALDEN: Nah. It's difficult, see. I've been in overseas postings since I was an apprentice. This is my third tour.

A/C SHAW: Third! You should be at a home base by now.

L/A/C WALDEN: Can't. Need the combat pay. I got a sister back home – she's the clever one in the family – and I'm helping pay for her studies.

A/C SHAW: You're risking getting your brains shot out in some distant land for an education England probably won't even let her use?

L/A/C WALDEN: England's changing, you know. Anyway, you got any better ideas for a coalminer's son? *(Looks out at the desert)* Home by Christmas though – then I'm getting a girl of my own.

A/C SHAW: *(Impressed)* Doing the right thing seems to come easily to you. You're very lucky.

L/A/C WALDEN: *(He's never given it much thought)* How d'you mean?

A/C SHAW: That you even ask that, my young friend, is the whole point. For me, I'm always trying to do the right thing when it turns out it's the wrong thing. Safer all round for me to do nothing.

L/A/C WALDEN: You talk in riddles, you know. *(Laughs)* You're a nut. *(Smells the air)* Ooh, d'you smell that perfume? Hell, I could drown in that and die happy. Say, is that true about pith helmets?

A/C SHAW: No, I don't think they were really designed to shield us from the eye of Allah. But who knows – they're not much use against the sun.

L/A/C WALDEN: Maybe *I* should wear a head scarf – look like Rudy Valentino, eh? *(HE takes a dish towel from the bar and puts it on his head and struts like Valentino)* What d'you think, eh, – "The Sheik"? "Walden of Arabia"?

(Seeing WALDEN with the "Arab" headdress provokes a bad memory in SHAW. HE backs away in horror.)

L/A/C WALDEN: Anything the matter?

(SHAW tries to pull himself together.)

A/C SHAW: No. *(Forcing a smile)* Suits you.

(SHAW is still moved by the memory and appears to be having another malarial attack. HE wipes his face as if sweating.)

The LIGHTS change and there is THE SOUND of the Faisal's "Desert Motif", a mixture of Arab music, wind, and the jingle of camel harnesses, indicating this is a vision inside Shaw's head.

AN ARAB in the white robes and gold-roped headdress of a Sharif enters from the desert. HE has a gold dagger in his belt. It is PRINCE FAISAL. The general lights dim and a hotspot comes up on FAISAL. SHAW approaches him as if in a dream. It is the memory of his first meeting with Prince Faisal. SHAW no longer appears sick, but is the confident Lawrence of legend.)

PRINCE FAISAL: So, "English", you come from Cairo to see me? They say your name is Colonel 'Orense.

A/C SHAW: Yes, your highness.

(SHAW bows to PRINCE FAISAL.)

PRINCE FAISAL: You are most welcome here.

(FAISAL bows politely but coolly, and indicates for SHAW to sit, which he does. Then PRINCE FAISAL sits.)

I hope your journey here was not too hard?

A/C SHAW: I do not find the desert hard. To me it is a place of great beauty.

PRINCE FAISAL: *(Surprised)* You are English, are you not?

A/C SHAW: I am.

PRINCE FAISAL: A most unusual Englishman, then. But you are not the first who has been sent here by the Colonial Office. It is the Colonial Office, I presume?

A/C SHAW: You presume correctly.

PRINCE FAISAL: *(Slyly)* You wish us to fight the Turks for you, no doubt. *(A dig)* They are a thorn in your side, I hear.

A/C SHAW: (*Politely, but pointedly*) As they are in yours, I hear.

PRINCE FAISAL: (*Brusquely*) We are dealing with them.

A/C SHAW: Are you?

PRINCE FAISAL: You are always in a rush, you English. We shall drive the Turks out in time, God willing. (*Looks up to the heavens*) Maktub – it is written.

A/C SHAW: Maktub? Was it "written" that you were to be slaves to the Turks for four hundred years? That is how long the Turks have oppressed your people, is it not? How patient does Allah expect you to be?

(*SHAW takes a stick and draws a map of Arabia in the "sand".*)

The Turks are not Arabs, yet they control all the holy places.

(*SHAW points the stick at "Damascus".*)

Damascus is the city of your dreams, but you cannot go there.

(*FAISAL visibly bristles at the mention of Damascus.*)

PRINCE FAISAL: (*Tersely*) And you think you British can take us there?

A/C SHAW: We British can supply guns, ammunition, gold. What we cannot supply is a leader. A new Sala-ha-deen.

PRINCE FAISAL: And you think I could be that Sala-ha-deen?

A/C SHAW: I have heard that you are the most courageous of all the sons of King Hussein.

PRINCE FAISAL: Ah, you know how to flatter. But you also know that Sala-ha-deen drove out the English crusaders. So if you come as a crusader – a new Richard the Lion-Heart – then we must be enemies.

A/C SHAW: We British learned well that taking the holy land is a lot easier than keeping the holy land. We have no imperial ambitions here.

PRINCE FAISAL: None? Has the leopard changed its spots?

A/C SHAW: The leopard has new enemies.

(*FAISAL stands.*)

PRINCE FAISAL: New enemies, but the same spots. You English hunger for desolate lands, to build them up in your image, so perhaps Arabia once again seems precious to you?

(*SHAW stands.*)

A/C SHAW: We wish to do good here, not to take your land.

PRINCE FAISAL: Your good and my good, perhaps they are different? You see, both forced good and forced evil will make a people cry with pain. You will try to change us, to make us like you – to make Arabia a little England with minarets. You will give us Prime Ministers in little bowler hats. You will draw lines in the desert and call them countries. But we are tribes, not countries. The desert has no lines in it. You see us as a rough ore which you can mine and transform into metal. But take care – the ore does not always admire the flame which transforms it.

A/C SHAW: I come here to be transformed, not to transform.

PRINCE FAISAL: (*Disbelieving*) Then you are a most unusual Englishman indeed! But what of the men who sent you? If the English wish me to be a falcon, who will be the falconer? I do not sit well upon a master's arm, to be ordered into the sky and then return for scraps of food.

A/C SHAW: England will not be your falconer. Only God can order you to action.

PRINCE FAISAL: Your God or mine?

A/C SHAW: I see no distinction there. We are all the children of Abraham.

PRINCE FAISAL: *(Smiles)* You are a clever man. And clever men are dangerous. *(Friendly)* You are most welcome, all the same. You will dine with us, of course.

A/C SHAW: It would be a great honor.

PRINCE FAISAL: *(Politely)* And how do you like our place here in Wadi Safra?

A/C SHAW: I like it well. *(Pointedly)* But it is far from Damascus.

(FAISAL visibly reacts to this. The loss of Damascus, as Lawrence well knows, is a sore point.)

PRINCE FAISAL: *(Stiffly)* Yes. It is far from Damascus. *(Regains his composure)*

But, praise be to God, there are Turks closer to us than that.

(SHAW smiles. He's managed to tap into the deep longings of all Arabs for Damascus. The lights fade on the apparition of PRINCE FAISAL, WHO EXITS slowly into the desert and the LIGHTS change back to normal. SHAW turns and sees WALDEN looking at him.)

L/A/C WALDEN: You got it bad, ain't you? Malaria again?

A/C SHAW: Yes – malaria – sorry – did I say something?

L/A/C WALDEN: Nothing that made sense. Don't worry – I've seen enough cases of camp fever, nothin' bothers me now.

(SHAW looks out across the desert, stage left, towards the place where he saw Faisal.)

A/C SHAW: *(To himself, laughs bitterly)* A chest full of stones...

L/A/C WALDEN: What's so funny?

A/C SHAW: Oh, nothing. Just an old joke I remembered.

L/A/C WALDEN: Want to share it?

A/C SHAW: It's not really very funny. And you don't have malaria.

(A painful silence. SHAW seems depressed.)

L/A/C WALDEN: You want me to get some quinine from the MO?

LAWRENCE: No. I already took some today. *(Beat)* It's passed.

(SHAW wipes the sweat off his brow with a handkerchief. WALDEN looks at him, concerned, then goes to pick up his beer.)

L/A/C WALDEN: *(Sees the book SHAW got out of his kit bag earlier)* This your book?

A/C SHAW: Yes.

L/A/C WALDEN: *(Looks at cover)* Morte D'Arthur. Thought that was written by Tennyson?

A/C SHAW: Tennyson wrote the poem. Mallory wrote the book.

(SHAW puts the book away in his kit bag, embarrassed that Walden saw it. SHAW also puts away the shirt and cap HE also took out earlier.)

L/A/C WALDEN: I learned that poem when I was at school. "I go to the island-valley of Avalon; Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow, Nor ever wind blows loudly..."

A/C SHAW: (*Impressed*) Very good.

L/A/C WALDEN: (*Proudly*) I had an English teacher who would cane the tar out of you if you didn't learn your verses. Still, I liked that one. Sad, though. King Arthur lies dying – he's been betrayed by his most trusted knight – Camelot is in ruins... Poets love that stuff though, don't they?

A/C SHAW: (*Darkly*) Yes. Don't let yourself fall for any of that nonsense.

L/A/C WALDEN: Funny book to bring to the desert. Makes you think of home, eh? Nice to read of the green fields of England when all you got is this barren brickyard to stare at.

A/C SHAW: Barren? I don't know about that. This "brickyard" had the world's greatest civilization while our little island was filled with wild men running around in wolfskins covered with blue paint. They were writing Hammurabi's Code of Law when we didn't even have a written language.

L/A/C WALDEN: But we caught up, didn't we, professor? And now we're ahead.

A/C SHAW: (*Wearily; he gives up*) Yes, Tam – now we're ahead.

(*WALDEN goes back to his beer; finishes it.*)

L/A/C WALDEN: Come on, Broughie – don't talk like that.

A/C SHAW: Like what?

(*WALDEN heads to the bar for another beer.*)

L/A/C WALDEN: You're beginning to sound like one of them "let's all pack up and go home and give the Empire back" types. Get your 'ead out of the clouds, Broughie. If we didn't rule this oily sandbox, some other Charlie would. Just last week we had a bunch of Krauts snooping about pretending they was archeologists. We sassed them out pretty quick – they were looking for oil for the new army that Hitler geezer's building, that's what. Them Germans want a piece of Arabia so bad... one night when they were pissed we heard 'em singing "Deutschland über Allah". (*HE laughs; Shaw does not*) "Über Allah". Get it? (*WALDEN opens another beer, looks to see if Shaw needs another*) You've hardly touched your beer. You'll keel over if you don't drink more.

(*SHAW moves away from WALDEN, trying to disguise a look of anguish.*)

You OK, Broughie? (*SHAW fights to hold his tongue*) Did I say something?

(*SHAW is bursting with emotion, but restrains himself.*)

A/C SHAW: Tam, I know it sounds moronically simple, but have you ever considered letting the people who live here run the place themselves?

L/A/C WALDEN: What! You 'ave been in the sun too long!

(*SHAW staggers unsteadily. The LIGHTS change again and the vision of PRINCE FAISAL enters from the desert, urgently.*)

PRINCE FAISAL: 'Orense. 'Orense. I must talk to you.

A/C SHAW: Faisal!

PRINCE FAISAL: I have heard rumors... rumors from Cairo that you English have made a secret deal with the French. Have you heard of this?

A/C SHAW: A deal? What sort of deal?

PRINCE FAISAL: That you are not going to give us freedom when the war is over – that you are going to keep Arabia for yourselves. 'Orense, tell me this is not true. You, I trust. You would not lie to me. Tell me this is not true.

A/C SHAW: *(Firmly)* It is not true.

PRINCE FAISAL: The Quran says: "always bear true witness, even if it be against yourself, your family, your friends – *(Beat, significantly)* – or your country". Many of my men have died following you. There would be no greater dishonor than if they died for a lie.

A/C SHAW: It's nothing but gossip. Secret deals, conspiracies! My friend, we have gone into battle together; we have braved bullets and bayonets together. You must know by now I would tell you instantly if I heard any rubbish like that. When this war is over you will have your country. Tell your men I say it is so. Tell them Lawrence gives his word.

(FAISAL looks him in the eye, and believes him.)

PRINCE FAISAL: I will tell them.

(PRINCE FAISAL EXITS offstage and the LIGHTS go back to normal. A look of utter torment contorts Shaw's face. HE staggers to a chair and sits.)

L/A/C WALDEN: *(Feels SHAW's forehead)* You're burning up!

(WALDEN pours some water into a glass.)

'Ere, drink this. You may 'ave heatstroke as well. *(SHAW drinks the water)* Let's get that shirt off! *(HE peels off Shaw's shirt and pours some water over SHAW's head and face)* Feeling better?

A/C SHAW: Yes, thanks. I don't know what sets it off. Talking too much, I imagine.

(WALDEN sees some scars on SHAW's back.)

L/A/C WALDEN: Jesus! Look at them scars! You've been lashed!

A/C SHAW: Oh, that. It was a long time ago.

(SHAW quickly puts his shirt back on.)

L/A/C WALDEN: It must 'ave nearly killed you.

A/C SHAW: I was captured by the Turks in the war. Not a pleasant experience.

L/A/C WALDEN: I'd say not. *(Looks at the scars; winces)* Them scars don't look that old.

A/C SHAW: They still get infected easily.

L/A/C WALDEN: 'Orrible! 'Orrible! And you still think that way about these wogs! I don't get you, Broughie. You honestly think some old battle-ax sheik or mad Mullah is going to be any better for his people than we are? Giving all the best jobs to his idiot cousins or his bastard harem kids and everyone else can starve to death for all he cares! Nah, they're better off with us. If we pulled out, these tribes'd tear each other apart in two minutes flat. Pax Brittanica, mate! Good for them – very good for us. 'Sides, they got a government now in Baghdad. A parliament – a prime minister —

A/C SHAW: *(Losing his temper)* They're all our puppets. Why do you think we still have an air base here in Basrah? What kind of independence is that?

L/A/C WALDEN: *(Half-joking)* We're 'ere to make sure they're our puppets, not someone else's. *(WALDEN notices a look on SHAW's face.)* You think I'm an uneducated bastard who knows dick-all about this country, don't you?

A/C SHAW: (*Wearily*) I don't, Tam. You're simply a product of the country that made you. I'm trying to undo some of the damage, that's all.

L/A/C WALDEN: You gotta be careful the way you talk, Broughie. I don't mind so much, but the others...

A/C SHAW: The way I talk?

L/A/C WALDEN: Sounds like you're "going native". Well, I've seen men go native, and it ain't pretty. They warned us. It's like a disease. One day a fella's a normal cricket-playing, bangers-n'-mash Englishman, and the next day he's wearing a feather headdress, yakking the local lingo, and looking at them Fatimas all googly-eyed. When it gets to that, you can't reason with them. You ask Crasher – he's seen all that. He says when one of our boys goes native you may as well just take 'em out and shoot 'em. So when the other squaddies show up, you keep them thoughts to yourself. It's for your own good.

(There is the SOUND of a hard object hitting the ground – it kicks up the sand near WALDEN.)

What the hell was that?

(WALDEN looks at the horizon, stage left. The smudge on the horizon has grown ominously in size.)

They're shooting at us!

(WALDEN grabs his rifle as SHAW looks through the binoculars.)

A/C SHAW: They're just shooting in the air. It may not mean anything. They fire off joy-shots for all sorts of reasons.

L/A/C WALDEN: Bloody idiots! Do you think we should get the Lewis gun?

A/C SHAW: You're the senior rank. What do *you* think?

L/A/C WALDEN: Oh, yeah. (*Beat; decisively*) We should bloody well get it.

A/C SHAW: I couldn't agree more. Sir.

(SHAW is happy to see Walden taking charge. CHARLOTTE SHAW ENTERS from stage right looking miffed.)

