

CHAPTER 8

A FINE FLIGHT

“The beliefs we make are the best for us, whatever their truth.
Any belief is sanctified by the believing and justified by the
results.”

— Austin Osman Spare, from *Images and Oracles of Austin
Osman Spare*

WHEN KIP ARRIVED in Boston, he felt that he was finished with the Middle East for good. If he had been in any way practical, given his background in Arabic language, he would have investigated careers in the international field, but he had been through so much in the past year that he doubted that he was suited for life overseas. People suggested that he apply for the diplomatic corps, but he had done such a miserable job of getting along with people while he was in Egypt that he merely laughed at the thought. His greatest ambition had been to get on the fellowship program, and having accomplished that, his imagination failed him. He didn't know what to do next. He got a job working in a travel agency and found a room in a house in Cambridge, which he shared with a couple of college kids. The students smoked pot occasionally, and while Kip hadn't indulged in the stuff in years, they seemed like nice guys and he didn't see how their personal habits in this respect would affect him. In his spare time, he picked up Desmond Stewart's biography of T. E. Lawrence, and began to read it with interest.

One Sunday morning, when he was about halfway through the book, he got up early while his housemates were still asleep. He left the biography on the nightstand beside his bed, opened to a picture of Lawrence conferring at Cairo military headquarters in 1917 with D. G. Hogarth, his mentor at Oxford and spymaster in British Intelligence. Wandering into the kitchen, he noticed a plate of brownies sitting on the counter. He greedily reached for a couple and munched on them contentedly as he strolled back to his room. Within a half an hour, however, he noticed a feeling creep over him that he hadn't felt since his early college days. It didn't take a genius to figure out that the brownies had been loaded with hash.

If Kip had made the same mistake a few years earlier, he might have simply enjoyed the high, and treated the whole event as nothing more than an unexpected diversion from his usual routine. But he had belonged to the League for a considerable period now, and had been practicing the

contemplation techniques taught by this spiritual group on a regular basis. As a result, his body had become more sensitive, attuned to a higher rate of vibration. Under these conditions, the effect of whatever he had just ingested was like rocket fuel. As soon as he realized what was occurring, he immediately got back into bed, lay on his back, closed his eyes, went into contemplation, and chanted a special word designated for this purpose, clinging to this mantra as if he was a man cast overboard and it was a life preserver.

The point of these exercises was to achieve controlled, out-of-body experiences. While Kip had always found that they were relaxing, produced a feeling of balance, and occasionally furnished him with rewarding imaginative experiences, he had never succeeded in actually getting out of the body in full consciousness. Now, however, the drug acted as an agent to propel him out of the body, while the contemplation exercise served as a means of focusing his attention like a compass. Under these dual influences, he no sooner lay down, closed his eyes, and began this process, than he was aware of two large globes of light, one blue and the other green, swooping down within the field of his inner vision. The globes picked him up and instantly carried him out of the body. He soon found himself in a place that seemed to be far above the earth. From this observation point, he was aware of viewing the time track of his life. It was like an immense strand of DNA stretching across the blackness of space, composed of millions of images, like photos imprinted in sequential order on file cards and spread out in accordion-like fashion for him to view.

Somehow, he must have chosen to view one of those cards, for his next awareness was of having landed at a particular location in time and space. He sensed that it was the eastern coast of England in the late 1920s or early 1930s. He was walking along the shore, all alone, feeling the tide move over his feet and the wet sand that yielded beneath his toes. He seemed to be walking differently than usual, pointing his feet outward with each step. He looked down at his torso and noticed that it was stockier than normal. His hands and feet felt larger, and his skin appeared fairer. He turned inland, walking over some hillocks of sand tufted with long grass, until he came to a little hut as bare as a barracks. He entered it and made his way into a tiny lavatory with a porcelain sink and shaving mirror on the wall. Holding onto the sink with both hands and resting his weight, stiff-armed, on its edge, he raised his head slowly until he was looking straight in the mirror. The face that looked back at him wasn't his face, or at least not his present face. It was the face pictured in the book he had left open on the nightstand beside his bed—the face of T. E. Lawrence!

His first reaction, once he had returned to his body and the effects of the brownies had worn off, was of tremendous anger towards his housemates. The rage he felt was beyond all reason, all logic. He banged on

their doors, rousting them out of bed. He shouted at them, fumed, crashed dishes to the floor—did everything but attack them physically. He felt an uncontrollable urge to show them what they had done to him, to let them know that they had caused some irrevocable change in him. He had been saddled with some kind of information about himself that he did not want, that he had not requested, that he could not even acknowledge. Yet, how could they understand? How could they see anything except that he was beside himself and acting like a crazy person? He couldn't tell them what he had experienced. He couldn't even give them a hint of it. He could only scream that he needed to move out, that they had done something to him that was unspeakable, and that he couldn't live there any more.

