

# **THE WHITE COLUMN**

Maxwell Grant

## Table of Contents

<u>THE WHITE COLUMN</u> .....	1
Maxwell Grant.....	1
<u>CHAPTER I. SKY RAIDERS</u> .....	1
<u>CHAPTER II. THE SECOND FLAME</u> .....	6
<u>CHAPTER III. PERFUMED DEATH</u> .....	12
<u>CHAPTER IV. INDIAN 16</u> .....	17
<u>CHAPTER V. TREASON</u> .....	22
<u>CHAPTER VI. HOUSE OF PERIL</u> .....	27
<u>CHAPTER VII. PREVIEW OF HELL</u> .....	32
<u>CHAPTER VIII. WHISTLING DEATH</u> .....	36
<u>CHAPTER IX. THE WHITE COLUMN</u> .....	41
<u>CHAPTER X. MOB RULE</u> .....	46
<u>CHAPTER XI. HOODED MENACE</u> .....	51
<u>CHAPTER XII. MURDER AT MIDNIGHT</u> .....	57
<u>CHAPTER XIII. BLACK WATER</u> .....	62
<u>CHAPTER XIV. SKY TRICKERY</u> .....	67
<u>CHAPTER XV. THE SUPREME THRILL</u> .....	72

# THE WHITE COLUMN

Maxwell Grant

This page copyright © 2001 Blackmask Online.

<http://www.blackmask.com>

- [CHAPTER I. SKY RAIDERS](#)
  - [CHAPTER II. THE SECOND FLAME](#)
  - [CHAPTER III. PERFUMED DEATH](#)
  - [CHAPTER IV. INDIAN 16](#)
  - [CHAPTER V. TREASON](#)
  - [CHAPTER VI. HOUSE OF PERIL](#)
  - [CHAPTER VII. PREVIEW OF HELL](#)
  - [CHAPTER VIII. WHISTLING DEATH](#)
  - [CHAPTER IX. THE WHITE COLUMN](#)
  - [CHAPTER X. MOB RULE](#)
  - [CHAPTER XI. HOODED MENACE](#)
  - [CHAPTER XII. MURDER AT MIDNIGHT](#)
  - [CHAPTER XIII. BLACK WATER](#)
  - [CHAPTER XIV. SKY TRICKERY](#)
  - [CHAPTER XV. THE SUPREME THRILL](#)
- 

## CHAPTER I. SKY RAIDERS

IT was snowing heavily in the Adirondacks. The storm had started at dusk. It was now long past midnight.

A worse night for flying could scarcely be imagined. Millions of wind-tossed snowflakes clouded the darkness like a dense, milky veil. Every commercial and private airplane along the eastern seaboard had been grounded long before darkness had set in, by a warning from the weather bureau.

But one plane had ignored the warning.

It was a transport plane with an enormous wingspread. Twin motors enabled it to ride through the storm with ease. But it was not behaving normally. It was flying at a dangerously low height. Its course was queer, too. It was describing a giant circle over a desolate section of the Adirondacks.

There was no airfield within miles of the spot. The transport was in no difficulties, so that a forced landing was not necessary. A forced landing, in fact, would have been suicidal. The pilots were well aware of this. They had no intention of nosing their big ship earthward.

There were two pilots. One handled the controls. The other was examining the contour of the hills below through powerful night glasses. He was looking for a landmark he had never seen before. But that lack of experience didn't bother him. For days, he had studied an accurate map of this hilly region. Every contour below was an accurate picture in his army-trained memory.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

Suddenly, he rasped a guttural word to the pilot at the controls. Below the big transport, a shaggy hill whizzed briefly into view and was gone. The plane narrowed its circle. The snow-covered hill swam back into sight.

The man with the glasses opened a sliding door and peered into the transport's cabin. There were five men in that cabin. None of them occupied seats. They sat in a row on the floor, one man behind another.

They didn't look human. All of them were helmeted and goggled. All wore bulky ski suits, tucked into thick, hob-nailed shoes. Warm gloves covered their hands. Each was equipped with a parachute pack and a stout knapsack.

Their goggled eyes watched the man who peered back at them. They knew what was coming. They were ready.

Suddenly, a signal was given. A startling thing happened. Only four men remained seated on the cabin floor of the plane. The first man had vanished.

He had dropped into space through an open trapdoor!

He was well used to an air jump from a dangerously low height. It was part of his army training. As his falling body cleared the ship, his parachute opened almost instantly. He began to drift earthward under the billowing silk of his 'chute.

The man who had given the signal saw nothing of what happened to the first man. He was staring grimly at his watch. Again his hand waved. A hole yawned beneath the crouched figure of the second parachute soldier. He vanished. Then the remaining three dropped in succession.

The transport plane ceased its slow circling. It headed backward in the direction from which it had come – a route that would bring it in a swift line to the Atlantic seaboard. Its job was done.

But the job of the five parachute jumpers was just beginning.

THE leader of the five landed with a jarring impact on the slope of the hill. Snow flew upward like a small geyser. Weighted with his equipment, he struck hard enough to knock the breath out of him. But he recovered quickly. Like his four comrades, he had been trained and toughened for this dangerous assignment.

He floundered through the snow to a clearing that faced the valley below. Driving white flakes made it impossible to see for more than a few yards. But the sky raider was prepared for that, too.

He had divested himself of his parachute and dragged it after him. He bunched it into an unwieldy pile and reached into his pack. He scattered a reddish powder all over the 'chute. Then he struck a match and touched it off.

Flame leaped high for a few moments. It was not an ordinary flame. Its hue was blood-red. The chemical powder that produced the color had come from the war laboratory of a foreign nation. Traitorous eyes, watching from the valley below, would be able to see that flame for a long distance.

It burned out quickly. The parachute dissolved into thin ash, which the wind blew away. Strapped to the side of the air-raider's pack were a pair of collapsible snowshoes. He adjusted them and buckled them on.

He waited.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

One by one, his four comrades joined him, sliding along on snowshoes. Their parachutes, too, had been burned. But not with the aid of the reddish powder. The five men drew guns. They stood back-to-back, in a circle of grim defense.

The leader's goggled eyes watched the snow-blurred valley.

Suddenly, he saw an answering glare of red. It glowed briefly, then it vanished. The leader of the goggled and helmeted invaders growled a brief command.

He led the way down the slope of the hill, toward a valley road that skirted its base. The quintet of air invaders began to follow the road, sliding swiftly along on snowshoes with machinelike precision.

But before they had gone very far, they encountered an obstacle not included in their plans. Two men floundered into view from a wooded thicket. They were hunters who had been trapped by the storm. They staggered with exhaustion.

The sight of the five men brought a faint shout of joy from them.

But their joy was short-lived. Goggled eyes stared. Four of the invaders clutched at small glass spheres about the size of a walnut.

The four waited silently for an order from their leader.

It came swiftly.

Glass pellets were hurled at the faces of the two hunters who had accidentally found out something that no American eyes were to be permitted to behold. The fragile glass shattered. Liquid splashed on terrified faces.

From the dripping liquid rose a pleasant, flowerlike perfume. It penetrated the nostrils and mouths of the gasping victims.

Its effect was deadly. For a moment, the two hunters stiffened, their clawing hands at their throats. Then they pitched headlong to the snow-covered road. The leader of the parachute men waited. It was dangerous to approach the bodies too soon. The gas that had killed them was potent even in the open air of the valley road.

Presently, an order was given.

Two of the invaders produced collapsible tools from their packs. Handles were fitted into the sockets of a pick and shovel. The two parachute men disappeared behind a snow-whitened screen of bushes.

Two more picked up the corpses and carried them into the thicket. The leader followed. He carried in his hand a copper-colored metal can. It looked like a sort of can in which beer is sold. But it was slightly larger than that. It had a silver tip, like the nipple on a baby's feeding bottle. The leader unscrewed the silver tip. Under it was a projecting bit of glass.

The men with the pick and shovel completed their grisly job hastily. The bodies of the two hunters were rolled into a shallow pit. The leader of the parachute men broke the glass tip of his copper-colored can. He poured a thick amber liquid over the bodies in the grave.

Then he lighted a match and tossed it.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

Flames crawled instantly. They were like green-and-yellow serpents over the clothing and the flesh of the dead victims. None of those tongues of flame spouted more than an inch or two high. But their effect was horrible.

Intense heat was generated. Snow all around the grave began to melt. In the center of the shallow grave the bodies of the two hunters dissolved!

Flesh vanished. Bones were consumed. The flame liquid was a well-guarded secret of a foreign power overseas. It had never yet been used in war. It was being held in reserve as a prelude to the conquest of the world.

The guttural laughter of the helmeted invaders testified to the power of that deadly agency of destruction, as they peered into what was now an empty pit in the snowy ground.

No sign remained of clothing, of flesh or bone. All that was left was a reddish hue in the scorched earth. It looked like streaks of red clay.

The grave was filled. Snowflakes began to cover the spot. The snow-shoed invaders shuffled back to the valley road.

Presently, the road branched. A narrow private lane led through snow-covered pines and balsams to what was evidently a private estate. There was a sign at the entrance to the lane. The leader of the sky invaders brushed off the thick covering of snow with his gloved hand.

The sign announced that the land beyond the highway was private property. It was owned by Henry Norman.

Norman was one of America's biggest industrial leaders. He was many times a millionaire. He owned the Norman Repeating Arms Co. His factories supplied the United States army with a large part of the rifles and ammunition needed by America, in its gigantic rearmament program, to make itself strong in the face of foreign peril.

Henry Norman had bought this isolated estate in the Adirondacks as a deer-hunting preserve for himself and his friends. He had built here what he called a "rustic hunting lodge." It was more like a Park Avenue mansion than a cabin. Wealthy friends of the arms manufacturer came on invitation to "rough it."

The parachute spies snowshoed up the lane toward the lodge. It was from this spot that a red flare had glowed briefly in reply to the signal from the mountain. The spies were expected here.

The lodge door was not locked. The five invaders entered, after removing their clogged snowshoes.

The living room was brilliantly lighted, but there was no one present to greet the invaders.

It was a gorgeous room. Foreign eyes bulged with astonishment at its magnificence. Costly rugs covered the floor. On the walls were paintings that had been brought by Henry Norman from the most famous museums in Europe. A log fire crackled comfortably in a fireplace. Over the fireplace, the mantel was a solid piece of teakwood.

A map of the United States covered a section of the wall.

The invaders were more interested in the map than in any object in the room. Guttural sounds came from their lips. They clustered in front of the map, like flies gathered near a cube of sugar. America was, indeed, a

## THE WHITE COLUMN

rich lump of sugar for a hungry warlord overseas. Three-quarters of the world's gold was held in America. Oil, coal, steel, iron! Factories, belching smoke from a million chimneys! America, alarmed at aggression, was arming herself for defense.

That defense must be broken, was the thought of the foreign invaders.

No sound indicated the entrance into the room of the host of these five enemies of America who had dropped from the sky. But there were six men in the room, now. The spies saw their unknown American leader when they turned away from the wall.

The man was garbed in a heavy ski suit, like his guests. Gloves were on his hands. But he wore neither helmet nor aviation goggles. A hooded mask covered his entire skull. Glittering eyes peered through narrow slits in his mask.

"Welcome!" he said in a muffled tone.

There was delight in that snarled word. When the time came that America lay crushed and helpless, this man would control the destinies of the country. There would be only one man on earth higher than himself. That was the All High overseas, who had sent these five men dropping from the sky to cripple the rearmament efforts of a free America and soften her up for invasion by land, sea and air.

"ARE you alone here?" asked the leader of the parachute men.

"No. Two servants. Both are tied up and gagged in the cellar. One of them saw me light the flare, in answer to your signal."

There was a grunt, then a harsh command. The ugly routine that had taken place on the mountain slope was repeated. Three men went tramping down to the cellar. Two of them carried a pick and a shovel. The third carried a small copper-colored can with a silver tip.

They were gone quite a while. When they returned, they saluted and said nothing. Words were unnecessary.

The masked host of these ruthless killers finally spoke.

"Everything is ready. American aviation will feel our strength first. You have come here to receive definite orders where to go. Let me show you on the map."

He strode toward the wall. Eager enemies of America crowded close behind him. The masked traitor stuck a pin in that map. He stuck it into the dot of a town located in a middle-western State.

"Oakmont," he said.

The name was repeated in guttural chorus.

"In this town is located the heart of America's aviation defense. Here were built the factories that are now turning out the means to make America too strong in the air for a successful attack against her."

His voice growled harshly.

"Airplanes, with new liquid-cooled engines better than any possessed abroad. A secret bomb sight that makes it possible to hit a target as big as a barrel from a height of 20,000 feet. Machine guns and light

## THE WHITE COLUMN

cannons to arm those monster planes. Oil, piped from distant fields and refined in the Oakmont area as high-octane gasoline!"

The masked man withdrew the pin from the map.

"You will go at once to Oakmont. You know the man with whom you will co-operate there?"

"We do."

"Excellent!"

From a tall cabinet in the living room, the masked traitor to his native land produced six wine glasses. He filled them and passed them around.

"Death to democracy!" he toasted.

The toast was drunk. The empty glasses were snapped, and flung into the fireplace where they shattered to pieces. The parachute invaders of America left the room. The masked man alone remained, chuckling as he stared at the map.

He knew that his henchmen were changing their attire. They would be no longer soldiers, but civilians. Fifth Columnists!

All of them spoke perfect English. All had been trained for months for the specialized tasks that awaited them in Oakmont. A horse-drawn sleigh was waiting outside the rear door of the lonely lodge. The sleigh would take five ruthless enemies of America over snow-covered road to a railroad station.

Fifth Columnists had secretly invaded a free country. Their presence was unknown. How could police, the F.B.I. – any of America's defense agencies deal with this invisible threat?

Only one man in America was strong enough to take up this challenge to a nation.

The Shadow!

## CHAPTER II. THE SECOND FLAME

THE room in New York was shrouded in darkness.

Not a sound was audible. Not even a current of air moved. A human eye could have stared indefinitely into that velvet blackness without being able to say positively that the room contained a human being. But a human being was there.

The Shadow was in his sanctum!

Sibilant laughter hissed through the darkness. The laughter died into silence. Then suddenly a blue light glowed from a hanging covered globe overhead, and threw an oval of brilliance on the surface of a polished desk.

The hands of The Shadow rested in that pool of brilliance. Part of his face was visible. His hawklike features betokened strength and power. Thin lips were curved slightly in an ominous smile. The Shadow was examining interesting material.



## THE WHITE COLUMN

His tapering fingers had drawn two small packets of news clippings into the brilliant oval of light. One was a collection clipped from various newspapers published in upper New York State. The other items had appeared in the morning and evening papers of a middle–western town.

The Shadow read the latter clippings first. They dealt with the strange madness and death of a workman in the town of Oakmont.

The man was a trusted foreman in a government rearmament factory. The plant was jointly owned by two wealthy industrialists named Peter Kirk and Ralph Jackson. Originally, agricultural implements had been manufactured there. But the United States government had taken over the factory as part of its preparedness program at the threat of war abroad. The factory now produced one of the most vital weapons of national defense. From it came thousands of the new airplane bomb sights that had revolutionized the art of aerial attack in warfare.

The dead workman about whom The Shadow now read had long been a trusted employee of Kirk and Jackson. In his charge was the machinery which turned out the most delicate mechanism of the secret bomb sight. He was at his post of duty when his sudden attack of madness occurred.

Workmen closest to him had no warning of trouble, until he suddenly screamed with crazy laughter. He darted at his helper and smashed out his brains with a murderous blow of a heavy wrench. Then he flung himself at the delicate bomb–sight machine and began to demolish it with wild blows of the wrench.

Luckily, he was stopped before he could do fatal damage. There were guards stationed in the war plant. They rushed at the demented foreman. Other workmen aided the guards. The foreman was seized.

He fought fiercely and broke away. A blow of his fist knocked down one of his captors. He seized a pistol and tried to flee. Two men died before they could get out of his path. Others were wounded. Then the guns of other guards ended the slaughter. The foreman fell, pierced by bullets.

Insanity seemed the only explanation. The foreman's record had been excellent. He was a native, patriotic American. His son was a soldier in the United States army. There was no reason to suspect sabotage behind this strange outbreak.

The Shadow examined the second packet of clippings, from upper New York State.

THE story those clippings told was more vague than the account of the outrage in Oakmont. It dealt with mysterious rumors and happenings in the Adirondack region. People had reported hearing the buzzing of an airplane motor during a night snowstorm. A strange red glow had been seen on a hill long past midnight. Two local hunters had disappeared that same night.

The Shadow's sibilant laughter hissed as he considered more facts.

Every plane in the East had been grounded that night by the snowstorm. The Shadow had checked up on both commercial and privately–owned ships. All had been accounted for. No plane smaller than a transport would have dared to fight that snowstorm. Where had it come from? Where had it vanished?

The Shadow decided that these two unrelated events – the Oakmont affair and the mystery in the Adirondacks – were equally important. There was a strong possibility that the activity of Fifth Columnists might be in back of one or both. The Shadow faced a dilemma. Which of the two should be investigated first?

He chose the Adirondack mystery for his initial move.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

There was a simple reason for this. In the valley, not far from the hill where a strange signal light had flared briefly after midnight, was the luxurious hunting lodge of Henry Norman. Norman used this cabin for winter sports. Wealthy friends of his had been often invited there.

Lamont Cranston had refused an invitation only two weeks earlier. Social engagements in New York had forced him to decline. Now The Shadow intended Cranston to accept – and to accept promptly by wire, without giving Norman a chance to refuse.

For Lamont Cranston was an identity of The Shadow!

The newspaper clippings vanished from the bright oval of light on The Shadow's desk. The light winked abruptly out. The sanctum was shrouded in darkness. Through that darkness The Shadow vanished without sound –

Two hours later, a telegram was dispatched to Henry Norman. It told him that Lamont Cranston had reconsidered his earlier refusal and was now on his way for a weekend of winter sport.

There was no chance for Henry Norman to advise Cranston that this particular time might be inconvenient. Long before the telegram was sent, The Shadow was speeding upstate by swift train. He had already changed to a branch line that connected with the sparsely-settled valley in the Adirondacks where Norman's hunting lodge was located.

LAMONT CRANSTON arrived at the lodge in a hired sleigh just as dusk was changing to darkness. His greeting was friendly. So was Henry Norman's. But there was dismay in back of the millionaire industrialist's smiling eyes.

He was a tall man, with powerful shoulders. Power was his keynote. Power and ambition. He had risen from poverty by a series of ruthless deals that had brought him wealth and leadership in the arms industry. The threat of war from abroad had increased Norman's power. He not only owned the enormously important Norman Repeating Arms Co., but he had also been appointed to the president's aviation rearmament board.

A Norman plant had been erected in the defense zone of Oakmont in the middle west. It was turning out machine-gun ammunition to be used in the new pursuit planes and bombers destined to cloud the skies over America.

The Shadow wondered grimly about Norman's lust for power, as he listened to the millionaire's deep voice. How far did Norman's secret ambitions reach?

"I wish you had given me time to countermand that telegram of yours," Norman murmured. "A later time would have been more pleasant for both of us. Things are rather awkward here, right now. Perhaps you won't want to stay, after I explain."

His explanation was prosaic: Servant trouble.

"I brought Giles and Thomas up here with me. They didn't like the solitude. Last night, both of them quit. They demanded to be sent back to New York. There was nothing I could do. So I drove them by sleigh to the railhead, and now they're gone."

"You mean you have no servants here at all?"

## THE WHITE COLUMN

"Not exactly. I have three – local men whom I had to pick up in a hurry. They're not well trained. I really hate to subject you to annoyance."

Cranston noticed a quick upward glance that Norman unconsciously made while he talked. Both men were standing outside the door in the open, where the driver of the sleigh that had brought Cranston waited. Norman's glance went toward the snowy roof of the hunting lodge. There was a metal rod on the peak of the roof, that looked like a small lightning rod.

Norman was unaware that The Shadow had noticed the direction of his upward gaze. He shrugged, and Lamont Cranston followed him indoors to a luxurious living room with a vast fireplace.

Norman became more genial. There were drinks, followed by a perfectly cooked and served meal. The three new servants seemed excellent substitutes for the two missing ones. They didn't utter a word unless spoken to. The Shadow insisted on complimenting all three of them at various times during the evening. He was anxious to hear the manner in which they replied.

They spoke very precise English. They sounded like men who had learned the language in a university, rather than by birth. There was a slight foreign intonation to everything they said.

Yet Henry Norman had declared these three servants were Americans whom he had hired in a nearby town. Was Norman a victim of intrigue, or was he deliberately lying?

The Shadow decided to seek an answer to that question after everyone in the lodge was asleep.

He was particularly interested in two items his keen eyes had noted before he went upstairs to his room. One was the upright metal rod on the roof. The other was a glint of broken glass below the roaring log flames in the fireplace.

It was well past midnight when the door of Lamont Cranston's bedroom opened softly. The Shadow emerged. He was robed in black. The upturned collar of his cloak, the tilted brim of his slouch hat, hid most of his face except the watchful gleam of his eyes. He crept noiselessly down the broad staircase to the living room.

The embers in the fireplace had almost burned out. The Shadow had substituted heavier gloves for the black ones he usually wore. He poked with swift urgency among the hot ashes, and was rewarded by an interesting find. He discovered not one broken piece of glass, but many! Some of the pieces were thin stems. There were six like that. The Shadow divined that six men had drunk a toast here at some very recent date. They had then hurled the empty wine glasses into the fireplace.

The glasses must have been fragile and very expensive. They were the most delicate type of crystal. In the home of Lamont Cranston there was glassware similar to this. Only a man of means could afford so costly a set.

Noiselessly, The Shadow glided toward a corner of the living room. He examined a tall cabinet that stood there. On an upper shelf he found six glasses similar to the smashed ones he had uncovered in the ashes of the fireplace. Empty spots on the shelf showed where the missing half dozen had stood.

Who were the six unknown men who had drunk a toast before the fireplace? And what was the meaning of that glass-breaking ceremony?

The Shadow sought an answer above the mantelpiece of teakwood that spanned the fireplace. There was a large map on the wall there, a map of the United States. It seemed out of place as a wall decoration. All the

## THE WHITE COLUMN

other decorations were sporting items. Snowshoes, rifles, bows and arrows, the mounted heads of deer and elk, made a more normal appearance on the walls of a hunting lodge.

The Shadow examined the map closely.

There was a small stain on the lower edge – a wine stain. Someone had leaned a hand carelessly, while he had pointed out some spot on the map to the other five men with whom he had drunk the toast. The spot was not easily discoverable to an ordinary eye, but The Shadow soon located what he was searching for.

A pin had been stuck briefly into a town. The pin had been withdrawn, but it had left a tiny perforation on the glazed paper of the map. The tiny indentation did not escape The Shadow's eyes. Nor did the name of the town itself.

Oakmont! Heart of the Midwest territory where the government's airplane rearmament program was in progress! Where a workman in a bomb-sight factory had gone suddenly crazy and attempted to wreck delicate machinery useful in the nation's defense.

