Killer Keeler

Bulletin of the Harry Stephen Keeler Society
No. 76 ..................................... January, 2011
The dream of an audio version of a Keeler novel has become a reality! Jim Gill has read *When Thief Meets Thief*, and done so quite sonorously too. His recording can be found here:

www.trickcoin.net/2010/10/
harry-stephen-keeler-audiobook.html

Soon it should be on iTunes as well.

Longtime readers will also recall this fine portrait of HSK created by Jim, which he’s now colorized. (But Jim, wasn’t Harry blond?)

In November I tried NaNoWriMo, National Novel Writing Month, for the second time. This time I succeeded! I reached the goal of churning out a 50,000-word story in 30 days. The result, which ended up with the title *Appointment with the Inferno*, can be downloaded from my blog, writingball.blogspot.com.

I tried to follow the Keeler Law: make your main character intersect a series of other strands early on, with each intersection causing the next. That, says Harry, gives you a lot to weave with. I didn’t think it would work, but in the end, it had a pretty convoluted and (I hope) surprising ending. Webwork? Maybe. And I learned that another piece of advice from Harry is also excellent: write every single day, no matter what.

Oh, the novel as well as most of my blog is written on manual typewriters. If Harry did it … hmmm, I was going to write “so can I,” but that would be a howling non sequitur.
With only one entrant in the Imitate Keeler Contest this year, and none last year (except myself), in my capacity as almighty editor I declare the contest officially defunct. Of course, if anyone wants to submit a Keeler parody to the News, they’re still welcome at any time. I do want to congratulate our lone IKC entrant, Dave Dalessandro, for a creative submission sponsored by “Binary Paste, now with Dream Weavers™! It’s a dual action split formula that has Day Paste, imbued with caffeine, and Night Paste, imbued with chloroform. It wakes you up, and puts you to sleep.”

Our readers were notified electronically about the alternative contest, more adapted to the 21st-century attention span: Tweet Like Keeler! Edward Bolman, the mastermind behind twitter.com/HarryS-Keeler, agreed to judge the submissions, and Roger Ebert retweeted the contest to his nearly 300,000 followers. Every entry had to come in at under 140 characters, including “#tlkc.”

And the winner of the Tweet Like Keeler Contest, as determined by Edward—and proud new owner of a Spanish-themed issue of 10 Story Book!—is José Luis Forte, for the following mini-masterpiece:

#tlkc I entered the witch’s stand. Before her, a bullet holed skull.
It’s you, she said. I looked at the bone eyes. They were empty too.

Edward praises José Luis for writing “an actual story, Keelerian in imagery, moderately so in syntax.” And here are the runners-up:

#tlkc “Negativity”—airy-fairily spluttered the Celestial—“is less than subzero—when thou comest—to accentuating the pos-ee-tive!” (Richard Polt)

Mop wringer magnate Hardesty Cheatwood—who hated all things Mexican!—bequeathed his Sinaloa works to a worthy Siamese—human or feline! #tlkc (Bill Poundstone)

DuKerky’s Lunch Truck @Halstead & 2nd: Molecularly Adjusted Wieneywurst, made from freshest carbon, oxygen, nitrogen & protoplasm! #tlkc (Bill Poundstone)

#tlkc McMorgan Pawluwszki, glimming the entirety of his inheritance, was overawed by the vastness—of same’s insignificance! (Richard Polt)

#tlkc If ‘twasnt—and ‘tisn’t!—then ‘tweren’t! (Richard Polt)

Time is mazuma! How I turned $1 into $6,310,000,000,000. http://bit.ly/afM5xu #compoundinterest #socialism #tlkc (Bill Poundstone)

Contrary to Einstein, there’s a particle more Lilliputian than the atom—the shrimp in the Chop Suey @Lotus Diner #leangreyratsfail #tlkc (Bill Poundstone)

It was 16:51— at least by that dusty old institution, the grandfather clock— when the Author—that is to say my very self!—tweeted #tlkc (Luke Oram)

#tlkc Yet same, while voluptuously gifted in her chestile area, was deficient brainwise — for the simple reason that she had none! (Richard Polt)
Yes, it was a shock.

