

Beyond Murder

by Phil Richards

Stanley Henshaw didn't even bother about an alibi. For the corpse would provide one.

THE car rolled into the garage. The engine choked off and presently a door slammed. In the library of Dr. Chappell's lonely retreat, Stanley Henshaw caressed a bulky manuscript. It was a typed carbon copy of "Swan Song." Henshaw's eyes were little flames of avaricious intelligence. His mouth tightened in an unholy smile, showing the ugly double upper lip of greed. He was ready for murder.

Stanley Henshaw glanced in a mirror and permitted himself a chuckle at his expression of inhuman gloating. He prided himself on the Mephistophelian cast of his refined and sensitive countenance. There reflected was the remarkable face of an intellectual cutthroat.

He heard Dr. Chappell enter the back door. Again Henshaw glanced at the mirror, and agreed that now he looked the soul of good humor.

His eyes fixed on the manuscript with the loving gaze of a father. "Swan Song" represented a lifetime of high intellectual pursuit. After forty years building up a philosophic proportion that gave Dr. Chappell an understanding which few men achieve, the professor then had spent thirty years assembling material for "Swan Song." The actual writing had encompassed three years of intensive labor, ten to fifteen hours a day. Stanley Henshaw had done the secretarial work.

"Swan Song" possessed the precious quality of literary permanence—universality. In its thousand and one pages

life was stripped to the naked elements, harshly, brutally, with the cruel finesse of a surgeon's scalpel. Dr. Chappell had performed an autopsy on the living.

"It'll have the financial success of 'Anthony Adverse,'" Henshaw told himself. "I'll make half a million dollars out of it alone. And my twenty short stories that I wrote to Chappell's suggestions—Now they'd only bring fifty dollars a piece. But remember what the French publisher told Alexander Dumas. 'Make a name and I'll publish anything you write.'"

"After 'Swan Song' is published, I'll easily get seven thousand apiece for them. Then a long-term Hollywood contract at five grand a week. Lectures at two thousand a performance. In one year I'll clear a cool million."

Henshaw used the first person, for by the simple process of murdering Dr. Chappell and changing the title page on "Swan Song," the colossal work would become his. No one else knew about the novel. Since retiring after thirty years as professor of philosophy at Fenwick University, the doctor had been a recluse.

"What pathetic morons are the bank presidents and stock swindlers who steal dollars!" Henshaw thought. "They get nothing but dollars. Overnight I'll cease to be a thirty-a-week secretary and small-time writer, and take my place among the aristocracy. I'll marry into the Social Register. I'll get on the preferred lists of Wall Street tycoons. I'll have my yacht, my racing stable. I'll back musical

shows for talented and sympathetic little darlings.

Chappell entered. He looked like a very, very tired Longfellow. "I'm burned to a rind, Stanley," he said wearily in a cultured, resonant voice. "I have a premonition that shortly the inexorable surge that is life will force me out—for a fresh, unbattered casing to carry forth its mystery."

The old man dropped into an easy chair.

"You need rest, doctor," said Henshaw softly. Gently he stroked the doctor's forehead—a nightly duty.

"Ah," murmured Chappell, "those soft, womanly hands. Soft, womanly hands, Stanley, have contributed the major catastrophes to mankind—"

Henshaw soothed Chappell into a catnap. Madness burned in the secretary's eyes. He was completely the man-devil, mastered by the killer urge. He smothered a pillow against the old man's face. Chappell gave a convulsive jerk, uttering a choked, muffled cry. The will to live asserted itself, and he clutched Henshaw's wrists. But age-hardened arteries and a septuagenarian heart require much oxygen. The fingers slipped away, and a falling hand waved in what seemed like a mocking gesture of farewell.

Chappell was dead. There were no marks of violence. The hectic tinge of suffocation would soon vanish. Henshaw congratulated himself. His hands shook a little, but it was from the ecstatic anticipation of the glamorous future. He had a marvelous feeling of accomplishment.

Outside, he determined that he was quite alone. The nearest house was more than a mile distant. Carrying the body to the garage, he placed it behind the steering wheel. He started the engine, and thrust the end of a tube, attached to the exhaust,

into the corpse's mouth, forcing carbon monoxide fumes into the lungs.