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Well! Wing Commander Strickland didn't give me quite the welcome I expected. Usually they're delighted to have visitors to break the boredom of base life.

A/C SHAW: You picked the wrong base. It's not been boring here, has it Tam?

L/A/C WALDEN: It's been a bit lively all round, Ma'am.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Not that you seem particularly happy to see me either, Ned.

(WALDEN senses the tautness in the exchange and realizes, once again, that he's in the way.)

L/A/C WALDEN: Right – well – I'm nipping over to the armory – pick up the – ah – you-know-what. (*Nods towards the Bedouin; whispers*) You'd better tell her.

(WALDEN leaves.)

A/C SHAW: I'm sorry Charlotte, but I don't think you understand just how important it is that my cover here is not blown.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: No, I don't understand. I don't understand why you are running away from yourself. What happened to you out there in the desert? What changed you?

A/C SHAW: All you need to know is that if I had remained as Lawrence I would be dead by now.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Dead? What nonsense! The world adores you and all you do is hide.

A/C SHAW: The world does not adore me – the world adores an illusion. (*Sudden anger*) It was that son-of-a-bitch Lowell Thomas! That ridiculous show with Arabian dancing girls and marching bands! Do you know he sold four million tickets! He turned me into a circus freak!

CHARLOTTE SHAW: You are not a freak. You are a great man – at least you were when you put your mind to it.

A/C SHAW: I was never a great man. I've found my proper level here as a simple soldier who gets a pat on the back for a good watch as a sentry, writing a proper report, keeping his uniform tidy...

CHARLOTTE SHAW: This is madness!

A/C SHAW: Not for me. There's something deeply comforting about sleeping in a barracks with uncomplicated soldiers. Their life's joys are a beer on a Saturday night and a girl back home who cares about them. There's a purity here I can't find anywhere else – it's the only real home I've ever known. No, take this – (*Indicates barracks*) – away from me and I *will* die, one way or the other.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: It's all very morbid. I think you're obsessed with your own death. Faisal said you always charged into battle as though you wanted to get killed, and Winston said you threatened to shoot yourself if the R.A.F. didn't let you back in. I hope you're not thinking of doing anything drastic.

A/C SHAW: I've never considered a bullet in the head particularly drastic. Staying alive is drastic. But don't worry, here in the ranks I have found ways to cope. And now you know all that, do you still want to tell me what this business is about? As you can see the answer will be "no", whatever it is. Let me guess. The Foreign Office?

(SHE sits, fanning herself in the heat.)

CHARLOTTE SHAW: No.

A/C SHAW: Good. Perhaps they've given up on me at last. The Secret Service?

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Certainly not!

A/C SHAW: Hmm. That leaves the Colonial Office. I thought I was considered something lower than the Antichrist over there.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Not *official* Colonial Office.

A/C SHAW: Aha! A faction in the Colonial Office. Some of your progressive chums?

CHARLOTTE SHAW: What would you rather have – the imperialists who dominate Cairo and Whitehall?

A/C SHAW: And these "progressives" feel shunted aside – they feel they have no power, no voice – but if they had a leader, a figurehead, perhaps a Lawrence of Arabia type...

CHARLOTTE SHAW: People listen to you.

A/C SHAW: Do they? (*Rising anger*) I don't recall anyone actually listening to what I said. I seem to recall them wanting me to parade around London in white robes with a gold dagger stuck in my belt. Well, that pantomime is over!

(SHE goes to him.)

CHARLOTTE SHAW: How can you remain silent when you see what's happening in the east right now?

A/C SHAW: Silence is not a crime.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Yes, it is! When you stand by and watch the old empire dying knowing it will either die in a pool of blood or resurrect itself as a model of...

(She hesitates)

A/C SHAW: Go on, say it! Enlightenment.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: I was trying to think of another word. But a word can be trite and true at the same time.

A/C SHAW: Charlotte, did you know I was offered the Governorship of Egypt? 20,000 pounds a year, a mansion in Cairo, a hundred servants and a silk hat. They're all so desperately afraid of losing the Empire and think I possess some mysterious power to put things right. It's a topsy-turvy world that belongs down a rabbit-hole.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: It's no madder a world than the one you risked your life for.

A/C SHAW: I didn't know that at the time. I thought it was a world where good deeds and loyalty are rewarded. I know better now. *(HE looks at her with a weary smile.)* Charlotte, of all the cunning tempters sent my way, I confess you're the most inspired choice yet. I can just hear your "enlightened" chums at the Colonial Office: "Oh, look, he'll be going through Basrah on his way back from India – the first time he's set foot in Arabia in ten years. He'll see the sweep of the sands, the smell of the desert winds, the sound of the camels groaning in the morning – it will awaken all that old longing —"

CHARLOTTE SHAW: It was something like that.

A/C SHAW: Well, let's see.

(SHAW looks out across the desert and takes a deep breath.)

No. Nothing. Sorry.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Liar! It kills you when you look out there! Admit it!

A/C SHAW: It makes no difference what I feel.

(CHARLOTTE sees the Bedouin.)

CHARLOTTE SHAW: There's some Bedouin out there.

A/C SHAW: So there are.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: They're coming this way.

A/C SHAW: So it appears.

(They watch the movement on the horizon for a moment.)

CHARLOTTE SHAW: I wonder what they want?

A/C SHAW: They either want to make their supper or kill us. I can't quite tell which.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: How exciting!

A/C SHAW: So now you should leave. *(Tries to hustle her off)* You could still get a boat to take you down the Shatt.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: There'll be no evacuation. The Wing Commander told me that if there's any trouble we're stuck here. They have no personnel to waste on protecting foolish women travelers.

A/C SHAW: Then you must go to the main compound.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: What? And miss the show!

A/C SHAW: Charlotte, one of the reasons I joined the ranks was to get away from feeling responsible for people. *(Off her dubious look)* People and causes. Now I have the two people I care for most in the whole world to worry about.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Do you really care that much?

A/C SHAW: (*Heartfelt*) You have no idea. There are only two things I really need in life – Clare's adulation and your disapproval. They balance me. Take either one away and my world would collapse.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: You certainly don't have to worry about losing my disapproval if you keep behaving this way.

(*SHAW opens a box of ammunition and loads the rifle.*)

Lawrence, my darling boy, you must listen to me. I have no children – apart from you now that you seem to have adopted me. I have a famous husband whose plays have, in their own small way, changed the world. I help a little in that. Many years ago, before he had written a single play, he became very ill – he was at death's door – I nursed him back to health. It is, to date, my greatest accomplishment.

A/C SHAW: For which he married you, so you were well repaid.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: He proposed, but only because he thought he was about to die. I've often wondered why he went through with it.

A/C SHAW: (*Cheekily*) Especially when you made him sign a contract that the marriage would never be consummated.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: I was giving him an opportunity to break his promise without guilt. He knew where I stood on that subject.

A/C SHAW: Is it true he went gray overnight when he read it?

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Ha! He'd like you to believe that. He was already going gray. What I'm trying to say is that I saved a great man once. I intend to save another.

A/C SHAW: And once again the deal comes with impossible conditions attached.

(*SHE goes to him earnestly.*)

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Not impossible! I've already proved that. I will save you from this madness – even if I have to break you into pieces to do it.

A/C SHAW: What if I don't want to be broken into pieces?

CHARLOTTE SHAW: It doesn't matter. You'll thank me afterwards.

A/C SHAW: I'm glad to see your disapproval is intact, and I intend to keep it that way. But I'm worried about Clare's approval. You let her read "Seven Pillars".

CHARLOTTE SHAW: I was surprised you didn't give her a copy.

A/C SHAW: Uncritical love, dear Charlotte. I still need it.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Ha! From a distance.

A/C SHAW: At a distance it's always perfect. She's my girl. Every common soldier needs a girl. Clare is mine.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: So you've got the poor girl playing Guinevere to your Lancelot. (*Off his look*) Oh, don't look so damned innocent – you've always been obsessed with Camelot. I'll bet you still carry that moth-eaten old Morte D'Arthur with you.

(*CHARLOTTE goes to SHAW's kit bag to look in it.*)

A/C SHAW: (*Defensive, he snatches the book away*) What does that prove?

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Let's see – Guinevere was the beautiful wife of the king; Clare is the beautiful wife of your commanding officer...

A/C SHAW: There's one big difference. I have not betrayed my commanding officer.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Not in body. But you've stolen her mind, which is worse.

A/C SHAW: We both know where we stand.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: No, *you* know where you stand. She doesn't.

A/C SHAW: Guinevere, indeed! I hope you haven't told this mad theory to Clare.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: No. I know you men need your fantasy women. George is just the same. (*Goes to him; earnestly*) Come back to England with me!

A/C SHAW: I'm an enlisted man – I can't go anywhere.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: I can get you a transfer to the Colonial Office to run out your service there. Don't you see, you *can* go back!

A/C SHAW: There's no second act in my life. I threw everything I had into Act One.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: So you're just going to let this all wind down in some colossal anticlimax?

A/C SHAW: I'm not one of George Bernard's plays, you know. There's nothing wrong with an anticlimax in life. It's the natural order of things. We decay and our dreams decay with us.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: All of your dreams?

A/C SHAW: Oh, I have a few simple ones left. I'd like to change the poisoned views of one or two young airmen, and then live my life out knowing I'd done some small amount of good. I have a good prospect in young Walden. He has a noble heart, and the shadow of the world hasn't fallen on him yet. These are small dreams, perhaps, but decent ones.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: You're not tempted by Moseley?

A/C SHAW: Ah, we're back to Moseley.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Come over here! (*Indicates for him to sit*) Sit down! This is important.

(Reluctantly, SHAW goes over and sits by Charlotte.)

You've been seen a lot with Henry Williamson.

A/C SHAW: (*Shrugs*) He's a friend.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Is that all?

A/C SHAW: I like his work. He's a talented novelist.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: He's a talented Fascist.

A/C SHAW: He's a talented Fascist and a novelist. I prefer his novels.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: You know that MI-5 has been watching you. You're making them very nervous. If you joined Moseley and the Blackshirts...

A/C SHAW: I won't.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: But the Secret Service doesn't know that. They just know you've always been a loose cannon. Do you remember what happened to Beecham?

A/C SHAW: Beecham? He died in a motor accident.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Yes. A hit and run. A black car with no license plates. They never solved it.

A/C SHAW: A lot of hit and runs are never solved...

CHARLOTTE SHAW: I'm telling you – flirting with Fascism – even from a distance – is a very dangerous business in England these days.

(WALDEN returns carrying, overloaded with a heavy Lewis machine gun and a drum of ammunition.)

L/A/C WALDEN: (*To Charlotte*) Ma'am, Wing Commander Strickland asked to see you.

A/C SHAW: There goes your adventure. He'll have you locked up inside the main compound 'til this blows over.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: We'll see about that. (*Leaving*) Just remember what I said about MI-5.

A/C SHAW: (*Amused*) I'll keep a lookout for black cars without license plates.

(CHARLOTTE leaves.)

L/A/C WALDEN: MI-5? The Secret Service... (*WALDEN stares at Shaw*) Bloody hell!

A/C SHAW: What?

(*WALDEN keeps staring at Shaw – his eyes go wide.*)

L/A/C WALDEN: Oh, my God! You're – you're – you *are*, ain't you?

A/C SHAW: I am what?

L/A/C WALDEN: These visitors – that accent – them scars from the Turks – it all makes sense now. (*Circles him*) Yeah – I can see it. What an idiot I've been! (*SHAW sighs, sensing what is coming*) You're Lawrence of bleeding Arabia! That's who you are!

A/C SHAW: Don't be ridiculous.

L/A/C WALDEN: I *knew* I'd seen that face before. Your picture was on the wall of the lecture room at Halton. I must have stared at that bloody picture for hours —

A/C SHAW: My name is Shaw.

L/A/C WALDEN: I'd heard you'd joined the service a while back, using the name Ross.

A/C SHAW: I'm not Lawrence!

L/A/C WALDEN: Don't worry, I won't spill the beans. Lawrence of bleeding Arabia – there's a thing!

(*"SHAW" realizes that the gig is up. *NOTE: From now on he will be referred to as "LAWRENCE".*)

LAWRENCE: Promise me you won't tell anyone.

L/A/C WALDEN: Scout's honour. You saw how long it took me to work it out – most of the other squaddies are like Crasher – they're so dense they wouldn't recognize their own grandmothers. Does anyone else know?

LAWRENCE: Only the C.O.

L/A/C WALDEN: Lawrence of bleeding Arabia!

LAWRENCE: All right – you can stop saying that now.

L/A/C WALDEN: Sorry. Shaw. Broughie Shaw. (*Winks conspiratorially*) Aircraftman Second Class. I'd heard you was kicked out of the R.A.F.

(*A/C SHAW goes to the Lewis gun.*)

A/C SHAW: I was. I've been given a second chance as long as I can keep my identity secret from the newspapers. It seems my fame either "disrupts base life" or causes "embarrassment to the government". I intend to make sure neither happens again.

L/A/C WALDEN: But why are you wandering around the empire pretending to be a nobody?

LAWRENCE: I'm not a nobody. I'm Aircraftman Shaw. I'm your squadron mate. *You're* not a nobody and neither am I.

L/A/C WALDEN: But you were famous! You were the biggest hero to come out of the war.

LAWRENCE: Of course I was. How could trench warfare create a hero? All they had was mud while I had the desert. It didn't matter that nobody quite understood what I was doing, as long as I rode into battle on a camel I was the mythic hero they were all looking for. But I'm not a myth – as you'll see soon enough if we're attacked. So can we get back to this gun?

(*A/C SHAW attaches the ammunition drum to the machine gun.*)

L/A/C WALDEN: Hey, you know Crasher was there in Aqaba with the R.F.C. He's always blathering how he met Lawrence of Arabia there.

LAWRENCE: Half of England claim they've met Lawrence of Arabia. I don't know where I found the time.

L/A/C WALDEN: He said he didn't like you much.

LAWRENCE: Hmm. Sounds like he did meet me. *(Beat)* Now, no more questions about Lawrence.

(An uncomfortable silence as they go back to the gun.)

L/A/C WALDEN: *(Breaks the silence)* So what was that joke, Broughie?

LAWRENCE: What joke?

L/A/C WALDEN: The chest full of stones?

LAWRENCE: Oh, that. Early in the Arab campaign, we were short of money and needed gold to recruit the more reluctant tribes. So Prince Faisal and I had a big money chest filled with stones. We guarded it around the clock. Anyone who got near that chest got a gun in their face.

L/A/C WALDEN: It worked?

LAWRENCE: Like a charm. Everyone thought it was full of gold so they followed us. Imagine! A chest full of stones.

(LAWRENCE laughs cynically)

L/A/C WALDEN: Arabs'll fall for anything, won't they?

LAWRENCE: Not just Arabs.

(LAWRENCE becomes quiet and introspective again and sits.)

L/A/C WALDEN: I read your book, you know.

LAWRENCE: Broughie Shaw never wrote a book.

L/A/C WALDEN: Right. Sorry.

LAWRENCE: No more Lawrence.

L/A/C WALDEN: Got it.

(WALDEN goes back to setting up the gun, but cannot contain himself.)

It's just that title – The Seven Pillars of Wisdom. I never could figure out what that meant.

LAWRENCE: *(Startled)* What did you say?

(Behind them, AN AIRMAN appears in the doorway of the barracks and stands yawning and stretching – he's been sleeping. It's CORPORAL "CRASHER" DUNSTONE – a large hulk of a man who's not happy about being awakened. HE's a tough and weathered old soldier. He wears a bayonet in a sheath on his belt. HE rubs his eyes, dazzled by the light, and spits on the ground. Neither WALDEN nor LAWRENCE sees him.)