No doubt you have at some time in your life stood under a shower device, turned on what you thought was the warm water, and found it to be—icy cold instead. Then you can understand how I felt when I read it the first time. It ran:

Gregory:—When you find this note I will be gone—gone with someone for whom I care a thousand times more I ever did for you. Just forget me and our two years of married life—and don’t be so foolish as to try and find us. I expect you, instead, to secure a divorce at once so as to leave me free to marry him. And one more thing—I am afraid this will hurt you—I am taking with me baby Geraldine, as you always intended her to be called, for she is mine far more than yours.

Jeanne.

Several times I read the note through, at first uncomprehendingly, but later with a full realization of its import. Then I crumpled it in my hand and stood staring for a long time into the fire, wondering how I could ever adjust myself to a new life from which Jeanne and little Geraldine would be absent.

Of course it had been folly on my part, as a mere student of mining engineering at the State University, and only twenty years old at that, to marry Jeanne Elsworth—and she, no doubt, was foolish to consent. True it is, that I had a few thousands inherited from my father to live upon—but neverthe-

...
an easy-going old lady, whose chief pastime was to sit on the piazza of the hotel and knit; her mother and father, so I gathered from our conversations, had died when she was young, leaving her without even a brother or sister.

Naturally, a few weeks of tennis, golfing and automobiling provoked the inevitable. I fell head over heels in love with Betty Carthorpe.

It was one evening on the piazza about ten o’clock, that I told her of it as we sat listening to the booming of the surf.

“Betty,” I said, “I guess you’ve discovered it already—that I love you. I want to marry you and have you by me always—just want to be able to feast my eyes on you and be good to you—but before you answer you must realize that you are a girl of only twenty, while I am a man of forty-one.”

I was glad the piazza was deserted. My answer came in a soft arm stealing around my neck and a warm kiss on my cheek.

“From the moment, Greg, that we first met,” she replied, “I felt that you were destined to mean far more to me than anyone else. And as for our ages—what difference does that make as long as we care for one another. After all, you are nothing but a big boy—and from now on I shall have to call you My Big Boy.”

“And you’ll marry me, Betty?” I asked eagerly.

“Any time,” she answered in an even tone of voice. “You see,” she continued rather sadly, “since I am practically alone in the world, I have no one to exercise any authority over me but great-aunt and she doesn’t seem to care for much but her knitting and the mere comforts of life; although,” she added, “I must admit she has been very good to me.”

“Betty, child,” I said, my happiness becoming greater every second, “if I have a big red auto down on the beach tomorrow night at eight o’clock—and a waiting minister at Paxton, thirty miles away—and a ring—may I have you?”

Tomorrow night at eight o’clock,” she replied, “I’ll be ready and we’ll surprise great-aunt with a sure-enough elopement just like we find in the magazine stories.”

The following day seemed to drag by interminably.

I can see her now as she came hastening along the sands with the full moon showing the pink that had mounted to her cheeks from the excitement. I can remember, too, how I intercepted her several hundred yards from the machine and kissed her. Then I laughingly placed my hands on her shoulders and said:

“Betty, suppose, I were one of these very jealous persons, who, upon seeing you wearing a new locket tonight, should refuse to go on with our ‘sure-enough’ elopement until I could see the picture of my ‘hated rival’ that it contained.”

Continued on p. 9

The Beach-Fly Flapper

who always waits about the dressing houses on the beach, a pretty flower by contrast with her sisters who are all in bathing suits; with her hair nicely frizzed and all in curl, she inveigles the sheiks after they have come out of the water and are tired of water nymphs.
If you’ve just read “The Elopement Extraordinary,” you’re in a good position to judge the following conundrum. Morgan Wallace found this story in the March 4, 1922 issue of the Chicago Ledger. Who was “O.O. Orange”? We know that Keeler used that pseudonym for “Kats I Have Known,” in The Case of the Transposed Legs (1948). We also know that he was editing the Ledger in 1922, and put some of his own work into the periodical under other names, including his first story, “A Telescopic Romance” from 1910 (KN #42). If Keeler wrote “A Fool and His Wife,” it would also have to be an early effort. But it is not listed in Harry’s detailed reckoning of his literary endeavors (KN #7). He did speak on the topic “Other Men’s Wives” in 1911 at a meeting of the Vejas of the Blinded Skull at the Armour Institute of Technology (KN #29, p. 4), for whatever that’s worth. Read this little tale—and decide for yourself.

