

Quotes from *King Abdullah's Tomb*:

1) “What do you think has gotten them nowhere on the Western Front?” he stood nose to nose with me and thundered at me as if I were the British War Office. “Secret treaties. Dirty treaties. Stalemate. Why, I was at Gallipoli . . .”

“So was I . . .” I reminded him.

“Soldiers drowned in the trenches from the winter rains. Unburied corpses washed into the lines. Frostbite. Snow. Men killed from exposure because they wanted to sit there in a trench and shoot and shoot until everyone on both sides was dead and nothing was accomplished,” he whipped about like a fury. “A dysentery epidemic. The young physicist Henry Moseley killed. The poet Rupert Brooke dead of a septic mosquito bite. All together over seventy thousand young men from the United Kingdom dead in one battle. One hundred fifty thousand for the allies – in one stupid military operation that accomplished nothing for anybody.”

The Colonel was so fearsome when he got in a mood like this, I was rooted to the spot.

“I’m going to actually win this war even if only on one front! I’m going to DO SOMETHING – if they put me in front of a firing squad for treason or disobedience.”

2) “If he thinks I have any influence with Colonel Lawrence, he must be nuts! I can’t write to Lawrence and tell him to give back the humidor.”

“I thought you told me Lawrence had traded it to a merchant called Mohamed for cigars.”

“Yes, but another letter came this morning. Now Mohamed gave it back again. He complained to Lawrence that it was made of worthless pine wood.”

“I see,” said Mr. Byrne. “Another mysterious development.”

“What do you mean?” she asked him with big eyes.

“Simply this – I think this Colonel Lawrence has something up his sleeve. He knows more than he lets on.”

“You mean what goes on in the Arabian Desert and Pittsburgh is somehow connected?”

“It’s a world war, isn’t it?” Mr. Byrne paid the cabbie.

3) She was so astounded she didn’t know what to say. “What other wrong could they have committed against your religion?” Dora asked, trying to force herself to keep calm. Time was still passing, but all too slowly.

“Only the greatest wrong of all – *the great forbidden!*” he glared into her eyes with such intensity she wanted to shrink back, though she was already smack up against the wall and couldn’t move an inch. “The thing the Prophet said to guard against above all other things.”

4) Ahead a roseate temple ascended grandly from the street, carved by some long ago sculptor from a solid rocky mass. Pink steps started up abruptly. I fled up them, falling over my own feet, picking myself up, and disappearing into the rock fortress. Powerful Corinthian columns with fig leaves sculpted at the top towered above me as I entered under the protective portico. Statues of unknown gods and rounded urns flanked me on either side. Above me loomed a hideous, sculpted head of a woman, very much like Medusa, with writhing snakes for hair. Her wide open, staring eyes were ready to pop out of her head at any moment. Her lips were open, revealing sharp teeth. It had to be my imagination that, as I passed beneath on the stairway, the creature’s eyes turned downward and stared straight at me, freezing my blood despite

the desert heat.

You may think the rose stone softened Medusa. But it made her more horrible still. Bathed in a half-light, neither white nor red, sometimes this color and sometimes that in the dying light of day, glinting with sun and now darkened in growing dusk and shade, she seemed alive and breathing. She was an ominous presence closely watching me below.

5) The sunlight above me had changed its angle, illuminating more of the chamber. I was astonished to see an engraving on the wall above me of a camel caravan making its way through a landscape that looked very much like the Great Arabian Desert. It was easy to recognize the outlines of the rugged, red sandstone jagged cliffs and mountains.

Where had I seen a wall mural like this before? I remembered trekking through the mountains. We'd come upon some etchings in the rocks. That had led to a cave where we'd had lunch. The Bedouins had not wanted to join us. They'd said it was taboo. The cave had been elaborately painted with murals. There had been recognizable donkeys and horses, also pictures of fires and weird-looking demons and spirits.

Lawrence had said the cave spooked the Bedouins because it was a burial chamber. Could this be another of a much later time period, albeit a more expensive and well-built one? Could that be why it was so empty? Why it was under the surface of the street?

I heard voices. Two men were lowering themselves down into the chamber. It was too late for me to escape, even if there had been way to do so. I hunkered back against the wall in the shadows and lay perfectly still. I closed my eyes and peered at the men through cat-like slits.

A shaft of sunlight thrust its way down to the floor. It had a strange, three-dimensional quality that resembled the finger of God pointing down accusingly at the interlopers, who by now had reached the floor. The middle of the tomb was illuminated, sweeping away the dark shadows.

Along the opposite wall lay a corpse, a shriveled up mummy with leather for skin. He still wore rings and traces of finery, persevered by the dry desert air. He lay stretched out on a bier with his hands folded over his chest. He was looking straight up at the ceiling in tattered shreds of cloth that had survived the centuries.

6) "Can't wait to find yourself a Turk?"

I turned to behold a man wearing a *kuffieh* of white silk and gold embroidery. It was held in place over his head by an *agal*, consisting of two black woollen cords decorated with silver and gold thread. Over his shoulders was thrown a black camel-hair robe, or *abba*. Underneath all he wore a pure white robe coming down to his feet. He tied the robe in place around his waist with a gold-brocaded belt. In the belt was fastened a curved sword. Only Princes of Mecca were allowed to wear such fine attire.

After my initial surprise I noticed that the apparition out of the desert with the sun shining behind him was scarcely more than five foot three and talking in a familiar tone of voice. "You've put on that costume?" I asked, dumbfounded. It wasn't the one he wore everyday. It looked newly laundered, not the least bit dusty or dirty.

"Certainly! I want to give the Turks a scare," Lawrence admitted, every bit the showman.

"I see . . ." "No wonder everybody called him Sidi Lawrence, the blond *shereef*, the uncrowned King of Arabia!

"Come!" the Colonel beckoned me to follow him.