L/A/C WALDEN: The Seven Pillars of Wisdom. The name of your – *(Stops himself)* – that book.

LAWRENCE: *(Alarmed)* You must be thinking of "Revolt in the Desert". The Seven Pillars of Wisdom hasn't been published.

L/A/C WALDEN: No, I read 'em both.

LAWRENCE: That's impossible! The Seven Pillars – you're absolutely sure?

L/A/C WALDEN: Yeah. There's a mimeograph copy floating around the base somewhere. Someone picked it up in London. Pirated, I suppose. I shouldn't be telling you that, should I?

(LAWRENCE rises in alarm. CRASHER moves out of the doorway of the barracks, behind them, listening with curiosity.)

LAWRENCE: Good God!

L/A/C WALDEN: Keep your shirt on, Lawrence – I mean, Broughie. You should be flattered people want to steal it.

LAWRENCE: You don't understand – that was released for private subscription only. It was not to be read by just anyone. You say it's here on the base?

L/A/C WALDEN: The C.O. heard it was around and ordered it to be given up. For some reason he didn't want us to read it – seemed to think it would be bad for our morals. 'Course that meant we all had to read it.

LAWRENCE: Was it given up?

L/A/C WALDEN: Are you off your chopper? Of course not. It's damn hard to find any books on Arabia. Bloody strange book, if you don't mind me saying so. Although I liked it, generally. Some of the other sqaddies didn't care for it, so it's good they don't know who you really are.

(CRASHER steps out of the shadows.)

CRASHER: *(Rough working class accent)* Who the hell's this?

L/A/C WALDEN: *(Surprised)* Crasher! Ah – 'is name's Shaw. Just in from Karachi.

CRASHER: Karachi, eh? And how long do we have the pleasure of your company?

LAWRENCE: A few days. Waiting for a transfer.

CRASHER: *(Mimics his Oxford accent)* "Waiting for a transfer, are we?" *(Looks at his uniform)* Ac/2, eh? Gentleman ranker.

LAWRENCE: Yes.

(CRASHER goes to the bar, takes his mug off the shelf, and pours himself a beer.)

CRASHER: Welcome to 203. Nice lot, ain't we Tam?

L/A/C WALDEN: Yeah, very nice.

CRASHER: Now pardon my seeming really stupid, but I coulda sworn he called you Lawrence.

L/A/C WALDEN: I didn't, did I?

(CRASHER smiles coldly.)

CRASHER: *(Circles Lawrence)* And what was all that stuff about Seven Pillars of Wisdom... Revolt In The Desert... ?

L/A/C WALDEN: He's read 'em, that's all. We were talking about 'em.

CRASHER: A little meeting of the Base Literary Club, was it? Didn't know you were such a scholar. *(Looks at the two men with a sneer)* It's a strange world, in 'it? Here's a man trying to get a little kip of an evening, and having to listen to a pair of erks yakking away, and me thinking I'll go outside and punch their lights out for messing with my shut-eye, when lo and behold... !

WALDEN: Now just a minute, Crasher. We was only kidding about all that Lawrence stuff.

(To Lawrence) Just shooting the breeze – weren't we? *(To Crasher)* His name's Shaw. You don't think Lawrence of Arabia would be an Ac/2. That'd be a joke, eh? *(Laughs)*

CRASHER: Toss it, Tam, you're a lousy liar. I heard he was back in the service. 'Sides, I know this bastard. Probably wouldn't have recognized you after all these years.

LAWRENCE: I've never set eyes on you before.

(CRASHER puts his beer down.)

CRASHER: No, you probably haven't, but I've set eyes on you. Remember Aqaba? Remember that R.F.C. bomber squadron you ordered? I was a lowly armourer back then, and you were strutting around in that swami get-up of yours playing the Grand Sheik of Araby and looking every inch the royal pratt. 'Course you wouldn't remember me, you took dick-all notice of anyone 'cept those Arab buddies of yours.

LAWRENCE: Perhaps I'm being oversensitive, but it seems I didn't make a good first impression.

CRASHER: Oh, you noticed.

LAWRENCE: Since we've never actually met, how is that possible?

CRASHER: How's that possible, he asks? How about how you took credit for all the fighting that me and my mates did. How good men died, unnoticed – 'cos you were hogging the bloody limelight. How somehow, the British army had a million men in Arabia and yet one man, history now tells us, did it all on his bleeding lonesome. Now don't think I 'ave a chip on my shoulder or nothing – (*Right in Lawrence's face*) I just hate your fucking guts.

LAWRENCE: I do like plain-speaking men. So I'll speak plainly: how much do you want to keep quiet about this?

CRASHER: Yeah, pay me off – just like you did the Arabs. That's your way, in it? 'Nah, don't insult me! Think you can pay me off with your blood money! I know a chest full of stones when I see it. Yeah, I heard that crack too. You make me sick.

L/A/C WALDEN: Now don't tell anyone, Crasher. If the newspapers get wind of this he'll be drummed out for keeps.

CRASHER: Good! I want him out! He don't deserve to be in the service.

L/A/C WALDEN: Cut him some slack, Crasher! You can't blame him for the way they write history.

(*CRASHER turns on WALDEN.*)

CRASHER: What do you know about it, you little twerp? What fighting have you done? A couple of skirmishes and suddenly you know what war feels like.

L/A/C WALDEN: I'm just saying...

CRASHER: How would you know how it feels to see this man turned into a god while me – me, who got shot at by the same bullets – me, who sweated under the same sun – me, who burned his feet black crossing the same desert! What did I get after the war? Nothing! Just a demob suit, a few quid and an unemployment line.

L/A/C WALDEN: Well life ain't always fair, Crasher —

CRASHER: Fair? This ain't about being "fair"? It's about the memory of brave men. Mates of mine. Men who died saving my skin. My best pal – Stoker – he had a wife and kids – didn't have to join up, but he did. Why? 'Cos he was my pal and I got conscripted. Pals stick together, see. (*Takes his bayonet out of its sheath*) One night our base got attacked, and a couple of Sinbads were about to skin me alive when Stoker, out of ammo, goes for 'em with his bayonet. (*Flashes his bayonet towards Lawrence*) Stoker sent 'em off to Allah, but they got 'im too. He died a couple of days later. You'll get a medal for this, Stoker, I tells him, I'll make sure of that. And I did try. I tried to get him a VC – a mention in dispatches, DSO – but he got nothing. Nah, nobody cared about a common soldier. See, the papers were full of this Lawrence of Arabia bloke. He was all they wanted to hear about. (*Threatens Lawrence with the bayonet*) A Lawrence who stuck his mug in front of every camera and every newsman he ever set eyes on! And now you're hiding out in my squadron. Hiding out 'cos you're worried they might find out the truth about you, I'll bet. Best way to keep the myth alive. But I know the truth about you. Now I never believed much in fate, or Kismet, as your Ali Baba pals would say. Fate's never done much for me. But it seems if you wait long enough, your time comes.

(CRASHER sheathes his bayonet just as CHARLOTTE and CLARE ENTER, stage right, happily chatting with each other; unseen by the men.)

You're out, Lawrence! Out and good riddance to bad rubbish!

(CRASHER picks up his mug of beer and throws it into Lawrence's face, daring him to fight.

WALDEN rushes and stands between Crasher and Lawrence.

When CHARLOTTE and CLARE see the beer being thrown into Lawrence's face they stop in their tracks.)

CRASHER: *(Does not see the women)* And when the news boys ask me why I ratted on you, I'll tell 'em: 'cos he's phony as a three-pound note. I'll tell 'em everything I know – about all the lies you told, and maybe they'll listen to me this time. Lawrence of Arabia! Hero of Damascus! What a joke! Yeah, and maybe there'll be some justice and my dead mates can rest in peace.

(WALDEN sees the women standing there.)

WALDEN: *(Hits CRASHER on the shoulder to get his attention)* Ladies in the mess!

(CRASHER and WALDEN instinctively stand to attention. CLARE is aghast at what she's heard; CHARLOTTE is fascinated.

CLARE runs to Lawrence's side protectively.)

CHARLOTTE SHAW: I think you have some explaining to do, soldier.

The LIGHTS fade.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

(Continuing from the end of the previous scene, CRASHER's fight with LAWRENCE has been interrupted by CLARE and CHARLOTTE.)

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: What was that man saying? How dare he say things like that! Calling you a liar!

LAWRENCE: Clare, Charlotte – can you give me a moment alone with the Corporal here?

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: But, Tes...

LAWRENCE: Please – it's very important.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: He should lose his stripes for speaking like that!

LAWRENCE: Just a few minutes...

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Come, Clare! Our soldier-boys obviously need to discuss a few things. *(To LAWRENCE)* Call us when you're done.

(CHARLOTTE leads a very reluctant CLARE offstage right in the direction of the camp.)

CRASHER: Who the hell are them women?

LAWRENCE: They are friends of mine. Corporal, can we talk about this?

CRASHER: Don't think you can work your charms on me. I'm no fool. I know what I know.

LAWRENCE: I'm not going to defend what I did back then. I may not deserve much out of life, but I deserve to stay in the service. This is my home as much as it is yours.

CRASHER: That's for me to decide, in 'it?

LAWRENCE: So it seems.

L/A/C WALDEN: Come on, Crasher. No matter what you think of him he's still the guy who took Aqaba from the Turks.

CRASHER: Aqaba was a circus trick, not a fight! On the Western Front it wouldn't even be called a skirmish, but you made your career on it. You're a one-trick pony who cashed in big.

L/A/C WALDEN: Cashed in! He's on an A/c's pay – twenty-two shillings a week!

CRASHER: So he spent all his winnings! I'm not weeping for him. Why're you taking his part?

L/A/C WALDEN: He's in my squadron now. I gotta look after my men.

CRASHER: You're so bloody wet behind the ears. He's got you dangling on a leash, hasn't he?

LAWRENCE: I can't rewrite history, Corporal. But I can do something.

CRASHER: Yeah? What?

LAWRENCE: Your friend – he deserved a medal?

CRASHER: More than you ever did. I remember when you were awarded a CB and a DSO. Made me puke.

(CRASHER goes to the bar and fills up his beer mug.)

LAWRENCE: Do you also remember that I turned the medals down?

CRASHER: Yeah, you were bloody clever – knowing you'd get more attention that way. Get your mug all over the papers again. I heard that you used one of your medals as a collar for your dog.

LAWRENCE: That's not true. It was a friend's dog.

CRASHER: Still more publicity for you. You mock everything.

LAWRENCE: I was trying to make a point.

CRASHER: What point?

LAWRENCE: That I didn't deserve them. Now about your friend – Stoker I think you called him – I could get that incident re-opened. He may get a medal yet.

CRASHER: That was years ago. 'Sides, I already petitioned for it and got told to f-off in no uncertain terms.

LAWRENCE: Your petition was in the wrong hands.

(LAWRENCE goes to his kit bag, takes out a notepad and writes on it.)

CRASHER: Oh, you're very clever, ain't you. No deal. You're not twisting me around the way you did the rest of the world. I'm onto you.

L/A/C WALDEN: Come on, Crasher! At least give him a chance. You ain't heard his side of it yet. You can't condemn a man without hearing his case – fair play, an' all that.

CRASHER: You and your "fair play" are getting on my wick. *(Reluctantly; to Lawrence)* A medal, eh? And his story told?

LAWRENCE: I can't guarantee a medal.

CRASHER: I'll bet you can't.

LAWRENCE: But I can do something. I know I can get his story told. *(Tears the page out of his notepad; folds it and offers it to Crasher)* This is the name of a reporter for the Times of London. He's a friend of mine. Just show him this.

(CRASHER looks at LAWRENCE coldly; does not take the note.)

CRASHER: Like shaking hands with the devil, in'it? Well, I've done that before. Look at this. *(Pulls back his shirt)* See them wounds. Arab bullets. When I left the service, I never wanted to see another uniform or a grain of sand as long as I lived. Then I lost my job in '26 after the general strike, and I was broke – and there were troubles in Iraq and old Arabia hands are hard to find. So I went back to the R.A.F., cap in hand. They looked at my record: *(Posh accent)* "Oh, fought with Lawrence, did you old boy? Bonus pay for you, old chap, if you go back..." And here I am. The last place on earth I want to be. All thanks to you.

L/A/C WALDEN: But you gotta think of your mates, too. Their story's worth something – even now.

CRASHER: What bloody rock did you crawl out from under?

(CRASHER walks away from the two men and considers, then turns back to them.)

Nah! I couldn't live with it. Him staying in my squadron! Him even staying in my service!

LAWRENCE: Your friend has a widow and two children, I think you said. At the end of the day, stories – for good or ill – are all we leave to this world when we're gone.

(LAWRENCE offers him the note again.)

CRASHER: Oh, you're a clever bastard, you are.

LAWRENCE: You're not leaving me many options.

CRASHER: And you know all about stories, don't you? But I'm not one of your Arab pals. I'm no fool.

LAWRENCE: I can see that.

(CRASHER thinks hard about his options.)

CRASHER: Damn it! All right, here's the deal — *(Takes the note reluctantly from Lawrence)* You tell me your side of it – for Stoker, that's the only reason – for his wife and kids, that's all. So they got something to hang on to.

L/A/C WALDEN: *(To Crasher)* That's the decent thing to do. After all, Stoker wouldn't have joined if it weren't for you.

CRASHER: *(Hit a nerve)* I don't need you to remind me of that! *(To Lawrence)* But you lie to me once – just once, and you're out. Savvy?

LAWRENCE: One lie?

CRASHER: One lie.

LAWRENCE: Are you telling me there have never been times when you've lied – for a greater good?

CRASHER: Nah, that's for you clever blokes – to me a lie is a lie. And a lie means civvy street for you.

(WALDEN tries to change the mood.)

WALDEN: *(Cheerfully)* Hey, this is just like The Arabian Nights!

CRASHER: What are you rambling about now?

WALDEN: In that book, you know, Scheherazade had to tell a story to the king every night, and if he didn't like the story he killed her. I mean, it's sorta like that, isn't it?

(CRASHER looks at WALDEN; shakes his head.)

CRASHER: *(To Lawrence)* Does he get up your nose as much as he gets up mine?

LAWRENCE: No. It's nice to find someone who's not suffocated by the past – unlike you and I.

(CRASHER doesn't try to hide his reluctance, but he has given his word.)

CRASHER: All right. Tell me your story. Like The Arabian friggin' Nights, if you like. And I'll play the king. But first – *(To Walden)* – get the book.

L/A/C WALDEN: *(Trying to protect Lawrence)* What book? Arabian Nights? *(CRASHER glares at him)* Oh, yeah – *his* book. "Revolt In The Desert". I'll get it. *(CRASHER grabs him and glares at him even harder)* Right. The other one. *(Starts to leave and stops)* I don't know where it is.

CRASHER: Don't play silly buggers with me! Someone in your flight had it last.

L/A/C WALDEN: I think it was Gabber.

CRASHER: Then get it from him.

L/A/C WALDEN: He's off in Basrah.

CRASHER: Then the book'll be in his bedside locker won't it?

L/A/C WALDEN: No! After that last inspection we kept it hidden in the...

(Glances at Lawrence.)

CRASHER: Hidden where?

L/A/C WALDEN: See – everyone hid it in a different place.

CRASHER: You lying little maggot! Where's it hidden? *(Silence)* I said where's it hidden?

(More silence. CRASHER grabs WALDEN and puts him into a painful arm lock.)

L/A/C WALDEN: Ow! Lay off, Crasher... !