Was there a sinister connection between a secret toast drunk by six men in the Adirondacks and that queer happening out West? The Shadow had no time to ponder about the meaning of the clues he had found. With a sudden bound, he darted away from the fireplace.

His quick withdrawal made no sound on the soft rug. The black cloak shielded him from sight as he faded quietly into a dim recess at the room's corner. Scarcely breathing, he watched the hall doorway. From that hall had come a faint creak that had warned The Shadow.

Someone was stealthily approaching the living room!

A moment later, The Shadow saw a figure, faintly illuminated by the dim hall light behind it. The man was tall, as tall as Henry Norman or any of Norman's three huskily-built servants. But it was impossible to determine the identity of the intruder.

He was wearing a mask that fitted entirely over his face and skull, like a cloth helmet. His hands were gloved. He wore a heavy jacket and bulky ski pants. His shoes, however, didn't match the rest of his costume. Instead of hob-nailed boots, the masked man was wearing thin-soled slippers. They made no sound as he cautiously advanced into the darkness of the living room.

As though drawn by malevolent fate, he tiptoed close to the dark recess in the corner where The Shadow waited.

The Shadow wanted no fight with this masked figure. A premature battle might ruin the entire success of The Shadow's subsequent investigations. The Shadow had barely scratched the surface of what he now believed was a Fifth Column plot against the security of the United States.

The masked man wasn't sure that there was anyone hidden in the dark living room. Suspicion alone had drawn him here on this midnight prowl. The Shadow intended to keep that vague suspicion from becoming knowledge.

His gloved hand emerged from under his black robe. There was a .45 cartridge in it. It was part of the extra ammunition for the twin .45's The Shadow always carried. Hidden in the shallow recess where he crouched, The Shadow estimated the distance between his hiding place and the two doors that gave access to the living room.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

One was the corridor doorway through which the masked intruder had glided. The other was an opening that led to a smaller room. The Shadow threw his palmed cartridge through this second door. It landed with a faint thump on the rug of the adjoining chamber.

Like a jungle cat, the masked man whirled. A swift leap carried him through the curtained doorway. A gun gleamed in his fist.

It took him only a few seconds to realize that no human being was in the tiny sitting room. He decided that his strained hearing had tricked him. Those few seconds made up the precious margin that The Shadow needed. He was already a black patch on the corridor staircase, returning swiftly to his bedroom above. He moved as soundlessly as if he trod on air. In an instant, his bedroom door was locked on the inside. The disguise of The Shadow was swiftly peeled off.

Lamont Cranston was revealed. He was dressed only in pajamas. He got into bed and drew the covers upward. He rumbled the sheets and the pillow, in case shrewd eyes might try to determine how long that bed had been slept in.

The Shadow expected a prompt visitor.

His guess was justified barely two minutes later. A hand tried the knob, then knuckles rapped on the panel outside.

The Shadow replied sleepily. He went in bare feet to the door and unlocked it. The man outside was one of Henry Norman's three servants. His sharp glance studied the sleepy appearance of Lamont Cranston.

"Sorry to disturb you, sir. I thought I heard you ring."

"You must have been dreaming," Cranston smiled. "I've been asleep for the past two hours."

"Excuse me, sir."

He departed with the quiet humility of a well-trained servant.

Again, Lamont Cranston became the black-cloaked figure of The Shadow.

A PERILOUS trip downstairs was still necessary. When The Shadow finally made it, the house was as quiet as a tomb. The Shadow glided swiftly to the little chamber into which he had thrown his .45 cartridge. He estimated the exact spot beyond the doorway at which the missile must have fallen. He found it where it had rolled out of sight. It was under the squat bottom of a heavy chair.

The masked man hadn't located that bit of evidence. Unable to remember exactly the nature of the sound he had heard, he had decided that his suspicious ears had tricked him. A shutter was banging outside the window in the night wind. The masked man had concluded that the shutter was the source of the thud which had so alarmed him on his midnight prowl.

The Shadow retreated with the only object that might have betrayed his presence downstairs. But his activity was far from ended. It was just beginning. Presently, the window of Lamont Cranston's bedroom lifted softly. The Shadow squirmed out on the sill. His questing arms lifted above his head. Fingers clutched at the dark overhang of the roof.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

He chinned himself slowly aloft, careful not to make the slightest sound. He crawled silently up the slant of the roof toward the ridgepole. It was on the ridgepole that a queer metal rod projected vertically. A rod in whose purpose The Shadow was grimly interested.

He noticed a clamp on it, that suggested the existence of something that had topped the rod – something that had since been removed. The upper end of the rod was tinged a queer reddish color. It was flaky as if flame might have burned it.

Flame! A red glow that had been seen briefly during a snowstorm on a nearby mountain? Had there been an answering red light here, on the roof of Henry Norman's lodge?

Laughter whispered sibilantly from The Shadow's lips. The object that had been clamped to the top of that metal rod must have been a metal cup. Flame had burned in that cup. It was intense enough to have badly corroded the steel rod below. A red flame!

To The Shadow's brain, the color of the flame had grim significance. The mountain was distant. The air on that earlier night had been thick with falling snow. An ordinary light would never be seen through such a milky veil. But a red light, fed by chemicals – a light that produced infra-red rays as well – could have been easily distinguished.

The twin exchange of signals on a night when a plane had been heard circling over the mountain, now made ugly truth in The Shadow's mind. Five men had descended from that mystery plane by parachute. They had headed straight for Norman's lodge. There, they had drunk a toast with a sixth man concerning the middle-western town of Oakmont.

Quietly, The Shadow crawled down the steep roof. He lowered himself to the sill of his bedroom window.

### **CHAPTER III. PERFUMED DEATH**

AS soon as The Shadow reached the privacy of his top-floor bedroom, he listened. The only sound he could hear was the dreary whine of the north wind over the eaves of the roof.

Swiftly, The Shadow began to prepare for an expedition into the cold outdoors.

He had brought with him to Norman's lodge a complete kit of sporting equipment. The kit included both snowshoes and skis. The Shadow chose skis. With the light, greased runners strapped to his feet, The Shadow could make a swift foray over the surface of the snow.

He dropped the skis out the window and lowered himself quietly to the ground by a knotted rope. He headed toward the mountain where the mysterious red flare had been reported.

The mountain was not a high one. It was one of the foothills of the Adirondacks. The Shadow reached the top after a half hour of skillful work among the snow-crusted trees. The fact that the hill was so wooded gave him a clue to the spot where the red light must have been burned. There was only one clearing that overlooked the valley in the direction of Norman's hunting lodge. It was here that five men from the air had lighted their signal.

The Shadow, however, was unable to find any trace of a clue.

He began to retrace his way toward the valley road. Soon, he found hints that he was on the right trail. Twigs were broken off from some of the low-bending branches of trees. Bushes had been thrust aside, and the

## THE WHITE COLUMN

weight of the snow had prevented them from springing upright again. The Shadow followed the spoor of five men with the same skill he had used many times in the past, when on the trail of master criminals.

He began to move along the valley road and had gone only a short distance, when he stopped. This time, he headed for the opposite slope. He vanished behind a snow-crusted clump of bushes whose contour suggested they had been disturbed fairly recently.

Behind the bushes the snow level was slightly lower than the surrounding surface. A faint depression was noticeable. The Shadow worked grimly to clear away the snow at this spot.

When he succeed, his eyes gleamed with triumph. The earth below had been disturbed. A pick and shovel had been used. The loosened earth was still unfrozen. A strange man-made heat of some kind obviously accounted for this queer softness.

The Shadow was able to remove the soft earth without too much trouble. A shallow pit was disclosed. The Shadow expected to find buried here the two bodies of the missing hunters.

To his astonishment, the grave was empty

A closer scrutiny of the bottom of the shallow pit increased The Shadow's astonishment. It was streaked with a queer reddish color. It looked like clay, but it wasn't. The Shadow knew that red clay didn't occur naturally in this part of the country.

The earth had been scorched by flame!

The Shadow had no time to ponder this ugly mystery. Something whizzed suddenly past his head like the buzz of a hornet. At the same instant, the echoing crack of a rifle sounded.

Another bullet flew by as The Shadow flung himself flat to the snow. He rolled over and over in a desperate effort to escape the aim of that unseen marksman.

THE SHADOW now gave the appearance of a man wild with terror.

It was only the appearance of fear, however. The Shadow's brain was as cold as the snow over which he fled. A gun battle was the last thing he desired. By deception, he hoped to take his unknown enemy alive. Dead men couldn't answer questions. Living men could.

The rifle cracked again. The armed assailant was moving in, eager for an easy kill of a man he believed was unarmed. At the roar of the third shot, The Shadow shouted. Both arms flung upward over his head. He fell heavily backward.

He was standing at the lip of a small declivity. His plunge carried him out of sight. The man with the rifle darted forward. He came sliding down to where The Shadow lay in a crumpled heap. The muzzle of his gun jammed close to the head of his inert victim.

But before his finger could pull a trigger, there was another shout.

This time, it was uttered by the would-be murderer. The Shadow had moved with the speed of a cobra. His hand wrenched the gun barrel away. With a bound, he was on his feet in the snow.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

It was like tackling a wildcat. The man fought with the fury of a maniac. He was lithe and powerful, he knew every trick of battle. He had obviously been trained for hand-to-hand encounters. And the rifle was still secure in his grip. He reversed it, swung the butt like a club. Twice, a desperate duck of The Shadow's head kept his skull from being smashed in like an eggshell. His only hope was to crowd close and prevent his foe from making use of the rifle as either club or gun. They fought like cavemen, instinctively smashing at each other in an effort to get in a quick disabling blow.

The Shadow scored first. There was a howl from his antagonist. The rifle flew through the air from pain-loosened fingers. It was man-to-man, now. Bare hands!

The Shadow tore sinewy fingers from his throat. The two men stumbled back to the top of the declivity during that wild struggle for possession of the rifle. A swift whirl forced The Shadow's foe to the edge of the slope. The Shadow broke the hold of his enemy with a thrust of his foot. Then his fist landed with smashing impact.

Backward plunged the killer. He pitched headlong down the snowy slope like a crazy cartwheel. He was upside down when he struck the bottom. His flying legs stiffened and keeled over. He lay in an inert huddle.

Panting, The Shadow descended. He had knocked the killer unconscious. As soon as the man recovered his senses, The Shadow would force him to reveal who he was and who hired him.

It was a vain hope. The Shadow realized it as soon as he saw the position of the inert head alongside the boulder where the man had struck. The head was bent almost double under the rifleman's shoulders.

The man's neck was broken. He had died instantly.

A quick search of the body's clothing was valueless. All the pockets were empty. There wasn't even a tailor's label.

But his face was familiar to The Shadow. He was one of the three "new servants" whom Henry Norman had hired after his two regular servants had become fed up with the country and had left for New York.

THE SHADOW didn't waste time in futile thought. Like a black wraith, he regained the deserted streak of the valley road. His skis were again on his feet. He slid swiftly back to the hunting lodge of Henry Norman.

Quickly, he climbed the knotted rope which he had left dangling from the upper window. His skis went aloft with him, strapped to his back. Once inside his warm room, he became an inferno of silent energy. The skis were dried and polished. They were replaced in the spot they normally occupied in the sport luggage of Lamont Cranston. The Shadow closed and locked the window. He began swiftly to undress.

Before he could finish his task, he stiffened. A faint sound was audible from the top-floor corridor outside the locked door of his room. It sounded like the creak of a floor board. It was not repeated.

Not waiting to listen for it again, he finished undressing and donned his pajamas. Once more, he slid into bed in the sleepy guise of Lamont Cranston.

He wasn't bothered. No one came near his door. No one retreated down the unseen hall toward the staircase. The silence was ominous. The Shadow gave up all thought of sleep. He had an uncanny sense of unseen peril swirling all around him.



## THE WHITE COLUMN

Toward dawn, his alert senses again heard a faint creak from the corridor. This time, the sound was repeated. Someone was tiptoeing along the hall toward the locked door of Lamont Cranston's room.

For ten minutes, The Shadow lay quietly in bed, watching the dark door and the transom above it. It was one of the few doors, on the top floor, equipped with a transom. Henry Norman had insisted that Lamont Cranston should occupy this particular room.

The transom was now slowly opening. It didn't move more than an inch or two, nor did it make the slightest noise. The pivots on which it revolved had evidently been oiled.

No face showed in the dimness of the transom opening. Instead, a hand appeared. The hand was clenched. It opened and something dropped to the floor. There was a faint tinkle of fragile glass breaking. Then the hand withdrew.

A strange and lovely odor was perceptible in the closed room. The perfume of flowers! It became stronger and more pleasant as the gas released from the glass pellet swirled closer to the bed which The Shadow had just quitted.

It was the odor of death!

The Shadow realized this the instant he drew in a cautious breath. He could feel a hideous sensation in his nostrils and throat. He reeled and almost fell. But he didn't lose his senses or his knowledge that he was at the edge of death.

He fought his way soundlessly in bare feet to the locked window. Feebly, he tried to reach the lock and lift the sash. He was unable to do so. The tiny whiff of poison gas he had inhaled had drained him of strength. He was barely able to stand on his feet. The dark room was whirling before his sight, becoming rapidly black.

He realized he was collapsing into a coma!

With his last conscious act of will power, The Shadow placed his hand against a cold pane of glass of the many-paned window. With eyes glazing, he had noticed the putty holding in this particular pane was dried out, rotten. With all the firmness of finger he could command, he pushed.

With a slight scraping sound, the pane let loose, fell to the snow-covered ground below. Fresh air began to pour into the closed room.

The Shadow thrust his nose and mouth into the opening. It was hard to hold himself there, hard to remain upright on his feet. But presently his darkening senses began to clear. Every lungful of clean air he breathed dissipated the deadly effects of the tiny gulp of poison gas that had almost killed him.

Behind him in the bedroom the sweet perfume of flowers slowly faded.

THE SHADOW'S head ached with agony. His temples felt enclosed by iron hands. But he had saved his life. Forewarned of peril, he had not breathed in too much of the lethal flower gas. How deadly that gas was, his present nausea and pain testified.

Outside the door, the murderer made no effort to see what had happened within. Silence reigned in the corridor for nearly fifteen minutes. Then a faint creak near the head of the staircase sounded. The killer was retreating, confident that Lamont Cranston had died peacefully in bed while asleep.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

But The Shadow was a long way from being dead! A grim whisper of laughter came from his tense lips. He got back into bed and waited calmly.

Shortly after sunrise, the knock on his door for which he was waiting, sounded. The Shadow did not answer. He heard an oath of triumph. Feet departed swiftly. Then they returned with other feet. This time, somebody threw himself fiercely against the door in an effort to break it down.

The Shadow stopped that with magical suddenness. He shouted sleepily in the voice of Lamont Cranston:

"Here! What's the matter? What's going on?"

Padding across the room in his bare feet, he unlocked the door. He saw utter consternation on the two faces that peered at him.

Henry Norman and one of his servants were outside. The servant seemed dumfounded. It was Norman who recovered first.

"I thought something was wrong," he said quietly. "Richard said he had knocked to awaken you, and got no reply. He came to me and I told him to break the door. Thank God, you're all right!"

"Perhaps I should have warned you last night," Lamont Cranston said. "I'm a heavy sleeper. I was too comfortable in bed, I guess, to hear your good Richard's knock. I didn't waken until I heard you banging at my door."

While he spoke The Shadow's gaze swept the floor inside the threshold. He was looking for traces of broken glass. He found none. All that was visible was a faint tracery of powder. A killer had worked with sly efficiency! The glass pellet that had contained the deadly flower death had crumbled to powder when it shattered, like a smashed electric bulb.

Neither Henry Norman nor the servant was aware of Cranston's quick glance at the floor. Their own eyes had jerked toward the window. They uttered cries of astonishment when they saw the missing pane.

Cranston echoed their cries. He didn't give the two men a chance to think or to talk. He began to babble with fake excitement.

A burglar! That was the theme of Cranston's chatter. A burglar had tried to enter the room and rob Cranston while he was asleep. A noise must have frightened the burglar away before he could slide his hand inside the hole in the window and reach the lock. A double trail in the snow below showed how he had escaped. The burglar had used skis for his swift getaway.

Cranston talked excitedly and fast. He wasn't sure whether his story impressed his listeners or not. But they had no chance to weigh the probabilities of the burglar yarn. A fresh mystery had developed! Henry Norman's ring for his servants brought nobody to the top floor. Richard's two fellow servants were missing!

Presently, one of them returned from outdoors. He was out of breath, badly frightened. He gave Richard a white-faced glance that seemed to say: "Watch yourself!"

His story was a sensation – to all except The Shadow.

The servant claimed he had heard someone sneaking from the house a short time earlier. He had followed ski tracks from below Mr. Cranston's window. They had led to a wooded hill. There, the frightened servant had

found the body of Norman's missing employee – with a broken neck!

The news was somewhat disconcerting. The two surviving servants stared covertly at each other. A faint nod was exchanged. Both servants notified Norman that they no longer intended to remain in so dangerous a place. They demanded to be driven to the railroad and put on a train for New York.

Norman didn't object. He agreed that perhaps a quick departure for everyone was sensible.

THE breakfast that followed was an unpleasant one. Lamont Cranston was conscious of the suspicious eyes of his millionaire host. Norman suspected that the burglar story was a myth, but there was no way to prove his suspicion. His prompt agreement with the servants' demand to leave was evidently designed to get rid of Cranston in a hurry.

Cranston tested Norman with a smiling objection.

"We don't really need servants. I'd love to rough it alone with you. Cooking our own meals and making beds might be amusing. How about it?"

Norman vetoed that. He declared that the thing to do now was to notify the police, and then return to the safety of New York City.

Two hours later, Cranston and Norman and the two servants stepped from a horse–drawn sleigh in a small town twenty miles from the hunting lodge. Norman was guilty of a odd piece of forgetfulness. In his eagerness to board the train, he forgot all about notifying the police that a servant of his had mysteriously died of a broken neck on the slope of a lonely hillside.

Lamont Cranston didn't remind Norman.

He was watching another man who was waiting on the railroad platform for the train. When the locomotive and its string of coaches pulled in, Cranston hurried forward at the same time the stranger did. They slipped, collided. Cranston clutched at the man to keep from losing his balance.

During that brief clutch, the hands of The Shadow and the other man touched briefly. A folded scrap of paper changed ownership.

The thing was done with perfect secrecy.

## **CHAPTER IV. INDIAN 16**

THE name of the man who had so deftly received the note passed to him by The Shadow, was Harry Vincent.

Vincent had arrived the previous evening on the train that had brought Lamont Cranston from New York. On arrival, he had gone to the only hotel in town and had registered under another name. He had announced himself as a representative of a chain grocery company.

Harry Vincent was an agent of The Shadow.

Boarding the train, now, Harry followed the two servants of Henry Norman. They entered the last coach. So did Vincent. Palmed in his hand was The Shadow's note. It warned Harry that the two thugs might try to leave the train en route. Harry was ordered to keep watch on them.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

The Shadow was already in the vestibule of the coach he had entered. He started to walk to one of the forward cars. Then he realized that Henry Norman was no longer behind him. The millionaire industrialist had apparently changed his mind. He had jumped back to the station platform.

A gleam came into The Shadow's eyes. But he was careful to keep to the innocent role of Lamont Cranston.

"You'd better hurry!" he yelled to Norman. "You'll be left, if you're not careful!"

"Can't help it!" Norman yelled back. "I forgot something. I've got to notify the police! I'll take the next train."

The Shadow knew that Norman was deliberately dodging him. But he made no objection. The train was already in motion. Cranston walked forward to one of the front coaches.

His idea was to lull the suspicions of the two suspects in the rear car by seeming to pay no attention to them.

The Shadow relaxed in a seat and watched the snow-covered scenery slide past. It was shaggy, mountainous country. There were plenty of high trestles.

It was shortly after the train had crossed a particularly long trestle that The Shadow saw the conductor hurrying into the car in which he was seated. The conductor seemed excited. He cried out a quick question.

"Is there a physician in this car?"

"What's the trouble?"

Lamont Cranston spoke curtly. He didn't state that he was a doctor. The conductor assumed it from his voice and manner.

"Do you mind coming with me for a minute, doc? One of my passengers has been suddenly taken ill."

Cranston picked up a leather bag. It was too large to be a physician's bag, but the conductor was too upset to notice. He led the way hurriedly to the rear coach.

The Shadow took one look at the man sprawled in a seat of the rear car. The victim was Harry Vincent.

The two servants of Norman were no longer in the car!

A sniff at the wide-open lips of Vincent told The Shadow the nature of the attack. The odor of a drug was unmistakable. It was a simple drug whose narcotic effect didn't last long. It was also easy to administer, and it usually worked fast.

The Shadow noticed a slight smear of blood on the back of one of Vincent's hands. A needle had made a fresh scratch there.

Lamont Cranston went grimly to work. Presently, Vincent's eyes flew open. He looked startled. His head jerked toward the vacant seat where the two suspects had been. He started to utter a quick cry.

"Take it easy," Cranston said soothingly.

Harry realized suddenly who the "doctor" was. He relaxed. The Shadow bent over him and whispered briefly.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

"I've been robbed," Harry lied, after a slow search of his pockets. "My wallet is gone!"

THE news drew attention to the strange disappearance of two other men from the car. After a quick search, the conductor announced that both men were no longer on the train.

The method of their "robbery" was soon established. A passenger recalled seeing one of them go to the water cooler. He had come back with a paper cup. Passing Vincent's seat, he had lurched.

"That's when he stuck me with the needle," Vincent said. "I felt the prick of it. Then I passed out."

"Last I saw of them, both men went out on the rear platform," a passenger said.

The Shadow followed the conductor to the windy cold outside.

"I'm afraid there's no way to nab those crooks," the conductor growled. "The attack took place shortly after we crossed that last trestle. The train was climbing a long grade. It was going slowly. The thugs simply dropped off the rear end of the train."

It was a logical explanation. It fitted all the known facts. But The Shadow knew it was not true!

A chunk of frozen snow lay on the wind-swept expanse of the rear platform. The Shadow's quick glance saw where it lay, and realized instantly the point from which it had fallen.

The curved roof of the car overhung the rear platform. The snow chunk had been dislodged from the roof's edge by the hasty kick of a man swinging upward to the car roof.

The two suspects were still aboard the train!

However, The Shadow did not divulge this knowledge. To that knowledge he added a deduction. The crooks were still aboard the train, because the train had not yet reached the exact spot where they wanted to leave!

Returning to his own, forward coach, The Shadow managed to watch both sides of the train every time it halted. He was careful to keep his surveillance casual.

Twenty minutes later, a busy freight junction provided the crooks hidden on the roof with their opportunity. Two furtive figures dropped to earth in the darkness beneath an overhanging freight shed.

The Shadow followed without betraying his pursuit. The time of the day aided him. Afternoon had already faded to dusk. Dusk was changing to darkness.

