

MIDNIGHT IN THE
MIRROR WORLD

Fritz Leiber

As the dock downstairs began to clang out midnight's twelve strokes, Giles Nefandor glanced into one of the two big mirrors between which he was passing on his nightly trip, regular as clockwork, from the telescopes on the roof to the pianos and chessboards in the living room. What he saw there made him stop and bunk and stare. He was two steps above the mid-stair landing, where the great wrought-iron chandelier with its freight of live and dead electric bulbs swung in the dull fierce gusts of wind coming through the broken, lead-webbed, diamond-paned windows. It swung like a pendulum—a wilder yet more ponderous pendulum than that in the tall clock twanging relentlessly downstairs. He stayed aware of its menace as he peered in the mirror.

Since there was a second mirror behind him, what he saw in the one he faced was not a single reflection of himself, but many, each smaller and dimmer than the one in front of it—a half-spread stack of reflections going off toward infinity. Each reflection, except the eighth, showed against a background of mirror-gloom only his dark lean aquiline face, or at least the edge of it—from bucket-size down to dime-size—peering back at him intently from under its sleek crown of black, silver-shot hair.

But in the eighth reflection his hair was wildly disordered and his face was leaden-green, gape-jawed, and bulging-eyed with horror.

Also, his eighth reflection was not alone. Beside it was a thin black figure from which a ribbon black arm reached out and lay on his reflected shoulder. He could see only the edge of the black figure—most of it was hidden by the reflected gilt mirror frame—but he was sure it was thin.

The look of horror on his face in that reflection was so intense and so suggestive of strangulation that he clutched at his throat with both hands.

All his reflections, from the nearly life-size giants to the Lilliputians, copied this sudden gesture—except the eighth.

The eleventh stroke of midnight resounded brassily. An especially fierce gust of wind blew the chandelier closer to him so that one of its black hook-fingered arms approached his shoulder and he cringed away from it before he recognized it for the familiar object it was. It-should have been hung higher, he was such a tall man, and he should have had the window repaired, but his head missed the chandelier except when the wind blew hard and after he'd been unable to find a craftsman who could work leaded glass, he had not bothered about either chore.

The twelfth stroke clanged.

When he looked into the mirror the next instant, all strangeness was gone. His eighth reflection was like the rest. All his reflections were alike, even the dimmest most distant ones that melted into mirror smoke. And there was no sign of a black figure in any one of them, although he peered until his vision blurred.

He continued downstairs, choosing a moment when the chandelier was swinging away from him. He went immedi-

ately to his Steinway and played Scriabin preludes and sonatas until dawn, fighting the wind with them until it slunk away then analysed chess positions in the latest Russian tournament until the oppressive daylight had-wearied him enough for sleep. From time to time he thought about what he had glimpsed in the mirror, and each time it seemed to him more likely that the disordered eighth reflection had been an optical illusion. His eyes had been strained and weary with star-gazing when it had happened. There had been those rushing shadows from the swinging chandelier, or even his narrow black necktie blown by the wind, while the thin black figure might have been simply a partial second reflection of his own black clothes—imperfections in the mirror could explain why these things had stood out only in the eighth reflection. For that matter the odd appearance of his face in that reflection might have been due to no more than a tarnished spot in the mirror's silvering. Like this whole vast house—and himself—the mirror was decaying.

He awoke when the first stars, winking on in the sky of deepening blue, signaled his personal dawn. He had almost forgotten the incident of the mirror by the time he went upstairs, donned stadium boots and hooded long sheepskin coat in the cupola room, and went out on the widow's walk to uncap his telescopes and take up his star-

gazing. He made, as he realized, a quite medieval figure, except that the intruders in his heavens were not comets mostly, but Earth satellites moving at their characteristic crawl of twenty-some minutes from zenith to horizon.

He resolved a difficult double in Canis Major and was almost certain he saw a pale gas front advancing across the blackness of the Horsehead Nebula.

Finally he capped and shrouded his instruments and went inside. Habit started him downstairs and put him between the mirrors above the landing at the same minute and second of the day as he had arrived at that spot last night. There was no wind and the black chandelier with -its- asymmatric constellation of bulbs hung motionless on its black chain. No reeling shadows tonight. Otherwise everything was exactly the same.

