

Gandolphus
Anthony Boucher
From "The Compleat Boucher"

"If there was a detective's union," said my friend Fergus O'Brien, "I'd be out on my ear."

It was a good hook. I filled the steins again with Tuborg dark and got ready to listen.

"Remember that Compleat Werewolf business right here in Berkeley?" Fergus went on. "Or the time machine alibi in L.A.? You take now Dr. Fell or H. M. or Merlini; practically every case they get looks like it's supernatural or paranormal and they just plain know it isn't and start in solving it by 'How was this normally gimmicked?' Rules of the profession. Gentleman's agreement. Only to me things happen, and they don't fit."

"And what was it this time?" I asked. "A poltergeist? Or an authentic Martian invasion?"

Fergus shook his head. "It was...Gandolphus. And what Gandolphus was...Look: I'll tell you how I got dealt in. Then you can read the rest for yourself. I wangled a photostat of the damnedest document...

"It was when I was back in New York last year. Proving a Long Lost Heir was a phony—nice routine profitable job. So it's all polished off and I stick around Manhattan a couple of days just for kicks and I'm having dinner with friends when I meet this character Harrington. I won't describe him; he characterizes himself better than I could. So he learns I'm a private investigator; and just like people learn you're a writer and give with their life histories, he drops his problem in my lap.

"It looks more like a police job to me, and I tell him so; and since I know Bill Zobel in his precinct I say I'll introduce him. He's all hot to get started, once he's got the idea; so we take a cab down and Bill thinks it's worth looking into and we all go over to Harrington's apartment in Sheridan Square.

"Now you've got to understand about Bill Zobel. He is—or was at this time I'm talking about—a damned good straight cop. Absolutely efficient, more intelligent than average...and human. Tough enough when he had to be, but no rough stuff for its own sake.

"Bill and I settled down in the living room to watch for whoever or whatever Gandolphus might be, and Harrington went into his study to type a full formal statement of the complaint he'd sketched to us. It was about two a.m. by now; and we were too tired for chess or cribbage even if we hadn't been kind of scared by the too damned beautiful boards and men Harrington offered us. So Bill Zobel switched on WQXR and we sat listening to music and Harrington's typing.

"The typing stopped at three. Nobody had come or gone, not even Gandolphus, through the one door of the study. At three fifteen we went in. Harrington was dead, and to me it looked natural."

Fergus stopped.

"To date," I said flatly, "this is no payment for good beer."

He reached for his briefcase. "At that point," he said, "I thought it was just about the most pointless evening I'd ever spent. Then, while we waited for the men from the Medical Examiner's office, Bill and I read what Harrington had been typing."

He handed me a sheaf of photostats. They were labeled *Statement found in and beside typewriter of Charles Harrington, deceased.*

My name is Charles Harrington. I am fifty-three years of age, and a native American citizen. My residence is 13 Sheridan Square.

That is, I believe, the correct way to begin a statement? But the way from that point on leads through thornier brambles or, to shift the metaphor, through a maze in which the desideratum is to find, not the locus of egress, but the locus of entrance.

My name may not be unfamiliar to such as are interested in hagiography and iconography. My collection of tenth-century objects of virtu relating to Christian devotional practices has made my apartment, I dare say, an irreligious Mecca to many (inevitably one recalls the Roman Catholic church which one observed in San Francisco, which so unbigotedly advertises itself as "a Mecca of devotion for the faithful since 1906"); and hardly any one concerned with the variant vagaries of the mystic mind can be totally ignorant of the series of monographs which will some day form the definitive "life" of St. Gandolphus the Lesser. I place the term "*life*" within quotation marks because the purpose of the book is to demonstrate the fact that the canonized gentleman never existed.)

The habits of a scholar should, perhaps, make easier the compilation of such a statement as this; but familiar though I may be with the miraculous in the Tenth Century, the...shall we say, unusual in the Twentieth is

more disturbing.

Let us put it that the matter began a month ago, on Saturday, October the thirtieth. I was taking my conventional evening stroll, which on this particular evening led me toward Washington Square. The weather was warm, you will re-call; and you are doubtless familiar with Washington Square of a warm evening?