The younger man spoke bitterly. “I suppose I deserve to be kicked into the army and shipped out of the country on $30 a month, but, just the same I am mad in love with her. She’s a fever in my blood, as the old poet says, and I’ll never get her out till I spill the last drop in my heart.”

The other idly drew on his cigar. “Yes, women are fever, and the only cure is—marriage.”

The boyish face of the first speaker resented this cynical remark. “No; there you’re wrong! I’d love her even more dearly if she were my wife, for I wouldn’t feel all the time like a cad.” The frank eyes flinched. “It hurts to know that my love would disgrace her, should the world learn of it, for she’s another man’s wife.”

“Another man’s wife!” The older man fell into a strange musing, but, suddenly arousing himself, refilled first his companion’s glass, then his own. “That she’s another man’s wife is a great objection and danger, but not necessarily an unsurmountable obstacle. She has ceased to love her husband, as she has confessed to you, and loves you instead, while you in turn”—the speaker smiled more charitably than cynically—“You love her better than money, fame. Well, I don’t see but what you have rights in the matter to offset her husband’s claim of prior pre-emption. Besides, you know, a fool and his wife are soon parted.”

The younger man started up from his chair. “Do you mean it? You really think that I have some claims that are honorable?”

“With due reservation, I would say that you have claims that are honorable, tho not lawful. You see, I make a distinction where the moralist would not. I hold that the written law is not the whole and sole text of honor, and that there are times when an act may be honorable without being lawful. However, it’s rash business, this giving advice to a hot-headed young Romeo like you.”

“By heaven!” cried the other, “you make me dizzy with hope. If I could believe that I were not a despicable cad in taking her from her husband, I’d fly with her tonight. And, thank God, she would go with me!”

The older man turned his wine glass about meditatively. “You have never seen her husband, you say?”

“Never! She has forbidden me meeting
him, for she fears I would do something rash. Make a fool of myself, I suppose,” the speaker added moodily.

“She’s a wise little woman.” smiled the older man. “I rather admire her acuteness. Without a question, should you meet her husband, you would make a consummate ass of yourself.”

“Thanks! I admit it.”

“No offense, my boy. However, her husband must be taken into account, tho she has ceased to love him. He may be a fool and a coward, and you can steal the rose without carrying the thorn in your skin the rest of your days. Again, he may be a fiend incarnate for jealousy and rage. Better go slow.”

“No, no!” cried the young man. “If you’re a friend, advise anything but delay!”

“Why, in case it’s that serious,” smiled the other, then paused to sip his wine with evident enjoyment.

“In that case—go on!”

“Why, it stands this way with me. You say the lady is willing, and Lord knows you are willing. Good! there is a clear majority of one over her husband, and if the majority rules in politics, which is greater than love, why not in love also?”

The younger man seized the other’s hand and wrung it fervently. “For this advice, my eternal thanks! I’ll be d—d for it, I know, and I richly deserve all I get, but with her in my arms I don’t care!”

The other smiled. “Good night, my boy! Better go home and to bed, and think it over. It’s one thing to advise a friend, and quite another to take the blame if the advice proves ill-chosen.”

The younger man laughed gayly. “Here’s to the present hour—and Her!”

But the older man had fallen into a reverie, scarcely noticing the other as he lingered a moment to say good night before quitting the clubroom.

It was a strange reverie, that of the man now left alone. It carried him back to five years before. He stood again on the deck of a swift-sailing steamer, just putting out to sea from a foreign slip. Beside him stood a woman, with great dark eyes and slender, girlish waist. Suddenly a gray-haired, hatless man rushed down to the wharf and shouted and gesticulated like a madman after the vanishing steamer. The lovely form beside him had trembled with alarm, but he had whispered: “Courage! no one here knows that he is your husband, and the hour we touch American soil I will make you my wife. Courage, my great queen!”

The wharf, with that gesticulating figure, soon faded into the receding horizon, and the open sea laughed sunny and blue around them.

Ah! how happy they had been for five years, and tonight she was waiting for him in their home, with the same great, dark, love-lit eyes, and the same slender girlish waist.

He came from his reverie with a sigh—a sigh of exquisite happiness—and looked at his watch. He had been dreaming a full hour. He bought another cigar and left.

The boyish face of his late companion came distinctly to his mind’s eye.