He moved out the next day and found an apartment in Boston near Fenway Park. He left the travel agency and got a job as a receptionist for the International Institute. In his spare time, he returned to the biography by Desmond Stewart. One of the first things that caught his attention was the original, unedited version of Lawrence's dedicatory poem to *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, entitled "To S.A.," which Stewart had reprinted in his book:

I loved you, so I drew these tides of men into my hands, and wrote my will across the sky in stars, to gain you Freedom, the seven-pillared worthy house, that your eyes might be shining for me when I came.

Death was my servant on the road, till we were near, and saw you waiting. When you smiled, and in sorrowful envy he outran me and took you apart, into his quietness.

So our love's earning was your cast-off body to be held one moment, before earth's soft hands would explore your face, and the blind worms transmute your failing substance.

Men prayed me to set my work, the inviolate house, in memory of you, but for fit monument I shattered it, unfinished; and now the little things creep out to patch themselves hovels in the marred shadow of your gift.

To Kip it seemed a remarkable piece of writing, even if it was overly Romantic in its pretension and read more like the précis of a memoir than poetry. In a few compact sentences, Lawrence had succinctly written his own myth, expressing his love for an anonymous person who had served as his inspiration, his motive for action. Whoever that person was, he had died before the symbolic gift of freedom could be presented, and out of that sense of loss, Lawrence claimed to have turned his back on his labor of love, foresworn it, and rejected it. Everything in the poem seemed exaggerated—Lawrence's sense of his own importance in history, the purity of his motives, and even the very love that he professed. Yet something about it seemed also profoundly true. "Where there's smoke, there's fire," went the saying, and Kip felt that beneath the melodrama was a genuine human predicament.

How presumptuous it was of Lawrence, he thought, to say that he had shattered his work (the liberation of the Arabs), as if he could write

history and erase what he had written. In this sense, the poem was a monumental expression of ego. Yet Lawrence had also subtitled his book “A Triumph.” Why had he done so, when the very poem with which he dedicated it screamed the opposite? To Kip, it seemed that Lawrence had gotten caught up in a web of historical forces, and in searching for himself amid them, had found only pieces, remnants, nothing that had added up to a whole. This was what made the poem so personal, for it presented the reader with the inscrutable mystery of a man’s life. Lawrence presented himself as a mystery to others because he was a mystery to himself.

Kip had a sudden desire to write a poem of his own, in answer to Lawrence’s. He wanted it to be a poem of reassurance, however—of reconciliation and healing, not one of broken monuments, debris, offal, vermin, and unclaimed gifts. He sat down in a darkened, quiet room, and wrote the following words in response to the rising tide of thoughts and feelings that were building up within him:

Having wandered through so much ugliness and terror. (Yes, mine was a fine flight, groping for that opening, rising like a bubble out of the deep sea, to break again and find myself on another shore.) All is now quiet, still, and a deep peacefulness is with me, guiding me firmly, yet softly. (The ages lived in dawn’s caravan, trooping and singing, seeing with myopic eyes, laughing with a laughless love that is the death of the soul.) It was here, all night, I slept, and dreamed strange dreams, alive with the terror of old, and my body was scoured, and I was washed clean. This, then, is my last poem to S.A., whoever he may be.

Let your soul look for love, and you will find it there—in the mystery of the petal of a rose, or the crying of a baby. Let it be felt that when you soared up and away, forsaking this world, you looked down at me and smiled through your tears. And as for the roles we played in past lives, let them be, and enjoy this moment of rest. Eternity is with you in this moment. As each hour passes, the day draws closer. You are in my arms, you have crossed the border between life and death, you have found yourself ‘neath the far-flung range of the cosmos, and your body is no longer flesh.

Then, as to dying, say that it was never that bad, that it came easily, and without tantrum or display you went obediently, as commanded by your Creator, to help with the task of Creation. For all this being born and dying, all this playing it by the rules—the true bestiality and the mock bestiality that sits like a mask on frozen faces—What of it is real? What of it is truth? What of it can be plainly seen? To see it is reserved for those times when the thunder impels and the lightning thrusts its tongue out and laps at you. Hear the drummers strike! Hear the savage roar of that wave which threatens to take you out to sea!