(LAWRENCE holds Crasher's arm.)

LAWRENCE: *(With his old authority)* Let him go!

(CRASHER stares at Lawrence in disbelief.)

CRASHER: You laying a hand on a senior rank?

LAWRENCE: I thought you old hands didn't care much about rule books.

(CRASHER pushes WALDEN aside.)

CRASHER: All right, Lawrence! Just you and me – out in the desert. No officers! No rules! Last man standing. Let's sort this out.

LAWRENCE: I agree, on one condition. Not the last man standing – the last man to admit defeat.

CRASHER: Fine! It's all the same to me.

LAWRENCE: If I win, I get to stay.

CRASHER: *(Derisively)* You're mad! You don't think you can beat me?

(LAWRENCE picks up Crasher's beer.)

LAWRENCE: I can't beat you, but I can outlast you. *(Empties Crasher's beer into the sand)* You can pound me all you like, but you'll never get me to admit defeat. The only way for you to beat me is to kill me. Either way I win.

(WALDEN comes between them.)

WALDEN: Now let's not have any talk about killing! We have them women to think about. *(HE goes to stage right and looks offstage)* They can see us, and that older one's having a hard time holding the young 'un back. Fight, and we'll all lose our stripes.

CRASHER: Bloody women!

LAWRENCE: Just tell him where the book is, Tam. It makes no difference to me.

L/A/C WALDEN: You sure?

LAWRENCE: Yes! Tell him! It's only a book.

(Beat)

L/A/C WALDEN: *(To Crasher)* It's in the rafters.

CRASHER: Go get it! *(Pause)* Go on!

L/A/C WALDEN: *(To Lawrence)* Sorry.

LAWRENCE: It's all right. You covered my back like a good soldier. I'll remember that.

(WALDEN EXITS into the barracks.)

CRASHER: Didn't take you long to get him all harnessed and tethered, did it? You won't find me so easy. *(Beat)* So, let's hear your stories. I'll start with an easy one. Tell me the story of Damascus.

LAWRENCE: The story of Damascus?

CRASHER: Yeah, like who took Damascus?

(The memory of "Damascus" sets off another attack of malaria. The LIGHTS change and the SOUND of Faisal's "Desert Motif" begins as a vision of PRINCE FAISAL ENTERS from the desert.)

PRINCE FAISAL: 'Orense, this plan of attack – it cannot be done! It would take days – weeks – to bring the tribes together.

LAWRENCE: It must be done! General Allenby has started his drive to Damascus.

PRINCE FAISAL: Some of the tribes are fighting with each other.

LAWRENCE: You must stop them!

PRINCE FAISAL: These are old blood feuds. The Howeitat are angry with the Harb, the Ibn Shefia with the Biasha. They do not listen to me.

LAWRENCE: *(Urgently)* They *must* listen! We *must* take Damascus before the British.

PRINCE FAISAL: Why is it important whether General Allenby takes Damascus or we do? He will hand the city to us, will he not?

LAWRENCE: We need a great victory! You must trust me when I tell you this. Freedom is never given, it is always taken! Tell the tribes I start my attack on Damascus tomorrow! Tell them Lawrence will lead them to Damascus! Tell them...

(The apparition of PRINCE FAISAL EXITS and the LIGHTS go back to normal and the SOUNDS fade.)

CRASHER bangs on the table to get Lawrence's attention, thinking he's being evasive.)

CRASHER: I asked you: who took Damascus? You always claimed that you rode into Damascus at the head of an Arab army. Wearing the white robes of a Sharif – Prince Faisal by your side, flowers thrown at your feet. You – the new Saladin. So I'm asking you straight – who took Damascus?

(There is a pause as the two men eye each other.)

LAWRENCE: The Australian 10th Light Horse, I believe, were the first to enter the city.

CRASHER: Good boy. See, it's not so hard, is it – telling the truth. And they were followed by Chauvel's Desert Mounted Corps – to which my squadron was attached. Your rag-tag little army of Arabs didn't get there 'til the next day. But that's not what you say in your books, is it?

LAWRENCE: No.

CRASHER: No, indeed. So why the bullshit?

LAWRENCE: There were reasons.

CRASHER: Reasons I wouldn't understand.

LAWRENCE: No, you'd understand well enough. But you wouldn't like them.

CRASHER: Try me.

LAWRENCE: The Arabs needed a great symbolic victory. It's no victory if an army of Christian soldiers took Damascus for them.

CRASHER: So you turn history into a lie.

LAWRENCE: All history is a lie. The victor gets to choose which lies. If the Arabs were ever to have the pride and confidence to create a country, they needed a national mythology to match. We couldn't create it for them.

CRASHER: D'you ever think of asking the Christian soldiers who were fighting and dying how they felt about that?

LAWRENCE: It would have been better in the long run for our country as well as theirs. As Faisal said: "the ore does not admire the flame which transforms it". More Christian soldiers will die in Arabia because of Damascus. *(Beat)* And there was another reason.

CRASHER: Yeah?

LAWRENCE: I knew that General Allenby would not give Damascus to Faisal. It had been promised to the French.

CRASHER: Well, I don't care nothing about all that. That's politics.

(WALDEN ENTERS through the barracks door with the book. It's dog-eared, mimeographed and roughly bound. WALDEN tosses the book down on a table.)

Ah yes. *(Crasher picks up the book and reads the cover)* The Seven Pillars of Wisdom" by T. E. Lawrence. Right then – let's have a little read, shall we? Let's find the real Lawrence. *(Flicks through)* Ah! We don't have to get very far. The dedication page. That poem. *(Stabs it with his finger)* Read that, Tam.

L/A/C WALDEN: Me?

CRASHER: You. And put on that posh accent of yours.

L/A/C WALDEN: What do you mean?

CRASHER: The one I heard you practicing down by the Shatt last week, you ambitious little bastard. *(To Lawrence)* 'E wants to be an officer one day so he's practicing his lah-dee-bleeding-dahs. *(To Walden)* It don't matter what you sound like, there'll always be coal dust under your fingernails. You should be proud of it.

L/A/C WALDEN: Yeah, and be a corporal for the rest of my life, like you.

CRASHER: *(Stung; goes to backhand WALDEN)* Watch your damn mouth... !

(CRASHER stops, knowing what he says is true.)

Nah, you're just too young to know any better. You'll learn. *(Stabs his finger at the book)* Go on, read it! And give it some style. This page here. The dedication.

(WALDEN takes the book, scans a few lines and then reads.)

L/A/C WALDEN: "I loved you, so I drew these tides of men into my hands / and wrote my will across the sky in stars / To earn you freedom..." *(Pause)* That's kinda nice, ain't it?

CRASHER: When I want an opinion outta your mouth, I'll squeeze your head. Do it again. And don't stop this time.

(WALDEN takes a breath and starts again)

L/A/C WALDEN: "I loved you, so I drew these tides of men into my hands / and wrote my will across the sky in stars / To earn you Freedom / the seven-pillared worthy house, that your eyes might be shining for me / When we came."

(Silence)

CRASHER: And what does it say on the top of the page? Right there.

L/A/C WALDEN: It says "To S. A."

CRASHER: *(To Lawrence)* Well then?

LAWRENCE: Well what?

CRASHER: Who the bloody hell's S. A.?

LAWRENCE: A friend.

CRASHER: Not a girl friend, though?

LAWRENCE: Does it matter?

CRASHER: "Love... shining eyes... when we came". I think it bloody matters. My squad went through the book trying to find who the hell this "S. A." was –

LAWRENCE: Is there really so little to do on this base?

CRASHER: There's no lady by those initials. In fact there's nothing female in your book except the goddamn camels.

LAWRENCE: It's a war book – what did you expect?

CRASHER: I found plenty of ladies during the war. But then I was looking, wasn't I? You some kind of puff?

LAWRENCE: No. I'm not much of anything.

CRASHER: What do you mean?

LAWRENCE: I'm afraid I've never been much of a sexual creature of any kind. Perhaps my desires were never strong to begin with, or perhaps I diverted them to other uses – who knows? Chastity always seemed like a noble ideal, but then it may just have been the most practical state for someone like me. Sorry to disappoint you.

CRASHER: I don't believe you. You were writing that to a man, weren't you? *(Takes his bayonet from its sheath and menaces Lawrence)* You know what we do to queers in our squadron...

(WALDEN steps between them.)

L/A/C WALDEN: He's got a girl, Crasher! A real corker, too. She's the young one who got all out of joint with you. *(To Lawrence)* So this S. A. you loved was a woman? Someone whose name you didn't want to put in the book? Protecting her privacy, like? Was she married, you know, like this one... ?

CRASHER: Don't be a dope! S. A. was a man!

LAWRENCE: S. A. was not a man! *(Pause)* Had he lived a little longer he would have been. A great one perhaps.

CRASHER: Jesus!

LAWRENCE: S. A. was Selim Ahmed, referred to in the book as Dahoum.

L/A/C WALDEN: Your servant boy?

LAWRENCE: Yes.

CRASHER: Jesus friggin' Christ!

(CRASHER goes to hit Lawrence.)

L/A/C WALDEN: Hold it, Crasher! He only wrote those words – don't mean he ever did anything. He's an Oxford lad, educated-like. I mean, they use this fancy language sometimes. Like Shakespeare did in them sonnets we learned at school.

LAWRENCE: If I ever get court-martialed, Tam, I'll ask for you to defend me.

L/A/C WALDEN: *(To Crasher)* All I'm saying is: these posh types don't always use the word "love" the way we do. *(To Lawrence)* You didn't touch him, did you? You didn't do anything to him?

LAWRENCE: No I didn't "touch" him. Not in that way.

CRASHER: *(Cynically)* Here we go...

LAWRENCE: Perhaps I can explain.

CRASHER: What's to explain?

LAWRENCE: You loved your friend Stoker, didn't you? After all, he saved your life. "Greater love hath no man than he who lays down his life for a friend". Obviously he loved you.

CRASHER: *(Taken aback for a moment)* Well, of course I... of course I did – but I would never have said it like that. Soldiers don't talk to each other like that.

LAWRENCE: It's true, I've had a ruinous education for a common soldier.

(Reluctantly Crasher backs off.)

CRASHER: All right, Scheherazade. Explain.

(CRASHER indicates LAWRENCE to start.)

LAWRENCE: Yes, Dahoum was my servant boy. But he was wise beyond his years. One day, during the revolt, Dahoum and I rode out into the rolling plains of North Syria. We made our camp at an old ruin. Dahoum said it had been built long ago by a prince as a desert-palace for his queen. Even though it was a dry summer, I could smell roses.

CRASHER: *(Skeptically)* Roses? In the middle of the friggin' desert?

LAWRENCE: Yes. Dahoum knew the place. He said that the bricks of this wedding palace had been made with the oils of flowers – oils kneaded into the clay a thousand years ago.

(As Lawrence recalls, he drifts back into a dreamlike state and the SOUND of a desert wind and the jingling of camel harnesses in the wind fades in.)

Each crumbling room we entered smelled different – this one like jasmine – this one violet. Then Dahoum said: "come and smell the sweetest scent of all". He led me to a gaping window where the desert wind ebbed in from across the Syrian plain. It was a wind that had been born far beyond the Euphrates and had dragged its way for many days and nights over dead grasses and thorn trees to this poor broken palace. "It is the smell of our country" he said, "our homeland".

(HE pauses, recalling the moment. The SOUNDS fades. Lawrence comes out of his reverie and turns to the others.)

I don't think the word love was misused. He was my companion. And friend. We shared dreams – that's all. Until he died. Since then I've given up looking after people – and their dreams.

(A thoughtful silence; LAWRENCE seems pained by the memory – CRASHER doesn't know what to think.)

The LIGHTS change with the SOUND of Faisal's "Desert Motif", only more animated now as the apparition of PRINCE FAISAL ENTERS from the desert holding a map.)

PRINCE FAISAL: 'Orense! This map! Is this some kind of joke?

LAWRENCE: It is a joke, but no one seems to be laughing.

PRINCE FAISAL: Look how they are carving up Arabia! The French take this, the British that! What is left for us? Nothing! We drive out the Turks and now they slap us in the face!

LAWRENCE: I will go to the Peace Conference. I will shame them into keeping their promises.

PRINCE FAISAL: You! You are but one man.

LAWRENCE: I am Lawrence of Arabia.

PRINCE FAISAL: You *were* Lawrence of Arabia. Now you are Lawrence of England. The war is over – they have no need of you now. Or me. Or any of us Arabs. All they need now is our land.

LAWRENCE: *(Broken)* You're right that I am not needed anymore – but *you* are needed. I have heard that they want to make you king of Iraq.

PRINCE FAISAL: You are making fun of me. There is no country called Iraq.

LAWRENCE: There is now. Look! *(Points to the map)* They are going to take the old Turkish provinces of Mosul, Baghdad and Basrah and cobble them together.

PRINCE FAISAL: That is madness! There are hundreds of tribes there and many of them hate each other. This is to pay me off, I suppose.

LAWRENCE: You can always go back to war.

PRINCE FAISAL: Fight the British and the French? And who would support me now? Where would I get the guns? The ammunition? Would *you* fight with me now – my best general, my most trusted advisor? Would you fight your own people?

(LAWRENCE does not respond.)

You see. You really *are* Lawrence of England now.

LAWRENCE: I never wanted it to end like this.

PRINCE FAISAL: I believe you. But ended like this, it has. *(Beat; sadly)* Well – perhaps I can do some good as king. *(Studies the map; shakes his head)* I will get some support from the Al-Dulaym federation – they are Sunni like me – but the Shia tribes of Basrah will need to be controlled, and the Kurds of Mosul are not even Arabs. What a country you have given me! You have thrown these tribes together like tigers in a sack! And I am not even from there – I am from Hejaz. I will be an outsider to them all.

LAWRENCE: It doesn't matter. You'll only be a puppet king anyway. Nothing matters. The world has gone mad. What is left but to follow them into madness?

(PRINCE FAISAL tears up the map in disgust and EXITS. The LIGHTS go back to normal and the SOUND of Faisal's "Desert Motif" fades. LAWRENCE slumps to his knees in pain over the memory.)

CRASHER: *(To Walden)* What's the matter with him?

L/A/C WALDEN: Malaria...

(The SOUND of several GUNSHOTS ring out in the distance. This snaps LAWRENCE out of his hallucination.)

CRASHER: What the hell's that?

(CRASHER looks towards the sound and sees the Bedouin in the distance.)

Jesus! There's a whole bloody rabble of 'em out there! *(Squints at the distant horizon)* They're shooting in the air. Does HQ know?

L/A/C WALDEN: Yeah. They put us on picket. I got the Lewis ready.

CRASHER: Nice of you to mention it. Bloody wogs! This base is getting on my nerves. How many rifles we got?

L/A/C WALDEN: Two.

CRASHER: Get my Mark III from the locker – that frigging Lewis jams all the time.

(CRASHER gives WALDEN a key from his pocket) Go on! On the double! And a box of ammo! *(Looks at Bedouin)* Make that two.

(WALDEN EXITS into the barracks.)

Huh! Don't like the look of them camel jockeys. (*CRASHER stares at the Bedouin through the binoculars*) That's bigger than the usual caravan. They're edging over this way. I know that routine – they pretend they're just passing and then when they're nice and close they charge us. We should scramble some planes and strafe 'em just in case.

LAWRENCE: And if they're peaceful, they certainly won't be after that. You know, Crasher – can I call you that?

CRASHER: No. That's for my mates. You call me Corporal Dunstone.