And while the clock struck twelve, he saw in the mirror exactly what he had seen last night: tiny pale horror-struck Nefandor-face, black ribbon-arm touching its shoulder or neck, as if arresting him or summoning him to some doom. Tonight perhaps a little more of the black figure showed, as if it peered with one indistinguishable eye around the tinied gold frame.

Only this time it was not the eighth reflection that showed these abnormalities, but the seventh.

And this time when the glassy aberration vanished with the twelfth brassy stroke, he found it less easy to keep his thoughts from dwelling obsessively on the event. He also found himself groping for an explanation in terms of an hallucination rather than an optical illusion: an optical illusion that came so pat two nights running was hardly credible. And yet an hallucination that confined itself to only one in a stack of reflections was also most odd.

Most of all, the elusive malignity of the thin black figure struck him much more forcibly than it had the previous night. An hallucination—or ghost or demon—that met you face to face was one thing. You could strike out at it, hysterically claw at it, try to drive your fist through it. But a black ghost that lurked in a mirror, and not only that but in the deepest depth of a mirror, behind many panes of thick glass (somehow the reflected panes seemed as real as the actual ones), working its evil will on your powerless shrunken image there—that implied a craftiness and caution and horrid calculation which fitted very well with the figure's cat-and-mousing advance from

the eighth reflection to the seventh. The implication was that here was a being who hated Giles Nefandor with demonic intensity.

This night and morning he avoided the eerie Scriabia and played only dancimgly brisk pieces by Mozart, while the chess games he analysed were frolicsome attacking ones by Anderssen, Kieseritzky, and the youthful Steinitz.

He had decided to wait another twenty-four hours and then if the figure appeared a third time, systematically analyse the matter and decide on what steps to take.

Yet meanwhile he could not wholly keep himself from searching his memory for people whom he had injured to the degree that they would bear him a bitter and enduring hatred. But although he searched quite conscientiously, by snatches, through the five and a half decades over which his memory stretched, he found no very likely candidates for the position of Arch-Hater or Hater to the Death of Giles Nefandor. He was a gentle person and, cushioned by inherited wealth, had never had to commit a murder or steal a large sum of money. He had wived, begat, divorced—or rather,, been divorced. His wife had , remarried profitably, his children were successful in far

places, he had enough money to maintain his long body and his tall house while both mouldered and to indulge his mild passions for the most ethereal of the arts, the most coolly aloof of the sciences,, and the most darkly profound of the games.

Professional rivals? He no longer played in chess tournaments, confining his activities in that direction to a few correspondence games. He gave no more piano recitals. . While his contributions to astronomical journals were of the fewest and involved no disputes.

Women? At the time of his divorce, he had hoped it would free him to find new relationships, but his lonely habits had proved too comfortable and strong and he had never taken up the search. Perhaps in his vanity he had dreaded failure—or merely the effort.

At this point he became aware of a memory buried in his mind, like a dark seed, but it refused to come clear. Something about chess? ... no ...

Really, he had done nothing much to anyone, for good or ill, he decided. Why should anyone hate him for doing nothing?—hate him enough to chase his image through mirrors?—he asked himself fruitlessly as he watched Kie-

seritzky's black queen implacably pursue Anderssen's
•white king.

The next night he carefully timed his descent of the stairs, using his precision clocks in the cupola—with the result that (precision machinery proving less reliable than habit) the downstairs clock had already struck five strokes when he thrust himself breathlessly between the mirrors above the landing. But his greenish horror-struck face was there—in the sixth reflection this time, as he'd fatalistically assumed it would be—and the slender black figure was there too with outstretched arm; this time he seemed to detect that it was wearing a veil or stocking-mask: he could distinguish none of its features, but there was a faint shimmering in the face area, rather like the pale gas front he had once again detected crossing the Horsehead Nebula.

This night he completely altered his routine, neither opening a piano nor setting out any of the chessmen. Instead he lay for an hour with eyes shut, to rest them, sad then spent the rest of the night and morning investigating reflections of reflections in the mirrors on the stairs and in two somewhat smaller ones which he set up in the living room and tilted by the fractional inch to get the best effects. .