Washed back again is a lifeless corpse, the seaweed twisted ’round in unnatural fashion. This was our honor, a dirty honor, the dirty honor of a small life, a life half-lived, half-realized. So it was with me, as with the rest of mankind. Father, mother, son—the

repression sets in until smiles are held back, restrained by tears, by sallow faces glimmering in candlelight—just enough to read by, but not enough to help us understand. Fate is the key that we hold in our hands to unlock the secret of that seemingly complicated life we call our own. And there is temptation to use it, to unlock forbidden secrets, to threaten, to provoke a wrathful entity—to face it, to confront it, to see the evil in our nature and then to laugh!

To laugh the cosmic laugh, the laugh of Satan, and of the Time Makers. To take part one last time in the unsacred ritual, the profanity, the desecration of the self and all that is to us holy—to see behind the masks, the disguises, the thousands of roles played, and to laugh. Certainly, it is the nature of Satan to laugh like that. For what is he but what we have already been—he whose face looks to the East, the setting sun like a livid flame eternally at his back, turned from the path of surrender, always praying for yet another day in which to laugh.

To S.A. Though I loved you, today I do not know who you are. You must have meant much to me, and perhaps it is not inaccurate to say you still do. My vision of you now is as neither man nor woman, or the ideal of either, but as a struggling misconception of the Infinite given Romantic proportions by the force of wounded love. To S.A. Live with me again. Reside in my heart. Let me see you change from a struggling, evanescent flame of beauty to something tremendous—the love of God, and of Life itself. If you become this for me, the mystery of the poem is revealed to me, and yet remains concealed from others. Even the disappointment, the blame, the sorrow, becomes a victory. It no longer matters who won. It no longer matters. The wounded heart turns its affection to the West. It sees the setting sun, and knows that it must follow to a new day...

What, he wondered, were these feelings that he had just written about? Where did they originate? When he declared, “This was our honor, a dirty honor,” he was tapping into feelings that were not recognizably his own, for his life had never involved questions of honor. Yet they clearly came from somewhere inside him. Before reading *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and the Stewart biography, Kip had little knowledge of Lawrence. He had seen the movie *Lawrence of Arabia*, in wide screen, when he was still in high school, and had been impressed by David Lean’s cinematography. In college, he had read *The Outsider*, by Colin Wilson, a series of essays on famous personages, which included a short study of Lawrence. Now, he started reading more biographies, looking for anything that could be meaningful to him.

It was not easy to imagine a more complex personality to pick as an object of study. Lawrence’s career touched on such diverse subjects as medieval history, archaeology, military history, British diplomatic history, Middle East studies, and English literature. Many considered him to be an outstanding writer himself, a talented linguist and translator, a military strategist of considerable brilliance, and a persuasive long-range political strategist. On the other hand, Lawrence was alternately an exhibitionist and a recluse, and utterly incapable of human intimacy. His most notable feature

was his self-denial and self-loathing. A sexually ambiguous figure, his life story allowed biographers to read whatever they wanted into his personality. Desmond Stewart brought his own sexual bias to bear in expounding his theory that Lawrence was overtly homosexual, but offered no proof for this opinion, merely speculation.

Lawrence was the illegitimate son of a baronet who had left his wife and set up a new home with his mistress under another name. Outwardly, the couple had lived a respectable life, yet it was in conflict with the morals of the Victorian age. While insignificant by contemporary standards, such a situation was socially unacceptable in those times, and Lawrence's parents had to change their names to avoid dishonor and scandal. Lawrence's mother was also an illegitimate child, a Christian fundamentalist, and full of remorse, guilt, and fears. She used to beat her children on a more or less regular basis. To make matters worse, Lawrence lived for many years under a cloud of mistaken notions regarding his family, imagining that Mr. Lawrence was not his real father. He thus grew up with an intense feeling of guilt and shame that was not relieved by any clarification—such was the veiled nature of family communication prevalent in those times. When he finally learned the truth from his mother, in 1919, his father was already dead. His letters and private conversations with friends revealed the hideous feeling that his mother inspired in him, which clearly affected his view of women for his entire life.

Lawrence ran away from fame, yet at the same time was attracted to it. He was enamored of writing. He loved to be around writers, and assiduously cultivated their respect. His role in the Arab revolt was controversial. He was often described as an honorable man put to a dishonorable task. He wanted dearly to help the Arabs gain unity and freedom, but he was an English soldier, and a member of the Intelligence Service at that, and thus ultimately acted out of divided loyalty. Before the famous incident at Deraa, he had no known intimate relationship with anyone, male or female. Then, in 1917, he was captured, beaten, and apparently sodomized by the Turkish governor of that town. Though he escaped alive, he was shattered by the experience. "I gave away the only possession we are born into the world with—our bodily integrity," he later wrote. He was the victim of what one psychologist who studied Lawrence called the "Job effect," an expression that was derived from a passage in Job 3:25: "For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me."