LAWRENCE: Well, Corporal Dunstone – my legal name is Shaw. You'll find my name change officially filed in the Dorset County Court. Ned Shaw, Ted Shaw, Broughie Shaw, I don't care which. I have a number and rank. A lowly one perhaps, but a rank. And my number. That represents me best of all – six clean digits – 338171. I actually tried to change my legal name to that number, but when Noel Coward wrote to me and asked: "Can I call you 338 for short?", I realized *that* wouldn't work. Now that other fellow – the fellow you saw in Aqaba – is as repulsive to me as he is to you.

CRASHER: I doubt that.

LAWRENCE: You may be surprised.

CRASHER: Don't shed any crocodile tears around me. You're clever, and I ain't. I know that. But I keep my word. One lie and you're out on your ass.

(*CRASHER looks nervously towards the Bedouin.*)

They've stopped.

(*CRASHER checks on the Bedouin through the binoculars.*)

They're having a little confab. Checking us out, I'll bet.

(*WALDEN ENTERS from the barracks with Crasher's rifle and juggling two boxes of ammo. HE hears the animated VOICES OF THE WOMEN offstage right and looks towards them. HE puts the rifle and ammo down.*)

L/A/C WALDEN: (*Hands the locker key back to CRASHER*) I think them women are coming back, and the young 'un is screaming mad. You'd better watch out Crasher.

CRASHER: To hell with 'em. (*To Lawrence*) Why'd you bring women on base?

LAWRENCE: I didn't. They tracked me down.

CRASHER: I dunno what's worse – a horde of Arabs on the warpath or a bloody woman with her dander up. Tell 'em we could be under attack any minute. Tell 'em to go to the compound.

L/A/C WALDEN: You tell 'em!

(*CRASHER picks up the rifle and puts in an ammo clip, then looks out at the Bedouin. The sun is now close to setting, the light is golden-red with the sunset and gets darker throughout the rest of the play.*)

L/A/C WALDEN: (*Looking offstage right*) Oh, oh! Here they come! You should scarper, Crasher.

CRASHER: I ain't going nowhere. This is my base, not theirs.

(*CLARE SYDNEY SMITH ENTERS with CHARLOTTE trying to stop her.*)

CHARLOTTE SHAW: (*To Lawrence*) I'm sorry, I couldn't hold her back any longer.

(CLARE rushes to LAWRENCE's side.)

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: How are you, my darling? *(Turns on Crasher)* How dare you insult this man?

CRASHER: It was a private conversation, Ma'am. Not meant for your ears.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Well, it reached my ears. And I never heard anything so vile or so untrue in my life.

LAWRENCE: Clare, it was just rough soldiers chatter. But the corporal and I have talked it over and come to an "understanding".

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: He called you a liar. That's beyond rough soldier's talk. Beyond any "understanding". I want him to apologize to you.

LAWRENCE: That's not necessary.

CRASHER: *(Stubbornly)* And that ain't gonna happen, neither.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: I could have your stripes, you know. My husband is the Wing Commander at Aboukir.

CRASHER: Yeah, I know how that works. Well, I never told a lie just to save my skin before and I ain't starting now. He don't deserve an apology. Do what you like to me.

LAWRENCE: Forget it. I don't need an apology. Ladies, I strongly recommend you go to the safety of the main compound —

(LAWRENCE tries to hustle the women offstage.)

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: If you're too modest to defend yourself, I will. *(Turns to Crasher)* You're denigrating the greatest man of the century, and I won't have it!

CRASHER: The greatest man, eh? Well, have it your way, ma'am.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Yes, the greatest man! And great men are always being sniped at by lesser men like you.

LAWRENCE: Now that's enough, Clare!

(CRASHER, stung by Clare's remark, struggles to hold his tongue.)

CRASHER: With all due respect, ma'am, I may be a lesser man as you call me, but I've never pretended to be something I'm not.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: I'm going to see that you're drummed out of the service for this!

LAWRENCE: No, Clare. Leave it be. Nobody is going to be drummed out of the service. This is his home, as it is mine. No matter what he thinks of me, we are comrades in arms.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Leave it be? An insult like that! No, I want an explanation and I want it now! I want to know what grounds you have for such a low accusation. And Tes will set you straight. I've seen him demolish people a hundred times as clever as you. Why did you call him a liar?

(CRASHER pauses.)

CHARLOTTE SHAW: *(Calmly)* Come corporal, as long as you tell the truth nothing bad will happen. We're all reasonable people here. If you're laboring under some misapprehension I'm sure that Mr. Shaw will set you straight, and all will be well.

LAWRENCE: Charlotte, I know what you're thinking, but it won't make any difference.

(CRASHER looks at Charlotte and Lawrence.)

CRASHER: What's going on here? What are you all talking about? I don't want any part of this.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: You called him a liar! This man who suffered so much to bring freedom to this part of the world. A man who suffered the deprivations of the desert while men like you had barracks to sleep in; a man who starved in the wilderness while you had three meals a day. It's envy, that what it is. Nothing but envy that one man could do so much. He was captured by the Turks at Dera'a and flogged until he was near death – and then brutalized in unspeakable ways – yet he escaped to fight on.

CRASHER: (*Cynically*) Yeah, I read about that in his book. Quite the Houdini.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: You can take that sarcasm out of your voice. I've seen the scars.

CRASHER: What scars? From Dera'a?

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Yes, from Dera'a.

CRASHER: (*To Lawrence*) Is that what you've been telling them?

LAWRENCE: (*After a pause*) Yes.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: (*At Lawrence; pointedly*) A horrible incident. An experience like that can do a lot of damage to a man. Take some of the fire out of his belly.

(*LAWRENCE is silent.*)

CRASHER: I remember Dera'a. Turkish garrison, big railhead – crawling with enemy troops. Yeah, I remember it well. We took it later in the war. 'Course, I never heard your Dera'a story 'til long after the war. Not 'til I read it in your book, in fact. (*Crasher points to the copy of Seven Pillars on a table*) The flogging – and everything. Very unpleasant. It's quite a tale.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: It's not a "tale".

CRASHER: I'm not saying it is. It just seems odd to us old Arabia hands that Lawrence here snuck up on the place all on his lonesome to take a recce (*pronounced "recky", military slang for reconnaissance*) – so deep in enemy territory —

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: What's wrong with that? He disguised himself as an Arab. He's brave. Like Daniel in the lion's den.

CRASHER: Yeah, like Daniel, the commander of the desert army goes off alone into the biggest enemy camp south of Damascus to take a quick look about. He gets caught, but by some miracle they don't recognize him. (*To Lawrence*) That's how it goes, don't it? In the book.

LAWRENCE: That's how it goes. (*Beat*) In the book.

CRASHER: So there he is, a blonde-haired, blue-eyed Englishman strolling around Dera'a like it's Leicester Square. Gets nabbed, but they think he's an Arab!

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: He told them he was a Circassian. Circassians are lighter-skinned than Arabs.

CRASHER: (*To Lawrence*) You know this part of the world pretty well. How many Circassians would you say have blonde hair? And blue eyes?

LAWRENCE: (*After a beat*) Not many.

(*CRASHER looks coldly at LAWRENCE.*)

CRASHER: So they didn't notice your blonde hair or your blue eyes, and they didn't notice that you were the most wanted man in Arabia even though Fakhiri Pasha had put a twenty thousand quid bounty on your head. Your "wanted" poster was probably right there on the wall of the interrogation room, but amazingly they didn't recognize you. And then you escaped. You are a lucky lad.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: He's not lucky, he's clever. Where do you think those scars come from? They don't appear by magic. That's why he's Lawrence of Arabia and you're Corporal Nobody!

LAWRENCE: Clare, this must stop now! He's a brave soldier. He has his own scars.

CRASHER: *(Stung)* Corporal Nobody. Well, you're right there. I am a nobody. Of course a cat can look at a king. And I remember the first time I saw him – "The Uncrowned King of The Arabs" as they called him in those days. Not something you forget – him already being the great hero. This was after Aqaba and Dera'a, and all that. There was a routine in camp that after work we'd kick off our uniforms and go for a swim in the Red Sea. You were there. Cats and kings all swimming together. *(To Lawrence)* D'you remember that? I remember it.

LAWRENCE: Remember the swimming? *(Beat)* Yes. It was a very pleasant diversion.

CRASHER: Yeah. Very pleasant. The one thing I've always had is a good memory. *(Pointedly)* A very good memory.

(LAWRENCE moves away thoughtfully, then turns to Crasher.)

LAWRENCE: And you noticed, I'm sure, that I didn't have any scars on my back.

(CRASHER hesitates. HE looks at Lawrence closely - still disliking him, but some of the fire of his hatred has been doused by Lawrence's honesty and vulnerability. Crasher is a hard man, but not without feeling.)

CRASHER: *(Backs off)* Nah, you can have scars on your back if you want. Listen, I've had enough of all this. You want to stay in the service, that's fine. Stay! I'm not gonna tell anyone. I'm calling off the dogs. You know, I always thought if I ever met you I'd really enjoy tearing you off a strip – but I don't. Don't ask me why.

(CLARE is bewildered.)

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: What do you mean, you didn't have any scars on your back?

CRASHER: Forget it. He had scars.

LAWRENCE: Thank you Crasher. But I've got rather used to telling the truth. I should have listened to Faisal: "always bear true witness, even if it be against yourself".

(LAWRENCE turns to CLARE.)

I'm sorry, Clare.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Will somebody please explain to me what is going on?

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Let me see if I understand this correctly. Corporal, are you claiming Lawrence was never flogged in Dera'a? Or are you saying that he was never in Dera'a at all? That he made the whole incident up? Is that what you're saying, corporal?

CRASHER: I'm not saying nothing.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: It doesn't make any sense. Where would the wounds come from if not from Dera'a?

LAWRENCE: You probably know, don't you Crasher? You're a clever man. Don't let anyone ever tell you you're not.

CRASHER: I don't know – I heard rumors, that's all.

LAWRENCE: I'm sure you did. There's only a few squadrons in overseas service. Word gets around. Tell them.

CRASHER: I'm not doing your dirty work for you.

(LAWRENCE begins to speak in a dreamlike way, as if the stress has brought on the malaria again.)

LAWRENCE: When I was in India I heard this crazy rumor. There was a story going around of a gentleman ranker who paid a young airman five shillings a week to put the lash to him. I suppose the ranker thought the lad wouldn't talk. *(To Crasher)* Is that the rumor you heard?
 CRASHER: *(After a beat)* Leave me out of it.

(CLARE stares at Crasher. Then she looks at Lawrence in mounting horror.)

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: I don't feel well.

(CLARE has to sit down.)

LAWRENCE: *(Moves to her)* Clare...

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: *(Waves him away)* No, no! I'm confused. This is – monstrous.

(LAWRENCE staggers slightly, as the malaria attack hits him hard.)

LAWRENCE: Truth is a funny thing, isn't it? Whoever said: "the truth will make you free", didn't have to live with my truths, I imagine. I can't explain, except to say that it gave me some peace – at least for a few days. What kind of man would do that to himself?

(More to himself than the others; rambling.)

"Turning and turning in the widening gyre, the falcon cannot hear the falconer, things fall apart; the center cannot hold; anarchy is loosed upon the world, and everywhere the ceremony of innocence is drowned."

CRASHER: What's he saying? He's gone mad.

LAWRENCE: *(Hears this)* What? Mad? Oh, I hope so. Can a dream make you mad? Or was I mad to have the dream?

(HE looks out at the desert, almost delirious. The LIGHTS change again as the apparition of PRINCE FAISAL ENTERS from the desert accompanied by the SOUNDS of Faisal's "Desert Motif" music.)

PRINCE FAISAL: It was not a mad dream. We all shared it.

LAWRENCE: *(Goes to FAISAL)* When I was young all I ever wanted was to be a knight. Not one of those crusading knights – no, the old knights from long before that. Before our people were enemies.

PRINCE FAISAL: *(Sadly)* That was a very long time ago.

LAWRENCE: Those knights had honor. Their quest was noble. *(Catches himself)* Of course they never existed. There were no dragons or swords in stones! I knew that, so why... ?

(Pauses) Whatever it was it got a hold on me. I trained myself to face my deepest fears. I kept myself chaste and pure. I could go for days without water or food or sleep. I once walked alone across the holy land, you know. I was only nineteen.

PRINCE FAISAL: Yes, I know. I could tell you were a man who knew this land. That is why I trusted you.

(A bright morning light comes up, MUSIC changes.)

LAWRENCE: I remember waking early that first morning from my tent and looking out across the desert. I saw the first light of the sun coming up over the Sinai – it was like – an opening to heaven. In that instant I felt the weight of ten thousand years – all the distilled emotions of great battles fought on the plains below, of generations born, of old men dying — It was a moment of such force I knew I was looking into the face of God. Do you understand, Faisal?

PRINCE FAISAL: Of course I understand.

LAWRENCE: I was a grain of sand that would change a desert. I had found my quest. (*HE stands on a table as if on the mountaintop*) I would free Arabia! Do you know how many bullets shredded my robes, but never touched me? I was protected by some magic. When history didn't unfold quite as it should, I made some adjustments, that's all. But when it all went wrong, I realized I'd been deluding myself. (*HE gets down from the table, drained*) It wasn't God I saw – it was just an ordinary fine sunrise in the Sinai mistaken by a stupid Englishman accustomed to grey, colorless mornings. I was just a little man in a great desert, talking to myself.

(The apparition of PRINCE FAISAL EXITS and the LIGHTS and SOUNDS return to normal. CHARLOTTE goes to his side.)

CHARLOTTE SHAW: It's no crime to have a dream. A noble dream.

(Charlotte's words snap LAWRENCE out of his hallucination.)

LAWRENCE: It's no crime to have a dream, but to conscript others into that dream and then betray them —

(LAWRENCE turns away from them. CHARLOTTE goes to him.)

CHARLOTTE SHAW: She'll forgive you, you know. In time.

(Lawrence glances at Clare and sees the look of horror in her eyes.)

LAWRENCE: I don't think so. (*He turns to WALDEN, perhaps hoping that he has not rejected him*) What do you think of me now, Tam? (*WALDEN backs away instinctively*) Yes, of course. I don't blame you. (*To Charlotte*) You see, a legend is far more attractive than the truth.

(LAWRENCE staggers again, this time on the verge of collapse. WALDEN rushes over to hold him up.)

Thank you, Tam. You really are a good soldier. I knew you wouldn't abandon your men.

(LAWRENCE pushes Walden away and waves a pistol at them.)

L/A/C WALDEN: He's got my gun!

LAWRENCE: Who wants to kill the beast? (*Offers the handle of the pistol to Charlotte*) You, Charlotte? I'm no use to you or your causes now. (*Offers the pistol to Clare*) Clare? Please, one final act of love before you go. No? (*To Walden*) Tam? You wouldn't leave me wounded on the field. No? (*To Crasher*) Corporal? Ah, the wise one. Too clever to fall for it in the first place. What was it you said: "once they go native, you may as well take 'em out and shoot them". Would you deliver the coup de grace? (*CRASHER backs away*) Not you either? It's left to me I suppose.

(HE puts the pistol to his head.)

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: No!

(LAWRENCE hesitates, staggers again, obviously unwell.)

LAWRENCE: (*Murmuring to himself*) "I am going a long way now, to the island-valley of Avalon; where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow; but lies deep-meadow'd, happy, fair, crown'd with a summer sea; where I will heal me of my grievous wounds."

(*LAWRENCE looks about to squeeze the trigger.*)

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Tes!

LAWRENCE: There is no Tes. He's a fiction, remember.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Lawrence, then. Please put the gun down.