Using a string of motionless box cars as a shield to cover his advance across the maze of tracks, The Shadow trailed the erstwhile servants of Henry Norman. He was no longer Lamont Cranston. His black cloak made him seem part of the darkness. The brim of his slouch hat shielded the alert flame in his eyes.

The two suspects swung aboard a freight which was waiting on a curved spur that led to the main line. An impatient whistle tooted from the locomotive. Brakemen moved lanterns. The freight moved slowly past the main switch, then picked up speed as it roared through the night.

The Shadow, too, was on that freight!

## THE WHITE COLUMN

He was curious about this train's destination. He knew it was not headed for New York. The switch had turned the freight west. The Shadow examined some of the merchandise that was piled in the car in which he had melted from sight.

The Shadow's eyes gleamed as he read the name of the town to which these goods were consigned. The crooks were heading for Oakmont!

LEAVING the box car, The Shadow swung to the steel rungs of a ladder. Climbing, he slid bellywise to the catwalk on the roof. He was protected by his black cloak and the surrounding darkness. The two mobsters were not. The Shadow could see them dimly, when he raised his face a trifle. They were on a roof four cars ahead.

The Shadow lay rigid until the freight plunged into a black tunnel. Then he crawled swiftly forward the length of three cars. Before the train emerged from the tunnel, The Shadow had again disappeared.

He was hunched close to the clanking roar of a steel coupling. He was convinced that the two crooks on the roof of the car ahead were on their way to Oakmont. But if they left the train before Oakmont was reached, The Shadow was in a position to watch and follow.

There was only one thing The Shadow didn't count on: the chance appearance of a brakeman.

He could hear the solid thumps of the brakeman's feet as the man walked forward along the car roofs. The brakie didn't see The Shadow. That spot above the coupling where The Shadow lurked was as black as coal. Besides, the brakie was staring straight ahead.

He had seen two men lying flat on the roof of the car in front of him. He uttered a cry of danger.

"Hey, you damned hoboes!"

Neither of them looked like hoboes, but the brakie didn't notice that. He had received strict orders about not allowing tramps to ride this freight. Its consignment was valuable. There had been damage done to previous consignments.

The two men rose to their feet. They began to whine. When the brakie got close, they moved quickly apart and allowed the trainman to step between them. He was startled when he saw their clothing and faces.

"Hey! You guys ain't tramps! What –"

They sprang like tigers. In the windy darkness, the brakie's yell died in a moan. A heavy bludgeon struck him on the skull. He fell limply to the catwalk.

Heaving at his unconscious body, the thugs started to roll him headlong to a death under the grinding wheels of the fast train.

The Shadow's plan to keep out of sight, was frustrated. To remain hidden was to allow a brutal murder to take place. The Shadow sacrificed strategy for action.

He was climbing over the edge of the swaying roof almost as soon as the brakeman fell. A swift dive sent him sliding along the slippery catwalk on his stomach. His black-gloved hand caught at the brakeman's body as it lurched at the side edge of the roof.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

One of the thugs had swung around in a crouched huddle, to make sure there were no witnesses. He saw the black-cloaked figure bellying forward. A cry burst from his lips.

"The Shadow!"

His partner repeated that cry. Both retreated, snarling. The Shadow dragged the unconscious brakeman to safety in that split-second of time.

The next instant, he arose to his feet and attacked.

THERE was no time to do anything else. The two thugs had leaped toward The Shadow from either side. The man with the club raised it for a bone-crushing blow. The Shadow ducked. The blow landed on his left shoulder.

It was a terrific one. It numbed The Shadow's arm. He dropped to his knees, shoving desperately with one hand to thrust his foes away.

That quick thrust was all that saved him from death. It sent the man with the club staggering backwards. He yelled, and caught his partner around the waist. Both men teetered dangerously at the edge of the roof. Then they recovered and sprang apart.

It gave The Shadow time to regain his feet.

The club smashed at him again. But he had deliberately invited the blow, in order to be in a position to disarm the thug. A sudden twist of his body and a snakelike dart of his uninjured hand tore the club loose from the panting killer.

It went sailing end over end into the roaring darkness. The three men tangled in a writhing huddle on the car roof.

All this time, The Shadow had made no effort to reach for one of his .45's. Capture was his intent – not death. Who were these two hard-faced killers who spoke English with a slight foreign accent? The Shadow intended to force unwilling lips to reveal the truth about themselves and their mission at Oakmont.

But he found himself in a dangerous predicament. These Fifth Column foes were worse than criminals. They were young and tough, trained for hand-to-hand combat.

A fist struck The Shadow behind the ear with dazing impact. Another landed on his jaw. One of the thugs held The Shadow in a death grip, which he refused to loosen in spite of the terrible punishment that rained on his unprotected face. His pal was attempting to slug The Shadow and hurl him from the train.

So terrific was the battle, that The Shadow barely felt a light, wavering slap across his face. It was not a blow from a human hand. It was a slap from a loosely dangling cord. Several cords.

Instantly, The Shadow understood the meaning of that slap. Those dangling cords hung from a horizontal cable, to warn trainmen in the dark of the danger of an approaching tunnel. A tunnel with a low-hung roof whose stone entrance would sweep anyone who stood erect from the top of the train.

The knees of The Shadow hinged. He dropped limply. The thug who was holding tightly to him let go. He thought that the flailing fists of his pal had knocked out The Shadow. He turned with a savage snarl to shove The Shadow and the unconscious brakeman off the speeding train.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

Neither of the two thugs had felt the swaying slap of dangling cords.

Before they realized the doom that rushed at them through the windy darkness, death struck at both. The Shadow neither heard nor saw what happened. An instant after he dropped flat, he felt the freight dive into the tunnel with an echoing roar. The reverberations made his ears ring. A draft of wind almost tore him loose from his hold. Smoke, billowing in the tunnel from the stack of the locomotive, stung his nostrils.

He rose dizzily to his feet when the train dived into the outer air. One glance, and his face set grimly.

His two foes were gone!

MAKING his way carefully along the roof to a side ladder, The Shadow descended steel rungs. The train was still racing at a dangerous speed, but The Shadow had no choice. Back in the darkness of a lonely tunnel lay two enemies of America. Both had been swept to probably instant death. The Shadow's intent to capture them alive had been balked by fate.

But on the bodies of those dead killers might be some scrap of revealing paper. Some hint to guide The Shadow after he arrived at Oakmont.

Fifteen minutes after The Shadow leaped from the train, he reached the mouth of the tunnel. Both men had died horribly. One had been cut to pieces under the thundering wheels of the freight. The other had been hurled against the tunnel wall. Most of his head was gone.

The Shadow searched the pockets of this second corpse. He got blood smeared all over his hands in the process, but paid no attention to that. His attention was concentrated on a scrap of paper which he had found in an inner pocket of a dead Fifth Columnist.

A number and a word were written on that paper. The Shadow's eyes blazed with grim curiosity as he stared at the message:

Indian 16. –

## CHAPTER V. TREASON

THE room was large. In shape it was semicircular. It was flooded with light that seemed to come from the surface of the ceiling itself. It had no windows. The room was empty. No one sat in an enormous oak chair that stood alone on a raised platform. Nor did the chairs that faced that platform have any occupants. There were five chairs. Behind them was a locked steel door.

Presently, a chime sounded. It filled the empty room with soft echoes. The signal was followed by a swift change in the appearance of the locked door. A panel slid aside. A small glass window was revealed. The glass was thick and slightly cloudy.

Through that glass a face peered. A man stood outside the steel door, undergoing inspection from within. It was easy to see the visitor's face. He was one of the five parachutists who had dropped to earth near the Adirondack hunting lodge of Henry Norman.

No one watched from within the room. But a satisfactory inspection of the visitor had, nevertheless, been completed. This was proved when the glass panel went dark and the steel plate closed.



## THE WHITE COLUMN

The door swung open automatically. The spy sat down in one of the five chairs facing the empty platform. He waited in disciplined silence.

Soon the chimes sounded again. More visitors arrived in the same manner. When the last had entered, all five of the chairs were filled. Only the oak chair on the platform remained empty.

Then a bell tolled with startling suddenness. It tolled only once. At its hollow, brazen sound, every light in the chamber went out. The room was plunged in darkness. For the space of a full minute it remained so. Then light returned.

A man was sitting on the platform chair. It was impossible to tell his identity. He was wearing dark, loosely-fitting trousers that looked like ski pants. His tunic was made of the same material. Over his skull and face was a cloth helmet that masked him completely. Cold eyes stared through two slits in the mask.

"Welcome!" the man rasped.

There were no rivets on the wall behind him, no signs of any break that might conceal a door. His method of entrance was the masked man's secret. Behind the wall was the hidden mechanism that operated the defenses of this meeting room.

The masked leader wasted no time.

"Our first problem," he said harshly. "A factory in Oakmont, owned and operated by Peter Kirk and Ralph Jackson, under the supervision of the United States government. Producing the new American bomb sights! To destroy that plant, to seize the bomb sight plans, is the problem!"

He continued in his metallic voice. He reminded his listeners of the recent death of a trusted employee in the Kirk-Jackson plant. A foreman named Donovan had gone suddenly insane. He had tried to smash delicate machinery. Fleeing, he had been shot down by armed guards. The job Donovan had held was now vacant. A new man had been recommended.

"Number Three!"

The parachute spy in the third chair rose stiffly and saluted. The salute was returned by the leader.

"You will take Donovan's place. You will have all the necessary documents to show that you are an American citizen, that you possess the skill necessary to fill the job. A member of the defense committee will vouch for you. Your name will be Frederick Brownson."

"Frederick Brownson," the man repeated.

"The rest will co-operate in accordance with instructions which will be provided later. There must be no slip-up. The motto must always be: 'Death to Democracy!'"

"Death to Democracy!" chanted his grim listeners.

The masked man laughed, but there was no mirth in the sound.

"More news remains to be told. Bitter news. The Shadow has started to fight back! We face difficulties!"

There was a low murmur.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

"Three of our brave agents outside the inner circle are now dead! One was killed in the Adirondacks. Two more died when they fell from a freight train en route to Oakmont. I am positive that The Shadow was responsible. He may be here in Oakmont. Be careful!"

Again there was a vicious murmur.

"I have caused secret inquiries to be made about a millionaire sportsman named Lamont Cranston. Cranston was at Henry Norman's hunting camp when the first death occurred. He is now reported to be at his home in New Jersey, although spies in the East have not seen him face to face. If Lamont Cranston should appear in Oakmont, he is to be killed!"

The masked leader straightened in his oak chair on the platform – and suddenly the bronze bell tolled. Every light in the room went out. When they blazed again, the chair on the platform was empty.

One by one, the five men rose and departed by the steel door which opened automatically for each. It was done swiftly, silently, and with discipline.

AN hour later, a far different scene was taking place at the Oakmont airport. A plane from Washington was winging in for a landing. The airport was crowded with spectators. All of them were eager for a glimpse of the international celebrity arriving by air.

His name was Kent Allard.

Kent Allard was the foremost aviator in the United States. He had won an affectionate hold on the hearts of Americans, particularly since the danger of war from abroad had changed the country into an armed camp. Here, in Oakmont, was concentrated the heart of the aviation rearmament industry. Kent Allard was arriving to preside at a meeting of the Aviation Defense Committee. He came as a personal representative of the president.

Sometimes The Shadow used the guise of Lamont Cranston, sometimes other guises. But The Shadow's real identity was Kent Allard!

Allard left the airport at once. He was driven to a building in downtown Oakmont, where the Aviation Defense Committee was awaiting his arrival. He was greeted with applause when he stepped into the flag-draped room.

The man who led the committee's applause was Henry Norman!

It amused The Shadow to know that Norman didn't realize that the man he applauded had been so recently a guest of his in the Adirondacks. Norman could be pardoned for that ignorance. Two men more dissimilar than Cranston and Allard could hardly be imagined. Allard seemed younger, taller, handsomer. His facial and bodily appearance was completely different.

He had known that Norman would be in Oakmont. A member of the Defense Committee had died suddenly from a heart attack. The president had appointed Henry Norman to fill the dead man's job. This was natural enough. Norman, in addition to his huge ammunition plant in the East, had built a big plant here in Oakmont for the manufacture of aviation machine guns.

Besides Norman, the committee consisted of Lee Morley, a gasoline refiner, and Peter Kirk and Ralph Jackson, who were partners in the plant which manufactured the new bomb sight.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

A LIVELY discussion took place after Allard arrived. A new foreman had been recommended for the job left vacant by the death of a trusted workman who had gone so suddenly insane at the Kirk–Jackson plant. The new man's name was Frederick Brownson. He was waiting outside with his credentials.

The committee was in favor of hiring Brownson. But Peter Kirk objected strenuously.

"I don't like it," Kirk said. "It's queer Brownson should turn up with such excellent qualifications so soon after the strange death of poor Donovan. I still think there was something queer about Donovan's sudden madness. I can't help feeling that he might have been removed to make way for a possible Fifth Columnist."

Kirk spoke shrilly. The others laughed indulgently at him. His partner, Jackson, tried to soothe him. Lee Morley, the oil man, seemed disgusted. Norman pointed out, reasonably enough, that Kirk hadn't even seen the new employee yet.

The Shadow took no part in this argument. He watched Peter Kirk. There seemed something phony about his angry objection. It was too shrill, a shade overdone. The Shadow wondered if all this argument might not be a cunning device to make Kirk look innocent, if later developments showed that Brownson was not what he appeared to be – a loyal and patriotic citizen of the United States.

Finally, Kirk's arguments were voted down. Frederick Brownson was brought in.

His words were soft and pleasant. But when he answered questions, a chord in The Shadow's memory was touched. Brownson had papers which showed that he had been born of American parents in a small town in Kansas. But his voice had a slight foreign lisp – like the voices of the three "servants" at the Adirondack camp of Henry Norman.

The Shadow noted other things. Both Brownson and Peter Kirk wore the same type of seal ring. A barely perceptible glance had passed between them when the new foreman had entered the room.

Brownson sat quietly on a chair, one leg crossed over the other. His pose brought the sole of his right shoe into The Shadow's line of vision. The Shadow saw on that exposed sole something that made his eyes gleam. Then the look was gone.

In the end, Brownson was hired.

Kent Allard left the room before any of the others. He announced that he had to return to the airport. But he didn't head for the staircase that would bring him from the second–floor meeting room to the street. Tiptoeing along the hall, he unscrewed a wall light. The corridor lapsed into gloom.

In that gloom, The Shadow waited. But not as Kent Allard. A black cloak shrouded him. His eyes burned ominously under the low brim of his slouch hat. He had come prepared for an emergency. He was ready.

Brownson emerged from the committee room alone. The other men lingered to continue their discussion. Brownson started for the staircase. He never reached it.

A hand closed on his throat, shutting off his wind. There was a desperate struggle, but no sound of it was audible. In a few moments, Brownson was helpless on the floor. The Shadow made no attempt to harm the suspect. His purpose was theft.

He stole both of Brownson's shoes.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

With a bound, The Shadow fled to the end of the corridor. A window opened on a rear court. The Shadow raced down a fire escape behind the building, made toward an alley that connected with the street.

IN the hallway above, Brownson had recovered his dazed wits. Shouting at the top of his lungs, he raced in stocking feet to the room where the committee still conferred.

"The Shadow! Quick! He tried to kill me."

Peter Kirk was the first to recover his wits. An ugly light came into his eyes. As the committee raced along the hall toward the rear window, Kirk saved them from a waste of precious time.

"Down the stairs" he roared. "Follow him out front! There's no escape from the rear except through the alley. The rear court is hemmed in by brick walls!"

So quick was the pursuit led by Kirk, that The Shadow was seen as he leaped into a waiting car out front. It was not the car in which Kent Allard had arrived. It was driven by an agent of The Shadow. It left in a terrific burst of speed.

The agent who drove that car knew every inch of the route he was taking. He had practiced it beforehand. When he stopped finally, it was at the exact spot where The Shadow had instructed him to halt.

His jaw dropped in amazement as he turned. There was no one in the fugitive car. The Shadow had vanished.

All that remained of his presence was the slouch hat and the black cloak. Tucked in the hat brim was a brief note. The agent read that note, and obeyed it. He abandoned the car. With him went the cloak and the hat of The Shadow.

When pursuing police finally arrived at the scene, they found nothing to point to the identity of The Shadow or the agent who had helped him escape. The car had been stolen. Its owner, summoned hastily to the scene, could throw no light on the mystery. His name was Clyde Burke. He was an ace New York City newspaperman, in town to write a series of articles on national defense. He answered police questions glibly. But there was one important fact he held back.

Clyde Burke was an agent of The Shadow!

Among the committee members who had made so vain a pursuit, was Kent Allard. He had appeared in a nearby spot in time to join the others. He could add nothing to the knowledge of the police. As soon as possible, he made a polite exit.

Alone, Kent Allard went back to the vicinity of the building where The Shadow had made his amazingly strange theft. He picked up a locked leather traveling case which he had been careful to drop in a safe spot.

Inside the bag were a pair of shoes which The Shadow had stolen from Frederick Brownson.

The Shadow examined those shoes in the privacy of his room. He paid particular attention to the sole of the right shoe. A strange twinkle of reflected light had caught Kent Allard's eye when Brownson had crossed his legs in the committee meeting and exposed the sole of that right shoe.

A trace of sibilant laughter passed The Shadow's lips, as he discovered a small fragment of glass imbedded deeply in the leather sole.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

He cut it out carefully with a sharp knife, and examined it. The fragment was a tiny chunk of expensive crystal glassware. It looked like a duplicate of certain other broken pieces of glass The Shadow had examined a few nights earlier in the darkness of an Adirondack hunting lodge.

But The Shadow made no snap judgment. He used painstaking tests before he nodded with complete assurance.

The sample was a fragment from a crystal wine glass. It was the same type of expensive glassware owned by Henry Norman!

With certainty, did The Shadow know why that tiny bit of expensive glassware had been imbedded in the sole of Brownson's right shoe. Brownson was one of the five parachutists who had descended through a snowstorm from a mysterious transport plane! He was one of the invaders who had drunk a toast with a masked leader in front of Norman's wall map.

Only a fleeting glimpse of that masked leader had The Shadow caught on the night he had spent in Norman's lodge. The traitor might be Norman. Or perhaps Kirk.

But whoever he was, he was on the Defense Committee!

The Shadow reached for the telephone. His crisp call was answered by the quiet voice of Burbank, his contact man.

To Burbank, orders were given that concerned Clyde Burke. Burke was instructed to begin an immediate vigil outside a certain house on a street in Oakmont.

The Shadow had not forgotten the strange clue he had found in the pocket of a dead man in a railroad tunnel. "Indian 16." At first glance, the clue had seemed impossible to unravel. But an inspection of the Oakmont city directory had quickly solved the mystery. The clue was a street address.

There was one thing The Shadow had not divined. Criminals had wanted The Shadow to find that clue and act upon it.

Unknowingly, The Shadow was sending Clyde Burke toward his doom!

## CHAPTER VI. HOUSE OF PERIL

CLYDE BURKE was watching a house at No. 16 Indian Street.

It was evidently an unoccupied house. Shades were drawn on dirty windows. A faded real-estate placard was pasted on the peeling paint of the front door. The house was dark from cellar to roof. It stood midway down a short block.

At the corner was an automobile parking lot, enclosed by a high wooden fence. This parking lot figured importantly in Clyde's calculations. It afforded him a means of communication with The Shadow, in case Clyde had to make a sudden move.

He waited, confident that he was unobserved.

But keen eyes were watching him. A masked traitor to America sat hidden behind the drawn shade of a window across the street. He had noticed Clyde's arrival a short time earlier. He was ready to spring a trap.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

He rose from his cramped position behind the pin-point hole in his window shade, and walked noiselessly across the room and picked up a telephone. The message he delivered was low-toned. It appeared to amuse the masked man. He chuckled when he hung up.

Ten minutes later, Clyde Burke saw a car turn the corner into Indian Street. It halted in front of the vacant house.

The man behind the wheel spoke briefly to another man in the rear seat. There was a girl sitting with this second man. She got out of the car with him. He was careful to help her. He held tightly on her arm as the girl crossed the sidewalk toward the house. The driver of the car took the girl's other arm. Her steps stumbled. Clyde noticed that she was a pretty blonde.

It was difficult to notice much else. The girl's cape muffled the lower part of her face. Her lips couldn't be seen. Clyde wondered if adhesive tape was bound tightly over those hidden lips.

The trio didn't ring the front doorbell of No. 16. One of the men had a key. His companion held tightly to the blonde's arm while the door was being unlocked. Then all three of them vanished inside.

It left Clyde facing a dilemma. Should he try to sneak into the house and spy on what was evidently a kidnap hangout, or should he wait outside for developments?

His dilemma was solved for him by the two thugs themselves. Five minutes after they had vanished, they reappeared. The blonde was no longer with them.

Their car got under way. It left the neighborhood as fast as it had arrived.

The blonde had evidently been tied up, a prisoner inside the vacant house. The chances were excellent that she was alone. Thugs were reporting to their boss that their snatch had been successful.

Clyde Burke decided that it would be a smart idea to get inside the empty house before the two thugs returned with their boss. He lounged up to the corner where the parking lot was located.

Two doorways had been cut into the board fence. One was an entrance for cars, the other provided an exit. A painted word on each entry showed the proper traffic direction. One, was marked "In" ; the other "Out".

Clyde slipped a piece of chalk from his pocket. Over the entry marked "Out", he drew a cross. It was a prearranged signal for The Shadow. It meant that "Out" was no longer true. "In" was the proper signal. By this simple stratagem, The Shadow would know that Clyde had decided to enter the suspected house.

CIRCLING the rear of No. 16, Clyde soon located a cellar window whose lock was defective. Rust had so damaged the metal, that the tongue of the bolt didn't fit properly into its groove. Steady pressure by Clyde forced the rusted bolt further aside. The window lifted.

Clyde dropped into the darkness of the cellar.

A flight of rickety wooden steps led upward. Clyde searched the ground floor cautiously. The house had evidently been deserted for a long time. Floors and walls were bare. Mice squeaked in the black corners as Clyde's electric torch glowed.

The second floor was the same.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

But on the top floor, Clyde found what he was seeking. In a shuttered rear room lay the unconscious figure of the blonde. She was tied hand and feet to a cot. A gag had been jammed into the girl's mouth.

He bent over her to remove the gag and loosen the cords that bound her hands behind her back. As he did, he received a stunning surprise.

With a quick heave, the girl flung both arms into view. Her helpless pose had been faked! Her eyes were wide open. In her right hand she gripped a small gun which had been hidden beneath her body. She thrust the muzzle toward Clyde's face and pulled the trigger.

Agony splashed into his wide-open eyes. The acrid smell of ammonia filled the room. Clyde staggered backward, clawing at his dripping face. He was completely blinded!

The blonde charged forward like a tigress. She struck him head-first. Both hands shoved at him with all her strength.

