

Death by Chocolate

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Professor Firstenaw could see his breath in the chilly evening air. The days were drawing shorter, and the moon was rising gibbous over the trees of Hyde Park. Firstenaw was thankful for his fur as he watched some humans all bundled up against the cold.

A small crowd remained at Speakers' Corner, listening or heckling depending on their mood. The speaker's words caught his ears, which he rotated in that direction.

"...Will lead to a decline in the moral fabric of our great city. Our children are not safe from their predations. They're not like us; they don't have the same sense of morals that we do. See! There goes one now, trying to pretend he's not involved, but his ears give him away! See how he's listening in all secretively! You there! Go back to Prussia or Bohemia or wherever you came from!"

Firstenaw could not doubt that he was the target of that harangue. He didn't want to call attention to himself; didn't want to get involved. But the voice seemed familiar. The accent identified the speaker as college educated. A fellow professor, perhaps? All the more reason not to get involved. He folded back his ears and hurried by, tail held low, trying not to catch anyone's eye.

"Ah, hah!" said the speaker. "See how he's running away; he knows I've got his game!"

"Aww, lay off," shouted an onlooker. "The wolvens aren't any trouble!"

"That's what you think! That's what they want you to think! First they come to Britain from the mainland; now they want to teach in our universities."

Firstenaw continued away from the scene; the speaker's words grew faint as he retreated.

The next morning Firstenaw entered the coffee shop and gave what he hoped would be seen as a big friendly smile to the proprietor, a middle-aged woman in a tidy black gown and an apron.

“Good morning, Professor,” she said. “I’d recognize those big pointy ears of yours anywhere. What will you be having?”

“Good morning, Mrs. Miggins. I’d love a chocolate cruller and a nice hot mocha!”

“Oh, Professor,” she replied, playfully shoving his shoulder. “You know I can’t serve you that! Chocolate and coffee are strictly off-limits for you and all our wolvern friends. I can’t have you poisoning yourself in my shop!”

Firstenaw tilted his head down closed his mouth in a guilty pout as she led him to a table by the front window. He could hear the clippety-clop of horses’ hooves as carriages rolled by on the cobbled street.

“So just a chamomile tea for you this morning?” Mrs. Miggins asked.

“Yes, please.”

She went back to the counter to prepare the tea. Firstenaw sat down and read a newspaper. He skimmed a review of a Gilbert and Sullivan comic opera that had recently opened, something about foreigners with funny-sounding names. Mrs. Miggins returned with the tea and some pastries.

“Here you go, professor, with a splash of milk, just the way you like it. And a bear claw.”

“Oh, thank you. Just what a hungry wolvern needs.” Firstenaw went back to the newspaper. He chuckled at a report of a werewolf sighting. Probably just someone stirring up trouble about the wolverns again, he thought. He sipped the tea, munched the bear claw, and skimmed a few more articles. When all that was left was crumbs, a drop, and old news he stood from the table and gathered his belongings. As he left he tipped his hat to Mrs. Miggins. He gave her two Pence and said, “Treat yourself to a chocolate cruller.”

“Oh, thank you, Sir. Have a nice day, Professor.”

Firstenaw stepped outside and hailed a coach.

As Firstenaw walked up the stone steps to the lecture hall he was joined by the college throng: students and faculty from near and far. Occasionally he could see wolver ears poking up from the crowd. He entered the building and made his way to the classroom. The students were mostly humans, but he knew the three wolver students who attended. He subtly caught their eyes as he surveyed the class.

“Good morning, gentlemen and ladies. Today’s topic is one of the legends originating in central Europe, in my homeland of Prussia, Bohemia, Hungary, the Balkans. Werewolves frighten most humans, and many of us wolverns, for two principal reasons. First is the immediate threat to our safety: werewolves are fierce atavistic creatures of great strength and reduced mental capacity, hungry and easily angered. Second is the threat to our own identity, the fear that we should suffer the same affliction and become a werewolf, to be cursed by the monthly transformation.

“Of interest to us is how this occurs. Charles Darwin and other naturalists demonstrated that individual parts of the body do not disappear during the evolution of species. They showed that new forms do not appear; Nature adapts existing forms for new purposes. This is demonstrated in the remarkable similarities between all the mammals.