“Somehow I cannot choose but like the young fellow,” he soliloquized; “and if another man’s wife has brought me happiness, why should not another man’s wife bring him like happiness. Let them have one another, for love belongs to the lovers and not to the law!”

A white-faced servant looked into the room, and seeing the clubman hurried forward.

“Oh, sir, pardon me, if I am mistaken; but I fear, sir—” The speaker hesitated, with shaking knees.

“Well, what is it, Joe?”

“Your wife, sir! She is gone!”

“My wife! Gone! Where?”

“In the cars—with a young gentleman.”

“You lie!”

“For God’s sake, don’t strike me, sir! I am only trying to do my duty. I had my suspicions about this young gentleman, and when I found a note—”

“Who is the man? Quick, you stuttering fool!”

“It was the young gentleman that you like to talk with here, sir, after your game of pool!”

The clubman reeled back with ashen face.

“My God! then the woman he loves is my wife!”

He lunged heavily against the table, clutching at his heart and staring before him with fallen jaw.
I was struck by the uncanny similarity between Keeler’s diagrams for plot kinematics and the drawings for the action of particles interacting over time in John Gribbin’s book on quantum mechanics, In Search of Schrödinger’s Cat.

—Matt Levinthal

I can’t recall if anyone has compared HSK’s webwork to Tristram Shandy. I was reading this interesting blog about the book’s typographical tricks, and was startled to see that one of them consisted of various diagrams of the book’s “plot.” Did HSK ever mention Laurence Sterne?

—Michael Saler

Not to my knowledge. —Ed.
“Big foolish boy,” she answered, almost believing me, “if you were such a jealous person I would tell you right away that it contained the picture of my mother who died when I was five years old. And then I would open it up and let you see it, just like this.”

She clicked the locket open and handed it to me. Never shall I forget the photograph that stared at me from it in the clear cold moonlight; for years I had carried its duplicate. It showed the face of the woman who had deserted me twenty years before.

You have never met my daughter, I believe. Excuse me for a moment while I call her in.2

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**The Crazy Flapper**

*We hear an echo from the audience saying “They're all crazy!”*  
*But still, a special 10 Story Book number devoted to the history and study of flappers wouldn't be complete without at least one typifying the “nut.” Here she is. Nuts as nuts can be! A very sane girlie named Edythe Shephard consented to pose thus insanely, and complete the Flapper Issue.*

*Underwood and Underwood Photo.*
Letters

I’m basking in the feeling of not having a deadline at the moment, having recently finished the two books I’ve been working on for the last three years: one on impostors, and my magnum opus—a worldwide encyclopedia of eccentrics called *The Eccentropedia*, which will be published by Headpress in the UK next year. My good friend Glenn Smith, who is a terrific artist, has done portraits of 55 of the eccentrics in it, and I thought you might like to see the one he did of HSK.

Chris Mikul
Haymarket, NSW, Australia

Congratulations! The portrait is fantastic. It will grace the cover of the next KN. Meanwhile, busy Chris has also finished a fresh issue of his zine, Bizar-rism.

Dhooge is linked to another publisher. Therefore the novel about HSK is by … Harold S. Karstens. It’s a bizarre, surrealist David Lynch-like novel about HSK and my personal life. You’ll find the ISBN-number on every online bookstore and in every bookstore in the Netherlands and Belgium.

Bavo Dhooge
Gentbrugge, Belgium

I know everyone in the HSK Society will be itching with curiosity after reading that letter. If all goes well, we will be able to publish a book review in our next issue.

[KN #75 is] gorgeous, rich, truly impressive.

Daniel Riccuito
Brooklyn

The twist I loved in *Vagabond Nights* is not the major twist, but a smaller one that to me sets a context for the entire novel—and is one of those places where it seems that Keeler was entirely aware of what he was up to (and much as I love his writing, there are always moments where one wonders…). It’s the same way he seems to take great joy in having his characters say (about events in his books) things like, “Well, it just goes to show that truth is stranger than fiction.”

Matt Levinthal
Seattle
I find that George Lazenby, who played James Bond briefly between the Connery years and the Roger Moore years, is following HSK on Twitter and retweeting.

Tony Curtis was buried with a copy of his favorite novel, *Anthony Adverse*. Who will volunteer to spend eternity with *The Box from Japan*? (Bernard Schwartz adopted the name Tony Curtis in tribute to Anthony Adverse. Which suggests that we need a young actor named Gonwyck to even things up.)