LAWRENCE: (*Bitterly*) Oh, that's the biggest joke of all – there is no Lawrence either! I am the illegitimate son of Thomas Chapman and a servant-girl he ran off with. God knows where the name Lawrence came from – out of a hat, I imagine. My father's wife wouldn't give him a divorce, so I was a bastard child, conceived in sin. I was ten years old when I found out. Not the most sun-lit moment of my childhood. Then I read Morte D'Arthur – a story where Lancelot had a bastard child who became the purest of all the knights. (*Hardening again*) But that's all fiction, isn't it? Broughie Shaw... Lawrence of Arabia... Chapman's bastard son! They're all just vaudeville acts in some grotesque play.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: This is madness! You're not well. It's your malaria. You didn't betray the Arabs! You were their champion.

LAWRENCE: Oh, sweet, sweet Clare. I was never their champion. I was their Judas.

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: No! Don't say that! (*Desperately clinging to her illusions*) I can understand the beatings... I can... you felt guilty about what happened to the Arabs... so you made yourself suffer for the sins of England...

LAWRENCE: Ah, how noble – if only it were true. But my sins were all my own. (*A painful memory*) Have you heard of the Sykes-Picot agreement?

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: No.

LAWRENCE: What about you, Crasher? Tam?

CRASHER: Never heard of it.

L/A/C WALDEN: Nor me.

LAWRENCE: Of course not. It was a secret agreement between the British and French to divide Arabia up after the war. You may not have heard of it, but I had. I saw a copy of it early in the war. I betrayed him, my friend. I betrayed my cause. I betrayed them all. (*To Clare*) That's what the lashings are for! My sins! Not the sins of England! (*Exhausted*) Is this what you wanted, Charlotte? To see me broken into pieces?

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Come back with me. It's good that Lawrence never existed. Or Shaw. Let's burn them and spread their ashes on some new ground. Come with me! There are still great causes worth fighting for.

LAWRENCE: I had a cause. I dreamed of setting the desert on fire with a great movement – but all I had was a chest full of stones.

(*LAWRENCE throws the pistol aside in disgust and slumps down on a chair, exhausted.*
WALDEN runs over to the pistol and grabs it.)

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Thank God for that.

(*CHARLOTTE goes to LAWRENCE to comfort him. As WALDEN picks up the pistol he notices the Arabs.*)

L/A/C WALDEN: (*Alarmed*) They're stirring!

(WALDEN runs to the Lewis gun. The sun is close to setting and the sky is a deepening red.)

CRASHER: (*Looks out into the desert*) Oh, yeah! They're getting ready for something. This could be it. (*To the women*) Time for you ladies to go.

(CRASHER picks up his rifle and cocks it.)

(*Aside, to Lawrence*) Don't worry about your legend. I ain't gonna blather to the press. Douglas Fairbanks can still play you on the silver screen. You'll be buried in Westminster Abbey with the rest of our great heroes. For you there'll be a day of national mourning, while me – my obituary will read nice and simple: "He once fought with Lawrence of Arabia" is all they'll ever say 'bout me.

LAWRENCE: You have my permission to destroy Lawrence if you like. All my efforts to do so have failed, and you seem to have a flair for it. I will try to get a medal for your friend. I know some people in the right places. I'll see his story is told. Stories are all we have, and his has the particular merit of being true. (*Beat*) Now, if you'll excuse me I think I'll go for a walk.

CRASHER: A walk? Where?

LAWRENCE: (*Indicates the Arabs*) I want to find out if they intend to fight us. There are people here I care about and I want them to survive this day.

(LAWRENCE starts to walk towards the Bedouin, offstage left.)

CRASHER: Are you barking mad?

LAWRENCE: I've done this once or twice before, you know.

L/A/C WALDEN: But they could kill you!

LAWRENCE: Not if I approach them unarmed. The Bedouin have a great tradition of hospitality.

L/A/C WALDEN: What! That lot?

LAWRENCE: Yes, that lot. They will offer you their last food even if they go hungry. A sheep will be slaughtered for a special feast. We will all sit in a circle and eat it together. After the feast the storytellers will tell the history of the tribe, the poets will sing their war narratives - epic sagas of ancient blood feuds, or the love songs of their villages. All this, of course, if they are not currently predisposed to rid their country of every last trace of us. In which case you can forget about dinner.

L/A/C WALDEN: I'm coming with you.

LAWRENCE: Oh, no! Tam, you have your whole life ahead of you. You'll be an officer one day. And a good one.

L/A/C WALDEN: I thought you said it would be safe?

LAWRENCE: That's a relative term. With me, if I'm wrong, it makes little difference. With you it would be a waste.

L/A/C WALDEN: I'll get my camera.

(WALDEN gets a camera from his bag and takes off his holster and pistol.)

CRASHER: Are you both coming down with bleeding sunstroke? (*To Walden*) Don't you get it? There ain't no Lawrence of Arabia! Just as there was no King Arthur, or Saint George and his bleeding dragon! You'll just get your fool throat cut.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: You see people still follow you whoever you are... Ned Chapman, bastard child, liar, hero, playactor...

LAWRENCE: (*To Walden*) Which one are you following?

L/A/C WALDEN: I dunno. All of 'em, I s'ppose.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: *(To Lawrence)* Accept it! It's kismet, my boy. You can't outrun it.

LAWRENCE: It's *you* I can't outrun.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Then stop trying. Come back to England with me!

(LAWRENCE is unresponsive.)

L/A/C WALDEN: Remember what you told Crasher – no matter how much he pounded you, you'd never admit defeat. The only one who's pounding you now – is you.

LAWRENCE: I take that back about you being an officer one day – you'll be a bloody General. Stay! I want someone left who has a few kind words to say about me.

L/A/C WALDEN: Can't order me – I outrank you. Hey, will they know you? I mean – recognize you? As Lawrence?

LAWRENCE: I hope not, or we'll really be in trouble.

(LAWRENCE starts to walk towards the Bedouin.)

I may be a while.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: Lawrence! Out there in that desert Dahoum lies buried. You made him a promise.

(LAWRENCE stops)

"I wrote my will across the sky in stars / To earn you Freedom."

(LAWRENCE turns and looks at her, moved.)

The only difference between madness and genius is success. It's still within your reach.

LAWRENCE: How I wish that were true... *(Beat)* Be warned, Charlotte, I don't know if England is ready to accept a reborn Lawrence.

CHARLOTTE SHAW: But you'll try?

(HE looks out into the desert.)

LAWRENCE: *(A glimmer of hope)* We'll talk later. Perhaps it's not too late.

(HE starts for the desert.)

CLARE SYDNEY SMITH: Tes! Don't go!

LAWRENCE: *(Stops, moved by her concern)* Don't worry about me, Clare. It's far more dangerous for me here than it is out there. It's far more dangerous for me *anywhere* than it is out there.

(LAWRENCE walks towards the desert, stage left, when the LIGHTS change and:

THE VISION of PRINCE FAISAL appears from the desert.

MUSIC: Faisal's "Desert Motif".

LAWRENCE sees Faisal and hesitates.)

PRINCE FAISAL: Come 'Orense!

LAWRENCE: You must hate me now.

PRINCE FAISAL: No. We were lions outwitted by jackals. We made the kill and the jackals drove us off and kept the carcass for themselves. Jackals in gray suits with maps and scissors. The jackals are very clever, they do not fight themselves – they let us fight and bleed and then they steal. It is the way of the world. You were not to blame.

LAWRENCE: If only we had taken Damascus!

PRINCE FAISAL: Nothing would have changed. It was not our time.

LAWRENCE: I don't believe that!

PRINCE FAISAL: You are too impatient. We are grains of sand in a great desert. But one day the land will be free, and they will still remember what we did. Come! Maktub! You are among friends.

(PRINCE FAISAL hands Lawrence his gold dagger, beckons him to follow and then EXITS, stage left, into the desert.

LAWRENCE pauses a moment, looks at the gold dagger in his hand and then EXITS following Faisal into the desert. The lights change back to normal – the sun has almost set with an incandescent twilight glow peculiar to the desert.

WALDEN makes to follow Lawrence, then hesitates. WALDEN takes off his pith helmet and looks upward with a smile as though acknowledging the "watchful eye of Allah". HE puts the pith helmet aside and runs into the desert after Lawrence and EXITS.

CRASHER, CLARE and CHARLOTTE freeze, looking out into the desert, each in the pose of their feelings: CHARLOTTE hopeful, CLARE grieving, CRASHER reluctantly impressed.

THE SOUND of distant ARAB MUSIC being played, offstage left, as if around a fire in a Bedouin encampment. The camels GROAN, as they settle down for the night.

Then the SOUNDS BLEND into a desert wind.

CHARLOTTE: *(To herself; but directed towards Lawrence)* Be careful!

LIGHTS DIM. CHARLOTTE, CLARE and CRASHER stay in their poses, visible as ghostly images in the darkness.

A SLIDE fades up, using the same screen as used at the beginning of the play.

MUSIC: The Desert Theme.

SLIDE:



SOUND: The distant SOUND of a motorcycle.

SLIDE:



SLIDE:



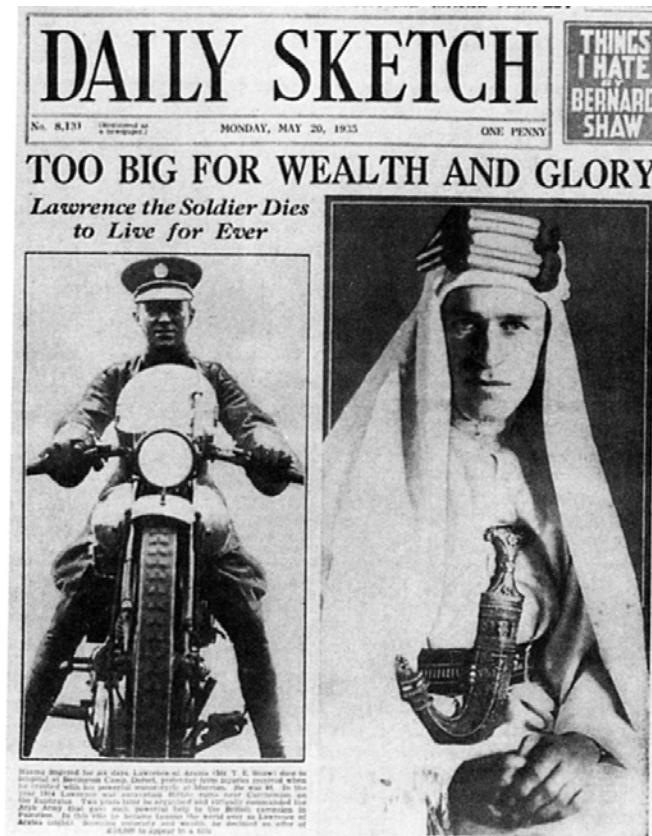
SLIDE:



SOUND: A SCREECH of tires followed by a CRASH.

SLIDE: "LAWRENCE OF ARABIA DIES IN MOTORCYCLE WRECK"

SLIDE:

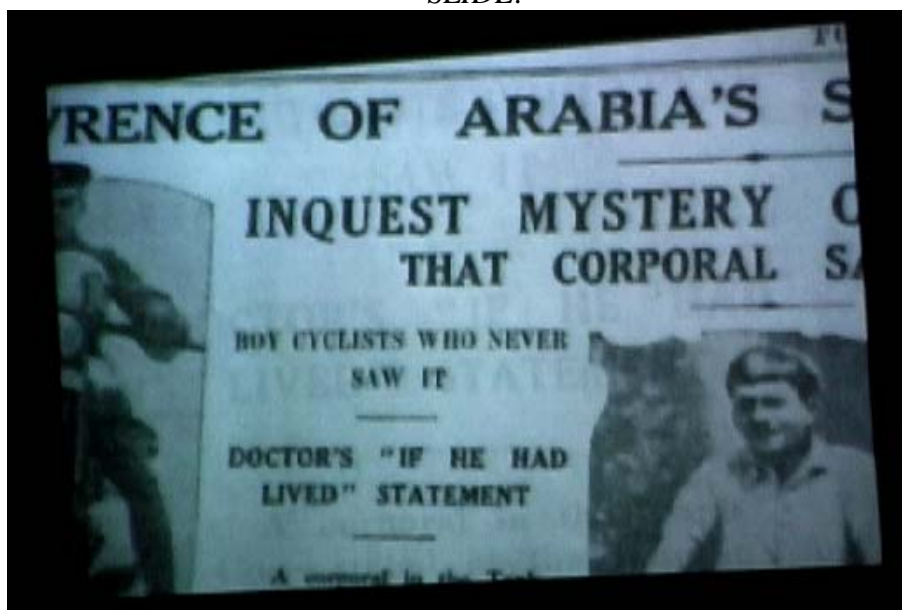


SOUND: a choir sings "Land of Hope and Glory".

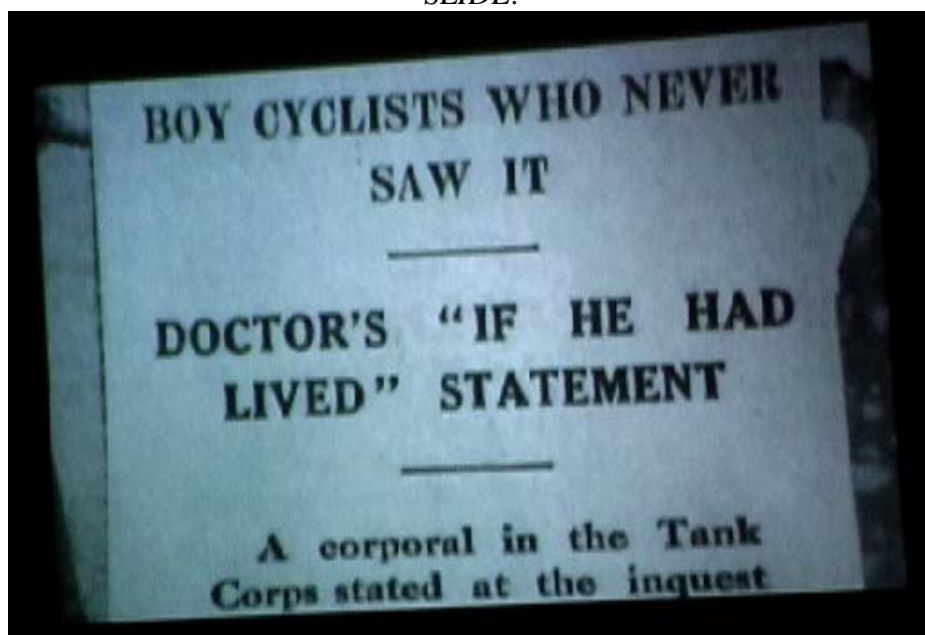
SLIDE:



SLIDE:



SLIDE:



SLIDE:



SLIDE: THE FOLLOWING WORDS appear on the screen and are also spoken by LAWRENCE:

LAWRENCE (*VOICE OVER*)

"All men dream, but not equally. Those who dream by night wake to find that it was all vanity: but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dream with open eyes, to make it possible."

T. E. Lawrence

MUSIC: "Land of Hope and Glory" segues into the "Desert Theme".

Lights slowly fade to black.)