The mating proclivities of the human animal can flourish as well in autumn as in spring, if the thermometer be but auspicious; and Washington Square of such an evening is an unsettling spectacle to a man of voluntary celibacy. I had regret-~~ted~~ my choice of locale and started to turn homeward when the thing flashed in my face.

It seemed, in fact, aimed directly at my eyes; and I knew a moment of terror, since sight has ever been to me by far the most rewarding of the senses. And although I dodged its direct impact, by swifter muscular response than I should have thought myself capable of (you will condone the informality of that construction), I felt a renewal of terror in the instant of the sudden blinding flash of its explosion.

The couples near me were too engrossed in other pursuits to pay any heed to me as I stood there trembling for what must have been a full minute. Only at the end of that time was I able to open my eyes, reassure myself that my sight was unimpaired, and observe upon the grass the shattered remains of what had so disproportionately terrified me. It was obvious from the fragments that the object had been a child's toy, modeled not upon the engines of my own childhood or the aeroplanes of my nephews', but upon an interplanetary spaceship such as is employed by the hero of cartoon adventures named, I believe, Buck Ruxton.

That the child should make no attempt to reclaim his toy after so nearly serious an accident is understandable. It is possibly also understandable that I, after so severe a nervous shock, was forced in the course of the short journey home to stop in three successive drinking establishments and in each to consume a pony of brandy.

I relate all this in order to make clear why I, a normally abstemious if definitely not abstentious man, retired that night with sufficient alcohol within me (I had added a fourth brandy upon my return to the apartment) to ensure an unusually, even abnormally sound sleep. It does not explain why I awoke next morning in most exquisite agony; but no hypothesis yet advanced has explained why, upon occasions, the mildest overindulgence may produce more severe reactions than many a protracted debauch.

Only after the ingestion of such palliatives as aspirin, raw egg, tomato juice and coffee was I sufficiently conscious to become aware of what had happened in my apartment during my sleep.

To put it briefly and colloquially: Someone had drunk himself silly. Silly, in-deed, he had been to start with; for indiscriminately he had emptied my cooking sherry and my Sandeman '07, my finest cognac and the blended rye which my younger nephew fancies. And all direct from the bottles: the dead soldiers stood all a-row, but no glasses had been soiled.

As I assured you at the precinct station, no key save my own opens my door. Because of the value of my objects of virtu, even the superintendent and the cleaning woman are admitted only by appointment. The windows could be considered as entrances only by the most experienced "human fly."

I need not say, therefore, that I was sorely perplexed by the puzzle thus presented to me, nor that I wondered why a burglar, by whatever means he had procured admittance, should confine his attentions to my potable treasures when the apartment contains so many portable articles of value.

I took no action. My civic conscience is not readily aroused, and a police inquiry would disorder my life far more thoroughly than had the burglar. And the next occurrence, involving though it did those very articles of value neglected in the first instance, contained no element of interest to the police.

After a night of unusually heavy sleep occasioned by late work on Hagerstein's ridiculously inept thesis on St. Gandolphus, I awoke to find a light still burning faintly in this study. I entered, to discover that the gleam was that of a vigil light (late Ninth Century) burning before my treasured Tenth-Century image of Our Lady, Font of Piety. Upon the prie-dieu (Thirteenth Century, but betraying unquestionable Tenth-Century influence), which normally stood across the room but now had been adjusted directly before the image, lay a Tenth-Century illuminated breviary, open at the Office of the Blessed Virgin. Most startling fact of all, there was still visible upon the worn velvet of the prie-dieu the fresh and unmis-takable imprint of human knees.

You will surely recall the legend (it is no more, as I have incontestably established) of the novice who fell asleep in the midst of copying a manuscript and awakened to find his task completed and the text illuminated far beyond his powers, with the minute signature woven into one of the initial letters: *Gandolphus*. There persists a handful of similar accounts of the unobserved and somewhat elfin post mortem activities of St. Gandolphus the Lesser; you will readily understand why the unseen fellow-tenant of my apartment was thenceforth, to me, Gandolphus.

