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Epistolary

By A Literary Horde

Exclusive report by The Daily Telegram. September 30.

Sensational Murder! The Daily Telegram received a chilling letter from an anonymous sender using the *nom de crime*, Shadow Stalker! The Stalker boasts that he will frustrate all attempts by the local constabulary to thwart his plans!

> To The Editor:
>
> I, Shadow Stalker, have begun my campaign of retribution against those who have wronged me. I will not rest until all have felt my wrath. Foolish police, don't try to stop me. Your bumbling attempts at solving crimes have made you a laughingstock. Even if I left you clews, your dullard detectives won't be able to follow them.
>
> Be warned. I won't tolerate interference in my plans. Those I have marked for punishment will suffer the consequences of their actions. Shadow Stalker has struck already at Pearson Lake. One down, and nine to go, Mr. Francis!
>
> Shadow Stalker

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Case Notes, Richard Allen Agency: October 1

They'd been dragging the lake for a few hours before I got the call. My answering service gal, Annie, gave me the scoop. "Rick, you read the latest Daily Telegram? I got a hot one for you. Chief Daly and his flatfeet are stumped, as usual. The buzzers are out at Pearson's, trying to dredge up… whatever, or whoever, is supposedly at the bottom of the lake. No soap so far. They want you to meet them there."

I thanked Sweetface, drove out to the lake and parked along the dirt road surrounding the beach area. I pushed through the gate of the deserted resort. The "beach closed" sign banged and the rusty hinges screeched in protest as I passed. The closest officers jerked their heads toward me as the frost covered sand cracked under my feet like thunder in the still air. Chief Daly stood with his hands on his hips, watching as the lake patrol's boat passed back and forth over the waters. The boat returned to the shore, and the crewman shrugged his shoulders. The chief pursed his lips and shook his head.

"Sorry, Chief. Nothing down there except this old boot." The erstwhile sailor raised an old rubber and poured out the water on the gunnels, splashing the chief with the dirty water.

I saw the steam rise from Daly's head as his pan turned bright red. The veins on his neck bulged. A sure sign a string of profanity was on its way to the unlucky stiff. I would have felt sorry for the guy, but the welsher hadn't paid me for his poker losses from last week.

The chief saw me arrive and turned his attention to me. "Oh, Richard. I'm glad you're here. This Stalker character says there's a body in the lake. We've dragged it over and over, but found nothing. You think this is some kind of put on?"

I was about to agree, but something caught my eye from the middle of the lake. A large log bobbed to the surface. I pointed my finger toward the item. “Maybe not, chief.”

We scrambled to the boat and headed into the lake. The crew tossed a grappling hook over the log and pulled it to the boat. Once inside, we could see it wasn’t a log. An oilskin tarp wrapped around our catch. Officer Burns, the welsher, tore at it and pulled a corner away.

“Look. I think it’s a body, chief!”

Chief Daly dragged the bill of his cap over his face. He muttered something of no value to the solving of this case.

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THE END