By the end of that time he had made a number of interesting discoveries. He'd noted reflections of reflections before, especially on the stairs, and been amused by their oddity, but he'd never thought about them systematically and certainly never experimented with them. They turned out to be a fascinating little field of study—vest-pocket optics—a science in miniature.

Vest-pocket wasn't such a bad designation, because you had to stick your vest and yourself between the two mirrors in order to observe the phenomena. Though come to think of it, you ought to be able to do the same thing with a periscope held sideways, by that means introducing your vision between the mirrors without introducing yourself.

It might be worth trying.

But getting back to basics, when you stood between nearly parallel mirrors, looking at one, you saw first the direct reflection of your face, next the reflection of the back of your head is the mirror behind you; then, barely visible around those two, you saw the second reflection of your face, really Just an edge of hair and cheek and ear; then the second reflection of the back of your head, and so on. As the heads grew smaller, you saw more of each,

until the entire face became visible, quite tiny and dim.

This meant, for one thing, that the eighth reflection he'd seen the first midnight had really been the fifteenth, since he'd only counted reflections of his face, as far as he could remember, and between every two of those there was a reflection of the back of his head. Oh, this mirror world, he decided, was fascinating! Or worlds, rather—a series of shells around him, like the crystal globes of Ptolemaic astronomy in which the stars and planets 'were set, going out in theory to infinity, and in each shell himself staring at himself in the next shell.

The way the heads got tinier intrigued him. He measured the distance between the two mirrors on the stairs—eight feet almost to the inch—and calculated that the eighth reflection of his face was therefore 116 feet away, as if it were peering back at him from a little attic window down the street. He was almost tempted to go to the roof and scan with his binoculars for such windows.

. But since it was himself he was seeing, the eighth reflection was sizewise 232 feet away. He would have to scan for dwarfs. Most interesting!

It was delightful to think of all the different things his reflections could be doing, if each had the power to move around independently in the thin world of its crystal shell. Why, with all those shell-selves industriously occupied, Giles Nefandor could well become the world's most accomplished pianist, most knowledgeable field astronomer, sad highest ranking of all chess grandmasters. The thought almost revived his dead ambitions—hadn't Lasker won the 1924 New York international tournament at 561—while the charm of the speculation made him quite forget the menace of the black figure he'd now glimpsed three times.

Returning to reality somewhat reluctantly, he set himself to determine how many of his reflections he could see in practice rather than theory. He discovered that even with the best illumination, replacing all the dead bulbs in the wrought-iron chandelier, he could recognize at most only the ninth or perhaps the tenth reflection of his face. After that, his visage became a tiny indistinguishable ash-grey blank in the glass. -

In reaching this conclusion, he also found that it was very difficult to count the reflections accurately. One or more would tend to get lost, or he'd lose count somewhere along the line. It was easiest to count the gilt mirror

frames, since these stood in a close-packed row, like golden numeral ones—even though, for the tenth reflection of his face, say, this involved counting nineteen gilt ones, ten belonging to the mirror in front of him and nine to the mirror behind.

He wondered how he could have been so sure the first midnight that it was his eighth reflection which had shown the unpleasant alterations, and the seventh and sixth reflections on the two subsequent midnights. He decided that his shocked mind must have made a stabbing guess and that it very likely had been inaccurate—despite the instant uncertainty he'd felt. Next night he'd watch more carefully—and the fifth reflection would be easier to count.

He also discovered that although he could at most count ten reflections of his face, he could distinguish thirteen and perhaps fourteen reflections of a bright point of light—a pencil flashlight or even a candle-flame held close to his cheek. Those tiny candle-flames looked strangely like stars do in a cheap telescope. Odd.

He was eager to count more reflections than that—to break his record, as it were—and he even fetched his best

pair of binoculars and stared into the mirror with them, using for light-point an inch of brightly flaming candle affixed to the top of the right-hand binocular tube. But as he'd feared, this was no help at all, magnification fading out the more distant light-points to nothing, like using too powerful an eyepiece on a small telescope.