“The human skeleton has many of the same bones as that of a wolf. The major bones are the same between human and wolverns: the same number of vertebrae, the same basic arrangement of bones in the skull and arms and legs. The individual bones may have somewhat altered shapes. For example, the male wolf has a baculum, which human men do not. Wolverns and humans have the same kinds of teeth. The basic form and function are the same. That said, the bone structure of a werewolf more closely resembles a human than a wolvern.

“One thing we do know is that certain aspects of the underlying biology are preserved. For instance, we all love chocolate, but for us wolverns it is poison. Interestingly, of all the poisons identified for true werewolves, chocolate is not among them. Otherwise, it would be a simple matter to just leave a box of cocoa lying around where a suspected werewolf could get to it. Not sugary milk-

chocolate, but concentrated, baker's chocolate, which humans find bitter. But this is not done. Why? Because chocolate is not poisonous to werewolves.

"It is suspected that the invigorating action of some chemical substance in chocolate and coffee has a much greater effect in wolvens than in humans, which leads to frenzy and heart palpitations and, if the dose is large enough, death."

A student raised his hand.

"Ah, a question here, in the third row."

"Professor Firstenaw, no one's seen a werewolf in decades. To what do you attribute this apparent disappearance? Could it be that werewolves are merely legends and misidentified wolvens?"

"An astute observation. Werewolves are very real, I assure you. I have encountered three myself in eastern Europe. I can only surmise that they have largely disappeared from London because of the difficulties that modern urban life poses for werewolves. It's hard to stay hidden. It may also be that the larger numbers of wolvens such as myself have, ironically, made it easier for the wolf-phase werewolves to exist without being noticed. If you reported a werewolf, the police would most likely think you were drunk and had seen one of us. Indeed, this makes identifying real cases of werewolf more difficult to detect.

"In back, there on the left."

"Professor, what's it like to be a werewolf?"

"No one knows—that is, aside from actual werewolves, who have not spoken to us about it. I suspect it's painful, starting with a migraine. The mind fogs, rational thinking ends, and the poor creature is reduced to a very animal way of perceiving the world. It's probably frightening ... until there's no rational mind left to be frightened."

Firstenaw paused to let that sink in. The haunted eyes with which the werewolves he encountered looked at the world were chilling memories. He hoped they would remain memories. He continued the lecture with disease theories of werewolfism and details of his own encounters. There were more questions and answers, and he concluded the lecture.

“Thank you all for your attention. Please follow up in your texts this evening. On the board I’ve listed the related chapters in Grimm, Menzies, Ritchie, and Crowe. Class is dismissed.”

The next morning’s fog was perhaps a touch chillier. As Firstenaw approached the coffee shop, he sensed that something was amiss. People hurried away from the area; there was an unusual crowd outside ... police. And there, on the front steps, Mrs. Miggins, crying.

“Mrs. Miggins? What’s happened?”

She looked up, but someone official-looking intercepted him. A human, late forties, lean and tall, hawkish nose, brown hair, moustache.

“I’m sorry, sir, but you’ll have to go about your business.”

“This is my business. I am here to have breakfast.”

“And you are?”

“Friedrich Firstenaw, Professor of—“

“You’re Firstenaw? We were told to contact you.”

“Oh?”

“Yes. The Yard tells us you’ve been helpful in the past in solving wolveren crimes.”

“Well, yes, ah, crimes involving wolverens. How is that relevant here? And you are?”

“Oh, beg pardon, Professor. I’m Inspector Haversham, London Metropolitan Police. This is my assistant, Leftenant Potter.” A younger man, black hair, wire-rimmed spectacles.

Haversham offered his hand. Firstenaw took it in his and they shook.

“Haversham. Potter.”

“A pleasure to meet you, Professor.”

“Likewise. So. How does this involve me?”

“First indications are that this is a wolveren crime.”

“First indications?”

“Perhaps if I showed you the scene of the crime. This way, Professor. Ah, here’s Mrs. Miggins. She’s the—”

“I know who she is. Have you spoken with her?”

Haversham smirked. “Poor thing’s hysterical. We haven’t gotten a word out of her.”