Clyde went staggering backward. He struck the wall opposite the bed. The wall opened behind him.

It was like falling through a swinging door. For an instant, Clyde's reeling body was visible as it plunged into a black opening.

Then the panel closed. The blonde remained alone in the room.

She ripped the fake gag from her mouth. Then she laughed. It was a shrill, vindictive sound. But there was no one in the house to hear it. Fifth Columnists had entrusted the blonde with the sole task of capturing Clyde. She had done her job well.

Tiptoeing to a front window, she raised and lowered the shade. Then she hurried from the house.

As she emerged on the sidewalk, a man came out of a doorway across the street. Neither paid any attention to the other. The blonde continued up the street. The man got into a small coupe which stood at the curb. His hat was drawn low. A coat collar muffled his throat. After he had got into the car, he kept his face low over the wheel. He drove into the parking lot on the corner. Halting at the pay shack, he got out of his car.

A normal customer would have accepted a parking stub and departed. But nothing of the kind happened. A quick word passed from the customer to the attendant who had emerged from the small shack.

The attendant went back into the shack, and the man followed him. The door closed. It remained shut two or three minutes before it opened again. The attendant came out, but not the customer. That was queer, because the customer was no longer in the shack! The open door showed that the tiny enclosure was now empty. There were no other doors or windows by which the customer could have left.

The attendant didn't seem to be troubled by the strange vanishing act. He got quickly into the man's car and drove it into one of the lines of parked automobiles. When he went back to the shack, he was grinning.

It was an ugly grin, bleak with murder.

THE old man who shambled around the corner into Indian Street looked pathetic. His clothing was shabby and worn. There was a dirty stubble on his unshaven cheeks.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

He blinked as he moved slowly outside the fence that closed off the corner parking lot from Indian Street. He blinked because he noticed a parking attendant staring suspiciously at him. A tired move of his head turned his face away.

But The Shadow had seen all he wanted.

The Shadow had seen a chalked cross on the exit sign. It disfigured the painted word "Out". By that device The Shadow knew that Clyde Burke was no longer lurking on Indian Street. He had gone into Number 16.

Like a human derelict, The Shadow continued along the dark sidewalk. Presently, he vanished from sight.

He emerged in the rear of No. 16. It wasn't hard to follow Clyde's trail. The rusted bolt on the cellar window was still out of its slot. The Shadow could see the marks where Clyde's feet had struck on dusty concrete, as soon as he had entered the cellar and snapped his flashlight on.

He followed Clyde's trail up the rickety stairs and through the empty house. But this keen-eyed, sharp-eared investigator was no longer an aged bum. A black cloak covered The Shadow's tall figure. A slouch hat shielded the cold flame in his eyes. He had an icy feeling of danger as he ascended through the musty house.

On the rear room of the top floor, he saw the cot where the blonde had made so easy a capture of Clyde Burke. There was no sign of a girl, or of Clyde either. But there were plenty of clues that told The Shadow that treachery had occurred in this now empty room.

The cot was dented with the unmistakable imprint of a human body. Someone had been stretched full length on that bed fairly recently. A woman, judging from the length of the body impression. Or perhaps a small-sized man.

One sniff at the mattress gave The Shadow the true answer. The smell of perfume was recognizable. Not a cheap perfume, either. The Shadow's nose crinkled as he recognized a famous and high-priced brand.

There was another odor in the room, too. A more pungent one. Ammonia! A girl, stretched in apparent helplessness on a cheap cot, had taken Clyde an easy prisoner by the use of ammonia.

But where had she taken Clyde? And how had he fallen so easy a captive? There were no signs of a struggle. Even temporarily blinded by ammonia, Clyde was no man to submit to an assailant without putting up a strong fight.

The Shadow searched the floor for other clues. He found them. The soles of Clyde's shoes had been coated with greasy dust from the floor of the long-empty cellar. He had left a telltale line of prints on the floor of this shuttered room. The prints moved backward. The spacing showed that Clyde had recoiled toward the wall under the impetus of what must have been a powerful shove.

The wall was papered. There were vertical red lines, with a design of roses in each panel between the lines. One of those vertical red lines was slightly wider than the rest. The Shadow pressed with his gloved hand.

Instantly, the wall opened.

Twin doors swung inward like the bat-wing doors of a saloon. Only the slightest pressure was needed. When The Shadow released his pressure, the wall became a flat surface again.



## THE WHITE COLUMN

He peered into a dark chute within the wall. That's exactly what it was – a chute. Instead of a vertical drop into blackness, the chute descended in a steep slant. Down that chute Clyde Burke must have slid at terrific speed.

It was impossible to see where he had vanished. The glow of The Shadow's flash down that strange, slanting wall tunnel showed that the chute curved abruptly out of sight at a point that must be considerably below the cellar of this "abandoned" house.

Clyde had fallen helplessly into a trap. The Shadow did a bold thing. He entered the trap voluntarily.

He knew that Clyde's life was in deadly peril. In The Shadow's battle against crime, one rule of conduct was paramount. If any agent encountered disaster in following orders given to him by The Shadow, that agent's safety became the only consideration in The Shadow's mind.

From beneath The Shadow's black robe a thin but strong rope appeared. Unwinding it, The Shadow tied one end to the cot, which he braced securely against the wall. The rest of the rope dropped silently down the black length of that slanting chute.

Slowly, The Shadow began to lower himself.

He moved cautiously in darkness. But he had hardly descended twenty feet, when from above his head came a sudden patch of brightness. The panel in the top floor room had opened! A hand shoved through. The hand clenched a sharp knife!

Instantly, The Shadow's .45 lifted. But that knife edge above him must have been razor-sharp. An instant before the .45 roared inside the wall, there was a sharp jerk at the rope, that ruined The Shadow's aim. His bullet missed.

The rope had parted.

Down the slippery chute sped the released body of The Shadow. The speed of his plunge flung him on his spine. He whizzed around the turn in the chute that led to a spot beneath the cellar of the old house. Then he landed with jarring impact.

He flung himself forward to his feet. It was pitch-dark. The floor seemed to be made of stone. An instant later, The Shadow heard the plop! plop! of two muffled explosions in quick succession.

An acrid odor stung his nose and made his eyes water. Tear gas! The stuff came billowing at him through the darkness. He flung one arm protectively before his eyes and charged forward. His groping gun barrel struck a solid surface. It was a door.

The door was locked, but the roar of The Shadow's heavy .45 took care of the lock. There was a splintering of wood. The Shadow staggered through.

He had no time to be puzzled by the fact that no human foe had yet faced him. The room where the tear gas had exploded was apparently empty. The tear-gas bombs had been released mechanically.

Pitch-darkness shrouded him as he advanced grimly. He had lost his flashlight during that swift fall down the chute. His arm swept through the darkness, trying to encounter the soft obstacle of human flesh.

But this second chamber seemed to be empty, also.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

The moment he realized this, The Shadow retreated. He stood with his back against the wall of the black chamber. It was then that the net dropped over him from above.

It was a strong net, made of powerful interlaced ropes. He could feel it tighten swiftly about his struggling arms and legs. The Shadow was yanked off his feet. He was tangled as effectively as a shark in the net of a fisherman.

But his brain remained as cold as ice. The moment The Shadow realized the nature of the trap, he ceased struggling. His hand flashed into a sheath under his black robe. A quick jerk brought a knife into play. The edge of that knife was sharp. But sharp as it was, The Shadow had to slash desperately three or four times before the tough fabric of the net ripped apart.

Through the ragged opening The Shadow squirmed. He rebounded to his feet. The knife was in his left hand. He still held the big .45 gripped tightly in his right hand.

Then a fragile tinkle sounded. It was the crash of breaking glass. The sound recalled to The Shadow's memory a similar sound he had once heard in a bedroom at the Adirondack hunting lodge of Henry Norman.

He flung himself backward.

As he did so, his nostrils sniffed a pleasant odor. Instantly, he stopped breathing. He knew that deadly smell – the odor of freshly-cut flowers.

The odor of death in a sealed room!

### **CHAPTER VII. PREVIEW OF HELL**

AT the first tiny sniff of that deadly perfume, The Shadow pressed his lips tautly together.

But the fact that he was aware of the poison gas in the darkness, was proof that he had unconsciously sniffed a small amount of it. His throat felt curiously paralyzed. His nostrils burned like raw flame.

He stood rooted where he was. The gas was swirling close to him in a compact cloud of death. There was no way to escape it by moving backward in a sealed room. Nor could The Shadow hold his breath much longer. He seemed utterly defenseless.

But there was a defense! It was gripped in The Shadow's hand.

He flung up his .45 and pulled the trigger.

The shot made a thunderous roar. The bullet struck an invisible steel wall and ricocheted. But The Shadow didn't care where the bullet struck. The explosion was all that mattered.

A terrific jet of expanding powder gas by the shot was released. It enveloped the poison gas cloud in front of The Shadow's face, churning it all over the room with explosive energy.

The Shadow dropped to one knee. Desperately, he held his aching lungs sealed for a few seconds longer. Then he took a quick, gasping breath.

He could smell the reek of burned cordite. But there was no longer that insidious scent of fresh flowers. The poison gas had been scattered all over the dark room. Its concentration was gone. The Shadow was able to

breathe safely.

There was a sudden clanging sound. Through the darkness came a rush of feet. An attacking foe flung himself unseen at The Shadow. Other hands caught at him from the rear. Under that multiple assault, he reeled and went down.

More men dived into the struggle. There were so many of them that they impeded each other's attack. At least four or five men were smashing viciously at the prone body of The Shadow, to put him out of action.

His gun hand was immovable on the floor. Someone's foot was jammed on his wrist. Fingers clamped murderously around his windpipe. A fist struck behind his ear, dazing him.

He managed to writhe sideways. His head ducked toward the leg of the man whose foot was a grinding pain on his wrist. Jerking his head forward, The Shadow snapped it against the leg on his wrist, knocked it off.

His freed gun swung upward. He fired blindly. He heard a strangled cry and the thump of a body.

But he had no chance to press the trigger again. He was facing men who had been trained for battle, men who cared not whether they lived or died, so long as they accomplished their task. A hand caught The Shadow's gun. Other foes flung themselves recklessly into the line of fire. Their combined attack was too much to withstand. The gun was wrenched from The Shadow's grasp. A heavy boot kicked him viciously in the ribs. He fell on his face. He tried to push himself upward with quivering palms.

Then he remembered nothing –

WHEN The Shadow's senses returned, he was lying flat on a stone floor. But it was not the room in which he had been captured. This chamber was bathed in vivid light. It was the inner underground chamber from which his attackers had emerged.

The Shadow was able to see them clearly, but he was unable to move. His hands and feet were tied. A gag was jammed into his aching jaws. Clyde Burke lay alongside him.

Masked men stared at the two prisoners. There were four of them. The fifth was the man whom The Shadow had shot. His dead body lay in an inert heap on the floor. Like his comrades, the dead man was masked.

Nor was it possible to identify their traitorous leader. He stood like an officer in front of a squad of soldiers. A cloth helmet covered his entire head and face. Murderous eyes gleamed through the narrow slits in that cloth covering.

The hooded man's voice provided The Shadow with no clue to his identity. It was a disguised voice, one that rasped harshly.

"Congratulations on your fighting ability," the voice sneered. "It was heroic, but useless. Your prompt capture is a small sample of what your entire country may expect from us when the Day – der tag – comes!"

The masked leader laughed.

"Tonight we are putting an end to one of the most important industrial plants in the rearmament program of America. I refer to the factory owned and operated by the Messrs. Kirk and Jackson. It will explode to heaven in a burst of flame from a weapon perfected overseas by a virile nation determined on world mastery!"

## THE WHITE COLUMN

He continued in his disguised snarl.

"I can tell you this now, because your life is doomed. An airplane will signal my attack – the same ship which carried my associates by air from the American coast. But the airplane will not cause the disaster. Only your stupid American Secret Service agents will think that. The real agency of death is already planted inside the factory!"

There was an impatient grunt from his four masked henchmen. They were enraged by the death of their comrade. They wanted quick action on The Shadow. Their leader sensed it. He issued a rasping order. The four henchmen moved in swift obedience.

The Shadow watched what they did, from his helpless position on the stone floor of the underground chamber. Queer things were happening.

A small cement block was removed from the wall, leaving a square hole. Into that hole was placed an object that looked like a blowtorch. The man tested it. Flame gushed from it with a loud hissing noise.

Having been tested, the torch was cemented into the wall. Quick-drying cement was used. Only the top of the torch projected from the wall. It was now impossible to remove the implement or to quench the ugly roar of its jetting flame.

A medium-sized box was now hauled from a corner. It was made of metal. When it was placed on end, close to the flame of the blowtorch, but not too close, The Shadow saw a turretlike projection on top of it. The turret was like an enlarged version of the nipple on a baby's feeding bottle. It was covered by a silver screw-cap.

The metal box was set firmly on a square spot in the floor. Before the spot was covered by the box, The Shadow noticed that it was a square sheet of metal.

The masked leader chuckled.

"Exactly! A metal plate in the floor. You will find it impossible to move the box in the unlikely event that you escape in time from your bonds. The floor plate is electrically magnetized. So is the metal box. A thousand elephants would butt their brains out trying to move it!"

The leader continued.

"Under that silver screwcap on the box's turret is a nipple made of wax. It will take less than five minutes for the heat from the blowtorch to melt the wax. When that happens, you will have a preview of hell!"

WITH a careful gesture, the masked leader unscrewed the silver cap. The wax nipple was disclosed. The roaring flame of the blowtorch in the wall began to send ripples of dissolving warmth toward the wax.

The leader snarled an order. Four hands saluted. Four enemy agents marched toward a different section of the wall that enclosed the death chamber. A panel swung open, disclosing the mouth of a black tunnel. The spies crawled swiftly out of sight. They were followed by their traitorous leader.

The Shadow began to struggle. It was impossible to break his bonds. They had been tied by experts.

Every muscle in his body felt paralyzed. His brain was dulled from the effects of the poison gas he had so briefly inhaled. But he forced his sluggish muscles to obey his will. He rolled over and over, toward the

## THE WHITE COLUMN

roaring jet of flame from the wall. He managed by superhuman will power to totter to his trussed feet.

It was impossible to put out that tongue of flame. The blowtorch from which it gushed was imbedded immovably in the cement. The steel box, too, was immovable. And the nipple in the path of the flame was beginning to change its shape. It was melting!

Hunched over like a cripple, The Shadow thrust the hands that were trussed behind his back into that searing jet of flame from the wall. It made him cringe with agony. But he held his corded hands there until the tightly-twisted cords parted.

They fell apart, writhing and smoking. The Shadow flung himself to the stone floor. He worked at his ankles like a madman.

Soon he was able to leap to his feet and race toward the helpless figure of Clyde Burke. He dared not look toward the wax nipple whose complete melting would detonate the contents of the immovable metal box.

A knife slashed so desperately at Clyde's bonds, that blood spurted from the flesh of The Shadow's agent. Clyde raced for the mouth of the earth tunnel through which the spies had fled. The Shadow followed.

The wall panel closed behind them. They crawled along the tunnel like rats, squirming, sliding, in their haste to put every possible foot of space between them and the deadly explosive in the underground chamber.

They were thirty feet along the tunnel when the blast erupted. The Shadow heard no sound at first. Flame was the only thing of which he was conscious. Searing heat blew open the door of the earth tunnel as if it had been made of paper.

Then the concussion of the explosion blasted their eardrums.

It was like the end of the world. It deafened them, flung them forward. Clyde fell in a twisted heap. He lay as if his neck had been broken. But a hard slap of The Shadow's hand roused him.

Feebly, he crawled onward. The Shadow followed.

The tunnel floor began to slant upward. It ended at a point considerably higher than the level at which they had entered it. The Shadow found himself facing a barrier of hard-packed earth.

But there was a ladder in front of that barrier. It led upward to a wooden trapdoor. The Shadow ascended swiftly, followed by Clyde. The .45 in The Shadow's clenched hand showed that he was ready for battle with the guardian of this secret exit from the bowels of the earth.

BUT there was no guardian waiting to stop either him or Clyde.

The Shadow found himself in the empty pay shack of the automobile parking lot at the corner of Indian Street. He shoved his gun out of sight as he and Clyde emerged into the open air.

Every human being in the neighborhood was out in the street, gazing with terror down Indian Street. The vacant house in the middle of the block had vanished. Where it had stood was a flaming inferno of toppled walls and tumbled masonry.

A glance over the fence of the parking lot was all The Shadow needed. He started to whisper a command to Clyde, then his voice ceased abruptly. He was listening.

High in the night sky, he had heard the hum of an airplane motor. As Kent Allard, The Shadow was familiar with the characteristic echo noise of every airplane engine made in America.

This one was different. A foreign-built motor!

It faded quickly. The Shadow realized the direction of its course. The plane was heading across Oakmont toward the bomb-sight factory owned by Peter Kirk and Ralph Jackson.

The Shadow darted back to the pay shack in the deserted parking lot. There was a telephone on a battered desk. He picked it up, tried to raise the operator. But the line was dead, probably put out of commission by the nearby explosion.

With a bound, The Shadow flung himself into the nearest car in the parking lot. Its key was in the ignition lock. That was the rule of all parking lots.

The Shadow stepped fiercely on the starter.

## CHAPTER VIII. WHISTLING DEATH

THE huge Kirk-Jackson factory was humming with energy. Tonight there was an air of jubilation on the crowded work floor. Quotas for the last month had been exceeded. Bonus payments had been made to patriotic workers. A message of congratulation had been received from the President of the United States.

Jubilation had spread to the private office of the factory owners on the second floor. The hiring of Frederick Brownson had apparently produced this happy change. Ever since Brownson had started work, with two assistants of his own choice, factory production had zoomed.

Brownson was being discussed in the private office. Kirk and Jackson were there. So was Henry Norman, who had dropped in for a brief chat on his way home from his own factory.

"You must admit, Kirk, you were wrong about this fellow Brownson," he said smilingly.

Kirk nodded.

"I completely misjudged him," he said. "He's thoroughly loyal. So loyal, that he's working on the floor right now."

"I thought he was on the day shift," Norman said.

"He insisted on staying, in order to help speed up the night shift."

"Isn't that a little too much? No man can work sixteen hours without rest."

Kirk hesitated. Then he spoke quickly.

"It isn't continuous work. Brownson knocked off for two hours this evening. He just came back to the plant a short time ago, with his two helpers."

Jackson chuckled. "We've had a long day ourselves. Are you gentlemen going home?"

Norman nodded. But Peter Kirk shook his head. Again, that strange hesitancy came into his speech.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

"You two go ahead. I'll be tied up here a little longer. I've got a few odds and ends to attend to here."

Jackson and Norman left. Alone, Kirk sat down in his swivel chair and cupped his hands behind his head. He looked like a tired man. But he didn't close his eyes, he kept staring at the wall.

Presently, the telephone bell rang. At the sound, Kirk moved swiftly.

"Hello? Peter Kirk speaking."

His caller was Lee Morley, the fourth member of the Aviation Defense Committee. The voice of the oil magnate seemed far away. But there was urgency in his speech, a note of excitement that was instantly apparent.

"What's the matter, Lee?" Kirk asked. "You sound jittery."

"Are you alone in your office?"

"Yes."

"I've just had a telephone warning. About spies!"

"That's... ridiculous!" Kirk said slowly.

Lee Morley explained, in a swift race of words over the wire. He had received a telephone call, a few minutes earlier, from a man who called himself The Shadow. The man had hung up after whispering a harsh warning. It had been impossible to trace the call.

"The Shadow told me that Fifth Columnists have stolen the plans of the airplane bomb sight," Morley gasped. "The theft was accomplished during the interval when the day shift quit work and the night shift took over. Kirk, for God's sake, examine your safe! Open it and make sure that —"

"This is idiotic!" Kirk snapped.

"I tell you, it's no joke! I'm scared!"

Kirk spoke indulgently.

"All right. I'll have a look at the plans, just to set your mind at rest. Come on over, Morley. We'll examine the safe together."

"I'll be there in fifteen or twenty minutes. Will you wait for me?"

"Sure!"

KIRK hung up, and relaxed in his chair. For a couple of minutes he sat there, watching the big safe in the corner. Then his glance moved upward toward the clock on the office wall. He uttered a grunt that might have been a sound of impatience.

At any rate, he didn't wait for the arrival of the oil magnate. He hurried over to the safe, spinning its dials with hands that trembled perceptibly. When the safe door swung open, Peter Kirk took from it a metal dispatch case.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

The metal box contained the blueprints that explained in technical language the secret of the new bomb sight whose invention had revolutionized airplane attack. Kirk didn't close the safe.

Walking back to his desk, he laid the tin box down. He seemed in no hurry to open it. Perhaps he had decided, after all, to wait for Morley's arrival, in order to have a laugh at his worried associate's expense when the plans were found to be O.K.

But there was no humor in Peter Kirk's stony-cold eyes.

THERE was a big clock down on the busy floor of the factory. Frederick Brownson watched it.

The new foreman and his two helpers were busy at the delicate semiautomatic machinery they controlled. Under their hands was the very heart of the assembly line that produced the enormously valuable bomb sights.

Presently, Brownson walked closer to one of his assistants. He made a minor adjustment at an electrical switch panel. But he also made certain that he leaned close to the ear of his assistant.

Into the man's ear Brownson whispered a brief command.

The workman left his machine, drifted across the plant floor toward one of the windows. Below its steel sill, on the floor, was a large metal chest. The chest contained fire-fighting materials. In one compartment sand was kept, to fight a blaze of chemical origin. In another compartment were patent extinguishers.

The chest was locked.

The workman leaned closer, as if looking idly out the window. Slyly, he unlocked the box, using a key he slipped from his pocket.

He didn't open the closed lid. He merely wanted it ready. He continued to stare out the window. He wasn't watching anything, however; he was listening!

Suddenly, he heard it – a barely audible buzzing far up in the black sky. The hum of an airplane at a high altitude!

Gradually, the hum faded. Then twice more it was faintly audible. The plane had circled over the factory three times. Everything was ready!

The workman went back to his machine. As he passed Brownson, he whispered a monosyllable.

Brownson smiled. It was a taut grimace. Soon, he began to make a routine inspection of other machines on the factory floor. His tour around the plant excited no comment. As foreman, it was Brownson's task to make periodic check-ups.

He devoted more attention to some machines than others. Each one of these latter machines were located near air vents, ventilation fans, open shafts where draughts blew strongly.

The worst spots imaginable for a bad fire to break out!

Brownson managed to drop to his knees and get a casual look under those machines. In each case, he saw the same thing: a small metal cylinder, hidden from sight. The cylinders had a queer little turret atop them. The



## THE WHITE COLUMN

Shadow would have recognized the shape of those turrets. They were like the silver cap on the termite-bomb box that had blown the house at 16 Indian Street into flaming chaos.

But the principle of these bombs was entirely different. The nipple was not made of soft, easily melted wax. They concealed an amazing sound-receiving device, invented in the war laboratories of a foreign nation.