He thought of making and testing out a periscope—• candle attachment—but that seemed a touch over-elaborate. And in any case it was high time he got to bed—almost noon. He felt in remarkably good spirits—for the first time in years he had discovered a new thing in which to be interested. Reflectology mightn't be quite up to astronomy, musicology, or chess, but it was an elegant little science all the same. And the Mirror World was fascinating!—he looked forward excitedly to what he'd next see in it. If only the phenomena didn't stop!

It was perhaps his eagerness which got him between the Stairway mirrors next night several seconds before the clock began to strike twelve. His early- arrival, however, didn't inhibit the phenomena, as he suddenly feared might happen. They began on the clock's first twanging stroke and whatever may have happened on previous evenings, it was certainly the fifth reflection which was altered tonight. The figures were only about 70 feet away now, as

he'd earlier calculated, and so considerably larger. His fifth reflected face was pale as ever, yet he fancied its expression was changing—but because it had gone more than halfway into eclipse behind the massed heads in front of it, he couldn't be sure.

And the black figure definitely was wearing a veil, although he still couldn't make out the features behind it. Yes, a veil . . . and long black gloves, one of which sleekly cased the slender arm outstretched to his shoulder—for he suddenly realized that despite its height almost equal to his own, the figure was feminine.

A gust of fey hard to understand went through him at that discovery. As on the second night he wanted to strike out at the figure to prove its insubstantiality—smash the glass! But could that effect a figure 70 feet away? Would smashing the single glass in front of him smash all the nine panes he calculated still separated him from the figures in the Mirror World?

Perhaps it would—and then (the black figure in the Mirror World could come straight out at him . . . now, , In any case the veiled figure, if she continued her ap-

proach, would be with him in five more nights.

Perhaps smashing the glass now would simply end the horrifying, fascinating phenomena—foil the figure for good. But did he want to do that?

As he asked himself that last question, the twelfth stroke came and the Black Lady in the fifth reflection vanished.

The rest of the night, while he played Tchaikovsky and studied the chess games of Vera Menchik, Lisa Lane, and Mrs. Piatigorsky, searching for hidden depths in them, he reviewed the Lives and Loves of Giles Nefandor. He discovered that the women in his life had been few, and those with whom he had become seriously entangled, or to whom he had done possible injury, fewer still. The half dozen candidates were all, so far as he knew, happily married and/or otherwise successful. This of course included his divorced wife, although she had often complained of him and his "hobbies."

On the whole, though romanticizing women, he had tended to run away from them, he concluded wryly. Perhaps the Dark Lady was a generalized woman, emblematic of the entire sex, come to be revenged on him for his faint-heartedness. His smile grew wryer. Perhaps her

funeral costume was, anticipatorily, for him.

-He thought, oh the human infatuation with guilt and retribution! The dread of and perhaps the desire for punishment! How ready we are to think others hate 'us!

During this search of his memory, the dark seed stirred several times—he seemed to be forgetting some one woman. But the seed refused to come clear of its burial until the clock struck its twelfth stroke next midnight, when. Just as the now clearly feminine figure in the fourth reflection vanished, he spoke the name, "Nina Fasinera."

That brought the buried incident—or rather all of it but one crucial part—back to him at once. It came back with that tigerish rush with which memory-lost small incidents and encounters will—one moment nonexistent, the next recalled with almost dizzying suddenness.

It had happened all of ten years ago,, six years at least before his divorce, and he had only once met Miss Fasinera—a tall slender woman with black hair, bold hawklike features, slightly protruberant eyes, and rather narrow long mobile lips which the slim tip of her tongue was forever wetting. Her voice had been husky yet rapid and she

had moved with a nervous, pantherine grace, so that her heavy silk dress had hissed on her gaunt yet challenging figure.

Nina Fasnera had come to him, here at this house, on the pretext of asking his advice about starting a school of piano in a distant suburb across the city. She was an actress too, she had told him, but he had gathered she had not worked much in recent years—just as he had soon, been guessing that her age was not much less than his own, the Jet of her hair a dye, the taut smoothness of her facial skin astringents and an ivory foundation make-up, her youthful energy a product of will power—in short, that she was something of a fake (her knowledge of piano rudimentary, her acting a couple of seasons of summer stock and a few bit parts on Broadway), but a brave and gallant fake nonetheless.