Sex—in fact, the mere thought of physical intimacy—was completely alien to him. If, at 28, Lawrence was a virgin at the time of his assault as most of his biographers believed, the experience clearly had a shattering effect on his concept of self and sexuality. Unfortunately, in his lifetime there were no counseling services available to men who had suffered such an experience. The post-traumatic effects of same-sex rape often lasted a lifetime, and

Lawrence manifested all the classic symptoms in later life: addiction to work, depression, anger, and increased sense of vulnerability, as well as a destructive self-image and a psychological pattern of keeping himself at an emotional distance from other people.

In the wake of World War I, Lawrence experienced increasing difficulties with any form of human intimacy, withdrew from relationships or carried them out by mail, had problems trusting people, and manifested no discernible sex drive—not that he ever had much interest in sex in the earlier stages of his life. In 1922, he entered the RAF under a fake name as a private soldier, only to be discovered and cast out. In 1927, he enlisted again with an official change of name. In his later years, which were marked by melancholy and despondency, he engaged a man at regular intervals to flog him. Some biographers saw this as an indicator of latent homosexuality, while others viewed it as a mere repetition compulsion, a recreation of the experience that marred his life.

Kip, of course, had been born into a vastly different age than Lawrence, far less sexually repressed or overtly violent. He had been thrown into no World War, inherited no obvious class distinctions, received no corporal punishment from his parents, suffered no overbearing Christian morality, and struggled with no social stigma. Far from being evangelical Christians, Kip's parents were entirely non-religious. Instead of disciplinarians, they had been highly permissive. There were, however, darker undercurrents in Kip's family history. His paternal grandparents had died in the Holocaust. His father had escaped to the United States, enlisted in the U.S. Army, and fought on the Western front, but failed to rescue his parents. His father's sexuality had been somehow affected by his wartime experiences, although Kip had no idea of the nature of what he had undergone. His mother's family had also been displaced during the war. She had suffered a terrible automobile accident as a child in which she had lost most of her upper teeth, and had lived as a refugee during some of her critical teenage years.

Both Lawrence and Kip shared a negative self-image traceable to a weak father and strong mother, sexual insecurity, and a history of veiled communication within their families. Both had experienced a sense of ambiguity regarding the truth behind their parents' relationship, and had gleaned information from their mother in the absence of their father, or due to his reticence. Both had matured late physically and sexually, and had lacked knowledge and instruction in sexual matters as adolescents. While Kip, unlike Lawrence, was unambiguously attracted to women, he was not secure enough in his sexuality to be attractive to them, much less sustain an intimate relationship. It was thus not a stretch for him to identify with Lawrence, a latent homosexual who was nevertheless too shame-ridden to act on whatever sexual impulses that he possessed.

One might have thought that the notion of having been a famous person in a past life would have been attractive, self-flattering, and intoxicating to Kip's ego, but in fact the exact opposite was true. He felt that something unwanted had been thrust on him in much the same way that Lawrence's knowledge of his sexuality had been forced on him at Deraa. It was another case of the "Job" effect. When it first hit him, it had felt like a crushing weight. He wanted to disown the experience. Then he began tentatively to go within, as if in prayer or meditation, asking himself if his experience had really been telling him what he thought it was telling him. At such moments, he experienced a powerful affirming force within him that engulfed him like a tide, often reducing him to tears. The answer always came back in the affirmative. If he posed the question in reverse, asking if it had been a drug-induced hallucination, a figment of his imagination, a manifestation of hubris, there was no response, no wave of feeling, just blankness like a still pond without so much as a ripple on its surface.

One might further have thought that this inner confirmation would have been enough to settle any lingering doubts that he had, but that wasn't true, either. Quite the contrary, despite all the affirming forces within him, he couldn't bring himself to wholeheartedly believe in his own experience. His mind continually dogged him with rational arguments that it could have been the drugs, that the open picture of Lawrence by his bedside had provided some type of suggestion, or that he was simply a lunatic, suffering from a self-imposed delusion.

Then he began to have dreams about Lawrence. The first time this occurred, he remembered little of the dream other than that the places and actions in it reflected the confluence of his and Lawrence's lives. In one scene, he was hiking in a rocky, Levantine landscape, in much the same way as he used to do with Adrian and Galloway, and as Lawrence had also done in his extensive scouting of the area before the War. In another scene, he was scaling walls and walking around campus-like gardens that reminded him of the American University and the Gezira Club in Cairo. But was it 1976 or 1916? And was he an Arabic language student or a British intelligence officer? By the time he woke up, he couldn't remember.