Brownson went back to his own machine. He continued to watch the clock. Suddenly, he stiffened. The moment had come. His lunch pail was on the floor, close to his machine. He kicked it out of sight with a sly gesture.

Suddenly, there was a sharp, crackling noise. Dense, black smoke began to pour from the machine. It was thick and greasy.

It spread with amazing rapidity into a dense cloud.

"Fire!" Brownson screamed.

His two assistants took up the cry.

Workmen began to mill around, coughing in the dense smoke. A few more-level heads tried to stem the panic. They began to shout reassuring words. But they didn't do it very long. Fists smashed into their jaws, knocking them unconscious. The thick pall of smoke hid this treacherous attack.

Other workmen were dropping to the floor, overcome by the greasy smoke that swirled everywhere. It smelled like a chemical mixture.

THROUGH the smoke screen, the three foreign agents darted unseen to the metal chest near the window. From it they snatched smoke helmets, donned them quickly.

The three honest workmen who had been knocked unconscious were dragged through the dense smoke toward the machines in charge of Brownson and his two helpers. They were dropped there in a crumpled huddle.

If smoke didn't kill them, flame would. Their charred bodies would provide a false alibi for Fifth Columnists. Firemen, poking in the ruins, would find what they believed to be the bodies of Brownson and his two helpers, burned to a cinder at their posts of duty.

Protected by their smoke helmets, the three conspirators raced through the choking black fog and up the stairs to the office of Peter Kirk and Ralph Jackson.

Brownson darted into the office. His two assistants waited outside, to kill anyone who might interfere. But no one challenged them.

Presently, Brownson reappeared from the smoke-shrouded office. His voice was a thick, slobbering bellow from under his helmet.

"Dismissed! You know where to go."

Carrying the dispatch case which Peter Kirk had removed from the office, he jerked off his helmet, and so did the other two. They scattered to different windows. Swift leaps brought them downward to the paved surface of the factory yard outside. It wasn't a dangerous jump, barely twelve feet.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

The factory yard was a scene of confusion. Men milled in a confused mass, yelling with excitement and terror. Their fear increased as an ominous sound rose in the black heavens overhead. A noise like a descending hurricane. The shrill plunge of an airplane in a power dive!

The plane was a thousand feet above in the darkness. It had leveled off and was climbing aloft again. But from its steel belly a black dot dropped earthward – a dot that swiftly became an enormous bomb!

Workmen tried to run. Their yells were dwarfed by a more hellish shriek from the falling bomb. It was a siren bomb! It struck in the courtyard and lay where it had fallen, without exploding. Men stared over their shoulders at it in paralyzed terror.

The siren in the fallen bomb continued to shriek. Its sound got higher, shriller. Gradually, it vanished into silence. The noise of that bomb siren was at too high a pitch for human ears to hear. It was approaching the pitch of the sound mechanism in the metal cylinder concealed in the doomed factory.

Suddenly, there was a roar that seemed like the end of the world. The factory building quivered like a wounded animal. Then it erupted. Bricks flew, glass shattered. Flame spouted upward in enormous pillars topped with black smoke.

The government bomb–sight plant was doomed. No human activity could now save it.

Frederick Brownson watched it, flat on his belly in a dark corner of the factory yard. Darkness protected him. So did smoke. Through that darkness came a weird figure. It was a man dressed in bulky ski pants tucked into hob-nailed shoes. A cloth helmet masked his face except for the twin slits of eyeholes.

The metal dispatch case which Brownson had stolen from the office of Peter Kirk passed swiftly into the grasp of Brownson's traitorous chief. The masked leader fled.

He headed toward a queer haven. Shielded by billowing clouds of smoke, he raced toward the private garage at the rear of the factory yard where the automobile of Peter Kirk was kept. He darted inside. The door slammed.

A MOMENT later, a car roared into the factory yard through the street gate. It was driven by a wildly–excited member of the Defense Committee. Lee Morley leaped out, shouting at the top of his lungs.

"The Shadow! This fire was plotted by The Shadow! He warned me that the factory would be destroyed tonight! He must be here somewhere! Find him! Kill him!"

His words were repeated by the maddened men in the yard. Flames made terrific heat. Faces were flushed, lips cracked. Eyes turned toward the windows of the doomed plant. Then a horrible yell arose.

"The Shadow!"

He was visible at one of the factory windows. They could see him climbing out of Peter Kirk's office.

Men darted to the attack. But flame and smoke drove them back. It forced The Shadow to flee, too. He had arrived too late. His wild automobile dash across town had brought him to the factory after the blast had occurred. He had fought his way inside the doomed plant and raced to Kirk's office. It was empty, and the safe wide open. There was no sign of Peter Kirk.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

Poised at the open window, The Shadow's grim eyes peered through billowing clouds of smoke. He saw something that no one else in that maddened mob did. He saw a hooded figure vanish into the garage owned by Peter Kirk. Under the arm of the hooded skulker was a metal dispatch box.

It was a challenge to the courage and wits of The Shadow. He eluded the mob, which had fallen back from the terrific heat of the flaming factory. He did this by deliberately attempting something no human being could be expected to accomplish: he ducked back and raced through the heart of the flames!

It was a short cut and a necessary one; but it nearly took the life of The Shadow. When he staggered to another window above a dark extension roof, his robe was ablaze. Grimly, he beat the fire from his cloak. A leap carried him downward through the smoke to the pavement of the factory yard. He raced unseen toward Kirk's garage.

Another leap took him inside. His gloved hand slammed the door.

There was a man in the garage, but he wasn't hooded or masked. Nor did he hold the stolen dispatch box with the plans for the bomb sight.

The man was Peter Kirk! He lay in a huddle on the floor. There was blood on his head. Near his limp hand lay a chisel smeared with crimson.

As Kirk saw the black-cloaked intruder, he sprang to his feet, seized the bloody chisel and attacked The Shadow. His voice rose in a frantic shout.

"Help! The Shadow! In the garage!"

His shouts were heard. Men raced to Kirk's help. But when the door of the garage was flung open, Kirk was alone.

He was lying on the floor. At the rear of the garage, a window was smashed. The Shadow had escaped just in the nick of time from a maddened mob of Americans who would have torn him to pieces.

They found no trace of The Shadow. Fireman and police combed the entire neighborhood of the flaming plant, without avail.

In the garage, Peter Kirk continued to babble hysterically.

"The Shadow! He rushed into the garage while I was trying to save my car from the flames. He struck me down with a chisel. He stole the bomb-sight plans!"

The statement Kirk made was not true – whether because of his confusion, or because he had deliberately lied.

But it was a statement that no man doubted. The Shadow was branded with the guilt of treason!

## CHAPTER IX. THE WHITE COLUMN

DESPAIR filled the big conference room at Oakmont's police headquarters.

"I don't like the situation at all," the police chief declared. "The whole town is aroused. Citizens have lost confidence in the police. My detectives report that there are ugly whispers all over town. A secret vigilante

## THE WHITE COLUMN

organization is being formed. They call themselves the White Column. They're inviting loyal Americans of Oakmont to help them rid the town of Fifth Columnists. I'm afraid there will be bloodshed, if we don't solve this sabotage mystery swiftly and arrest The Shadow."

The members of the Defense Committee were there, too. Peter Kirk and Ralph Jackson sat side by side, their faces grim. The financial loss to them had been tremendous. Worse still, they had failed to safeguard a military secret entrusted to their care by the government. The sabotage raid had succeeded in every vicious detail.

Henry Norman looked as unhappy as his two associates on the Committee. So did Lee Morley, the oil refiner.

"Is it certain that The Shadow was guilty?" Morley asked the police chief.

"Absolutely! The Shadow was seen at a window of the plant shortly after the explosions occurred. He tried to hide in Mr. Kirk's garage, and attacked him with a chisel when Kirk tried to capture him."

A new voice spoke quietly in the conference room. Kent Allard was there. He had arrived late. He apologized for his delay. He asked the police chief to summarize the facts that had been discovered.

Kent Allard's position on the committee made such a request an order. As a personal representative of the President of the United States, he was charged with the duty of reporting directly to Washington. The police chief nodded respectfully.

"The factory was destroyed by thermite bombs," he declared. "They were detonated within the plant by a new method – a method set in action by a sound device outside the factory walls."

"I don't understand," Kent Allard said.

"The thermite bombs were hidden all over the plant near ventilator fans, air shafts and similar places, where the flames would spread quickly under forced draft. Chemical experts have examined one which failed to explode. Gentlemen, that bomb was equipped with a sound-receiving device. A deadly little thing like a tuning fork."

"But how was it set off?"

"The projectile that fell from the plane was a siren bomb. Its siren continued to shriek after the projectile landed. When the sound wave reached a certain pitch, they affected the tuning forks in those thermite bombs planted inside the factory!"

The police chief drew a deep breath.

"No commercial or private ship was in the air last night within miles of the factory. It's proof that the plane was a foreign one. Either it came from a secret field, or it flew from a foreign warship somewhere off the east coast of the United States."

"Could there have been a treacherous collusion inside the factory?" Kent Allard asked.

"The only man who might be suspected was the new foreman, Frederick Brownson. It was from beneath his machine that the smoke first appeared. But neither he nor his two assistants could be traitors. They were the only men who died in the disaster. Everyone else fled. We found the charred bodies of Brownson and his two helpers in the ruins. They remained loyally at their posts."

## THE WHITE COLUMN

"Were you able to identify them positively?"

"Yes. Each of them wore a metal tag with his name and payroll number."

Kent Allard's eyes gleamed at this, but he changed the subject. He referred to the strangely easy theft of the bomb-sight plans.

"That's more treacherous work on the part of The Shadow," the police chief growled. "Mr. Kirk, will you explain?"

Kirk licked his lips. He described the phone call he had received from Lee Morley.

"Morley said he had gotten a warning from The Shadow. The Shadow boasted that an attempt was under way to steal the plans. I opened my safe to make sure. It was a lie! The plans were in their metal case. I was about to return them to the safe, when the explosions occurred. I barely escaped with my life. I was forced to leave the plans lying on my office desk – where they were stolen by The Shadow!"

"The whole thing was a fake!" Lee Morley cut in. "I never made any phone call to Kirk. Whoever phoned Kirk with that rigmarole about the plans, impersonated my voice!"

Kent Allard's keen gaze studied the oil magnate, and he queried:

"In that case, why did you race at top speed to the factory to join Mr. Kirk?"

"Kirk asked me to," Morley said. "He phoned me up at my home and told me all hell was about to break loose at the factory."

Kirk's face was pale.

"I never asked Morley to come to the factory! The Shadow must have made both calls! First, he impersonated Morley and told me the plans were missing from the safe. Then he impersonated me and warned Morley to hurry to the plant. It looks to me as if he hoped to destroy both Morley and myself in the explosion."

"Funny, The Shadow didn't try to lure your partner Mr. Jackson," Allard mused. "And why didn't he trick Mr. Norman, too, I wonder?"

"He probably didn't have time," Henry Norman murmured.

Norman didn't seem to be as excited as the rest. He kept watching Kent Allard with a steady gaze. There was a faint frown on his forehead.

The police chief shrugged. He returned to the subject of the new vigilante organization that called itself the White Column.

"There have been threats of lynching and worse. The rumor is all over town that the police have failed and it's time for loyal citizens to take the law into their own hands. I'm afraid trouble is brewing."

"Probably just talk," Henry Norman said smoothly. "The question is, where is the Defense Committee to meet hereafter? The Kirk-Jackson factory where we used to meet is now gone. I suggest that we make our new headquarters at my machine-gun plant across town. It's well guarded. I've doubled my private police."

## THE WHITE COLUMN

It was so agreed. Kent Allard ratified the choice. But there was grim uneasiness in his mind.

Someone on this Defense Committee was a traitor to the United States. Which one of these trusted leaders of American industry was the masked criminal who had welcomed five foreign parachute invaders to the soil of America?

The Shadow had already learned much. He wasn't fooled by the identification of the three men who had perished in the flames of the Kirk–Jackson plant. Identity tags had been switched. Frederick Brownson and his two treacherous helpers had escaped.

And what of this so–called patriotic White Column? Was it an honest expression of American anger against foreign agents – or was it another cunning move on the part of clever foes from overseas?

The Shadow suspected that hidden forces of murder were gathering in darkness for another blow at America's defense!

THE saloon which Clyde Burke entered that evening was in a shabby district of Oakmont. Its patrons were chiefly workmen. The place was crowded, but there was little talking going on. What talk there was concerned winter sports and similar innocent topics. But the faces of the men along the bar were grim.

Clyde attracted no particular attention. He wore cheap khaki trousers, a flannel shirt, and a well–worn overcoat. His hands were bruised and calloused – the hands of a man accustomed to manual labor.

It had taken an hour to transform Clyde's hands to this toil–worn appearance. The Shadow had attended to that. It was by the orders of The Shadow that Clyde Burke had entered this particular bar and grill.

People kept drifting in and out, Clyde observed; no women. Most of them had a beer or two, then drifted into the street. A few men left by a rear door that apparently led to a back room.

Clyde noticed that no one who went into that back room came out again. And no workman went in who first didn't exchange a few words with a chunky, gray–haired man who seemed to have a lot of friends in the saloon.

Shortly, Clyde discovered that the gray–haired man was an ex–cop.

He waited until the talk got around to the subject of Fifth Columnists, then Clyde sounded off. He put on a good act. His face flushed. He pounded the bar with his fist. People in the saloon turned to look at him.

Clyde denounced spies and sabotage. He spoke angrily about the vain efforts of the police to round up the enemies of America.

"It's about time decent citizens took matters into their own hands," Clyde growled. "That's the only way to put the fear of God into traitors! We ought to do as they did in the West years ago. Flog 'em! Make 'em talk! By heaven, I'd like to swing a whip against some of those damned spies myself!"

Some of the men in the bar murmured approvingly. But the chunky, gray–haired man frowned. He spoke quietly to Clyde.

"That's silly talk, mister. The police are doing the best they can. I know, because I'm an ex–cop myself. That mob stuff doesn't help."

## THE WHITE COLUMN

"I can't help it! It makes my blood boil! There's only one way to handle rats who sneak into America to cripple our war defenses. That's to give them a dose of their own medicine!"

Clyde had struck a popular note. He could tell that as he watched the faces. But he dropped the subject quickly, and ordered another beer. He kept his eye on the chunky, gray-haired man. The man went over to an empty table in the corner and sat down. He sat there until a new batch of customers filled the saloon. Then he motioned to Clyde.

Clyde went over.

"Go in the back room," the man whispered. "Wait there."

Clyde obeyed.

The rear room was empty. There was no furniture, not even a chair. After a while, the gray-haired man drifted in. He didn't waste a minute coming to the point.

"I liked your patriotic talk. Did you mean it?"

"I sure did."

"What's your name? Where do you live?"

Clyde answered glibly. He gave the boarding-house address where he had registered under a fake name. He answered a lot of other questions. Evidently, his answers pleased the gray-haired man.

"O.K. We need guys like you. Go downstairs. You'll be told what to do and where to go."

There didn't seem to be any way to get downstairs. But the gray-haired man smiled grimly as he pulled aside an end of the ragged carpet on the floor. A trapdoor was disclosed.

Clyde descended. The man above closed the trapdoor. Clyde found himself in a small basement room, staring at a young man. The young man looked as hard as nails. Behind him were some shelves on the wall. There were dozens of paper packages on the shelves. They looked like laundry packages.

The young man handed him one of them.

"Don't open this until you get home. Got a car?"

"Yes."

"We're taking care of a rat tonight. Everything is arranged to show this community that we mean business. Can you join us tonight?"

"I sure can! Where do I go?"

The hard-faced young man leaned closer. He whispered briefly in Clyde's ear, ended with:

"Remember! Do it exactly that way, or you won't get to first base. We've got to be careful."

## THE WHITE COLUMN

The young man pressed a button in the wall. A rear door slid open. Clyde found himself in a dark rear court behind the saloon. He went back out where he had parked his car, and got in. He tore open a corner of the paper parcel.

Its contents made his eyes gleam. The hard-faced young man had given Clyde a white robe, white gloves, and a white cloth helmet with slitted eyeholes.

Clyde Burke had successfully carried out The Shadow's orders. He was a member of the White Column!

### CHAPTER X. MOB RULE

THE gasoline filling station was at the north end of Oakmont.

It was not a very big place. The road on which it was located was not a main-traveled highway. But Clyde Burke identified it instantly in the darkness.

His headlights picked out an American flag flying from the top of a small pole planted in a grass plot outside. The pole was painted white. The flag was brand-new.

There were three pumps at the curb. An overalled worker gave Clyde quick service.

"How many gallons?"

"I don't think you've got the brand I want. I want some good United States gas."

"O.K., pal. I think I can fix you up. Drive over to that last pump."

Clyde obeyed his instructions.

The last pump looked as if it were seldom used. Clyde's car had to bump over the curb of the driveway to reach it. It was a pump that ordinary customers would never bother with.

The grease-monkey shouted over his shoulder toward the filling-station office.

"Hey, Mack! Here's a guy wants some good United States gas. Can you fix him up in a hurry?"

"Yeah."

Mack came out of the office. He was a broad-shouldered powerful-looking man, of a decent, solid American type. But there was a fanatical gleam in his eyes as he looked Clyde over carefully.

That was the trouble with this secret White Column. It was designed to attract honest men who sincerely wanted to rid the country of Fifth Columnists. The Shadow suspected that patriotic citizens were being exploited by the very foes they were trying to punish!

After Clyde's tank was filled, the man leaned closer and passed him a folded piece of paper.

"Glad to meet guys like you. Here's your receipt. So long, and good luck!"

Clyde opened the paper after he had driven out of sight. It contained complete directions for reaching a spot on a small map marked with a cross. The spot, Clyde recognized at once, was a desolate one. It was in



## THE WHITE COLUMN

mountainous country that would require an unpleasant drive over bad roads.

Before he got too far out of town, Clyde stopped at a phone booth, went in and made a low-voiced call. When he hung up there was satisfaction in his eyes. The Shadow was now in possession of the facts.

Ten miles of jerky driving brought Clyde Burke to the spot on his map where he left the public road. A man dressed in overalls stood leaning on a gate. When Clyde halted his car, the man flashed an electric torch in his face.

"You can't drive in here. Private property."

"I've got the owner's permission."

"That's different. Let's see it."

Clyde handed over the paper he had received at the filling station. There was a quick grunt, and the gate-tender swung the barrier aside.

"O.K. Hurry it up! Most of the boys are already here. Put out your parking lights after you change clothes."

The lane was narrow and rutted.

It climbed steadily. Presently, Clyde found a spot along the lane where a lot of cars were parked. He swung his own machine into line and doused the lights. Quickly, he donned his white robe and pulled the slitted mask over his head.

He hurried toward a bright glow he could see through the black mass of interlaced trees.

WHEN he emerged into the open, Clyde saw a terrifying scene. The glade at the top of the hill was enclosed by shaggy trees. It was visible from the sky, but from no other direction. There was room in the clearing for a number of cars arranged in a semicircle. Their bright lights were all turned on. The dazzling beams pointed toward the center of the glade.

A white post had been erected there. At the top of this "white column" fluttered a small American flag. A man was manacled to the post. His bared back was toward the crowd. He had been stripped to the waist. A gag in his jaws kept him from screaming with terror.

His captors were robed and masked like Clyde Burke. They waited for a signal from the mobleader. The leader stood in front of the whipping post, with four henchmen at his side. Their identity was as secret as that of any man in the mob. But Clyde's throat felt suddenly dry. It was queer that the leader should have four assistants. Clyde suspected the ugly answer. The leader of this misguided mob was the ace enemy of America! He had only four henchmen, because one of his five parachute spies had been killed in the subcellar of 16 Indian Street during the vain attempt to blow The Shadow to flaming shreds.

A horrible perversion of justice was taking place!

A hush settled on the robed mob. The leader began to address them, began with a patriotic talk.

It was a skillful job. He appealed to every decent emotion. Clyde could feel the temper of the mob rising. Men began shouting impatiently for the punishment of the captive.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

"Wait!"

The leader's hand quelled the tumult he had himself skillfully built up.

"We're here to examine evidence and to pronounce a just verdict. We've taken the law into our own hands only because the police have failed!"

His voice rose trumpetlike.

"The prisoner is a man who claims to be an American. He has an important production job in the machine-gun factory owned by Henry Norman. If this man is what he claims to be, we have no quarrel with him. But if he is a soldier in the pay of a foreign nation – what does he deserve?"

"Death!"

It was a horrible cry. It burst from hooded throats in a mounting like that of wild beasts. The leader of the White Column quelled it with a gesture.

"The prisoner's name is Albert Kunner. He says he was born of an American father and mother. He says he has never been outside America in his life. I say he lies!"

The masked leader whirled. He snarled an order to his four subordinates.

"Take fingerprint samples of this Albert Kunner!"

The captive struggled at the white pole to which he was fettered, but it was a vain effort. His fingers were pressed on an ink pad. Their pattern was transferred to a large sheet of white paper. The paper was handed to the leader.

There was another document in the leader's hand. He held up both to the mob.

"Here is my evidence! Before we pass judgment, I want every member of the White Column to file past me and examine these two papers. After that, I shall call for your verdict."

Clyde Burke joined the line of advancing men. When his time came to look at the evidence, his heart quailed at the thoroughness of the case.

Kunner's fingerprints matched those on the document produced from under the robe of the masked leader. Kunner's name was on it, too. His age, his physical appearance, the foreign city where he had been born – they were all recorded.

The document was an army commission. It showed that Albert Kunner was a captain in the army of an aggressor nation overseas.

"Gentlemen, you have seen the evidence. What is your verdict?"

"Death!"

IT was shouted from a hundred throats. Clyde didn't join in that cry. He was moving quietly toward the white pole where the victim writhed helplessly.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

Two of the mobleader's hooded henchmen had picked up whips. They stood on either side of the prisoner. There was a whistling sound as a whip struck. A pink streak appeared across the captive's bared back.

His shriek was muffled by the gag.

Again and again, the whips lashed. Blood trickled down the man's flesh. He sagged in his bonds. He was being slowly beaten to death.

White-lipped behind the mask, Clyde sprang forward. From beneath his robe he jerked a pistol, swung its muzzle toward the masked leader.

"Stop it – or I'll shoot!"

The leader recoiled. He uttered a strangled yell of rage and terror. The men with the whips fell back too. Clyde's gun menaced everyone within range of its swiftly circling muzzle.

He had halted the torture of the victim, but it was a respite that lasted only an instant. There were too many hooded enemies for Clyde to hold the advantage.

These mobsmen were fanatics. They had been stirred to madness by a skillful criminal who had played on their emotions as Americans. They ignored the menace of the gun and flung themselves forward in wild attack. Clyde brought one down with a bullet through the leg, but it didn't stop the others.

Hands clutched at Clyde's robe, fists swung toward his hooded face. He went down like a chip under a wave, but he was up in an instant. He backed away before vicious feet could kick him to death.