THE END

FROM THE PRIVATE LETTERS OF T. E. LAWRENCE

(These letters were part of the research on Lawrence's character for the play)

- 1910: On arriving in the east "The sun rose, and like magic turned black to gold... in the distance a mixture of all the reds and yellows you can think of."
- 1915: *(After the death of his brothers on the western front):* "It doesn't seem right, somehow, that I should go on living peacefully in Cairo."
- 1915: To his parents: "I hope that when I die there will be nothing more to regret."
- 1915: *(Frustrated about being stuck at HQ)* "I am going to be in Cairo till I die. Yesterday I was at the undertakers looking over samples of pyramids with a view to choosing my style."
- 1916: (On meeting Faisal) "I felt at first glance that this was the man I had come to Arabia to seek."
- 1916: (To his mother) "It is so good to have helped a bit in making a new nation."
- 1917: *(This message, found heavily penciled over in Lawrence's wartime diary, was never sent)* To Brigadier-General Clayton: "Clayton, I've decided to go off alone to Damascus, hoping to get killed on the way: for all sakes try and clear up this show before it goes any further. We are calling them to fight for us on a lie, and I can't stand it!"
- 1917: *(Re: his march on Damascus)* "On this march I took risks with the hope of proving myself unworthy to be the Arab assurance of final victory. A bodily wound would have been a grateful vent for my internal perplexities, a mouth through which my troubles might have found relief."
- 1917: (To his mother) "Please don't put the rank of Major or CB* or any other letters (past, present or future) after my name. These sort of things are only nuisances to a person making only £250 a year and the intention of not making any more. I'm sending back all private letters so addressed."
*CB is a British award for chivalry.
- 1917: (re: The Dera'a Incident) *Curiously, there are no wartime letters from Lawrence about the infamous and much-disputed 1917 Dera'a incident.
- 1917: To E. T. Leeds: "After being a sort of king-maker I will not be allowed to go digging (as an archeologist) quietly again. Nuisance."
- 1918: To Vyvyan Richards "My job is to foment an Arab rebellion against Turkey, so it's a kind of foreign stage on which one plays day and night, in fancy dress, in a strange language with the price of failure on one's head if the part is not well filled."
- 1918: To Vyvyan Richards "These years of detachment have cured of any desire to do anything for myself. When they untie my bonds I will not find in me any spur to action. This is like one of those dreams out of which you awake with a start, and find that there is nothing left in the mind."
- 1918: To Vyvyan Richards "Achievement, if it comes, will be a great disillusionment."
- 1918: To Vyvyan Richards "I'm like sensitized film, turned black or white by the objects projected on me; and if so, what hope is there?"
- 1918: To Vyvyan Richards "I change my abode every day, my job every two days, and my language every three days, and still remain always unsatisfied. I hate being in front, I hate being back, and I don't like responsibility, and I don't obey orders. Altogether no good just now."

- 1918: To Major Scott in Cairo "The old war is closing, and my use is gone."
- 1918: To Major Scott in Cairo "We were an odd little set, and we have, I expect, changed History in the near East. I wonder how the Powers will let the Arabs get on."
- 1919: To Chief Political Officer, Cairo. "I went to Dera'a in disguise to spy out their defenses, was caught, and identified by Hajim Bey the Governor. Hajim was an ardent pederast and took a fancy to me. So he kept me under guard till night, and then tried to have me. I was unwilling, and prevailed after some difficulty. Hajim sent me to the hospital, and I escaped before dawn, being not as hurt as he thought. He was so ashamed of the muddle he had made that he hushed the whole thing up." **This contradicts Lawrence's other accounts of the incident. In the Seven Pillars of Wisdom he claims he was NOT recognized by Hajim Bey.*
- 1919: To C. J. Kidston: "You ask me why, and I'm going to tell you exactly what my motives in the Arab affair were: Personal, I liked a particular Arab very much, and I thought that freedom for the race would be an acceptable present. I also wanted to feel what it was like to be the mainspring of a national movement and have millions of people expressing themselves through me. The ideal... the impulse that took us to Damascus, was the only thing worth doing."
- 1919: To C. J. Kidston: "I haven't done a crooked thing since I began to push the Arab Movement, though I prostituted myself in Arab Service."
- 1920: To Sir Murray: "I am painfully aware of what Lowell Thomas is doing. His (lectures) are as rank as possible... I have neither the money nor the wish to maintain my character as the mountebank he makes me."
- 1920: To FareedaEl Akle: "An American (*Lowell Thomas*) has told a lot of lies about me. I'm afraid I can't ever come to Syria again. Because I failed."
- 1920: To Colonel Newcombe: "In the history of the world (cheap edition) I'm a sublimated Aladdin, the thousand and second Knight, a Strand-Magazine strummer. In the eyes of "those who know" I failed badly in attempting a piece of work which a little more resolution would have pushed through."
- 1920: To Robert Graves: "Warn me before you come as my movements are as odd as my manners."
- 1921: To FareedaEl Akle: "The Arab war was not nearly as silly as Lowell Thomas makes out: and I was not in charge of it, or even very prominent. Only I was in fancy dress, and so made a good "star" for his film."
- 1922: To General Clayton: "I wrote a book (*The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*) about that dog-fight of ours in Arabia. It's not for present publication, partly because it's too human a document for me to disclose."
- 1922: To Edward Garnett: "If that Dera'a incident had happened to yourself you would not have recorded it. For weeks I wanted to burn the manuscript because I could not tell the story face to face with anyone."
- 1922: To Edward Garnett: "The Seven Pillars is not meant for ordinary intelligences and must mislead them."
- 1922: To R.D. Blumenfeld: "You know I was always odd and my tastes my own."
- 1922: To R.D. Blumenfeld: "Please don't publish my eclipse. It will be common news one day, but the later the better for my peace in the ranks. As you say, it reads like a

cheap melodrama, and my life has been that, nearly since the odd circumstances of my (*illegitimate*) birth."

1923: From The Daily Express: "UNCROWNED KING OF ARABIA A PRIVATE SOLDIER!"

1923: To Mrs Charlotte Shaw (*The wife of George Bernard Shaw*): "It would be hard to remain inhuman while jostling all days and nights in a crowd of clean and simple men. There is something here which in my life before I'd never met – had hardly dreamed of."

1923: To Mrs Charlotte Shaw (*The wife of George Bernard Shaw*): "I showed my book to my mother and the horrors of the book (*The Dera'a incident*) strike her painfully, and she hates my having noted, or seen, such things."

1923: To Robert Graves: "I came here (*into the lower ranks*) to eat dirt, till its taste is normal to me."

1923: To J. L. Garvin: "I've been dismissed from the R.A.F. for possessing too large a publicity factor to be decent in an A.C.2."

1923: To J. L. Garvin: "What an unending nuisance being known is! I'm beginning to despair of ever getting away from my past."

1923: To: H. W. Bailey: "When that newspaper shriek came out about me the Air Ministry gave me the sack. The idiot Press!"

1923: To Vyvyan Richards: "Self-depreciation is a necessity with me."

1923: To Vyvyan Richards: "I've been absurdly over-estimated. There are no supermen and I'm quite ordinary."

1923: To Lionel Curtis: "Why did I join up? Mind-suicide"

1923: To Lionel Curtis: "Perhaps there's a solution to be found in multiple personality."

1923: To R.A.M. Guy: "I envy everyone who doesn't think continually."

1923: To Lionel Curtis: "The acts of the soldiers in Hut 12 is not filth, because you can't call filthy the pursuit of a bitch by a dog, or the mating of birds in the springtime; and it's man's misfortune that he hasn't a mating season, but spreads his emotions and excitements through the year. I lie in bed night after night with this cat-calling carnality seething up and down the hut."

1923: To Lionel Curtis: "The fault of birth rests somewhat on the child. I believe it is we who led our parents on to bear us, and it's our unborn children who make our flesh itch. A filthy business, all of it."

1923: To Colonel Wavell: "I've suffered more than I can bear of public discussion and praise, and the insufficiency and obliquity of it are like a nightmare of memory."

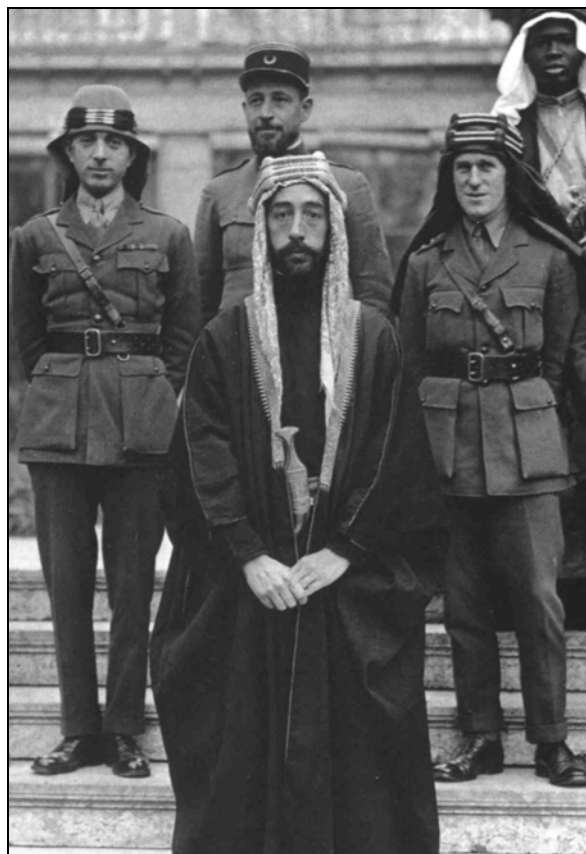
1923: To Lionel Curtis: "My masochism remains and will remain, only moral. Physically, I can't do it. Everything bodily is now hateful to me, and in my case hateful is the same as impossible."

1923: To Lionel Curtis: "This sort of thing must be madness, and sometimes I wonder how far mad I am, and if a mad-house would not be my next (and merciful) stage."

1923: To Lionel Curtis: "I want to stay here (*in the ranks*) till it no longer hurts me; till the burnt child no longer feels the fire."

- 1923: To Lionel Curtis: "I sleep less than ever, for the quietness of the night imposes thinking on me."
- 1923: To Lionel Curtis: "I am richer and more experienced than any of the others here (in the military). More of the world has passed over me in my 35 years than all their twenties put together."
- 1923: To Lionel Curtis: "Here in the ranks I have to answer only for my cleanness of skin, cleanness of clothes and a certain mechanical neatness on the barracks-square."
- 1923: To Edmund Blunden: "I wrote my beastly book in 1919. I have no intention on publishing it: there has been far too much talk already. That poor purblind Lowell Thomas creature imagined that he was doing me no harm. His story is a myth, built on a very small foundation of official information, padded with gossip."
- 1923: To Jock Chambers: "I wish I could see you. I'm homesick for the R.A.F. God be merciful to us sinners."
- 1923: To R.A. Guy: "I'm suffering from dryness of the brain and decay of the natural affections. I'm in the army as penance to kill old Adam."
- 1923: To R.A. Guy: "I wish we could meet again. Every R.A.F. uniform I see makes me heart-sick."
- 1925: To Mrs. Charlotte Shaw (*The wife of George Bernard Shaw*): "Do you know what it is when you see, suddenly, that your life is all a ruin? Tonight it is cold, and the barracks dark and empty, with all the fellows out somewhere. Every day I haunt their company, because the noise stops me thinking. Thinking drives me mad, because of the invisible ties about me which limit my moving, my wishing, my imaging. All these bonds I have tied myself, deliberately, wishing to tie myself down beyond the hope and power of movement. So long as there is breath in my body my strength will be exerted to keep my soul in prison since nowhere else can it exist in safety. I am afraid of myself. Is this madness? It's all a reaction to yesterday when I went mad, rode to London and saw Faisal. (Faisal's friends) kept expecting me to talk as though my R.A.F. uniform was a skin I could slough off any while with a laugh. I couldn't. I've changed and the Lawrence who used to be friendly and familiar with that sort of people is dead. He's worse than dead. He's a stranger I once knew. My reason tells me all the while, dins into me day and night, a sense of how I've crashed my life and self and gone hopelessly wrong: and hopelessly it is, for I'm never coming back. I'm pitching this letter straight away (into the mail) as written, because in a hour I'll burn it, if I can get my hands on it."
- 1925: To his mother: "Once I used to like things (not people) and ideas. Now I don't care for anything at all."
- 1927: To E. M. Forster: "I'm so funnily made up, sexually."
- 1934: Re: Clare Sydney Smith: "Am I a beast? She wants something which I want to keep, and she ought to understand it."

THE GHOST OF LAWRENCE OF ARABIA IN TODAY'S IRAQ



Lawrence, right, with Prince Faisal at the Paris Peace Conference.

By Peter Colley

Prince Faisal on meeting Lawrence: "You (westerners) hunger for desolate lands, to build them up. But your good and my good, perhaps they are different? Either forced good or forced evil will make a people cry with pain. Does the ore admire the flame that transforms it?"

My father served in Iraq. He was in the air force and brought back lots of great photographs and stories – stories of the shock and awe of air power, stories about insurgents and ambushes, stories about bringing western-style democracy to Iraq. "So what", you say, "stories like that abound these days". But these stories were not from this current war. They weren't even from the 1991 Gulf War. No, you'd have to go back a lot further than that – back through decades of social revolution and war to the days of British "colonial" Iraq. I suppose it's no wonder that these days I keep feeling like I'm having an endless episode of *déjà vu* even though the canvas-and-wire biplanes of the Royal Air Force have been replaced by Apache helicopters, and the British Union Jack by the Stars and Stripes.

Another story my father told from those old days was about an odd fellow he knew called Aircraftsman "Broughie" Shaw. No I'm not digressing, this low-ranking air force mechanic also has a bizarre but important connection to today's troubles in Iraq. My father was a teenage apprentice in the R.A.F. in England when he bumped into Broughie Shaw. Broughie was what they called in those days "gentleman rankers" – upper class, older, well-educated men who should have been officers, but for mysterious reasons of their own insisted on staying in the lower ranks. The name "Broughie" came from the high-powered Brough motorbike he loved to ride. After a few weeks on base somebody whispered in my Dad's ear: "Y'know that gentleman ranker, that odd bloke Broughie Shaw, d'you know who he really is? That's Lawrence of bleeding Arabia, that's who!".

I always put this bizarre story down to one of my father's wild flights of fancy stimulated by too much gin-and-tonic in the officer's mess, but, amazingly, it turned out to be true. Service records show they both served in Britain's small seaplane branch of the R.A.F. at the same time. Lawrence had legally changed his name and joined the Royal Air Force, insisting on the lowest rank.

What did the former Lawrence of Arabia think of all this Iraq business Britain was going through back then? At that point in his life Lawrence was keeping his feelings very close to his chest – and once his squadron mates found out who he was they quickly discovered never to mention the words "Lawrence" or "Arabia" or they'd get an icy glare from Aircraftman Second Class Broughie Shaw that could freeze a drill-sergeant in his tracks. However we do know how Lawrence felt about Iraq up until 1922 – the moment he disappeared from public life – and in later years from his private letters to Charlotte Shaw, the wife of George Bernard Shaw (neither of whom appreciated him commandeering their name, which had given rise to speculation he was their illegitimate son). Then in 2005 even more insight into Lawrence's feelings were revealed when a map he had drafted in 1919 was discovered. This map shows Lawrence would have divided up Iraq in a way that is very different to the modern-day Iraq and may, had his ideas been adopted, have changed the whole history of that region.

Lawrence felt deeply involved with the Iraq situation having been the man who, perhaps more than any other individual, had helped to reshape the Arabian peninsula. But why did he throw up his hands and walk away from all things Arabian? And why the new identity? Why the total abandonment of this famous icon he had become?

