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Barry Cunningham
Publisher

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WOLVEN

BAD WOLF RISING

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To Dan and Frankie, with love

In memory of John Major 1932–2011



Chapter 1
The Bakerloo Beast



NATIGOTSOMETHINK!

The intensity of Woody's mindhowl blasted through Nat Carver's brain like a freight train, threatening to knock him off the deserted Underground platform. They had parted company roughly five minutes ago and he could have sworn Woody had been in human form then. The fact that his best mate was using the two-way thing to communicate with him, instead of yelling from the top of the escalators, must mean that either Woody didn't want

to advertise his presence to the rogue werewolf they were hunting, or that he had wolfed out.

Of all the scary places Nat had found himself since he'd met Woody (and his life had been changed beyond his wildest dreams) the Oxford Circus section of the London Underground was one of the creepiest. It was old and filthy, the ticket offices and escalators were silent, the platform eerily draughty and deserted. Except for Nat, there wasn't a sign of life anywhere. Not *human* life, anyway.

Whereareyou? Nat sent back, as he ran towards the exit, glad to be leaving the claustrophobic Underground station. He had done his best to argue against Agent Alexandra Fish's plan to split up, but it was typical of her to assign each of them an area to search alone. Nat got the downstairs bit, the platform, which he wasn't very thrilled about.

'What about my claustrophobia?' he'd mumbled.

Fish shot him one of her looks. 'Don't be such a wimp,' she'd said, crisply. 'You're a *NightShift* agent now, remember. You can't go on being scared of closed-in spaces. Any werewolf activity has to be investigated in case it's connected with . . . well, you know who.'

Nat *did* know. Only too flipping well. Fish was right, and anyway, for tonight's exercise, she was the boss.

Since their first (unofficial) mission together, *The Case of the Black Widow Vampire*, when Nat and Woody had found themselves up against a deadly hive of thirsty vampires, Agent Alex Fish had proved to be a tough act: brave, shrewd and inventive in her fighting skills. A lot of people owed her their lives, Nat included. Tonight, Nat and Woody were working with Fish in a real assignment for *NightShift* (the ultra-secret agency working to uphold supernatural and paranormal law) and they were determined not to mess it up. When people using the London Underground had begun to disappear with alarming regularity, London's Metropolitan Police had suspected supernatural shenanigans and passed the case onto the agency.

Now it was up to rookie agents Nat Carver and Woody to find out what had happened. Meanwhile, not even the bravest of travellers risked the platforms on the Bakerloo line between Regent's Park and Oxford Circus, and although the line was still in service, trains no longer dared to stop there.

Despite Nat and Woody being equipped with enhanced supernatural senses and the ability to shape-shift, it was Agent Fish who had found a tiny scrap of human flesh deep in this deserted and lonely stretch of the underground. The grisly clue bore traces of saliva that was *not* human, and a simple test

back at the *NightShift* HQ showed it was 'lycanthropic' in origin. Or to put it simply, the DNA belonged to a werewolf. But it was vital that the general public were not aware of the real source of danger. Supernatural acts of violence were still thought to exist in horror films only – and it was *NightShift's* job to keep it this way.

The investigation had been given a typically lurid name by Alex Fish, and ***THE CASE OF THE BAKERLOO BEAST*** had been scrawled across the front of the office file in thick black marker pen – the more sensational the name, as far as Fish was concerned, the better. Quentin Crone, *NightShift's* permanently worried and floppy-haired boss, thought that the investigating team was a match made in heaven, or hell, depending on whose side you were on. Who better to get their teeth into a werewolf case than the two new recruits? After all, they were no strangers to werewolf activity, as anyone who had ever witnessed either boy's own shape-shifting skills knew only too well. Crone had never actually seen it himself, but he had Fish's assurance that it was '*totally acers*', which Crone had interpreted to mean a 'spectacular phenomenon'.

At the top of the steep escalators, Nat scanned the immediate area. He felt vulnerable in his human form, and Woody's mindhowl had indicated he was

on to something. Maybe he'd even caught a whiff of the killer. Nat's night vision hadn't detected anything unnatural lurking in the shadows, and he could feel Woody was near, which was a comfort. But if he needed to fight he would have to shift. In human form he wouldn't stand much of a chance against a werewolf, especially one who liked to eat his victims.