His gun butt dropped a mobsmen headlong. Another blow cleared a way for him. Clyde began to race down the rutted lane toward where he had left his car. The entire mob chased him.

Suddenly, they found themselves facing two figures. A man in cloak of black emerged from the darkness with uncanny speed. In his hand was a gun with a queerly bulky barrel. He swept Clyde behind him with a quick gesture.

The Shadow!

His black cloak made him seem part of the darkness under the branching trees of that mountain lane. His face was not masked, but even without a mask there was little to see. The brim of his hat was pulled low over his flaming eyes. The collar of his robe shielded the lower part of his face.

He ordered the snarling mob back.

It was a futile order. Men had been stirred to the point of madness. They leaped forward to tear The Shadow to pieces.

There was a booming explosion that made the dark leaves of the trees quiver. The air was suddenly filled with streamers of white vapor. The vapor spread everywhere. Wherever it touched men's eyes, they clawed them frantically.

Tear gas!

## THE WHITE COLUMN

The mobsmen milled together in a stumbling mass. Tears streamed from inflamed eyes. Voices shrieked curses. In their frenzied efforts to escape from the vapor that was blinding them, members of the mob fought with one another in a crazy tangle.

The Shadow saw nothing of this. Protected by the gas barrage, he dragged Clyde out of sight among the trees.

The Shadow had not forgotten the bleeding captive at the white pole. The man had already suffered a cruel lashing. The Shadow's first task was to rescue him; give him an honest chance to explain his innocence or guilt.

But The Shadow's mercy task was a vain one. Kunner was forever beyond rescue.

He was dead.

A quick test of the prisoner's heart and pulse proved it. The lashes had cut Kunner's naked back to ribbons, but they had not caused his death. Terror had done that. A heart organically unsound had given way under the strain.

A roar from the lane testified that the mob was racing back to cut off the escape of The Shadow and Clyde Burke. They sensed that The Shadow had darted to the hilltop to rescue the prisoner.

Guns crashed as they saw the black-robed figure retreat through the underbrush with Clyde. The Shadow didn't return that fire. The odds were too uneven. At least fifty maddened mobsmen were pressing on in attack. The leader and his four henchmen were cunningly protected by the flesh and blood of the leader's own followers, who headed the pursuit.

The Shadow knew exactly where he was retreating. He had thoroughly scouted the hill while Clyde was listening to the patriotic harangue of the mobleader. As The Shadow fled, his gloved hand unwound a pliable rope from beneath his robe.

He tied one end of the rope to a chunk of rock imbedded in the earth at the edge of a steep chasm, and dropped the loose rope into the gorge. Clyde smelled a queer odor from the rope. It seemed to be wet. But he had no time to hesitate. A stern order from The Shadow sent him over the edge of the black precipice. He slid swiftly down the rope to the bottom. His palms were raw from friction when his feet touched the earth below. Whatever the rope was soaked with, made his scorched palms sting.

Bullets spat at The Shadow as he followed Clyde. A slug drilled through his hat. Another lifted the sleeve from his arm as he slid through darkness to safety.

Above him members of the hooded mob were crowding at the cliff edge to slide down the rope. It was their only way to reach The Shadow. The smooth cliff offered no footholds.

But the rope gave no chance for pursuit, either.

With a quick gesture, The Shadow's hand swerved to the bottom of the dangling line. Flame made a quick crimson flare in the darkness. The flame grew instantly to a mounting line of fire.

The rope had been soaked with kerosene!

In an instant, it was ablaze from bottom to top. The mobsmen leaning over the cliff edge flung themselves hastily backward.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

The rope parted in the middle. A flaming end fell into the darkness of the deep ravine. The rest of it curled to a charred thread.

Gunfire streaked downward into the darkness where The Shadow and Clyde had flung themselves. Bullets cut the ravine with spiteful thwacks.

The fugitives, however, were not hit. Neither The Shadow nor Clyde had remained under those tangled bushes on the floor of the ravine. A quick jerk yanked Clyde's crawling body along a crooked depression that was evidently the dried-up bed of a small stream.

This led to the lip of a dry waterfall covered by a black mass of foliage. Scrambling down concealed rocks, The Shadow led Clyde through a labyrinth of trees toward a swamp. A path around the swamp brought the two fugitives to a clump of bushes at the edge of a rocky lane.

A car was parked there, without lights.

It raced down a hill in total darkness. The Shadow allowed it to coast. It was a terrible risk in that blackness. Curves dropped away in sheer descents unprotected by fence or guardrail. But The Shadow trusted to luck – and his superb nerve.

At the bottom, he swung into a level road, snapped on parking lights and started his engine. The car raced away.

The Shadow had saved Clyde's life and his own from the blind fury of the mob. But he had failed in one grim particular. Through no fault of his, a man was dead on the top of that lonely mountain – a man who had been given no chance to defend himself against a charge of treason.

Was Albert Kunner innocent? Had spies changed their attack from factories to workmen?

To The Shadow, the answer seemed viciously clear. A reign of terror was being established in Oakmont by a hooded order. Workmen at the Norman plant would be afraid to go near their jobs, for fear of new attack.

The mobleader was a criminal!

He was one of the members of the Aviation Defense Committee: Peter Kirk – Ralph Jackson – Henry Norman – Lee Morley.

But which?

## CHAPTER XI. HOODED MENACE

HENRY NORMAN was in an angry mood. He struck his fist against the desk belonging to the Oakmont chief of police. His voice carried a note of accusing challenge.

"It's a damned outrage! That man's death was murder! The police should have prevented it. I've a good mind to complain to the governor and have troops sent into this area to preserve order!"

It was the day following the "execution" of Albert Kunner by a hooded mob which called itself the "White Column." Sunlight streamed through the windows of the conference room at police headquarters. It was a peaceful room, but there was no peace in the mind of the worried police chief.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

"I'm sorry," he muttered. "The outrage was planned and carried out with complete secrecy. I haven't found any clues, as yet, concerning the identity of the mobleader or any of his hooded henchmen. But I've got my best detectives working on the case. If you'll only be patient, I can promise you action."

"Promises are no good," Norman fumed. "The White Column has got to be broken up before it ruins the morale of my workmen! Some of them have already quit. They're afraid they may be accused of being spies."

"The chief is doing all he can," a quiet voice said. "I'm sure it won't be necessary to bring in militia to preserve order."

The speaker was Kent Allard. His sobering words carried weight. The police chief looked grateful.

"It's a difficult problem," he said. "The town is full of rumors this morning. Everyone is whispering that the mob last night was headed by – The Shadow!"

Kent Allard had heard the whispered talk. That was why he had come with Henry Norman to police headquarters. He had another reason, too. He intended to commit an act of theft. But he wasn't ready for that yet.

"Are you sure that The Shadow is guilty?" Allard murmured.

"Positive!" the police head said. "He was seen leaving the Kirk–Jackson plant after the thermite bombs went off. Kirk tried to stop him and was slugged with a chisel. Now the attack has been transferred to Norman's factory."

The chief drew a deep breath.

"There's only one answer. The Shadow is the leader of the Fifth Column!"

"But why?" Allard asked quietly. "You told me a little while ago that you're convinced Albert Kunner was a spy. If The Shadow is serving a foreign nation, why should he have one of his own spies whipped to death?"

"That's the part I don't understand," the police chief admitted dazedly. "Kunner should be innocent. But the evidence we found tied around Kunner's neck is damning. It proves that he was a reserve officer in the army of an overseas nation. The document contains the description of his physical appearance, his fingerprints, age, and foreign birthplace. Perhaps he tried to double-cross The Shadow and was killed for that reason."

"Rot!" Norman said.

He spoke vehemently. Almost too vehemently, The Shadow thought.

"Albert Kunner had always been a loyal workman," Norman went on. "When I built this machine–gun plant out here, I transferred him from my Eastern arms factory, where he had worked for years. He's no more guilty of treason than I am. The whole thing is a put–up job to terrify other workers and throw my production schedule into disorder."

"May I see that document the mob left with Kunner's body?" Kent Allard asked the chief.

"Yes. It's here in my desk. I'm holding it until F.B.I. operatives arrive from Washington."

## THE WHITE COLUMN

He opened a locked drawer. Allard studied the army commission closely. It certainly looked genuine. Signature, description, fingerprints – all testified to the treason of the man who was now dead.

Kent Allard didn't ask if he might keep the document in order to check on the truth of it. The police chief had already made it clear that he would not allow the paper to pass from his possession.

Allard changed the subject abruptly, as he laid the paper on the desk.

"How are you going to protect other workers at the Norman plant?" he asked.

"I've already taken measures. The plant itself is being guarded night and day."

"Not worth a damn!" Norman rasped. "Kunner wasn't at the factory when he was kidnapped by the White Column. He was taken from his home. That's where the danger lies at the homes of my workmen!"

"I can't place a cop at every workman's home," the police chief protested. "There aren't men enough on the force. What you ask is impossible."

"You don't understand what I mean," Norman said. "All I want is protection for the foremen who are most essential to the running of my production. There are only five of them. They're all loyal Americans, but they're badly scared as a result of what happened to Kunner. If you'll post a cop outside their homes every night, I'll be satisfied."

The police chief smiled. He had expected a much more unreasonable request from the influential Mr. Norman. He wrote down the names and addresses of the five foremen, and promised to post a guard every night, until the White Column was broken up.

Kent Allard copied the names and addresses, too. There was no reason why he shouldn't.

A few minutes later, he excused himself from the conference. He left the room before Norman did, stepping out into the broad corridor on the second floor of police headquarters.

A swift glance showed him that none of the doors that lined the marble hall were open. It was exactly what Kent Allard had been hoping for. He hurried silently along the hall and vanished into a small closet near a rear-corridor window.

Three minutes later, the door of the police chief's conference room was flung suddenly open. A black-robed figure leaped inside and closed the door softly behind him. Twin .45's pointed at the startled police chief and Henry Norman.

"Silence – or death!" The Shadow rasped.

His appearance was frightening. Eyes gleamed like flame beneath the tilted brim of his slouch hat. The black cloak that covered his tall figure concealed The Shadow from throat to knee. Only his strongly-beaked nose, his taut lips were visible.

Neither of his dazed victims dared to shout an alarm or reach for a weapon.

The Shadow's left hand jerked swiftly toward the surface of the police chief's desk. He snatched the document which had been recovered by the police from the dead body of Albert Kunner. The paper vanished under The Shadow's cloak.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

The police chief was a brave man. He tried to leap to his feet and grapple with the intruder. His mouth opened for a warning shout to other bluecoats in offices along the hallway outside.

But the yell was never uttered. The Shadow halted the alarm by doing something he hated to do. He struck the police chief a blow with his gun butt. The blow was delivered mercifully. No bone was fractured. All The Shadow wanted, was to render his man unconscious for a few precious minutes.

He accomplished his purpose. The police chief toppled to the floor.

Norman had cowered back in his chair. But it was a tricky maneuver by a tricky man. As The Shadow whirled, the factory owner straightened. His hand leaped from his hip pocket, a small automatic grasped in his fist. He tried to fire from the hip.

The Shadow's quick blow dropped him. It was not a knockout blow. Norman groaned. His groan became a wild shout.

"Help! Murder! The Shadow!"

The Shadow was no longer in the conference room. He had taken advantage of Norman's brief paralysis, to slam the door and leap to the corridor outside.

BY the time startled bluecoats had emerged from their closed rooms along the marble hall, it was empty. The cops who raced to the aid of the chief were not used to a situation like this. All of them had clerical jobs, and were soft from many years at an easy desk assignment.

It was the chief who assumed charge of a quick pursuit of The Shadow. He had revived quickly. He staggered out the office doorway and raced toward the rear of the corridor. He had noticed that the window at the end of the hall was wide open. He peered into the dark courtyard below. It was an easy jump.

At the rear of that courtyard, close to a wooden fence, lay the slouch hat of The Shadow. He had apparently lost the hat as he scaled the fence. That was what the police chief deduced. That was what The Shadow intended him to do.

But before anyone could leap downward to the courtyard to take up the chase of the black-robed fugitive who had vanished so magically, there was a sudden interruption. A man began to groan.

The groan came from behind the closed door of a hallway closet. Cops raced to the door. Guns gleamed in police hands, as the door was flung wide.

A man crawled out on his hands and knees, a man whose head was trickling blood from a slight scalp cut. It was Kent Allard!

The police chief cursed with disappointment. Kent Allard was helped to his feet. His story was not very helpful, but it afforded added proof of The Shadow's villainy.

Allard declared weakly that he had been struck down almost the moment he had left the conference room. He had started toward the staircase that led to the rotunda on the ground floor. The Shadow had been hiding in a dark corner near the staircase. Robed in black, he had leaped without a sound. The butt of a .45 had toppled Allard. He had been dragged through the deserted corridor and thrust into the closet. That was all Allard remembered, until the shouts in the hallway had roused him from his stupor.



## THE WHITE COLUMN

No one doubted his story.

Kent Allard went back to the conference room with the others. He was there when detectives returned to report that no trace of The Shadow had been found. A citywide alarm had been broadcast. Every automobile within a five-mile radius of police headquarters was being halted and searched. But that, too, proved a waste of time.

All that remained in the hands of the police was the slouch hat that "proved" The Shadow had escaped from the building.

Kent Allard watched the tests that were made on the hat in the police laboratory. The tests were negative. No fingerprints, no manufacturer's label, no possible way to trace the ownership of that black piece of felt abandoned by The Shadow. Kent Allard veiled the gleam in his quiet eyes.

His head injury was a trifling one. The cut on his scalp was easily patched with a bit of adhesive tape. Norman and the police chief didn't need medical care. They had scarcely a bump to show.

"It proves what I suspected," the chief growled. "The Shadow is the leader of the Fifth Column! Now he's stolen the evidence taken from the body of Albert Kunner. There's no way to prove whether Kunner was innocent or guilty."

"He's guilty!" Norman snarled. "I take back what I said about him before. He was a reserve officer in a foreign army. The Shadow is his boss. That's why The Shadow took that desperate risk to steal the proof in the heart of police headquarters."

"Events certainly seem to support your belief, Mr. Norman," Allard said.

He said other things, but his talk was trite. After a while, he left for his hotel. He was conscious of a strong scrutiny on the part of Norman when they shook hands and parted. But the millionaire arms manufacturer made no more allusions to The Shadow –

HENRY NORMAN might have been amazed, however, had he been able to peer into the private suite of Kent Allard, two hours later. Doors and windows were locked. Shades were drawn. The suite was in absolute darkness except for a single bright light over the desk, where The Shadow was staring at a sheet of paper.

The paper was the document stolen from the chief of police. It had undergone painstaking and chemical tests. The Shadow had verified what hitherto he had only suspected. Kunner's commission in the army of a foreign nation was a forgery! The physical description was authentic. So were the fingerprints. But the signature was bogus.

It was an amazingly clever forgery. Only the fact that The Shadow had secured a half dozen real signatures of the dead man enabled him to spot the fraud. There was no longer any doubt of the truth. Albert Kunner had been a loyal American workman. His death had effectively sown the seeds of suspicion in the arms plant owned by Henry Norman. Other men faced a similar fate.

Particularly the five key foremen whose homes Norman had insisted should be guarded by police.

Was this sudden criminal switch from property to workmen due to the fact that Fifth Columnists wanted to spare the huge industrial plant in which Henry Norman had so big an investment?

## THE WHITE COLUMN

The Shadow picked up a private telephone his contact man, Burbank, had had installed. To Burbank, he gave crisp orders that concerned five of his agents now in Oakmont.

Orders were simple. Each of The Shadow's agents was detailed to watch one of the homes of the five workmen already under the protection of the police. The Shadow was not depending on police. He waited alone in his room for the first report of trouble.

First news came, however, not to The Shadow but to police headquarters. Shortly before midnight, an excited farmer phoned in sinister news. The White Column had struck again. The farmer had found a dead man on a lonely pasture. He had been beaten to death with whips. His body sagged at a post from which a small American flag flew. The post was painted white.

The dead man was not a workman at the Norman plant, but at a neighboring plant. For the last few days there had been nasty rumors about his integrity as an American. His death verified these rumors.

Around his neck hung a damning letter, left there by the White Column before it had disbanded and vanished. The letter was signed by the party leader of a foreign government. It showed that the dead man in Oakmont had been in secret communication with foreign enemies of America. The letter thanked him for turning over funds he had secretly collected as a gift to the propaganda bureau of this enemy nation. With the letter was a foreign decoration, as reward for treason.

The police didn't discover all this until they had driven miles through the darkness to the lonely pasture where the body had been left by the hooded mob. Every policeman in Oakmont raced to the scene, under a general alarm. With them went the five cops who had been detailed to guard the homes of key workers in the Norman plant.

It was a contingency The Shadow had prepared for.

Clyde Burke was one of The Shadow's agents on secret guard. He saw the policeman depart on the run from an assignment that no longer seemed important.

But Clyde stuck grimly on the job. Five minutes later, he saw a workman emerge stealthily from his house and hurry to its garage at the rear. The man drove swiftly away. He looked pale and scared. He drove as if the hounds of hell were after him.

Clyde followed in his own car.

Other cars clogged the road. People were heading toward the scene of the second White Column outrage. But the fugitive workman from the Norman plant headed in the opposite direction. He took the left turnpike. Clyde wondered where the frightened workman was fleeing. And why? That was the most puzzling part of the mystery.

The fugitive's car was already out of sight on the turnpike. A crossroad whizzed into sight and Clyde halted his car. There was a general store there. Clyde darted inside, to telephone The Shadow before he continued his trail of the man ahead in the darkness. He knew which way the man had gone. Tire marks lay clear and revealing under the headlights of Clyde's car outside the store.

But Clyde saw disaster when he darted outside after completing his swift phone call.

Every tire on his car had been ruthlessly slashed. The rubber was flat on the ground. The car was useless – impossible to move an inch.

A yell of rage from Clyde brought loungers piling out of the store. Eyes popped as they stared at the damage. But no answer as to who had done the criminal job was available. Nobody had been seen outside the store while Clyde had made his phone call. No other tire tracks were visible in the dusty road.

It was a perfect checkmate. Clyde Burke had been put out of action by a criminal foe who didn't want that fugitive workman from the Norman arms plant traced to his destination.

There was only one ray of hope. The Shadow had been warned by Clyde of what was going on!

### **CHAPTER XII. MURDER AT MIDNIGHT**

The twin beams of a speeding automobile stabbed through the darkness. The car was traveling at a terrific pace. The speedometer needle quivered at 70.

The man who drove that car was badly frightened. His face was like chalk. He drove as if he were fleeing from death.

His name was Charlie Danver. He was a skilled workman employed in the machine-gun plant owned by Henry Norman. A slip of paper was crumpled in his pocket. It contained terrifying news.

Charlie Danver maintained his reckless pace along the turnpike. His eyes watched the road signs that whizzed past in the glare of his lights. He was watching for a turn-off.

Presently, he slowed. He had seen what he was looking for. His car curved into a branching lane.

It was narrow and unpaved. It turned and twisted as it led deeper into heavily wooded land. After a while it began to climb. Danver lay at the end of this steep lane. He knew that protection and safety led to the summer cottage of the man who had sent him the warning note.

Presently, the cottage came into view. It was built of rustic logs. Windows were shuttered and shades drawn. But a faint reflection of light from within showed that Danver's arrival was expected.

Sobbing with relief, he sprang from his halted car. He had been promised that the door would be unlocked. It was. Throwing it open, he stumbled into the cottage.

There was no one in the living room to welcome Danver. But a cheerful log fire blazed in an enormous stone fireplace. On a side table stood a bottle of whiskey and a couple of glasses. A comfortable easy chair was placed near a bell cord.

Charlie Danver jerked the cord nervously. Nothing happened. Without waiting for his host, Danver poured himself a stiff drink of liquor with tremulous hands. The bite of the whiskey soothed his nerves. He relaxed in the easy chair with the glass in his hand.

The heat from the log fire made him drowsy. His head drooped. Suddenly, the glass slipped from Danver's hand. Dazed, he saw that the liquor had slopped over the expensive rug.

He leaned down to pick up the glass – and fell over dizzily. It alarmed him. With a gasp, he tried to regain his feet.

His head was spinning like a top. The room whirled around him. The lights seemed to be growing dimmer. Panic-stricken, Danver realized the truth.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

"I've been drugged!" he thought.

It was too late to do anything but clutch blindly for the arm of the chair. He couldn't see the chair any more. That was the last he remembered –

LAUGHTER purred in the quiet room. It came from the lips of a man who had opened a closet door. The man stared grimly at the unconscious body of the workman from the Norman arms plant. His laughter was muffled by a mask. It was a black cloth helmet that fitted completely over his head and face. Only the gleam of watchful eyes were visible through narrow slits.

He wore shapeless ski pants tucked into a pair of heavy mountain shoes. Gloves covered his hands.

A swift glance showed him that Charlie Danver was insensible. He whirled like a jungle beast. Over his shoulder he spat a quick order in a foreign tongue.

Four men answered his command. They advanced into the living room from another door. They were dressed like their hooded leader. But they wore no face masks.

The Shadow, had he been there, would have recognized three of these four scoundrels. One was Frederick Brownson. Two others had been his assistants at the Kirk–Jackson bomb–sight factory. These three were supposed to have died loyally at their posts. The actual bodies that had been found after the fire had been badly charred. Metal identification tags around the necks of the corpses had made the deception easy.

No further orders were needed by the four henchmen of the masked leader. They moved with military precision. One of them hurried outdoors to the parked car of Charlie Danver. The remaining trio approached the inert figure on the floor.

Two of the parachute men carried Danver toward a cellar staircase. A third man followed, carrying a grisly assortment of tools.

He had a pick and a shovel; also a copper–colored can with a silver projection at its top. When the silver tip was unscrewed and the glass nipple beneath it broken, the most powerful flame–acid yet discovered in the art of chemical warfare would make short work of the flesh and bones of Charlie Danver. All that would be left was a faint reddish hue at the bottom of a shallow earthen pit in the cellar. It would look, to the eyes of police, like ordinary red clay.

The masked leader laughed as his victim was carried down the cellar stairs.

Meanwhile, the fourth parachute spy was not wasting time. He drove Danver's empty car along the mountain trail. He didn't, however, go more than a quarter of a mile. A swing on the wheel brought the car's headlights blazing against a solid wall of underbrush.

The bushes sprang aside as the car thrust through the leafy obstruction. On the other side, a rough trail appeared. It was not even a lane; just a wheel track.

But the spy knew his way. Presently, he came to the lip of a lonely cliff. Sheer rock fell away for hundreds of feet. At the bottom was the dark, flat glint of a lake. It was fed by cold mountain springs.

But the lonely lake had two more practical virtues for the spy who glared triumphantly downward from the top of the cliff. The lake was on private property. Anyone who left the distant turnpike and was caught snooping around here could expect stern treatment as a trespasser. And the icy water of that spring–fed lake

## THE WHITE COLUMN

was many feet deep.