It seems to have much to do with what he felt was his betrayal of the Arabs; yet no one had worked harder for the cause of Arab nationalism than Lawrence. It was in 1916 while World War One was raging that Lawrence had promised Prince Faisal that if he spearheaded an Arab Revolt against the Turks (who had allied with Germany) that Britain would reward the Arabs with an independent state. Leaflets repeating this promise were also dropped by air on the scattered Bedouin tribes. Lawrence's feelings of betrayal came from the fact that he discovered that the British and French had made a secret deal to divide up Arabia as a spoil of war once the fighting was over. Lawrence hoped that the force of events he had created on the ground would somehow trump the coming land-grab; when that failed he used his fame and oratory as a last bastion, but was finally steamrollered by the force of realpolitik. Once the war was over, the victorious allies had no more need of Arab help – all they needed now was their land. Nor did they need Lawrence any more. Crushed and wracked with guilt Lawrence tried desperately to disappear – the very austerity of his disappearance being a mute protest against the loss of his dream of an independent Arabia and of promises broken; his ideal of a link between Iraq and Britain being forged by affection, trust and mutual interests just another casualty of war.

Iraq had been invaded in 1914 by an Anglo-Indian army – India being British in those gilded days. The Ottoman Turks, who had run Iraq for centuries, gambled badly by backing Germany in WWI and since everyone was invading everyone in 1914 nobody batted an eyelid when the British Tommies and their Indian Sepoy troops went barging into Iraq. Britain's national security interests were at stake and a pre-emptive strike was called for. There was none of the squabbling shown in the recent invasion – Britain controlled two-fifths of the world and this was just another dusty spot in need of a good English makeover. Iraq was seen by the India Office in London as a future colony of India, a preposterous idea that showed Britain was in the final stages of drunken intoxication with empire. Even so, when General Maude and his troops marched into Baghdad he still thought it wiser to say: "We do not come as conquerors but as liberators" – a phrase that didn't convince many Iraqis back then either. Maude was becoming a hero to the British and may well have become "Maude of Mesopotamia" had he not foolishly drunk a glass of unboiled milk in Baghdad and quickly met an end too inglorious for hero status. Another bucket of cold water was tossed onto the proceedings when the Americans joined the war and the hopelessly idealistic President Wilson came out with his "14 Points Of Light" speech. The old schoolteacher was rambling on about "sovereignty" and "the interests of the population", and since America had the only fresh battle reserves available to the exhausted European powers, like unruly pupils they had to sit still and listen. At least until the war was over, and then school was out.

The war did finally grind to an end in Europe, and the real trouble began for Arabia. Lawrence was barking loudly for Britain and France to keep their avaricious hands off Iraq – to remember the promises made. The romantic dash of Lawrence and the stern morality lectures of President Wilson were a potent force in shaping public opinion, but the business community was not ready to give up the enormously profitable colonial model so easily. The empire-builders scrambled for a more politically correct term for colonies, something that sounded like they had freedom, but did not cut the strings of control. They came up with the term: "mandate". The advanced powers would hold the primitive countries in trust for their simple-minded inhabitants until such a time as they were deemed ready for self-rule. This usually meant until a friendly puppet government could be installed, or until the country became – the greatest sin of all – unprofitable.

Oddly, after the war London seems to have undergone a change of thinking. Perhaps they had got a whiff of the post-war nationalism in the air at the Paris Peace Conference? More likely, in those pre-oil days (there was oil in Persia but not in Iraq) they saw a big drain on their treasury fighting to hold a vast useless piece of desert. After all, Britain controlled Suez and the sea-route to the empire, and their main rival Germany's dreams of a Berlin-to-Baghdad corridor had sunk into the mud of Flanders. Whatever the reason, according to Toby Dodge in his book "Inventing Iraq", by 1920 London was urging the British authorities in Baghdad that some real power should be given to the Arabs.

Lawrence of Arabia saw his chance and charged into the fray firing off missives to The Times of London. He was famous enough that his voice carried quite some weight. The American newspaperman Lowell Thomas had created a sensation with a "lecture" (complete with orchestra and film footage) on Lawrence's exploits and Lawrence had emerged as WWI's most glamorous hero. His letters to The Times of London were widely read and influenced opinion there, but whatever fresh oxygen they were breathing in London, the British civil authorities in Baghdad were breathing a different kind of air altogether, and Lawrence was incensed when they began taking away whatever morsels of self-rule the Arabs had been given. The British establishment in Iraq fought against any hint of autonomy for the locals, but were slowly becoming aware that the post-war tide of world opinion was turning against them. Now the war was over, idealists of

every stripe were joining with President Wilson and his "14 Points", so, in what they thought was a clever checkmate, the British faction in Baghdad decided to head off a more far-reaching statement that was being drafted in London by issuing their own proclamation which was full of airy rhetoric, but which gave up far less power.

The tribes of Iraq were not fooled – they smelled a land-grab and began an uprising in the summer of 1920. The truth was, now that the heady days of victory and "war to end all wars" talk was fading, the world powers were getting back to business – and business and nationalism did not mix.

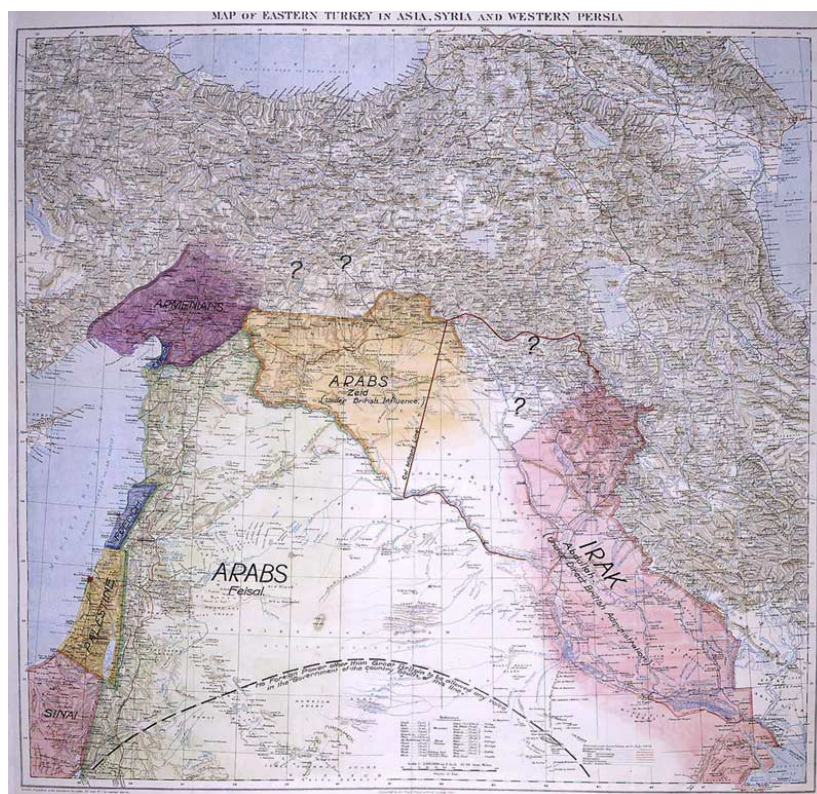
It is curious that Lawrence did not have even more influence in those post-war days. He was one of the first true celebrities of the century. Lowell Thomas had put his image on the screen and it had been seen by millions at a time when any moving picture was a novelty and newsreels of actual combat created sensations – especially the romantic images of a desert war. Lawrence could not walk the streets of London without being mobbed by the press and adoring fans, and – in a truly modern touch – even took a swing at photographers who got too intrusive. But in fact the political establishment did not trust Lawrence. He was too independent-minded, too uncontrollable, and voiced incendiary ideas. While every schoolboy dreamed of donning the white robes of a Sherif, sticking a golden dagger into his belt and dashing into battle on a camel, and women of all classes swooned over Lawrence before Valentino ever strutted as "The Sheik", Lawrence had committed the unpardonable sin of "going native". This was not uncommon in colonial days, as the empire-builders knew only too well. The heat, the exotic locations, the spicy food, the half-naked women swaying to the beat of jungle tom-toms – it could turn the head of the sturdiest Englishman. Joseph Conrad had already depicted the half-mad Kurtz in "Heart of Darkness" and Somerset Maugham was creating a whole genre around these crackpots. Once you had "gone native" you had been infected with a virus for which the only antidote was the firing squad or being marginalized as a lunatic. Lawrence got the latter treatment, amply aided and abetted by his own natural eccentricities.

Despite this, Lawrence did have some remarkably lucid ideas about the new Iraq. Once he saw the cause of Arab nationalism was lost he tried to come up with a formula for the control of the country. He saw a huge difference between the "town Arabs" whom he disdained for their intrigues and corruption, and the Bedouin with whom he had fought during the war. The simple nomads were to him the pure Arabs who were great fighters but who could be controlled by air power. He had seen how they had panicked at the sight of Turkish airplanes during the war, a perfect early example of "shock and awe" in action. Later when one old Bedouin saw a small British fighter plane parked on the air strip next to a big bomber, the old man asked Lawrence whether the larger plane had sired the smaller one.

The indomitable Gertrude Bell, who was sent to Baghdad as part of the Arab Bureau of the British Foreign Office, and knew Lawrence, tells this story: "Seventy Sheiks and headmen of the Beni Huchaim tribes were assembled to meet the minister and his adviser. It was arranged for a flight of Snipe airplanes to fly over the tent as the meeting began. It had the desired effect of imposing a somber atmosphere – the Sheiks thought their last moment had come." Lawrence had also become enamored of air power, a service in which he lived in austere anonymity until just before his death.

Lawrence's advice about running Iraq could have been well heeded by today's generals – stay out of the cities, control the outlying areas from the air, find friendly locals to run the place, and try to look as Arab as possible, which meant keeping out of their faces as much as you can. But that was all before oil: the blessing and curse of Arabia. It changed all the rules.

Whether Lawrence's infatuation with air power would have really worked over time is debatable. Once the Arabs got used to the idea of machines that could fly they became less panicked by them. In 1916 airplanes swooped into their medieval world like winged gods, but after the war British Imperial Airways had established regular service to Baghdad and the empire beyond. However, Lawrence's other ideas show considerable insight as his newly-discovered map was based on tribal patterns and commercial routes. At the very least, had his map been used as the boundaries of Iraq it would have saved the Iraqi Kurds decades of oppression. His map gave the Kurdish north a separate state, but the map did, however, lump the Sunnis in with the Shiite as "Mesopotamian Arabs" which is the crux of the current troubles.



Lawrence's recently-discovered map.

How history would have played out without the Kurds is a fascinating conjecture. One could argue that it was the bad press from the gassing of the Kurds that ultimately lead to Saddam Hussein's demise. Of course, back in 1920 even Winston Churchill was advocating using poison gas against the Iraqis, something that the advocates of a Churchillian stance against terrorism take care not to mention. Real history is a complicated business.

By using airpower and a multitude of other techniques honed through centuries of colonization, the British managed to keep their toe-hold in Iraq for long after the war. How did they manage it? Their first order of business was to put down the 1920 rebellion which they did with the kind of efficient brutality perfected in WWI, but which is not an option in today's CNN/Al Jazeera-world. With over 10,000 dead, tribal chiefs hanged and rebel-owned houses blown up, the uprising was crushed. Saddam himself could not have done it better. Then the British made deals and alliances, brought in a king they thought they could control – ironically the same Faisal who had fought alongside Lawrence – and in 1930 gave the Iraqis "independence". The fact that my father was still stationed at a Royal Air Force base in Basrah in 1935 shows just how independent they were, but at least a kind of calm had descended upon the land. And now that

vast amounts of oil had been discovered, the view that Iraq was a "useless piece of desert" was gone forever.

The good days were not to last. The Iraqis knew a puppet king when they saw one – Faisal was a Hashemite Sunni prince from distant Hejaz ruling a Shiite majority and had little standing in Baghdad. Lawrence's friendship with Faisal may have blinded him to this, but Faisal was an outsider. Just being an Arab was not enough, and Faisal's history of collaboration with Lawrence, a Christian, may also have tainted him. As a student of the Crusades at Oxford, Lawrence knew all too well what happened to Christian soldiers or their proxies when they lingered too long in the Muslim holy land. He knew that the Crusaders found taking Jerusalem was much easier than keeping it. Lawrence was also keenly aware that tribal and religious rivalries swirled like dust-devils in the desert air just as they had for centuries, and the dreams of a strong pan-Arab leader, a man like Sala-ha-deen of old who had driven out the Crusaders, persisted in the imagination of all Arabs. At the moment of Lawrence's untimely death in 1935 a young thug called Saddam Hussein, born a few yards from Sala-ha-deen's birthplace in Tikrit, was dreaming that dream.

Lawrence had a prophetic vision of the troubles that faced any western power in Iraq. He wrote to the Times of London: "The people of England have been led in Mesopotamia (Iraq) into a trap from which it will be hard to escape with dignity and honour. They have been tricked into it by a steady withholding of information. Things are far worse than we have been told. Our administration more bloody and inefficient than the public knows. It's a disgrace to our imperial record and (the situation) may soon be too inflamed for any ordinary cure. We are not far from a disaster."

When Lawrence called Iraq "Mesopotamia" he was showing that he knew Iraq was not a real country, but a hodgepodge of ethnicities and religions cobbled together by the western powers out of old Ottoman provinces which had little in common with each other, probably under the theory that the inhabitants would be more concerned with fighting each other than their colonial masters. Divide and conquer. That's how the empire was built. How else could a damp little island in the North Sea control 40% of the planet? But like all imperial models it was beginning to decay. Perhaps modern Iraq is the final failed experiment in that system? It may be that true peace will only come when it breaks up into the pieces that should have been created in 1919 – partly along Lawrence's boundaries – instead of trying to preserve a country that is like keeping three tigers in a sack. That process has already begun as the Kurds already are, in all but name, a separate country. Lawrence described the current boundaries of Iraq of having "geographical absurdities that would laugh it out of court". But nobody was laughing – and there has not been much laughter since. The future of this "geographical absurdity" will all depend on whether the Sunnis are willing to give up centuries of being the dominant group in the region – a dominance which stretches back to the Sunni Ottoman victory over the Shiites in 1534 – and accept minority status and the deep diminution of power that goes with it.

Today it all leads back to oil. The Sunnis may have once accepted a largely autonomous Sunni Triangle, but since they have no oil there it would mean, in their eyes, accepting an impoverished powerless future surrounded by wealthy Kurds and Shiites. That's a bitter pill to swallow for perhaps the fiercest and proudest tribes in Arabia and does not bode well for a peaceful future.

Today, dividing up Iraq would be a map-maker's nightmare - many of the cities have mixed populations so no clear border between Sunni and Shiite, or even Kurd, could be drawn. Only horrific intra-ethnic cleansing and vast population moves could create a map with any kind of clear border, but we have already seen that population shift begin.

There's an old Arab proverb that when Allah created hell, He found it wasn't bad enough so He created Mesopotamia – and added biting flies.

Lawrence had clearly sensed this trouble. He wrote: "We cast (troops) by thousands into the fire to the worst of deaths, not to win the war, but that the oil of Mesopotamia might be ours." I'm sure that as Broughie Shaw, the oil-stained R.A.F. mechanic laboring on his airplanes with my teenage father, he seethed with every news bulletin from Arabia. His map had been ignored in the drawing up of Iraq, his letters and speeches had been dismissed. Certainly my Dad knew not to mention anything Arabian. "Poor old Broughie", he said, "something was eating him up".

Today, Lawrence's role in Iraq has been largely forgotten, though he lingers constantly in our imagination whenever Arabia is mentioned. Even Toby Dodge in his otherwise superbly comprehensive book on the creation of Iraq mentions Lawrence in passing a mere three times, and yet he feels compelled to put a photograph of Lawrence on the book's cover. There we see the Lawrence of legend in full Arab headdress standing behind Prince Faisal at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. And so it is today with Lawrence's legacy as he peers at us from behind the history books, shaking his head and saying: "You should have listened to me."



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