Nat squeezed his eyes tight shut and imagined himself looking in a mirror. It always helped him concentrate. *Come on, come on*, he urged himself, *chaaaaange.* He could see himself in his mind's eye – a thirteen-year-old boy, quite tall, with almost black hair and dark blue eyes that would soon glow with a soft topaz light.

Look out, his brain warned him, '*cos here it comes!*

This time it was so quick Nat didn't even have time to strip off his clothes. A familiar warm feeling stole through him, starting in his innards and filtering outwards to his skin and hair. He had willed his Wolven side to take over, and now his spirits leapt as his heart pumped the Wolven blood around his body. His muscles contracted, his bones lengthened, his face shimmied and shook in the imaginary mirror. *One, one thousand, two, one thousand . . .* as Nat counted the seconds his change was taking, his clothes threatened to suffocate him. *Ten, one thousand . . .* he flexed his muscles again and he could feel even

the tough denim jeans give in and then split. *Fourteen, one thousand . . .* his T-shirt ripped all the way down his back as his spine lengthened. *Nineteen, one thousand . . .* still counting he could hear himself panting, ears stre-e-e-tching and growing pointed, snout puuuuushing and finally tongue lolling in a big Wolven grin. With the yellow glow in his eyes and his pupils dilated, his vision took on a supernatural clarity. He shook himself, a large silver-grey Wolven weighing around three hundred pounds, almost twice the weight of a natural fully grown *Canis lupus,* or wolf to you and me.

Twenty-two seconds! Oh, I am getting so *brilliant at this shape-shifting lark,* Nat thought to himself, rather smugly. *And it doesn't even hurt any more!*

In the station foyer, Woody had indeed got more than a whiff of their suspect. Not long after he had willed his own change (Nat wasn't the only one who felt more comfortable – and braver – in Wolven form), his nostrils had been assaulted by a familiar smell, the coppery, salty tang of fresh blood. He trotted to and fro across the upper level of the station, his long Wolven coat glowing so white it looked almost blue in the dim light.

When the smell became so strong it made his nose run, he stopped. He was standing by a door marked

Ticket Office, which looked as though it had been forced open sometime, either by someone hoping to find money, or the werewolf they were after. Woody nudged the door open to find a pile of broken furniture. Scrabbling around underneath it, he realised he'd come across a makeshift den, which was still warm. It felt like something had lain there only moments before.

Roguewolf, Woody thought to himself. It was evident from the den that this particular creature operated alone, unlike most werewolves who liked to run or hunt in packs. Woody growled. A werewolf who kills humans is thankfully a rarity, even in these troubled times, unless of course it has been corrupted by evil. Their orders from the boss were the same in any case; whenever possible *the suspect must be brought in alive*. Obviously this rule didn't apply to ghosts, who were already dead, or vampires, who were undead. *But*, shivered Woody, hoping that Nat or Fish would hurry up and appear, *if this rogue werewolf is responsible for stuffing its face with at least twelve people, I don't think it's gonna wanna come quietly.*

The werewolf (or lycan, as these shape-shifters are sometimes known) had once been a mild-mannered train driver named Martin Clough, and was indeed operating alone on the express orders of his maker.

Clough had been corrupted following an attack by a wolf in human clothing – a vile, hybrid creature, which had lain in wait for him at a small railway station in Somerset. The werewolf had told Martin Clough what to do and, dazzled by the creature's wonderful molten eyes, he had obeyed. He had gone to London and lived off humans in the London Underground ever since.

So when a large, white, Wolven creature pitched up uninvited in his private den, poking and prodding about, the thing that had been Martin Clough could *smell* it . . . all the way from the mouth of the Underground tunnel he now lurked in. The scent was puzzling. Whiffs of human and . . . what else? Not werewolf, but not really wolf either? But instinct screamed at him to avoid contact. There was something well dodgy about the intruder.

He was sure about one thing though. It hadn't smelt him yet. The lively draught from the Underground was drifting the wrong way for a start. Martin Clough licked his black lips with a snaking purplish tongue. *Would his hunger ever be satisfied?* He stifled a growl and slunk back into the tunnel, his crafty Halloween-coloured eyes glowing with malice.