The taut face of the Fifth Columnist split into an ugly grin. He started the engine and headed the car for the brink of the cliff. Then he sprang out.

Outward into space the car leaped. It turned over once in midair. There was a mighty splash. Then the upflung spray dropped sullenly back. Ripples on the black water began to spread toward the foot of the lonely rock cliff.

The spy raced to where his own car was hidden in a leafy covert. He drove swiftly back to the mountain cottage where the body of Charlie Danver was already decomposing in a chemical grave.

Victim No. 1 was gone. All that remained now was to wait for victim No. 2. And 3 – and 4 – and 5!

THE SHADOW was also waiting!

His car was parked out of sight off the turnpike along which Charlie Danver had traveled on his mad flight from Oakmont. The Shadow had no knowledge of where Danver had fled. But he suspected that there would be other fugitives.

Clyde Burke's report was not the only one which had been received by The Shadow. Four other agents had made similar telephone calls.

The Shadow had built a temporary barricade on the turnpike near the spot at which he now waited.

Presently, he heard a sound for which his ears had been straining – the hum of a fast-traveling car. Headlights grew in the darkness from the direction of Oakmont. The car was moving rapidly! But suddenly it slowed. The glare of its headlights had picked up the road obstruction. There was a scream of brakes. The car skidded halfway around.

The black robe of The Shadow brought a scream of rage from the motorist's lips. He believed the rumors he had heard in town: that The Shadow was the traitorous leader of the vigilante mob. A gun muzzle whipped level in his hand.

The Shadow acted instantly. He struck with the butt of his own gun. It was an act of pure mercy. He had no time to explain to this deluded victim that he had come to save his life, not to kill him. The man was mad with terror, beyond all reason. To knock him out was the only way to preserve his life. The Shadow delivered a quick, scientific blow. The motorist sagged behind his wheel.

Searching, a metal identification tag told The Shadow who the man was. His name was Oscar Swenson. He was one of the five machinist foremen employed at the Norman arms plant.

In his pocket was a note which made The Shadow's eyes gleam. It was a typewritten message warning Oscar Swenson to flee from his home in order to protect himself from the White Column. It advised him to hide in a certain mountain cabin, where no mob could reach him. It gave detailed instructions how to reach the cabin, the door of which Swenson would find unlocked.

Sibilant laughter whispered from The Shadow's lips when he read that note. The name of the man who had written the warning was signed at the bottom:

"Henry Norman!" The millionaire owner of the arms factory where these very men worked!

## THE WHITE COLUMN

The Shadow wasted not a second of time. His slouch hat was ripped from his head. His black cloak was discarded and stowed away in the car which The Shadow had hidden in a covert of bushes. The Shadow changed clothes with Oscar Swenson.

When he finished, he looked remarkably like the man he had put out of action. All except his face. That was a little difficult to arrange. Had The Shadow been in the privacy of his sanctum, he could have completed a perfect disguise. But he did the best he could with hasty grease pencil and wig.

He placed the unconscious workman in his, The Shadow's, hidden car, and drove away in Swenson's own machine.

The directions were explicit. The Shadow had no trouble finding the lonely hunting lodge on the crest of wooded land at the end of a private lane. He found the door unlocked and walked boldly in.

The Shadow saw no sign of a living occupant. He tried the bell rope and nothing happened. Then he poured himself a drink.

As he held the glass to his lips, his keen nostrils detected instantly what the first victim of the Fifth Columnists had failed to observe in his excitement: the sweetish odor of a powerful narcotic!

The Shadow pretended to drink. He dropped into the chair and allowed his head to sag. After a while, he uttered a faint gasp and pitched to the rug.

FROM where he lay The Shadow could see the door of a closet. He was not surprised when the closet door opened quietly. A hooded man with a gun was disclosed.

The man advanced warily. He was like a cat stalking a piece of poisoned meat. He seemed apprehensive of treachery. Suddenly he aimed his gun. He was taking no chances. He intended to kill this workman about whose facial appearance he was not quite certain.

Swiftly, The Shadow rolled aside as the traitor's gun flamed. The bullet smashed into the rug barely an inch from his writhing body. Then The Shadow was on his knees. A .45 leaped into his hand.

He had no chance to wing his hooded foe. The man had flung himself backward at the instant he had fired that shot. He was like a scared rabbit, the way he fled. A single leap brought him to the door of the closet. It slammed behind him and was locked.

The Shadow raced to break down the door.

A bullet whizzed past his throat. It came so close that the heat of it was perceptible and a trickle of blood stained his flesh.

Other guns began to bark. Four more enemies had appeared on the threshold of the living room. They entered through a doorway that was behind The Shadow's back. Only the reflection in a large wall mirror had enabled The Shadow to avoid instant death.

He flung himself to the floor, diving for cover, with the grim skill of a man accustomed to unequal odds. He found that he needed every atom of his skill. These hard-faced foes attacked with military precision. They took cover under that first hail of vengeful bullets. The Shadow's escape from the room was prevented. He was facing not merely criminals, but the battle tactics of foreign soldiers.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

He had seen their faces before he dived behind a heavy piece of furniture. He recognized three of these grim parachute men. One was Frederick Brownson. Two more had been employed at the Kirk–Jackson plant as Brownson's helpers.

The Shadow's gun flamed desperately to keep the murderous quartet at room's length. He knew that a straight gun battle was hopeless. Superior numbers doomed him. So The Shadow changed to trickery. He uttered a strangled cry as the bullet drilled through his temporary bulwarks. One of his .45's dropped from his grasp.

The four spies took the bait. They were overeager, mad with rage to finish this challenging foe. They darted in a wedge–infantry attack toward The Shadow's "wounded" flank.

They were met by flaming gunfire.

One of them dropped headlong. The others scattered in a retreating huddle while their weapons blasted at the heavy chair. The Shadow fired as coolly as an automaton. Another slug wounded a foe. The spy staggered wildly, and whirled squarely into the line of fire of his pals. Two bullets pierced his spine. He was killed instantly.

The fatal mishap took all the courage out of the spies. There were only two left now. They retreated behind flaming muzzles. The sudden gun battle had taken them completely by surprise. They had expected an easy murder of a drugged victim, and had run into death. Worse still, their masked leader had fled into the closet. Used to discipline, they found themselves in panic at the way things were now going.

Again a heavy door slammed. This time, it was the living room door. The two surviving spies had fled from the cottage. The roar of a car motor echoed outside. The pair were escaping. The Shadow could hear an oath, followed by a quick shout in a foreign tongue.

He didn't pursue the two parachute men. His goal was the locked closet into which their masked American leader had vanished. The roar of The Shadow's .45's made wreckage of that lock. He forced the smashed closet door open.

He found – emptiness.

There was no rear wall to the closet. The man who had flung himself inside had escaped through what turned out to be an earthen tunnel at the foot of concrete steps. The tunnel ended in a clump of bushes outside the cottage. The Shadow raced out of shrubbery into the dark clearing.

Oscar Swenson's car was still parked there. But the Fifth Columnists had made their escape. They had evidently fled in their own car, hidden nearby for just such an emergency.

With them had fled their masked leader.

THE SHADOW went back into the living room of the cottage. Two of the hooded traitor's henchmen lay rigidly on the floor. Both were dead.

Searching them, The Shadow found papers on the two spies that made his eyes gleam. It was proof positive that the White Column was not a patriotic vigilante society at all. The mob had been organized by Fifth Columnists. Deluded American citizens had been misled by enemies of their own country.

The Shadow pocketed his damning proof. He placed the bodies of the two parachute spies in Oscar Swenson's car, drove swiftly down the curving mountain lane to the turnpike. Then he headed to the spot

where he had hidden his own machine.

He transferred Swenson's unconscious body to the foreman's car. Safely in his own car again with the two dead spies, The Shadow drove swiftly toward Oakmont.

His goal was the building that housed Oakmont's police headquarters. But he halted in a dark street before he was ready to perform his final act in this grim midnight drama of treason and death.

Swiftly, the fake Oscar Swenson disappeared. He was replaced by the black-cloaked figure of The Shadow.

Driving swiftly down the main street of Oakmont, The Shadow halted his car for an instant in front of the stone entry of police headquarters. He dumped the bodies of the two dead parachute spies on the steps.

Jammed in the hand of one of them were the documents that proved exactly who they were. The Shadow sprang back to his car and fled.

People had seen his daring exploit. Men shouted. A woman screamed and fainted as the black-robed figure of The Shadow sped away. Cops poured out the entry of police headquarters.

Bullets crashed toward the fleeing automobile. But not a slug hit a tire. The car shrieked around a corner and was gone. Before pursuit could be organized by the bewildered cops, all chance of capturing The Shadow had been lost.

A short time later, Kent Allard smiled bleakly as he heard a wild radio news bulletin broadcast by an excited radio announcer. Kent Allard had found out something that cast an added light on the strange events of the evening.

The name of another suspect joined that of Henry Norman in the calculation of The Shadow.

The notes that were to lure five frightened workmen to that cottage had been signed by Norman. But the man who owned that lonely cottage on a private estate was the soft-spoken oil magnate on the Defense Committee.

Lee Morley!

## CHAPTER XIII. BLACK WATER

The night was bright with moonlight. During the early evening there had been thick clouds and a hint of rain. But a strong breeze from the west had blown the clouds away and filled the sky with millions of stars.

It was the worst possible sort of night for The Shadow's purpose.

He waited on the slope of a grassy hill on the outskirts of Oakmont. Close to him was the enormous shape of a pipeline that extended along the slope of the hill. It was a supply line that carried high-octane aviation gasoline, pumped from the oil-refining plant of Lee Morley, to the Oakmont airport.

There were a hundred army fighting planes at the airport, waiting for dawn. Crack pilots slept in the barracks nearby. They were under orders to take those planes aloft in the morning and fly them to the west coast for delivery to the Army air corps.



## THE WHITE COLUMN

The Shadow suspected another gigantic attempt at Fifth Column sabotage. Those fighting ships of the air represented months of skill and labor. They added a sizable increase to America's growing air strength. Spies could not afford to let those warplanes take their places in the sky to defend democracy.

Unaware of the exact form that Fifth Column sabotage would take tonight, The Shadow was forcing events by a planned move of his own.

He crept cautiously down the grassy slope, close to the pipeline. The moon threw a long patch of darkness that paralleled the line of the pipe. Through that protective gloom The Shadow crawled unseen.

He knew that national guard troops from a nearby armory had taken over the airport to protect the assembled airplanes from harm. But this routine precaution did not reassure The Shadow's mind. He knew the caliber of America's secret foes. They would make no direct attack against overwhelming odds. Guile and trickery would be used. The sabotage attempt would probably originate in the gasoline plant owned by the soft-spoken Lee Morley.

The Shadow had not been idle during the day which had followed his daring exploit at the steps of police headquarters. He had moved quietly about town as Kent Allard. Many things had been learned. Much had been accomplished.

Police were at last aware that the White Column was an agency controlled by spies. The evidence found on the two corpses which The Shadow had flung on the steps of police headquarters proved that. Raids had been made. Mobsmen had been rounded up. Confessions had been obtained. But the police dragnet had failed to make an important arrest.

The traitorous leader of the Fifth Column and his two remaining parachute henchmen remained at large. The small fry of the mob who had been clapped into cells were unable to answer grim police questions. They couldn't divulge what they didn't know.

It was The Shadow only who had an inkling of the ugly truth. The native-born traitor who was co-operating with foreign spies was a member of the Defense Committee.

Tonight, The Shadow intended to unmask "Mr. X."

His role of Kent Allard had allowed him to arrange a test of certainty. He had called a special meeting of the Defense Committee for tonight. An hour from now the meeting would be called to order. Every member of the Defense Committee was obliged to attend.

No human being – not even Mr. X – could be in two places simultaneously. If X moved against the Morley plant in an effort to cripple the gas supply of those planes waiting for dawn at the airport, The Shadow would know the secret of his identity. X would be the only committee member not at the meeting!

THE SHADOW continued down the grassy slope. Morley's oil plant was guarded by a stout wall. A few lights glowed in the main buildings, but no men were at work. The plant was far ahead of its production schedule. It operated only a day shift. At this hour of the night, the only danger to be encountered by The Shadow lay in the presence of watchmen.

He scaled the stone wall without too much trouble. He had brought the necessary climbing implements with him. For an instant, he lay atop the wall, then he dropped soundlessly into a broad courtyard that separated two buildings.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

He began to belly along the inner surface of the wall toward a locked door in a brick pumphouse.

His luck was bad. Before he had moved more than a couple of feet on his quick advance, there was a rattle of a key. A man stepped into the courtyard from the very locked door The Shadow was approaching.

He had an electric torch in his hand, but he didn't need it. The moonlight filled the courtyard with brilliance. The startled watchman's eyes jerked to the opposite wall. He saw something that dropped his jaw open with a gasp.

He saw the shadow of The Shadow!

Instantly, his gun hand flew up, as he aimed his weapon at the intruder. But he had no chance to wake the quiet night with the thunder of gunfire. The moment the watchman uttered that startled gasp, The Shadow flung himself forward like a silent thunderbolt.

A black-gloved hand caught at the lifting gun. The other hand fastened tightly on the watchman's throat. The yell of terror that bubbled behind the man's parted lips was never uttered.

The gun was wrenched from the watchman's twisted hand. It landed with a thump on the moonlit pavement. A silent battle began.

It was a desperate battle. The Shadow found himself hard put to subdue his foe. The watchman was a patriotic American. He had jumped to a false conclusion. He believed that the black-clad Shadow was a spy on a mission to cripple the gasoline refinery.

He gambled his life bravely in an attempt to kill or capture his foe. The Shadow was forced to use every trick of combat he knew. The Shadow had to subdue a tough opponent without harming him seriously or killing him.

His skill at jujitsu turned the trick. There was a sudden groan, barely louder than the man's first gasp. The watchman collapsed. He was not unconscious, but he was temporarily paralyzed. Before he could recover and yell an alarm, The Shadow had a gag jammed in his jaws. Rope appeared from beneath The Shadow's black cloak. He trussed his captive securely and carried him through the door which the watchman himself had unlocked from the inside.

The Shadow had gained the interior of the plant's pumping station. From here, high-octane gasoline poured through the supply pipe over the hill to the airport.

He hid the trussed watchman behind a tier of barrels. A bunch of keys stolen from the man's pocket enabled The Shadow to unlock an inner metal door.

He descended metal stairs to a chamber below the level of the ground.

A swift glance brought a gleam of comprehension to The Shadow's eyes. There was a huge metal manhole cover sunk flush with the stone floor of the room. It guarded an emergency entrance to the supply pipe. Down a ladder built of material carefully insulated to prevent sparks of static electricity, workmen occasionally descended to inspect the pipe's interior and to clean out the sludge that collected in various grease traps.

This manhole cover was always kept locked, except when the plant superintendent was present. But when The Shadow bent swiftly to test the cover, he made a sinister discovery. The lock had been tampered with!

## THE WHITE COLUMN

THE heavy plate in the floor lifted slowly under The Shadow's pull. He peered down. He could smell the heavy reek of gasoline. It was high-octane stuff, the most powerful airplane fuel to be found anywhere in the world. Foreign nations had made frantic efforts to buy huge consignments of this very stuff. They had failed because the President of the United States had declared an embargo on exportation of it.

The Shadow turned away from cellar. His glance circled about the manhole in the pavement of the chamber. He saw at once that there were three metal drums standing close to an inner wall of the room.

They looked like gasoline drums. But that was rather odd, The Shadow thought. Gasoline was not fed into the pipeline from portable containers. It bubbled into the feed supply underground by the valve action of huge pumps.

Forcing open the plug on the top of one of the barrels, The Shadow made another sinister discovery. The liquid that filled the barrel was not gasoline. It was as black as ink. It smelled like tar, to the sniffing nostrils of The Shadow.

Its tar odor, however, was deceptive. Tar was thick and viscous. Unless heated, it turned into a solid mass. This liquid was exactly like water. The Shadow dipped some into the palm of his hand. The black "water" rolled around his palm unhindered. When he dropped it into the open barrel, it left no black stain on his skin.

He took a drop of it for testing. His movements were extremely careful. He made sure that the manhole cover in the stone floor was closed. He put the plug back in the top of the barrel he had tapped. Then he carried his drop of black water to a corner of the underground room.

Spilling it to the floor, it lay there like a small globule of ink. The Shadow lit his cigarette lighter. Bending, he held the flame to the tiny sample of fluid.

He expected a small explosion. But the exact opposite occurred. To The Shadow's amazement, the flame that touched the drop waved and flickered. Then it vanished. The black drop had put out the flame.

It was noninflammable!

This reaction puzzled The Shadow. It seemed utterly insane. He was positive that this watery fluid that smelled like tar had been stored in this chamber by spies intent on the destruction of a hundred fighting planes that waited at the airport for dawn. The stuff was in the barrels destined to be poured into the pipeline. Spies wanted it to get into the fuel tanks of American war planes.

But why? If it was noninflammable, the trick would be instantly discovered when the planes began to warm up. Engines would refuse to function.

The Shadow decided that he had not pursued his experiment far enough. He took another drop of the black fuel and with it mixed a drop of gasoline.

This time, The Shadow was even more careful with the flame of his lighter. He didn't lean over the mixed drop in the corner to ignite it. He tossed the lighter from six feet away.

His precaution was justified. There was an instantaneous blue flash. The mixed drop exploded with tiny violence! Small as it was, it produced a tremendous concussion. The blast of disturbed air almost staggered The Shadow.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

A strong odor of garlic filled the air. The Shadow knew enough about chemistry to realize that this strange black fluid in the barrels belonged to the dangerous halogen group. The garlic smell was the tipoff.

THE full extent of the danger to those planes at the airport was now clear to The Shadow!

Mixed with gasoline, this black noninflammable fluid became a potential explosive of terrific energy.

Airplane engines would throb at dawn. Plane after plane would take off into the sky. Engines would heat up steadily. When the critical temperature had been reached, every plane in that squadron would be blown to bits.

A hundred planes destined for America's air defense would vanish in a snarl of sky thunder! Bodies of American pilots would be blasted into chunks of bloody flesh!

A grim look covered The Shadow's face. He began a swift, purposeful task. Using one of the keys from the watchman's chain, he unlocked another door in the underground chamber, then rolled the three barrels of the deadly black fluid into an adjoining room. Here he found what he was seeking – a drain pipe in the floor, connected with a waste-disposal sewer.

The Shadow was sweating when he had finished, but every drop of the horrible inky fluid as now in the sewer, out of harm's way.

He rolled the empty barrels back to the spot where he had found them. His course of action was now clear. He would find a snug hiding place, and wait for the arrival of the spy who intended to pour the deadly fluid into the pipeline.

But it wasn't necessary for The Shadow to wait. Again fate forced the issue. A man appeared suddenly in the underground chamber.

He came from the wall of the room itself. A panel had suddenly slid aside. The intruder had not expected danger. He uttered a strangled yell when he saw himself confronted by a black-cloaked intruder.

He was one of the parachute henchmen of Mr. X! The Shadow recognized him instantly. He was one of the two men who had escaped after The Shadow's gun fight at the cabin in the hills.

The Shadow fired. It was a hasty shot, fired from the hip. The Shadow had also been taken by surprise at the swift appearance of the spy. His bullet merely singed the ribs of his foe.

The enemy raider was as lithe as a jungle beast. With a twisting leap, he was halfway across the room before The Shadow could repeat his shot. As he darted aside, the man's hand clawed at his shoulder. A knife whipped into his hand.

It was drawn and thrown with a single motion. It streaked through the air like a glittering beam of light. The point of it pierced The Shadow's gun arm. He felt a stab of agony as his gun muzzle roared. It ruined his aim. Instead of dropping his foe, The Shadow heard a loud spang as the deflected bullet ricocheted from a wall.

He staggered backward with the knife still quivering in the flesh of his arm.

For a moment, The Shadow was an easy victim. A swift attack on the part of the spy would have wrenched the gun from The Shadow's pain-racked fingers. But the henchman of Mr. X made no such attack.

Instead, he whirled with a bubbling cry, and fled back to the opening in the cellar wall.

Dazed, The Shadow couldn't understand this swift retreat. Then the answer became clear to him. Something more important than The Shadow's life was at stake tonight.

The henchman of Mr. X was racing through a wall passage to some spot above. He was fleeing to a place where he could send a frantic signal of alarm to his traitorous leader outside the grounds of the oil-refining plant!

That signal had to be prevented.

The Shadow ripped the knife from his wounded arm. Blood spurted as the blade jerked loose, but he never even noticed the flow of crimson from the wound. He was darting toward the opening in the wall.

A narrow staircase led aloft. The Shadow could hear the feet of the spy pounding desperately upward above him. The sound drove all weakness from The Shadow's body.

He increased his own speed up that black stairwell.

### **CHAPTER XIV. SKY TRICKERY**

PRESENTLY, a glimmer of light showed above. It was the milky hue of moonlight. The fleeing henchman of Mr. X had gained the open roof.

But there was no sign of the fugitive when The Shadow arrived at the exit. He staggered out onto the roof. There was no place where anyone could hide, except in a tower to the left. The tower was a one-story structure that housed a water tank. A ladder led up the inside of the housing between the steel struts that supported the tank.

The Shadow raced across the open roof. Moonlight made him a perfect target from above. Bullets began to smash on the roof all around him as he ran.

But he weaved and dodged desperately. He ducked under the overhang of the tank's structure. His upraised face peered aloft toward a trapdoor at the top of the ladder.

The trapdoor was open, but no face glared downward as The Shadow began to climb. No more bullets sang spitefully.

The cornered fugitive above had mysteriously abandoned his attack.

It gave The Shadow the few vital moments he needed to come to close quarters with his enemy. As he bellied through the open trapdoor to the top of the water tank, he could see the figure of the spy outlined in the moonlight. The man was hunched over at the very edge of the tower.

There was a tiny flicker of flame from the man's hand as The Shadow aimed his .45 and shouted a harsh command to surrender. The flame came from the scratch of a match. It transferred itself swiftly to a fuse.

Then, suddenly, there was a roaring hiss.

A rocket shot swiftly skyward, trailing a brilliant stream of sparks. It whistled into the sky like a climbing red finger, exploded high over the oil plant.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

From the heart of that exploded rocket a terrifically bright light glared. It lit up the entire countryside. It was a magnesium flare! It descended slowly on a tiny parachute. It was a signal that no watchful eye along the pipeline on the hill could fail to miss.

The henchman of Mr. X had successfully warned his traitorous employer.

The Shadow darted toward the spy, now poised at the edge of the wooden tower. Suddenly, there was only emptiness where the man stood. He had jumped as The Shadow's gun flamed.

It was not a suicide leap, but a crafty bid for freedom. The Shadow could see what had happened as he raced toward the tower's edge. A few feet below the lip of the tower was a ledge of supporting timber. It was toward this ledge that the spy had leaped. From it, a stout rope dangled downward to the distant blackness of the ground.

The spy hoped to slide down that rope, to safety.