Quite soon she had made it clear that she was somewhat more interested in him than in his advice and that she was ready—alert, on guard, dangerous, yet responsive—for any encounter with him, whether at a luncheon date a week in the future or here and now, on the instant

It had been, he recalled, as if a duelist had lightly yet briskly brushed his cheek and lips with a thin leather glove.

And yes, she had been wearing gloves, he remembered now of a sudden!—dark green ones edged with yellow, the same colours as her heavy silken dress.

He had been mightily attracted to her—strange how he had forgotten that taut nervous hour!—but he had just become re-reconciled with his wife for perhaps the dozenth time and there was about Nina Fasinera an avidity and a recklessness and especially an almost psychotic-seeming desperation which had frightened him or at least put him very much on guard. He recalled wondering if she took drugs.

So he had courteously yet most coolly and with infinite stubbornness refused all her challenges, which in the end had grown quite mocking, and he had shown her to the door and closed it on her.

And then the next day he had read in the paper of her suicide.

That was why he had forgotten the incident, he decided now—he had felt sharply guilty about it. Not that he thought that he possessed any fatal glamour, so that a woman would die at his rebuff, but that conceivably he

had represented Nina Fasinera's last cast of the dice with destiny and he, not consciously knowing what was at stake, had coldly told her, "You lose."

But there was something else he was forgetting—something about her death which his mind had suppressed even more tightly—he was certain of that. Glancing about uneasily, he stepped down onto the landing beneath the low-dipping chandelier and hurried down the rest of the stairs. He had just recalled that he had torn out the story of her death from a cheap tabloid and now he spent the rest of the night hunting for it among his haphazardly-filed papers. Toward dawn he discovered it, a ragged-edged browning thing tucked inside one of his additional copies of the Chopin nocturnes.

FORMER BROADWAY ACTRESS

DRESSES FOR OWN FUNERAL

Last night the glamorous Nina Fasinera, who was playing on Broadway as recently as three years ago, committed suicide by hanging, according to police Lieutenant Ben Davidow, in the room she rented at 1738 Waverly Place, Edgemont.

A purse with 87 cents in it lay on top of her dresser.

She left no note or diary, however, though police are still searching. Despondency was the probable cause of Miss

Fasinera's act, according to her landlady Elvira Winters,. Who discovered-the body at 3 A.M.

"She was a charming tenant, always the lady, and very beautiful," Mrs. Winters said, "but lately she'd seemed restless and unhappy. I'd let her get five weeks behind on her rent. Now who'll pay it?"

Before taking her life, the 39-year-old Miss Fasinera had dressed herself in a black silk cocktail gown with black accessories including a veil and long gloves. She had also pulled down the shades and turned on all the lights in the room. It was the glare of these lights through the transom which caused Mrs. Winters to enter the actress' small, high-ceilinged room by a-duplicate key when there was no answer to her knocking.

There she saw Miss Fasinera's body hanging by a short length of clothesline from the ceiling light-fixture. A chair lay overturned nearby. In its plastic seat-cover Lieutenant Davidow later found impressions which matched the actress' spike heels. Dr. Leonard Belstrom estimated she

had been dead for four hours when he examined the body at 4 A.M.

Mrs. Winters said, "She was hanging between the tall mirror on the closet door and the wide one on her dresser. She could almost have reached out and kicked them, if she could have kicked. I could see her in both of them, over and over, when I tried to lift her up, before I felt how cold she was. And then all those bright lights. It was horrible, but like the theatre."

When Giles Nefandor finished reading the clipping, he nodded twice and stood frowning. Then he got put maps of the city and suburbs and measured the straight-line distance from the rooming house in Edgemont to his own place across the city, then used the scales on the maps to convert his measurements to miles.