His daily life was also studded with odd coincidences. In the Harvard Tube Station, one day, he picked up a copy of *The Gay Community News*, which contained an article on Lawrence. "I fear that Lawrence was a true Pervert," the columnist wrote, "not because he was gay (sic), but because he tried so hard not to be." To call Lawrence a pervert because he was not liberated by contemporary standards struck Kip as comical. Perversion was a concept that was meant to express a deviation from the norm. Gays, who in a previous age had universally been considered perverts, were now establishing new norms, not merely for themselves, but for society as a

whole. Yet these new norms were not necessarily altogether progressive. It was now a perversion to be repressed, to distrust one's own feelings. People who fled from, denied, or rejected their identity were judged almost as much as they had been when they were seen merely as individuals caught in the vise of well-deserved shame.

Kip noticed with some alarm that his obsession with Lawrence was changing his personality. He began to feel strangely androgynous, almost repulsed by sex, and definitely less capable of a "normal" relationship with a woman. He felt a genuine wish that there *be* no such thing as sex, that without sex life would be purer, less complicated than it was. What was sex except an elaborate entanglement that led only to misery? Sex was for the healthy and simple-minded. It was not for those who felt weak, crippled, or inferior. What the gay columnist saw as a perversion in Lawrence, Kip saw as an admirable quality—the courage to assert one's own self-doubt, one's own negative self-concept, rather than subscribing to the norm of psychological fitness.

On a subsequent occasion, Kip was riding the subway, when a man in a red down coat sat next to him and began poring over a book. Kip noticed the cover. It was Desmond Stewart's biography of Lawrence. Kip struck up a quiet conversation with him, all the while feeling a gentle chill up and down his spine. The man's interest in Lawrence turned out to be considerable. He had read another current biography of Lawrence recently published by a Boston psychiatrist named John Mack, and had seen the movie *Lawrence of Arabia* several times. He had numerous strong opinions that he poured out to Kip. Kip's response was reserved. He mentioned that he had met Desmond Stewart in Cairo. He agreed with the man's admiration for the film, but disagreed with him that Lawrence had been sexless. "No one is sexless," Kip said, although he was aware that his opinion on the subject was not necessarily any more informed than anyone else's.

As he conversed with the man, he felt like someone looking at a staged scene. On the one hand, he thought, 'If only this person knew that he was talking to the very person with whom he identifies so much.' On the other hand, he was equally aware that he did not differ in any objective way from him. Like him, Kip only knew Lawrence from his own images and mental constructs. Regardless of whether he had, in fact, been Lawrence in a previous life, he was no longer who he had been, but was now someone quite independent and separate, with only his direct experiences to call his own.

Kip subsequently had another dream about Lawrence that unfolded in four scenes. In the first scene, he found himself in a military staff room, located in a white-shingled country cottage. A changing of the guard was in progress. The staff was packing up, and Kip, as Lawrence, was the last one to leave. A party was being given in honor of the new staff, and as they were

introduced, he shyly excused himself and walked away. The scene seemed to reflect the disconnection that Lawrence had experienced after the war, when he realized that his usefulness was over.

The next scene took place in the same country cottage, except now it was located in mountainous terrain. A couple of top generals had just bribed Kip, as Lawrence, to fight on their side, but he had defected to the enemy for only a little extra cash. Alone in a small anteroom, he could hear the generals talking furiously to one another in the nearby staff room, as a heavy shower of rain beat down upon the roof. The scene, going backward in time, seemed to capture the conflicting loyalty that Lawrence experienced during the Arab Revolt. In the third scene, he was back in his identity as Kip, riding a camel in the desert, dressed in khaki. As he rode, he was trying to imagine what it would be like to wear Arab clothes. For a brief moment, he experienced the feeling of those flowing garments, and with this came a memory of having commanded a force of irregulars in the area. In the last scene, his previous sense of authority was entirely gone, and, as Kip, he found himself aimlessly wandering the dry desert valleys with a camera, like a tourist.

Meanwhile, despite his intellectual identification with Lawrence's androgyny, loneliness and sexual hunger assailed him. Coming out of the movies one evening, he got on to the subway and sat down next to a young Japanese girl. Although he tried to be discreet, he couldn't help looking her up and down. He was mortified when, at the next stop, she got up and ran out of the car into the crowd, as if afraid of him. Another young woman took her place, with blonde hair pulled tightly back, and an expression on her face that conveyed much in the way of sexual experience. Primarily, Kip noticed her hands, which were extremely small. Looking at them, he began to get turned on. He tried not to stare. Then their eyes met, and there was a shock of electricity between them. Kip's thigh was pressed against hers.