Meanwhile, on platform three, agent Alex Fish had lowered herself onto the tracks, and was now walking

gingerly towards the Underground tunnel. Even though she had personally ordered the electricity to be turned off, she glanced nervously across at the usually lethal third rail. She peered ahead, but her human eyesight was useless in these circumstances. Where were they? She hadn't seen Nat or Woody for at least ten minutes now, which was like, *way* too long.

'Come in, Woody. Over,' she said, hoping her throat mic was working. Nat and Woody had been under strict instructions to tell her if they were going to shift before they lost the power of human speech. Her earpiece remained eerily silent; there wasn't even any static.

She tried again. 'Come *in*, Nat. Over.'

Her voice sounded weak and puny in the near darkness, and although Fish was brave, she felt the first tiny fingers of unease tug at her fast-beating heart. *Now* she could hear something, but it wasn't a welcome sound. It was the sound of something snarling. And it was in the tunnel.

Alex Fish moved very slowly. She put her hands onto the cold slab of platform and hoisted herself up from the track, hating every second her back was turned towards what she guessed was coming for her with molten eyes.

'Oh man, oh man! Here it comes,' Fish muttered as she hauled herself to her feet, praying at the same

time that Nat and Woody would come. She turned round, her mouth dry, her heart hammering in her chest. Loping easily towards her, orange eyes burning with hate (or hunger), came the thing they were looking for: the werewolf. And it was slavering.

'I don't know if you are capable of understanding me,' said Fish clearly, in her best agency voice, 'but I am arresting you on suspicion of murder by devourment. That means eating a human. You have the right to remain silent – on the grounds that you are unable to use human speech – and I have to inform you that I have the authority to use Ag compound on you if you resist arrest.'

'Grrrrrrrggghhh,' growled the werewolf in reply, still advancing on Fish.

She swallowed. From her pocket she produced a silver object and raised its nozzle toward the werewolf.

'I have to inform you that resisting arrest is ill-advised,' she said calmly. 'If I pull this trigger, it will release a deadly stream of molten silver that will fry your old werewolf head like an egg.'

The werewolf hesitated slightly at the authority in her voice, then carried on, hackles raised, eyes glowing, and leapt up onto the platform.

'AAAAAAAhgggggggggggggggggggggggggrroooooooooooooooh!'

The werewolf who had once been called Martin

Clough nearly jumped out of his rather scruffy fur as two Wolven, one brilliant white and one a silvery grey, appeared on the platform like smoke.

Finally! Fish's heart leapt at the sight of her two Wolven friends creeping slowly towards the werewolf.

'If you are unable to morph back to human state,' she continued, as though nothing had happened, 'I will have no alternative but to muzzle you and put you on a lead.'

Even as the last word left her lips, a confused Martin Clough leapt backwards, desperate to get away from the enormous white wolf-being whose lips were curled back on its muzzle to reveal sharp white teeth, and whose grey friend seemed to have matching sharp white teeth. Fish cried out as Martin Clough half-fell, half-jumped onto the track below, his four legs flying akimbo in his haste to get away.

Unhappily there was a loud cracking noise and a flash, followed by the sickening smell of fried, singed fur. Martin Clough was being electrocuted!

Fish stared at the smoking, twitching werewolf in horror and disbelief. *Blumming heck!* Hadn't she ordered the late trains to be cancelled and the line to be switched off? What if *she'd* touched it by mistake during her little trip along the tunnel? The werewolf would recover; it took more than a dose of electricity to finish off a lycan, after all.

Then, just when she thought things couldn't get any worse, they did. The midnight train for the Elephant and Castle came thundering through the tunnel at seventy miles per hour, taking the twitching, smoking form of Martin Clough with it.

'Well,' said Alex Fish, looking distinctly annoyed, 'that went well.'



Chapter 2
Furballs and Wedgies



When the 12:01 train to Elephant and Castle had roared through the station taking the unfortunate werewolf with it, Nat hoped they could all go home, but Alex Fish insisted they follow the train. At the next stop they found a small team of *NightShift* agents carefully peeling Martin Clough from the front of the locomotive.

Nat and Woody watched as the werewolf slowly reanimated, his rather squashed form shifting to human until he was sitting naked on the platform.