Firstenaw sighed and looked down his snout at Haversham. Mrs Miggins looked up at Firstenaw; her eyes wide in fear at first, but recognition dawned. Firstenaw tilted his head; he made calming noises as a dog might to her puppies. Trying to make himself small, he crouched before her and took her hands in his, delicate skin in black fur.

“My dear,” he said, trying to hide his teeth and somehow look more like a puppy than a big wolverine. “I’m so sorry for your loss. You must have been terribly frightened.”

“Yes, Professor.” She tried to compose herself.

“Can you tell me what happened? Did you see something?”

“I saw ... that,” she tilted her head toward the shop door. “And stopped. I ran to the police box and called the police.”

“You did the right thing. What time was this?”

“Six o’clock. Henry—Mister Miggins arrives at three to start the baking. Then I come to open the shop and serve breakfast.”

“But this morning...”

“I opened the shop and found ... my Henry, dead.”

“Was the front door locked?”

“Yes, Sir. I have a key.”

“How do you think he could have got in?”

“The back door. Henry leaves it open for deliveries and fresh air. It gets quite warm in the bakery.”

“Ah, I see. I imagine it would. Well. You just sit here and gather your wits and strength. We’ll find who did this, I promise.” He looked her straight in the eyes.

“Yes, Professor. Thank you.”

Firstenaw turned to Haversham with a reproachful look. Haversham bit his lip and frowned.

“So,” said Firstenaw. “The scene is undisturbed?”

“Aside from the victim, the scene is pristine,” replied Haversham. “The victim is Henry Miggins, a male human, age forty-eight. He owned this bakery.”

“I know. This is my favorite spot for breakfast. Believe me; we shall leave no clue undiscovered.”

Firstenaw and the detectives entered the shop. The tables and chairs and display case were undisturbed. He went into the kitchen, prepared for a gruesome sight. There was blood spattered about. Henry Miggins, wearing white trousers and shirt and an apron, lay in the middle of the floor, bruised, lacerated, and bitten. A baker’s cart was askew, some chocolate muffins obviously missing. A baker’s tool for taking things in and out of an oven lay nearby. Firstenaw approached the victim.

“Has a cause of death been established?” he asked.

“The coroner believes it was caused by bleeding to death from these bite wounds.”

“I see,” said Firstenaw. “These bite marks...”

“The coroner identified them as being from a wolverine.”

“Uh huh.” Firstenaw made notes and sketches of the wounds in his notebook: canines 3 cm apart, four incisors top and bottom. He furrowed his brow. Claw marks were ... claw marks, somewhat shallow and wide.

Firstenaw turned his attention to the rest of the room. He looked longingly at some chocolate cakes in the glass counter. He sighed and continued his visual search.

“How did the attacker get out?”

“Same as he got in,” said Haversham. “The back door. There are faint tracks in the dust on the floor, and drops of blood.”

The tile floor was slightly dusty with flour, and prints of shoes and someone walking barefoot ... in both directions.

“Someone came both ways here,” said Haversham. “We think it was the attacker. Barefoot, by the looks of it. Wolven.”

Firstenaw looked at the footprints in the flour dust. Not quite human, the toes were too far apart, but not wolven either. He made sketches in his notebook. Whoever it was walked digitigrade and had claws, but Firstenaw thought the prints weren't quite right for wolvens.

Firstenaw followed the trail of prints into a storeroom. It seemed mostly undisturbed, but for a paper bag, torn apart and emptied of its contents. He fitted the pieces together: Cadbury's Baker's Chocolate Morsels, 75% Cocoa.

“So our wolven killed the baker for some chocolate buns, then came back here for more chocolate. He found this bag and emptied it... not on the floor. There aren't any chocolate morsels at all.”

Firstenaw looked at the trail in the dust on the floor.

“Our wolven went back out into the hall and then into the alley. Haversham, have there been any missing persons reports?”

“Not to my knowledge. Leftenant?”

“No, Sir.”

“Let's follow this trail. Where does this alley lead?”

“To the park, I believe, Sir.”

Firstenaw, Haversham, and Potter left the bakery through the back door and down the alley, which opened onto Bayswater Road. Beyond they could see the Gardens and Speakers' Corner.

“Wolven or not, this is probably the way the murderer would have gone,” said Haversham. “Potter, go back through the bakery, gather up some men, and go to the park. We will search it.”