As he stared at her, she seemed to be counting on her fingers, while pouting her lips in seductive fashion. "Fifteen times six," he heard her say, quite distinctly. Kip didn't know what to do. Was she giving him some kind of an opening? He wanted to say "ninety" right then and there, as if to help her in her computation, but he couldn't get the words out of his mouth. He waited until his stop came, debating whether he should get out or not. As the train came to a stop, he got up mechanically, turned to her, and with the poorest timing imaginable, blurted out, "Ninety." Then he rushed for the door, bumping his shoulder against its frame, and finally ricocheting onto the train platform.

Shortly afterwards, Kip encountered a young black woman on a Boston street. She was light-skinned, somewhat heavy-set, with natural hair, and looked strangely familiar. She turned out to be an old classmate of his from college, named Ashanti. She invited him over to her apartment, which was not far away. When they got to her door, they ran into a neighbor of

hers just leaving his apartment. He was a large, well-built black man, and looked at the two of them with a mixture of surprise and disapproval. Ashanti stared back at him as if to say, "It's none of your damn business!" When they were inside, she took off her clothes in the most casual way, and invited him to take his off as well and lie down beside her, which he did. They curled up together wordlessly, but Kip was too embarrassed and self-conscious to make love to her, and quickly fell asleep beside her.

When he awoke the next morning, he got dressed. As Ashanti showed him to the door, there was an awkward silence between them. Kip didn't know how to explain himself. She seemed to take his lack of sexual response to her as either a commentary on how he felt about her or women in general. He wanted to tell her that he *was* attracted to women, he was attracted to *her*, but he was just carrying so much baggage around with him. How could he tell her about the unwanted thoughts that were filling his head—thoughts of his past-life identity as Lawrence and the sexual inadequacy that was part and parcel of that identity?

Sometime after this, he had another dream about Lawrence. This time, he was walking along a country lane in his identity as Kip, when he met Lawrence exiting the front door of a nearby cottage, smiling vaguely. Kip noted the differences in their appearance. Lawrence was shorter, bulkier, sandy haired, and his chin jutted out slightly. Kip went up to him and spoke of the connection he felt existed between them. Lawrence looked bewildered, and replied, "There are other people like you in the world, you know." Then he smiled languidly again, as if to say that, on the other hand, he was quite sure there was no one in the world like *him*. The statement betrayed a touch of arrogance, a dose of self-pity, and considerable truth. He then rode off on his motorcycle, and Kip watched his form recede into the distance. Kip felt that this was his most profound dream so far, and that the Lawrence he had met in the dream was right. Lawrence had embodied a type of uniqueness that Kip no longer possessed, and while he possessed that uniqueness, he had known very well what it was.

In another dream, he was tramping around the United States as Kip, in an Army uniform, without a penny in his pocket. In one city, he managed to sneak into a fancy club. He entered a reading room with Hollywood magazines spread out on the tables. They were full of pictures of pin-ups dressed in gold. Every time he picked up one to read, however, it was taken out of his hands and he was told to get out. Next, the scene changed, and he found himself in a meeting of American veterans. At first, it was just a small gathering of about a half dozen men. Then, suddenly, the room was filled to capacity. A man from the Veterans' Administration had come to speak to them. He was saying that he was sorry, but there was nothing he could really do for them except take their names and offer moral encouragement. He had only a single job opening, which would go to the person most in need, but

otherwise they were on their own when it came to making their way in the world.

When he awoke, it struck Kip that the dream represented the transition from the one lifetime to the other. The Army uniform represented his connection with Lawrence, but this military could not serve Kip, as it did Lawrence, to establish a niche for himself in life. Moreover, it also suggested that the lifetime as Lawrence had ill-prepared Kip to make his way in the world—at least by conventional means. Lawrence’s experience was not something one could put on a resume. It hadn’t even served Lawrence well, in his own lifetime.

Yet another dream followed this one. He was re-visiting Arabia, in his identity as Kip. At the moment, he was in the modern capital, Riad, and had apparently been living there for a while. He was in Arab dress, and spoke impeccable Saudi dialect. The Hejaz region on the eastern coast, which Lawrence knew, was a backwater now compared to the centrally located Saudi capital. More astounding than the modernity of the city and the cultural and business life it attracted, was a river that apparently ran through its center—one that did not appear on any maps known to him.