Eleven and a half, it came out, as nearly as the limits of accuracy would make it

Then he calculated the time that had elapsed since Nina Fasinera's death: ten years and one hundred and one days. From Mrs. Winters' statement, the distance between the mirrors between which she'd hanged herself had been about eight feet—the same distance as between the mir-

rors on his stairs. If she'd entered the Mirror World when
She died and been advancing toward this house as she'd
moved the last five nights—two reflections, or sixteen feet,
each time—then in ten years and one hundred and one
days she'd have traveled 60,058 feet.

That figured out to eleven miles and 1,978 feet

Eleven and a half miles, or close to it.

He puzzled, almost idly, as to why a person could
travel only such a short distance in the Mirror World each
twenty-four hours. It must depend on the distance between
the two mirrors of your departure and also on the two
mirrors of your arrival. Perhaps you travelled one reflec-
tion for each day and one for each night. Perhaps his
theory of shells like the Ptolemaic ones was true and in
any shell there was only one door and you had to search
to find it, as if you were traversing a maze, to find the
right two doors in the crystal maze in twenty-four hours
could be a most difficult task* And there roust be all sorts
of interlocking dimensions in the Mirror World—slow
paths and fast ones: if you travelled between mirrors set
on different stars, you might travel faster than light.

He wondered, again almost idly, why he had been
chosen for this visitation? and why of all women it should

have been Nina Fasinera who had had the strength and the will to thread purposefully the glassy labyrinth for ten years. He was not so much frightened as awed—that an hour's meeting should lead to all these consequences.

Could undying love grow in an hour? Or was it undying hate that had flowered? Had Nina Fasinera known about the Mirror World when she'd hanged herself?—he recalled now that one of the things she'd said lightly when she'd tried to storm his interest had been that she was a witch. And she would have known about the mirrors on his stairs matching those in her room—she'd seen them.

Next midnight when he saw the black figure in the third reflection, he instantly recognized Nina's pale gauntly lovely face behind the veil and wondered why he had not recognized it at least four nights before. Rather anxiously he glanced down toward her black-stockinged ankles, which were slender and unswollen, then quickly back to her face again. She was gazing at him gravely, perhaps with the ghost of a smile.

By now his own reflection was almost wholly eclipsed behind the ones in front of it. He could not even guess at his expression, nor did he want to. He had eyes only for Nina Fasinera. The impact of his years of unfeeling loneliness shook him. He realized how desperately he had been

wishing someone would search him out. The clock twanged on, swiftly marking time forever gone. Now he knew that he loved Nina Fasiner, had loved her since the one only hour they'd met. That was why he'd never stirred from this rotting house, why he'd prepared his mind, for the Mirror World with chess-squares and singing wires and the stars. Since the hour they'd met . . . Except for colour and the veil, her costume was the same she'd worn that fateful sixty minutes. If she*d only move, he thought, he*d faintly hear the hiss of the heavy silk through the five thick panes of glass remaining. If she'd only make-that smile more certain ...

The twelfth stroke twanged. This time he felt a terrible pang of loss as her figure vanished, but it was swiftly replaced with a feeling of surety and faith.

For the next three of his nocturnal days, Giles Nef-andor was happy and light-hearted. He played the piano music he loved best: Beethoven, Mozart, Chopin, Scriabin, Domenico Scarlatti. He played over the classic chess games of Nimzowitch, Alekhine, Capablanca, Emanuel Lasker, and Steinitz. He lovingly scanned his favourite celestial objects: the Beehive in Cancer, the Pleiades and Hyades, the Great Nebula in Orion's sword; he noticed new tele-

scopic constellations and thought he saw the faintest crystal paths ...

-Occasionally his thoughts strayed eagerly yet guiltily, as if to forbidden fruit, to the mazy crystal corridors of the Mirror World, that secret diamond universe, and to his thousand wonderings about it: endless rooms and halls ceilinged and floored by transparency, and all the curious mirror-lost folk who lived adrift in them; piercingly sweet music; games of glass; revels and routs at a thousand levels; the tinkling of a million glittering chandeliers; diamond pathways to the farthest stars—

But he would always check these thoughts. There would be time enough for them, he felt certain. Experienced reality is always more satisfactory than imagination and illusion.