Edward Bolman
Los Angeles

Thanks for another incredible Keeler News! The title of Keeler’s “Can Such Things Be?” must have been an allusion to Ambrose Bierce’s 1893 short-story collection of the same title. Has anyone looked into a possible Bierce influence on Keeler? It occurs to me that there is a similarity of tone between Bierce’s Devil’s Dictionary and much of Keeler’s humor. Both make fun of established “experts” by adopting a faux-erudite manner. In proof I submit a few Bierce definitions of relevance to Keeler fans. (The entire Devil’s Dictionary is on the web at www.thedevilsdictionary.com.)

William Poundstone
Los Angeles

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CIRCUS, n. A place where horses, ponies and elephants are permitted to see men, women and children acting the fool.

CLOCK, n. A machine of great moral value to man, allaying his concern for the future by reminding him what a lot of time remains to him.

ETHNOLOGY, n. The science that treats of the various tribes of Man, as robbers, thieves, swindlers, dunces, lunatics, idiots and ethnologists.

GALLOWS, n. A stage for the performance of miracle plays, in which the leading actor is translated to heaven. In this country the gallows is chiefly remarkable for the number of persons who escape it.

LAWYER, n. One skilled in circumvention of the law.

OLEAGINOUS, adj. Oily, smooth, sleek. Disraeli once described the manner of Bishop Wilberforce as “unctuous, oleaginous, saponaceous.” And the good prelate was ever afterward known as Soapy Sam. For every man there is something in the vocabulary that would stick to him like a second skin. His enemies have only to find it.

READING, n. The general body of what one reads. In our country it consists, as a rule, of Indiana novels, short stories in “dialect” and humor in slang.

REALISM, n. The art of depicting nature as it is seen by toads. The charm suffusing a landscape painted by a mole, or a story written by a measuring-worm.

SLANG, n. The grunt of the human hog (Pignoramus intolerabilis) with an audible memory. The speech of one who utters with his tongue what he thinks with his ear, and feels the pride of a creator in accomplishing the feat of a parrot. A means (under Providence) of setting up as a wit without a capital of sense.

Superb issue! “Can Such Things Be?” is certainly one of the first and maybe the first of Harry’s which depends on Keeler Koinkydink with two kapital k’s!

There’s a Gene Autry picture where some rancher says, “I know cattle from A to Izzard.”

In the December 2010 issue of *Alfred Hitchcock’s Mystery Magazine* there’s a story, originally published in December 1910, which I think will be of interest to Keelerphiles. Why? Because Melville Davisson Post’s “A Critique of Monsieur Poe” with its unusual Arabian Nights framework may well have given Harry the impetus to use the same kind of framework in his own unusual way in *Thieves’ Nights, The Defrauded Yegman/10 Hours*, the Skull in the Box novels, etc. Post’s story appeared in America’s premier popular magazine, *The Saturday Evening Post*, at precisely the time when Harry was started to get interested in fiction writing. The odds are pretty good that he read it.

Mike Nevins
St. Louis

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I’m an English lit master’s student in London, where I’ve been devouring When Thief Meets Thief and the later *Stand By—London Calling!* in their original UK editions at the British Library. The BL has no fewer than 58 Harry Keeler titles (including some duplicates) and I aim to get through a majority of them this year.

Brian Reinhart
Chicago-of-the-East
I am very happy to have found your site and I’m delighted to know that there are various Spaniards in the Society. I believe Keeler was very well known in Spain some 50 or 60 years ago, but he has passed completely into oblivion, and I have never met anyone for whom his name even rang a bell. It’s also hard to find the Spanish translations of his books. I like to think that their owners and their children or grandchildren have taken care of them affectionately, but I haven’t managed to find much either in flea markets or in used book stores—and they’re always in bad shape, despite how carefully they were published.

I come from a dynasty of papyrovores and compulsive readers, and indiscriminate buyers of remainders and publishers’ liquidations. Ever since I was little, I was struck by the spine of Las gafas del Sr. Cagliostro, adorned with a drawing of a little pair of spectacles. I’m telling you in case you’re curious about the source of my enthusiasm for such a peculiar writer. One adolescent summer, I decided I was going to read all my parents’ books, starting from the last shelf and moving up. Naturally, I haven’t managed to do it, and although I am now the owner of this library, I haven’t been faithful to my project either—but I have been able to discover forgotten wonders, books discredited or exiled from the field of literary and political correctness.