As he was walking, admiring the city, he passed two American businessmen treading in a particularly muddy patch on the riverbank, and he thought to himself, ‘Mud! In Arabia!’ The scene looked more like the Tigris or Euphrates in Iraq than anything he expected to find in Arabia. The dream symbolized the changes that had occurred on the Arabian Peninsula since Lawrence’s day. The Saudi regime had long ago supplanted the Hashemite monarchy for which Lawrence had fought and lobbied. With the development of an oil economy and modernization, there was little of Lawrence’s mark left in this part of the world, nothing of the past to hang on to.

Still, even this plethora of dreams did not suffice for Kip to get a sense of closure and move on. If anything, he was only becoming more obsessed with Lawrence and in need of ever more affirmation concerning the reality of his experience. Finally, he contacted a hypnotherapist, a specialist in past-life regression, and made an appointment to see her. Her name was Rosemary Amberman, and she lived in a deeply wooded area in a suburb north of Boston. As soon as he sat down with her, he told her straight out that he thought he was someone famous in a past life. He expected her to be scornful of the idea, but she reacted in just the opposite manner, saying quite matter-of-factly, “I think you’re right.”

Kip was surprised at how easily he agreed with his suggestion. “Has anyone ever said that to you before?” Kip wanted to know.

“No, I haven’t,” she replied. “Who do you think you were?”

Kip got about halfway through Lawrence’s name, when her face lit up. “I was just going to say that,” she exclaimed. Whether or not she was just

pandering to him, he couldn't say for sure, but there was a type of ease in the flow of exchange between them that made him feel that she was replying on the basis of her intuition, rather than simply trying to please or placate him.

The therapist then took Kip in a back room, asked him to lie on his back upon a long couch, and put him through a series of relaxation techniques. She had him imagine that his body was gradually getting numb from his head to his toes, a preparatory process similar to one Kip had learned for out-of-body travel. Then she began asking him what he saw, where he was, and who he was.

Sure enough, Kip immediately turned into Lawrence. It was an odd feeling. Throughout the entire session, he was aware of speaking in an extremely broad Oxford accent, which he normally couldn't have mustered to save his life. He could feel his mouth moving in unfamiliar ways in order to form the words, and was conscious that he was speaking in an utterly different way from normal. The first visual image of which he was aware was of looking down at his military boots, then his khaki uniform. He sensed that he was in with the Camel Corps near Wadi Rumm, reconnoitering with his men, which included both British and Bedouin troops.

The therapist then asked him to count to three and to shift from this scene of comparative ease to one in which he had arrived at an important decision point. Kip immediately found himself on a hill on the way to Damascus, at a later stage of the campaign. The Turks were about to attack, and he had to decide what to do. There was no one else to help him in his decision-making. The Bedouin chiefs were depending on him, and looked to him with respect. As a British officer, his priorities were to sacrifice as many Bedouins as he had to, and save as many British as possible. This was hard on his conscience, however. Even though he knew that the Bedouins were spoiling for a good fight, and that they did not care whether they lost men as long as they won the battle and brought honor to their tribe, he felt guilty about giving the order to charge the Turks. He was aware of how much he both hated and relished this authority.

The therapist took him through the successful conclusion of the battle, but he emerged from the altered state crying. "Why was it so difficult for you to go on with your life after that?" she asked.

"I'll never go higher than this point," Kip replied in present tense, in his Lawrence persona. "This is the apogee of my life. After this, I will still have to make some major decisions, but none will ever be as crucial as this one I have just relived."

"Why is that?" she questioned him.

"I no longer feel the will to assert my authority. Once the recognition of having experienced that authority is in place, the will to exercise it dissipates. If I continue in a position of authority after this, I will no longer be going against the grain, building my spiritual muscle. Only with such

recognition lacking is the will to assert authority honorable. Given that recognition, it becomes flawed.”

She then asked him to go to the scene of his death. Kip described the motorcycle accident that ended Lawrence’s life. He was able to see himself flying off the cycle even before he hit anything. He then described a mangled figure, lying amid considerable blood in a patch of bushes. Slowly, he then began to leave his body. There was no sense of pain or loss.

“Looking back overall, how do you view that life?” she asked.

“It was successful,” Kip replied. “I acquitted myself well. It represented a burst of effort, brief but intense. I was catching up on some spiritual bodybuilding in a particularly focused way.”

“What lesson can you take from that life?” she queried. “One lesson is actually quite contrary to my inclinations.” Kip replied. “It’s that I can afford to relax more. In some ways I’ve inherited the mentality of Lawrence, which involved a very particular kind of intense, concentrated effort. It would help me to see relaxation, rather than tension, as a spiritual body-builder.