And often he would think of Nina and of the strangeness of their relationship: two atoms marked by one encounter and now drawn together among all the trillions of trillions of like atoms in the universe. Did it take ten years for love to grow, or only ten seconds? Both. But he checked these thoughts too—and struck the keys, or moved the men, or re-focused the 'scope.

There were moments of doubt and fear. Nina might be the incarnation of hate, the jet-black spider in the crystal web. Certainly she was the unknown, though he felt he knew her so well. There had been those early intimations of psychosis, of a pantherine restlessness. And there had been that first glimpse of his face, sick with horror . . .

But they were moments only.

Before each of the three remaining midnights he dressed with unusual care: the black suit newly brushed, the white shirt fresh, the narrow black necktie carefully knotted. It pleased him to think that he had not had to change the colour of his suit to match that of her dress.

The first of the three midnights he was almost certain of her smile.

The next midnight he was sure of it. Now both figures were in the first reflection and he could see his own face again, scarce four feet away. He too was smiling gravely —the horror was gone.

Nina's black-gloved hand resting on his shoulder, the black fingertips touching his white collar, now seemed a lover's gesture.

The night after that the wind came back at last, blowing with more-and more violence, although there were no clouds, so that the stars flickered and streamed impossibly in his 'scopes. The gale seemed to fasten on and shake their beams like crystal stalks. The sky was granular with wind. He could -not remember such a blow. By eleven it had almost driven him from the roof, but he stuck it out although the wind increased in frenzy.

Instead of daunting, it filled him with a terrific excitement. He felt he could leap into the air and be blown light-swift anywhere he willed in the diamond-dazzling cosmos -except that he had another rendezvous.

When he finally went inside, shaking with the cold, and took off his fleece-lined coat, he became aware of a rhythmic crunching and crashing below, with rather long intervals between.

When he went down the stairs, they were dark and the crashes were louder. He realized that the great chandelier above the landing must be swinging so far that it was hitting the lead-webbed windows beyond, breaking their remaining panes—and had long since burst all the electric

globes it carried.

He felt his way down by the wall, keeping close to it to avoid the chandelier's murderous swings. His fingers touched absolute smoothness—glass. Then the glass rippled for an instant, tingling his fingers, and he heard husky irregular breathing and the hissing of heavy silk. Then slender arms were around him and a woman's slim body was pressed against his and hungry lips met his lips, first through a faintly astringent, dryish, tormenting tantalizing veil, then flesh to flesh. He could feel under his hands the ribbed smoothness of heavy silk and of pliant, lightly fleshed ribs under that.

All in utter darkness and pandemonium. Almost drowned in the latter, midnight's, last strokes were twanging.

A hand moved up his back and suede-cased fingers lightly brushed his neck. As the last strokes twanged, one of the fingers turned hard and stiff and cruel and dug under his collar so that it caught him like a hook by the collar and the tightly-knitted tie the collar covered. It wrenched him into the air. A terrible pain stabbed at the base of his skull, then filled it to bursting.

It was four days before the policeman who nightly patrolled beyond the gate discovered by a stab of his flashlight the body of Giles Nefandor—whom he knew by sight, though never a sight like this!—hanging from the wrought chandelier above the landing strewn with glassy-shards. It might have been longer than four days, except ;a chessplayer across the city, contesting a correspondence game with the well-known recluse, spurred the police into action when the move on his last postcard had gone ten days unanswered. His first queries were ignored, but an evening phone call got action.

The policeman reported back the unpleasant condition: of the body, the black, booked, wrought-iron chandelier-finger thrust under the noose of collar and tie, and the glass shards, and several other matters.

He never did report what he saw in one of the two mirrors on the stairs when he looked at it closely, his powerful flash beside his chest as his wristwatch signalled midnight. There was a stack of reflections of his own shocked, sharply shadowed face. But in the fourth reflection there were momentarily two figures, hand in hand, looking back toward him over their shoulders—and smiling impishly at him, he thought. The one figure was that of Giles Nefandor, though looking more youthful than he recalled

seeing him .in recent years. The other was that of a lady
in black, the upper half of her face veiled.