But the contradictory nature of his activities puzzled me; one night of drunken orgy, one night of kneeling prayer. Nor was the puzzle closer to solution upon that morning on which I discovered in this typewriter an exquisite

sonnet—so remarkable in its perfection that it has since been accepted for publication, under a pseudonym, by one of our better journals—signed (as though the invader could read my mind) with the name *Gandolphus*.

I shall pass rapidly over the embarrassing morning when I awakened with a curious pain in my back, to discover in the guest-room a fair-haired young woman who greeted me with the indecipherable remark "Honey!...Hey! For a minute I thought you was him!", who proved to be the vendor of cigarettes at a nearby place of entertainment, and who departed abruptly and in a state of bewilderment conceivably exceeding my own.

Nor shall I linger over the disappearance of two thousand dollars in ten-dollar bills, present in the apartment because a certain type of art dealer, I must confess, prefers transactions of this sort (fuller details, I assure you, would have no bearing upon this investigation), and the ecstasy of the more impoverished Italians in Bleeker Street over the vaguely described stranger who had pounded on shoddy doors in dead of night to deliver handfuls of bills.

I shall simply stress here the cumulative inconsistency of these proceedings: inebriety, religiosity, poetry, eroticism, philanthropy...an insane medley of the loftiest and basest experiences of which the human animal is capable.

It is this inconsistency which leads me unhesitatingly to reject the most apparently obvious "solution" of my mystery: that the fellow occupant of my apartment is no other than myself; that Box and Cox, Harrington and Gandolphus, are, in short, Jekyll and Hyde.

For whereas of his actions to date the inebriety and the concupiscence might be considered evidence of Hydean depravity, the sonnet and the almsgiving represent an exalted sublimation of which, I confess, the poor Jekyll in question is flatly incapable; and the religiosity, to my mind, fits into neither character. This is not I, nor yet another I. This is a being unknown to me, sharing the apartment to which only I have access, and indulging in actions which seem to me to have only this in common: that all represent singularly heightened forms of human experience.

This brings me to what I fear may well be the most overwhelming experience which Gandolphus has yet known, and the reason which has driven me, at whatever cost to the placidity of my own ordered existence, finally to lay this problem before a private detective and, upon his insistence, to communicate it to the police.

When I conveyed to you the nature of the incidents already here related, I found it hard to explain even to myself what "mental block" (if I may be permitted so jargonic a term) prevented me from communicating to you this evidence of the ultimate extremity of the quest of Gandolphus.

I refer, of course, to the kitchen knife which I discovered this morning still coated with blood which a private laboratory this afternoon assured me is human.

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It is considerate of me, I think, to put those three asterisks there to denote the transition.

The knife, of course, is what alters the whole situation. That one bloody fact is sufficient to disrupt the tranquil *modus vivendi* which I believed that I had attained.

If you professional detectives, public and private, are as perceptive as, in rum-maging around in this mind, I find some reason to believe you are, you will by now have realized many things. You will have understood, for instance, precisely what happened that Saturday night in Washington Square, and that the bright and exploding object was not a toy spaceship.

You will even understand, perhaps, which word should have been underlined in that last sentence.

But I am not at all sorry that things should end as they now must. I have felt hampered here. It is not the ideal habitation in which to pursue my research. I was forced to realize this, in a somewhat comical but nonetheless vexatious manner, in the fourth of the episodes related above, and again to some extent in the sixth, that of the knife. There is also the matter of music, which I gather from reading to be one of the major human experiences; but these ears that I employ are tone-deaf.

In short, I need a better vehicle. And just outside of this room—listening, as a matter of fact, to music at this moment—is (I find the phrase lying somewhere in a corner of this mind) metal more attractive.

There is no reason why I may not be frank. You will surely have gathered that it is imperative that I explore and realize every sensation of the inhabitants of this planet. Only through this experience can I convey to the ships that follow a proper scout's report on the symbiotic potential here. Every sensation which the host may undergo and force its symbiotic companion to share—I *must know what it is like*.