But he had waited an instant too long to fire the rocket. A bullet from The Shadow's .45 struck the Fifth Columnist squarely in the spine. He was dead when he struck the ledge and bounced off into space. Through empty darkness, his body vanished like a dwindling dot.

The Shadow's rigid gaze shifted toward the hill that lay between the oil plant and the airport. Moonlight showed the black pipeline that stretched up the slope from the refinery. It was like a hollow black finger filled with gasoline.

Somewhere along the line The Shadow suspected the lurking presence of Mr. X. But he couldn't see any sign of a human figure.

Suddenly, however, there was a terrific explosion at the crest of the grassy slope. A giant plume of flame roared skyward. The rumbling concussion made the tower where The Shadow stood tremble like a leaf in a gale. For an instant, he thought that the whole structure would collapse. The Shadow flung himself desperately over the edge. He dropped to the supporting ledge which the dead spy had failed to reach. His fingers clutched for the dangling rope.

His brain was sick with the dreadful realization of what had happened. The whole sky was lighted up with flame.

Mr. X had forced a breach in the pipeline. At the rocket signal from his henchman, he had touched off a fuse that had ignited the gasoline in the supply pipe. Thousands of gallons of gasoline were now afire! It was like a gigantic underground stream of flame. That roaring river of flame was spreading backward down the pipe toward the doomed oil plant. Nothing on earth could stop it. Carried by the feedline like flame in a flue, the fire would leap swiftly to the enormous storage tanks from which the pipeline was fed.

A second and more hellish disaster was a matter of swift minutes.

THE SHADOW realized this as his clutching fingers tightened on the dangling rope. He slid down it like a black streak. His legs wound desperately on the lifeline, but his descent was not much checked. Nor did he want to check it too much. His life depended on the speed of his descent.

The friction ripped hot agony into his clenched palms, but his grip held. His body struck the earth with a terrific impact. It threw him, semiconscious, to the ground.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

Pain roused him from his daze. He flung himself to his feet, began to run at a stumbling pace away from the doomed plant. He counted the seconds off grimly as he ran. Then when he dared delay no longer, he flung himself flat to earth, rolling into the protection of a small grass gully.

The second explosion came in an instant.

A dozen feet The Shadow was flung by the tremendous roar of the blast. His ears were deafened. Behind him, the doomed oil plant dissolved in a sheet of flame. Chunks of wreckage sailed through the air. Debris rained everywhere. The Shadow's hair was singed by the heat of the blast. Every muscle in his body ached. He felt as if a giant hand had torn him apart. But he forced himself to his feet and resumed his staggering race. Up toward the crest of the hill where the burning pipeline still sent up a red plume of flame, The Shadow stumbled. He reached the spot where Mr. X had touched off his hellish blast.

There was no sign of the traitor. He had fled without waiting to see the final extent of the damage he had caused. The soft grass showed the imprints of his feet. He had raced down the opposite slope of the hill toward a distant public road.

The Shadow didn't follow those revealing prints. He knew where X was heading. The Shadow had not for an instant forgotten the meeting of the Defense Committee which Kent Allard had called for tonight. X was a member of that committee!

The Shadow intended to get there before the traitor could arrive.

He veered to the left and raced down the slope of the hill toward a narrow lane close by. Hidden in a covert of bushes, a swift little car was parked. The Shadow headed for Oakmont, crowding on every ounce of speed he could wring from the pulsing engine.

When the car finally halted in town, The Shadow did not emerge from behind the wheel. It was Kent Allard who raced across the dark sidewalk and headed up the stairs to the conference room.

He knew he had beaten Mr. X on that wild race. Only three members of the committee would be present. The fourth – and missing member – was X!

But The Shadow underestimated the cunning of his foe.

When he dashed into the conference room, he found not three fellow members – but none! Except for the panting figure of Kent Allard, the room was empty!

Sibilant laughter rasped harshly from The Shadow's throat. Trickery had seemingly ruined his acid test. But trickery was now too late. The Shadow knew the identity of X!

HIS mirth had barely ceased, when the sound of hasty footsteps became audible on the staircase that led upward from the street. A man was hurrying to keep his appointment with Kent Allard. A moment later, the visitor burst into the room.

It was Henry Norman.

He was panting. He sighed with audible relief as he glanced around an apparently empty room. Then his sigh choked off as Kent Allard stepped into view from the shadow of a high-backed chair in a corner.

"Good evening, Mr. Norman. Aren't you a bit late?" Allard said.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

Norman's face hardened. He was not deceived by the quiet greeting of Allard. He noticed the tousled appearance of his host, the skinned and bleeding palms. His own hands were clenched with the effort to regain self-control.

"All hell has broken loose outside of town, Allard," he grated. "Fifth Columnists have just blown up the gasoline pipeline from Lee Morley's plant to the airport. The pipe line and the whole plant have been blown to smithereens!"

"Were you there?" Allard asked. "Is that why you were so late keeping your appointment with me?"

"What the hell are you getting at?" Norman snarled. "I don't like your tone at all. If I'm late tonight, it's because someone played a dirty trick on me. That someone, Mr. Allard, is yourself!"

"What do you mean?"

Norman was in a towering rage. It seemed genuine, too. He was holding out a sheet of crumpled paper.

"I got this note from you an hour ago," he grated. "Like a fool, I believed in your sincerity. I was drawn off on a ridiculous wild-goose chase. I found no one at the place you told me to go. What was your purpose in lying to me?"

The Shadow didn't reply. He took the paper from Henry Norman's hand. It was a forgery, of course, but a very good one. It gave Norman an alibi. If he played his cards right, he could probably produce witnesses who would swear they had seen him leave Oakmont an hour before the sabotage explosion occurred.

The Shadow had no time to ponder on this unexpected development. More feet were racing up the stairs. This time, it was Peter Kirk. Like Norman, he was in a rage. He waved a sheet of paper under the nose of Kent Allard, accused the aviator of sending him out of Oakmont on a wild-goose chase.

His note was a duplicate of the one shown by Norman. But Kirk had been sent to an entirely different locality. It was impossible to check up on the movements of either man by questioning the other.

The same situation held true when Jackson and Lee Morley arrived.

"What does it all mean?" Ralph Jackson faltered.

"You'll know presently," Allard said.

"The hell with that! I want to know now!"

That was Lee Morley's snarl. His face was as white as paper, as he rasped:

"My plant was blown to bits tonight! I've been wiped out by damned Fifth Columnists! Where were you, tonight, Allard? How did you scorch the inside of your hands? Was that done, perhaps, by sliding down a rope, just before sneaking rats did their dirty work?"

Kent Allard's jaw tightened. He looked at the four wrathful men. Then his words came like a whiplash. He asked questions, brought out facts that swiftly put the four men of the Aviation Defense Committee on the defensive.



## THE WHITE COLUMN

Lee Morley admitted in a choking voice that he owned the mountain cabin where two parachute spies had been killed by The Shadow. But he denied that he had been near it for months. He had rented it to a friend, he declared. He turned slowly and pointed to Henry Norman.

"Is that true?" Allard hammered.

He was giving these men no time to collect their wits. Norman gulped. He admitted he had rented the cabin in the hills from Lee Morley. It afforded excellent hunting and fishing, and Norman was fond of both. But he denied that he had used it in recent months. He had been too busy, he declared, to leave Oakmont.

"Not too busy to be in the Adirondacks when five parachute spies dropped to earth in a blinding snowstorm," Kent Allard reminded the millionaire arms manufacturer grimly. "Was your ownership there a coincidence, too?"

Norman blustered.

"I'm not Mr. X. You're guessing. If you think I'm a traitor to America – prove it!"

The Shadow ignored him. He turned toward Peter Kirk. He spoke curtly about the scene in the garage when the Kirk–Jackson plant had been destroyed by incendiary bombs. Nor did he forget to discuss certain other seemingly innocent facts that pointed grimly toward Kirk's quiet partner, Ralph Jackson.

"I know who Mr. X is!" Kent Allard said, in a voice that rang like doom. "He's facing me right now. He is one of you four men. His confession will clear the other three."

Silence. Hunted eyes stared. But no one spoke.

"Very well, I must ask all four of you to accompany me by plane to Washington. At once! You will all go willingly – or in handcuffs. Is that clear?"

THERE was bitter argument. But the arrival of police settled that in short order. The four industrialists cooled down. Sullenly they agreed to fly to Washington. They were driven to the airport. There, a special plane was waiting, all tuned up.

Kent Allard donned a parachute pack. He made everyone of the quartet do likewise. He refused to explain this unusual precaution.

The pilot of the ship was already at the controls. He was Miles Crofton, private pilot in The Shadow's service. Crofton could not be identified by any of these men on the field. He wore a heavy leather flying helmet. Thick goggles covered his eyes. He grunted as Kent Allard patted his arm.

At that instant, The Shadow became aware that the man at the controls of his private ship was not Miles Crofton at all!

The pat on the pilot's padded arm was a secret signal. It was a signal that Crofton would have immediately understood, and acknowledged. The pilot did nothing of the sort. He didn't realize that a signal had been passed to him!

The Shadow didn't reveal his disturbing discovery. As Kent Allard he boarded the plane with his four conscripted "guests". The plane took off with a smooth roar of power, lifted into the dark sky.

But before it left, Kent Allard did something that attracted no particular attention. Hastily scribbling a note, he folded it tightly and handed it to an airport attendant. The attendant didn't read the note until the plane was a vanishing speck in the black sky. But when he did, he gulped with amazement and raced at top speed to the airport administration building.

The message was quickly sent out over the air. It was directed to a grim spot. The Shadow had addressed his message in the name of Kent Allard to an army airfield midway between Oakmont and Washington. It was an airdrome that housed a squadron of the latest type of army bombers.

Kent Allard was a high officer in the air reserve. He was a personal friend of the chief of staff. He could expect prompt co-operation.

### **CHAPTER XV. THE SUPREME THRILL**

THE airplane climbed steadily after it left the glare of floodlights at the Oakmont airport. Before it leveled off for the flight to Washington, it had reached a height of nearly 10,000 feet.

The Shadow gave no sign that he was aware that treachery had taken place before the plane had left the ground. He acted as calmly as if he still believed that the muffled and goggled figure at the controls was Miles Crofton.

But The Shadow would have known the truth, even without the revealing test of the signal which had not been understood by the disguised pilot who had taken Crofton's place. This fellow knew how to fly a ship! He handled it as easily as if he were driving a coupe along a well-paved parkway. Miles Crofton was a wizard as a commercial aviator. But this man had obviously been trained in handling big army planes in the complicated war maneuvers of overseas!

Allard's companions in the cabin of the big ship were restless and uneasy. Ralph Jackson was the least disturbed. He tried to make light of the whole affair, but his smile was forced, his attempts at flippancy sounded rather ghastly.

His partner, Peter Kirk, was definitely nasty. Kirk spoke about his political pull with the government. He made vague threats about reprisals that would cause trouble for Kent Allard. Lee Morley had little to say. He seemed still stunned by the disaster that had wrecked his plant.

The Shadow stared out the cabin window. He was an excellent navigator. The panel instruments were beyond the range of his vision from where he was sitting, but he didn't need instruments to enable him to check on the plane's course. As Kent Allard, he had flown between Oakmont and Washington many times. Each of the lighted towns below had their definite characteristics when viewed from the air.

At the moment the plane deviated from its normal course, The Shadow knew it.

It was cleverly done, but the course was no longer due east. The ship's nose now pointed northeast, at an angle that would take it to the seaboard in the neighborhood of lower New England.

However, The Shadow was not disturbed. It was a trick that would not go unnoticed on the black earth below. Strung along the area between Oakmont and the Atlantic coast were certain army airdromes. Each of them was equipped with the latest electrical listening devices to detect the characteristic sound of an airplane motor high in the black sky. The warning message passed to a field attendant by Kent Allard before he took to the air had taken notice of this fact.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

Allard began to talk quietly to his enforced guests in the cabin of the plane. Henry Norman seemed to be most scornful. The Shadow tackled him first.

He described the secret descent of five parachute raiders through a snow screen in the Adirondacks. He reconstructed the scene in detail – their welcome at an isolated hunting lodge, the pin stuck in the wall map over the fireplace, the toast to treason and the smashed glassware in the embers of the log fire. The Shadow didn't mention the later visit of Lamont Cranston, or the ugly murder attempts that had followed Cranston's arrival. That was not necessary. Henry Norman was deathly pale. He began to stutter, in his eagerness to disavow any guilt of treason.

"I know nothing of it! The night before those things happened, I left my hunting lodge. Business took me two hundred miles away. My two servants were gone when I returned. I hired three others. You can take my word – or go to hell! I don't much care which."

The Shadow ignored the millionaire arms manufacturer's trembling defiance. He shifted his attention to the partners in the bombsight plant. He reviewed the strange behavior of Peter Kirk at the time of the thermite explosion. He told of the lie Kirk had uttered concerning the guilt of The Shadow. That lie could have been an honest mistake – or it could have been deliberate!

There was sweat on Kirk's forehead. He said nothing. The Shadow swung toward Lee Morley.

He told of the treacherous murder of Charlie Danver and the subsequent attempt made to kill Oscar Swenson – the latter attempt nipped in the bud by the intervention of The Shadow.

Lee Morley shrugged. He sounded bored.

"We're wasting time. I never liked riddles. Who is your mythical Mr. X?"

The voice of Kent Allard deepened, became the voice of The Shadow!

"Answer that yourself, Mr. Morley! Mr. X is you!"

There was an astonished gasp from three of the industrialists. It was echoed by a cry from Morley. His face hadn't changed an iota. He was still smiling scornfully. But his swift backward leap was like the spring of a jungle cat.

He eluded the clutch of The Shadow's hand. With one unexpected leap, he was out of his cabin seat and darting toward the closed door of the plane. He wrenched at the catch of the cabin door, pushed against the loosened barrier. A gale whistled into the cabin. For an instant, Lee Morley and The Shadow were like queerly frozen actors in a drama of hate and death. The Shadow's right hand held a swiftly drawn .45. His left hand grabbed at the bulky 'chute pack on the back of the guilty oil executive.

Then the airplane went into a sickening side roll. The crooked pilot had deliberately thrown the ship into that dizzy swerve. It flung The Shadow headlong to the floor. Kirk and Norman and Jackson rolled against him in a confused mass.

Lee Morley jumped headlong into the roaring darkness ten thousand feet above the earth! His parachute whipped open. There was a faint cry like a mocking laugh. Then Morley vanished earthward.

The Shadow made no effort to follow, nor did he try to force the open door of the cabin shut. It was an impossible task against the hurricane force of the wind. A swift glance showed The Shadow that the other

## THE WHITE COLUMN

three passengers were clinging desperately to seats with a death grip that couldn't easily be broken.

The Shadow flung himself forward to subdue the criminal pilot who had aided Morley's frantic escape.

Only ten feet separated The Shadow from his foe, but it was like ten miles. The ship bucked drunkenly as the pilot sent it into a spin. The Shadow was hurled from his feet. Pitched headlong, he flung up his weapon and fired. The shot missed. Again, The Shadow fired, but no luck. It was like trying to shoot a gun accurately on the back of a bucking bronco.

The pilot, too, had drawn a gun. Both his hands had left the controls. He had jammed them, frozen them so that they no longer could be moved. The ship dropped, nose downward.

When the pilot whipped off his helmet and goggles, his face was a white smear of fanatical hate. The Shadow could recognize him now. He was the last surviving member of the five parachute raiders who had carried out the vicious orders of Lee Morley.

His shriek of triumph was barely audible above the lash of the gale that tossed the falling ship in a crazy, steep spiral of doom.

"... plans... in hands of... young and virile nation... Death to democracy!"

HIS smile widened to a horrible grin. Swiftly, he raised the muzzle of his pistol to his own temple, pulled the trigger. His face dissolved in a bloody smear. He fell limply, and hung in his safety belt.

The spy had died according to the fanatical code of his foreign leader. He had committed suicide and scuttled his plane. No skill on earth could loosen those jammed controls or stop the plane's crash!

The Shadow flung himself fiercely at the three terrified industrialists. They refused to let go their grips. They were mad with terror. The Shadow had to slug them unconscious before he could roll them, one by one, to the door of the cabin.

As he hurled Jackson into shrieking space, his hand jerked at the man's 'chute ring. The 'chute whipped open with a crackling noise, jerking the unconscious body out of sight.

Henry Norman's limp figure followed. Then Kirk's.

The Shadow dived to safety a split-second later. It was a desperate gamble with death. The black earth below was racing upward at express-train speed. Only the fact that the plane's plunge had started at 10,000 feet, gave The Shadow his split-second chance against death.

Almost before he felt the tug of straps at his armpits and crotch below his opening 'chute, he tensed himself for the impact. He heard dimly a tremendous roar, as the plane crashed and exploded into instant wreckage.

Sharp branches of a pine tree stabbed like black swords at The Shadow's fast-dropping body.

He missed by a hair-breadth being impaled among those branches. His struggle in midair had tilted his 'chute slightly, had spilled a small amount of air from beneath the spread silk. The Shadow struck twenty feet from the base of the towering pine.

The force of the impact knocked the breath from his body.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

But presently, he groaned and moved. Weakly, he swayed to his feet, ignoring the burning agony in his ribs. A knife whipped into his hand. He slashed himself loose from entangling shrouds. Flinging himself hastily over a fence, he crossed a road and made for the center of a dark pasture.

High above his head there was a faint murmur in the sky. The Shadow lighted a flare. Its glare lit up the deserted pasture with sudden brilliance. The murmur overhead became a whistling roar. A United States army plane was up there. It had taken off from a nearby airdrome as soon as listening devices had detected the motor roar of the fugitive plane.

The order of Kent Allard had been obeyed.

The army ship landed with a sharp bounce on the grassy pasture. But it didn't overturn. It was piloted by an officer who knew his business.

Kent Allard's rank in the air reserve made him that pilot's military superior. He returned a salute. Then his voice barked an order. The pilot vaulted the pasture fence and ran to the aid of Henry Norman and the other two industrialists, who lay unconscious where they had landed.

The Shadow took to the air.

Upward in a sharp, climbing spiral went that magnificent bird of war. Its whistling ascent was a thing to bring savage joy to the heart of a flier. But The Shadow had no time for exultation.

He was on the trail of a master foe – a criminal traitor who left nothing to chance. The Shadow divined that the spot where Lee Morley had leaped was not a matter of chance or accident. Morley had anticipated exposure. The vital bomb-sight plans he had stolen from the Kirk-Jackson plant were still in his possession. He still had a chance to flee from the country he had betrayed.

The Shadow drove his swift dive bomber at top speed across the black skies. He headed northeast, pointing his drumming propeller toward the horizon beyond which lay the rolling dark waves of the North Atlantic.

Soon he could see a tiny dot far ahead in the sky. It was barely visible at first, perhaps a trick of his imagination. But The Shadow's pursuit soon turned imagination into fact.

Morley's plane was a transport of foreign make. It was impossible that Morley himself could handle that ship. An air soldier of a foreign nation was at its controls. The ship had probably been hidden snugly along Morley's escape route for just such an emergency. A private tract of land could easily conceal it.

The Atlantic Ocean beckoned to an escaping traitor!

Presently, The Shadow could see the dark blur of endless water far below. He was flying at a great height, twice the altitude of the fleeing Morley. But height aided his speed. Air resistance was not so great. The Shadow panted as he breathed thin air.

He saw the fleeing transport suddenly drop lower. It was diving at a swift slant toward the surface of the ocean. A tiny plume of white was visible along the surface. It was the foaming track of a submarine's periscope!

Suddenly, the submarine broke the surface in a smother of spray. Conning tower, gun deck – it slid into view like a sleek monster from the deep.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

The hatch of the conning tower opened. Heads of sailors appeared. Some were pointing excitedly at the transport plane which had landed on the water nearby on its amphibian body. Others were staring aloft at the army machine piloted by The Shadow.

Lee Morley and his pilot had already dived overboard from their abandoned plane. They began to swim desperately across the narrow water that divided them from the foreign submarine. Behind them, the transport plane erupted suddenly into flaming ruin. A small bomb had been left behind. The abandoned plane would never be captured to disclose foreign secrets.

Machine-gun bullets ripped like hail toward The Shadow's ship as he dived downward from a great height. It was a terrific barrage from the latest type of automatic weapons. The Shadow was forced to swerve in a flat roll-over and try again for altitude.

His cabin was pitted with round holes. Blood dripped in a branching stream down the left side of his face. But his eyes were like hot coals.

Again, he dived in attack. He had established his position to his satisfaction. His hand moved to the almost human agency at his elbow – the trigger of the automatic bomb sight, perfected by the skill of so-called "decadent" America.

Lee Morley and his pilot had been hauled aboard the sleek gray shape of the submarine. It lay low in the water, awash like a half-sunken porpoise. Foam creamed all around it as Morley disappeared down the conning-tower hatch. The hatch closed instantly.

The submarine was already vanishing in a swift crash dive!

But The Shadow was diving, too. His hand moved toward the trigger of the bomb-sight mechanism.

From beneath the tilted belly of his plane a black shape hurtled oceanward in a beautifully-traced arc. It dwindled rapidly to a dot. It seemed to be falling hopelessly wide of its mark. But that was only an optical illusion.

The bomb struck squarely in the center of the foam that covered the disappearing submarine.

There was a hideous explosion. The upward waves of blasted air made The Shadow's plane reel. Chunks of wreckage spouted from the churned ocean. A gigantic whirlpool eddied from the destruction like a breaking wave.

Then the torn water rolled sullenly back.

The Shadow circled slowly above the ocean. The water was smoothing out with magic suddenness. The explanation lay in a thick blanket of black oil – oil that was bubbling up from the depths of the sea as a mute testimony of what had happened to that bombed submarine.

Submarine and crew were forever gone. Its loss would never be officially revealed by the propaganda ministry of the nation which had lost it. To admit its loss would be too embarrassing for diplomatic procedure. Overseas enemies were not yet ready to risk open warfare with the last great democracy on earth!

With the submarine had perished the traitorous Lee Morley. The vital plans he had stolen would provide food for fishes. America's greatest air secret was still safe in hands that would never misuse it.

## THE WHITE COLUMN

The Shadow found his eyes suddenly dim with moisture as he winged upward into the sky and headed back toward the coastline of the land he loved. He had averted a terrible threat to America. To The Shadow, it seemed like the supreme thrill of his career. But he was mistaken. His thrill was to come a short time later. The coastline appeared like a wavering line of mist. Darkness had changed to dawn. Far to the east over the gray Atlantic, the sun was rising over the pink-stained horizon.

Directly ahead of The Shadow's plane were the stone and steel ramparts of an American coast-defense fortress. There was a tall flagpole at the base of the fort. As The Shadow watched, he saw the American flag flutter upward to the peak of the pole. It snapped briskly in the wind, its stars and stripes like a brave challenge to world-wide hate.

The Shadow dipped his plane in salute to the flag as he passed over it.

That was his supreme thrill!

THE END