I’ve started to look for things about Keeler because I have a series on my Facebook page (which has no followers, ¡ay ay ay!) about unusual readings. I’ve been pleased to discover that there is a little club of Keeler admirers, and I’ve also been happy to learn that his so-strange prose is not due, as it is so often, to a bad translation.

I love Keeler’s universe of madmen and idiots, and the places he describes so minutely. I love the absurd accumulation of trivial details and the way he mixes them with other, exotic and extravagant ones—and I enjoy the drunken feast of useless and repeated information on every page. I get a little tired of his dialogues—so unnatural and thick—but I love to get lost in his plots and his illogical shock effects. It seems impossible that such a writer could have had a career, and I’m delighted to know that he did.

My utmost respect and admiration to everybody devoted to promoting Keeler’s memory.

Patricia Godes
Castellón, Spain

I am a ferocious reader and can’t wait to sink my mind into Mr. Keeler’s life work.

Deborah Paulin
Gainesville, Fla.

Yesterday I received a very handsome hardcover volume of full color reprints of Golden Age comics, Simon & Kirby Superheroes. Jack Kirby was an illustration genius, and there’s nothing better to read after a long day of teaching than these garish fantasies. (Well, to be frank, there’s nothing else my addled mind can assimilate at that point but four-color wonder.)

Anyway, the volume has a wonderful introduction by Neil Gaiman, who discusses not only Kirby, but also the quirky zaniness of Joe Simon, who wrote many of these stories. And lo and behold what appears in the Intro:

“And I think what attracted me to Simon’s stories was how like anyone else’s they were, how full of life.... One of my favorite early 20th century American authors is Harry Stephen Keeler, a mystery writer who wrote stories that were, in terms of plot, dialogue, and geography, nothing like anyone else’s. He was derided for it at the time, but is now collected and remembered while most of his contemporaries are forgotten. He was an odd writer. Joe Simon plotted more efficiently than Keeler, but, like Keeler, he wrote stories that no one else could have written, and they linger in the memory and in the heart. The oddness of Joe Simon’s work is where it gets its power.”

I love the idea that it’s now ok to use HSK as a term of approbation! And Gaiman is right.

Mike Saler
Berkeley, Cal.

I dedicated a session of my weekly radio show on genre writers to our admired Harry Stephen Keeler (see decimavictima.blogspot.com, entry for Dec. 28, 2010). I hope you like it. There are well-deserved words of praise for you and your work with the Harry Stephen Keeler Society.

José Luis Forte
Mérida, Spain

¡Gracias! At the end of the show, José Luis imagines that Quentin Tarantino could direct a Keeler-based movie. Now that would be something!
In the current issue of *Mystery Scene Magazine* (#117) and the previous one (#116), Harry S. K. was mentioned in two reviews of titles from Ramble House (Gary Lovisi’s *Ultraboiled*, and Francis Nevins’s *Cornucopia Of Crime*).

Alberto Sobóñez
Madrid

Thank you so much for *Keeler News* #74! I had so much fun finding your remark on Keeler and myself being “separated at birth”! Now for our mutual amusement I am sending you my hilarious portrait **ZANETO by SCHUNK**, made recently by my friend, designer and artist Schunk, who had dedicated it to my art project ARHENNALE: The People Met In Architecture, the first global photographic exhibition, which has been recently presented exclusively ON-LINE! The exhibition is basically dedicated to this year’s Biennale of Architecture in Venice, Italy, but pictured in very different and personal point of view. You can check this project out at tinyurl.com/6cfsm.

Nevertheless, after seeing my aforementioned portrait, I sent the famous Keeler’s photo to my friend, asking him to make his portrait too. That will certainly refresh the sense of Keeler’s presence in today’s virtual chaos.

Zaneto Paulin [no relation to Deborah—right?]
Motovun, Croatia
A Sentence from the Master

“Yes, the scowl was removed—if removed—yes, if!—by ‘section’ subcutaneous, as it’s termed, of the so-called ‘corrugator muscles’ lying beneath the inner one-third of the brow.”

The Scarlet Mummy