“Relations with other people also represent a great problem for me in this life,” Kip continued. “This area is like a scar, and much of it is traceable to Lawrence. I need to learn to act more as an equal of other people, rather than either greater or lesser. I also have to learn that I need help and encouragement from other people in this life. Sexuality, too, is an open wound that requires a great deal of healing. I can do this, first, by knowing that I was Lawrence. This can help me to understand some of my behavior, without dwelling too much on it. Then I have to start from scratch with people, by learning to become a more social person. Finally, I have to learn to give and take in relationships, which is a matter of not pushing but letting the relationships come of themselves.”

Kip was impressed with the results of the session. He went back to the therapist a couple of times after that, but the subsequent sessions weren’t productive at all. Kip was still fixated on Lawrence, and all he wanted to do was to get back repeatedly to that past life. The regression therapist didn’t work that way. She was not equipped to deal with someone with an obsession like Kip’s. Her method was mainly to steer her clients swiftly from one life to another, pausing just enough to give them a needed insight, sort of like a tour bus in Paris stopping for fifteen minutes at the Eiffel Tower before going on to the Louvre. After the third session, she told him that he was trying to force it, and there was nothing more she could do for him. He was just going to have to work it out for himself.

Of course, Kip took this the worst way imaginable. If he was forcing things, as she said, perhaps he had forced everything. Maybe the results of the initial session were just an exercise in self-deception, and he had merely succeeded in pulling the wool over the therapist’s eyes as well as his own. No

matter how strong the affirmations he received, they couldn't erase the gnawing sense of self-doubt that, ironically, was his greatest commonality with Lawrence.

Still, the dreams continued. One night, he dreamed that he was a soldier on horseback in a medieval army. His identity was neither Kip nor Lawrence, but somewhat closer to the latter. He was riding with his company through deep woods. They were about to bivouac, but then they came to a stream, carefully banked and mortared, like a canal. The mortared bank led to a precipice, astride of which sat a nearly impregnable castle. It was night. An army was massed along the defile. They were about to do battle. As soon as the battle began, Kip knew at once that his personal strategy would be to avoid the conflict entirely. He was in the front rank, and as the enemy began rumbling towards them, he slipped off his horse, into the river, and played dead. His action was at once cowardly, yet at the same time infinitely smarter than getting hacked to pieces just because that was what was expected of him. He glided through the moonlit waters making his way upstream, as carcasses began to float past him amid the din of battle. There was an eerie quietude to the scene—the floating serenity of the river, while hundreds were being axe-murdered only a few yards away.

Then the scene shifted. He was the only one of his army to survive the battle. He found himself inside the castle, in the company of an old man who was its lord and proprietor. The old man invited Kip to follow him, ushering him into a room literally draped in wealth. Jewels, silks, and velvets were everywhere. Kip was astounded, and the toothless old man, robed in finery, was clearly pleased. Kip sat together with him on a divan before a huge hearth. Vain and lecherous, the old man expressed open joy at Kip's presence and attentions. Realizing the corruption in the old man's mind, Kip thought of killing him, but this went against his moral fiber. He then pondered the possibility of seducing him through attention and flattery, and found this a more tempting alternative. He considered having to please the old man sexually, and found the prospect not unpleasant.

The scene shifted to a bazaar in Arabia. Kip, as Lawrence, was climbing all around a pile of trinkets that a couple of Arab boys were selling, pretending to demur about buying them. He then began to throw generous amounts their way, chuckling at his own antics. The scene changed again. Kip was now Lawrence at a later stage of life, when he was working on speedboats for the Royal Air Force. He was in a cavernous hangar that could only be reached by water. A row of bright new speedboats was tethered like racehorses to a concrete dock. The boats all had the names of famous men lettered on their hulls, such as G. B. Shaw and H. G. Wells.

Kip woke up at this point, numbed by the intensity and symbolism of the dreams. The one about the old man particularly shocked him. What did it mean? Who did the old man represent? Did he symbolize Lawrence's baser

instincts? If so, were those instincts still present in Kip? Or, was Kip being given a glimpse of himself in yet another incarnation? Could the old man have been himself? The last two scenes had also been disturbing. The scene with the Arab boys was full of latent sexuality and the manipulation of young children, while the final scene reflected a kind of vanity in the presence of great men. Kip felt himself in danger now of succumbing utterly to the Lawrence personality, of being overwhelmed by it, and losing his grip on his own identity.