So I am turning off this machine, which has served its introductory purpose. But before I abandon it, I shall (curious how with practice it becomes possible to use them awake as well as asleep) use its fingers to type.

Respectfully yours, (I believe that is the proper subscription?),
GANDOLPHUS

I took my time about refilling the steins. The photostats deserved some thought. I was not particularly inclined to argue with Fergus' description of them as the damnedest document I'd ever read in my life.

"I suppose," I ventured finally, "the knife did check—dimensions of blade, blood type and so on—with some known killing the night in question?"

"It did," said Fergus. "An Italian peddler."

"And the knife had only Harrington's prints on it?"

"Of course."

"The pattern's clear enough. Obviously neurotic self-centered celibate entering the perilous fifties. Very self-revealing—pretty standard schizoid set-up, though I'll admit that wild episode of philanthropy is a new one on me. Harrington's death was natural, I suppose?"

Fergus grunted. "Syncope was the word the M.E. used. In English words, something turned off the machine."

"It's a good case," I admitted. "One of the odder buildups to murder. But why on earth—"

"Why should it get me kicked out of the union? Because Bill Zobel dozed off."

I said "So?"

"It was late and it kept getting later at the station while they piled up all these facts about knives and syncopes. And finally Bill dozed off. He woke up when a patrolman came in yelling he'd picked up a hot suspect in a recent series of muggings. Nothing to do with the Harrington business; but the muggings were Bill's baby and he went off to question the suspect.

"The guy was guilty all right. Plenty of evidence turned up later. But he never came to trial. He died of the beating he got that night...from Bill Zobel, the tough straight cop who never stood for rough stuff.

"It got hushed up; there was nobody to make a beef. But I was there; I saw the guy before the ambulance came. It was an artistic job; that night Gandolphus learned everything he needed to know about sadism—he hadn't tried that one yet; couldn't, maybe, with Harrington's body.

"Maybe you didn't hear out in the West about the rest of Zobel's career. The beating was bad enough. Then they began to watch him when they saw he was spending damned near his whole month's salary on concert and opera tickets. Precinct captains aren't exactly used to that in their men.

"The next month's salary, and a pretty penny to boot, went to Chambord and Twenty-One and Giovanni's and Luchow's. He was dining like Nero Wolfe as a guest of Lucullus, with Escoffier in the kitchen. He was also hanging around off-duty in some joints in the Village—the kind of joint a policeman never goes into except for a raid, when you don't need a matron to search the sopranos.

"The talk that started died down a little when Zobel suddenly got engaged to his captain's daughter—hell of a sweet kid; you could still smell the starch-and-incense of the convent, but her eyes had a gleam...Later on, when the gleam was doused, she told me they'd never had a clinch you couldn't show on a TV screen; our friend was learning that there was more to love than backaches. Her Bill, she said, was so groundlessly jealous he made Othello look like the agreeable husband in a Restoration comedy.

"The pay-off came when Zobel picked up a dope-peddler and went on a jag with the bastard's bindles.

"His record up to then was so clean they let him down easy and fixed a psychiatric discharge. Next month he got picked up once as a peeping Tom and once for inciting to riot in Union Square. Gandolphus wasn't missing a sensation."

"But you see," I interrupted, "we did hear about Zobel in the West." It was a fine rich feeling to have the topper for the first time in my years of knowing Fergus O'Brien. "We even met him. He was a guest speaker at a meeting of Mystery Writers of America. He told us, and damned frankly too, about the nervous breakdown he'd had last year and the psychiatric discharge and the course of treatments that led the police psychiatrist to recertify him finally. Lieutenant Zobel's happily married, professionally successful..."

Fergus looked glum and disgruntled. "So you knew the topper," he said. "Yes, Bill's a normal man again. This time the machine wasn't turned off. Gandolphus just left. He'd found out what he needed. And like a good scout, he's gone back with his report on our symbiotic potential.

"Care to make a small bet as to what that report is?"