Lambert, the police chief in Clear Lake, didn't concern Henshaw. To Lambert it would be a simple case of suicide or death by accident. But Nick Forbes, the private dick from New York, was vacationing in Clear Lake. Henshaw had heard some unnerving things about Forbes.

LEAVING the car running, Henshaw returned to the house and put the tubing through a meat grinder, disposing of the hashed rubber down the drain. Nothing to fear from that source. And Forbes would be unable to find a motive for murder. Beyond his pension, Chappell had possessed no money.

Henshaw typed a new title page for "Swan Song." The original manuscript Chappell had taken to his safety-deposit box that day. But Henshaw had a key to the box and the authority to open it. There'd be no trouble substituting the page carrying his by-line.

Retiring, Henshaw fell asleep with the assurance that he'd fathered a perfect crime. Hours later he awakened with a start. In the closed garage, the engine was still running. But some one had been talking—in a foreign tongue.

Then he laughed. It was he. Henshaw had studied Swedish, so he could make a proper speech of acceptance when "Swan Song" won the Nobel Prize for literature—another fifty grand. He'd been reciting the acceptance speech aloud in his sleep.

In the morning he went to the garage. The engine had stopped. Rigor mortis—the stiffening of the body after death—held the corpse rigid. Henshaw ran to the next house and telephoned the police.

As he anticipated, Nick Forbes

accompanied Lambert. The dick's physique added to Henshaw's confidence. These brawny men were usually obtuse. Then he looked into the probing, dissecting eyes, and his jaw sagged. Behind those eyes was a razor-sharp intelligence.

Henshaw was subdued. "The doctor has been sorely troubled with insomnia. No doubt a sedative was taking effect when he drove into the garage. I'm a very sound sleeper, or—"

"Probably suicide," commented Lambert. "Insomnia can sure play hell with a man. When they get as old as Chappell—"

"Had the corpse stiffened when you found it?" Nick interrupted,

Henshaw bowed his head. "Rigor mortis had already set in."

The dick nodded. "It occurs usually two to six hours after death." He turned to Lambert. "Any marks of violence?"

"Huh?" grunted the chief. "Ain't a scratch or a bruise on him. You trying to make a murder case outa this?"

"Not trying to," said Nick coldly.

The insinuation sent the hint of a chill through Henshaw. "Why, it's absurd to think— The doctor died of carbon monoxide poisoning—"

"He died of ordinary suffocation," said Nick, "probably caused by being smothered with bedclothes or a pillow."

Henshaw struggled for control, but his philosophy deserted him. Fear embraced him in its strength-sucking tentacles. His hands were corpse-cold, though his head felt as though the four thousand volts of the electric chair were shocking through it.

"An examination of the lungs—" Henshaw faltered.

"A drop of the blood will be given the tannin precipitation test," said Nick. "In the meantime—"

Deftly he snapped steel cuffs on Henshaw's bony wrists. Henshaw shrank back, uttering throaty sounds. He couldn't have slipped up. Unmasked terror showed on his quivering face. He tried to talk, but words clotted on his tongue.

"I'll be damned!" exclaimed Lambert.

"He's guilty as hell!" rasped Nick. "Last night Dr. Chappell brought me the manuscript of a novel that culminated his life's work. That's why I'm here. He wanted the royalties to endow a chair of philosophy at Fenwick University.

"He'd often heard Henshaw talking in his sleep—in Swedish. He pieced together fragments and found they made up an acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize for literature. Naturally, he believed Henshaw planned to steal his manuscript."

The killer recovered sufficiently to smile derisively. "Why, the old fool was trying to rob me of my own work!" he grated the lie.

"The law probably would accept that," said Nick, "and list the case as death by accident—if you hadn't tried to make it appear like carbon monoxide poisoning. We won't have trouble busting a jittery guy like you wide open. You smothered Dr. Chappell!"

"He died from carbon monoxide!" snarled Henshaw, gesturing at the stiffened form.

Nick shook his head. "You don't know your geography. When carbon monoxide, in a fatal quantity, unites with the haemoglobin of the blood to form carbonyl-haemoglobin, *the corpse does not pass through a period of rigor mortis!*"