“Yes, Inspector.” Potter went back into the bakery. Haversham and Firstenaw went down the alley, crossed Bayswater Road, and entered the park. They couldn't see very far, as the morning fog had only begun to lift.

A policeman came running. “Inspector Haversham,” said a policeman who had joined them. “We've nabbed a suspect. A wolven, as you suspected.”

Firstenaw looked at Haversham. "That was fast."

"We caught him just half a mile down the road, walking about as though nothing was up. We found this on him."

He produced a paper sack.

"It's from the Miggins bakery," he said.

"Contents?"

"Day-olds. Bear claws and a peach cobbler."

"Anything chocolate," asked Firstenaw.

"No, sir."

"No chocolate morsels?"

"No, sir."

"He could have eaten them," suggested Haversham.

"Not likely," said Firstenaw.

"Right," said Haversham. "Likely suspect. Teeth and claw marks on the victim, paper sack from the bakery. Good work, officer. We'll wrap up the investigation here and join you and the suspect at the Yard this afternoon."

Firstenaw gave Haversham a puzzled look.

"Problem, Professor?"

"You have the wrong suspect."

"Look, Professor. You're here to advise us, not to tell us our job. The evidence all matches up. We've got our man. Or wolf, rather."

"I see. Well, then. If your mind is made up, then I suppose my work here is done. Good day to you, Inspector."

Firstenaw put away his notebook and turned his back on the detectives. He gritted his teeth and growled silently, then walked down the path away from the bridge.

Firstenaw sat at his desk in his University College office, reading a tedious scholarly journal about the Freudian implications of the stories collected by the Brothers Grimm. His thoughts were interrupted by a knock at the door.

"Yes, who is it?"

“Professor Firstenaw, may I come in?”

Firstenaw looked up from the book he was reading. The door opened to reveal one of the students who had attended yesterday’s lecture.

“Why certainly.” Said Firstenaw. “Please have a seat. What can I do for you?”

“My name is Edward Kirby; I’m one of your students. Some of the things you said in that lecture got me thinking.”

Firstenaw always liked it when he had that effect.

“Professor, aren’t you the wolverine who got harangued at the park the other day?”

“Uh, yes. Yes, I am.”

“Awful business that, Sir. I found it disrespectful.”

“And?”

“He’s a professor here at University College. I’m enrolled in one of his classes as well. I hate to criticize the faculty, Sir, but he’s become unusually gruff of late. Some say he complains of headaches, and has been missing lectures every few weeks. He missed his lecture yesterday and this morning; no one has seen him. His absences started a few months after he was away on a trip to Bohemia. Look, Sir.”

Edward handed him a sheet of paper with dates written on it.

“This is a very peculiar pattern, wouldn’t you say?”

Firstenaw looked at the dates and furrowed his brow. He got out his datebook and turned to the page with all the months in the year. He marked the dates from Edward’s list: August 9, September 8-9. October 7-8.

“Professor, what are these circles on your calendar, and why is there one already on each of those dates?”

“Those, my observant friend, mark the full moon.”

“What does this mean?”

“It means that the police have the wrong suspect. A bag of day-olds from the same bakery is not sufficient evidence to arrest a wolverine!”

The afternoon sun shone into the windows of the bakery where several people were gathered. The last arrival was a scholar from University College.

“Ah, Professor Wolverton. So good of you to join us. You know Mrs. Miggins, our student Edward Kirby, Inspector Haversham and Lieutenant Potter from Scotland Yard, and Robert Croft.”

“What’s he doing here? Shouldn’t he be in prison? And why are the police here?”

“Calm yourself, Wolverton. All will be revealed. Your agitation cannot help your headache.”

“How do you know I have a headache?”

“Let’s say I’m observant and am familiar with your ... condition.”

“My condition?! Haversham, put a stop to this or I shall take my leave. He can’t treat me this way!”

“Professor, I think you’d better sit down and listen to what Firstenaw has to say.”

Potter moved to the door and tried to look impassable.

Firstenaw said, “We know the facts of the case. On October 7 someone broke into Henry Miggins’ bakery and brutally murdered him. In addition to the murder and the damage to the bakery, a number of chocolate baked goods were stolen, along with a five pound bag of Cadbury’s Chocolate Morsels. These were never recovered. Later that morning, Robert Croft was arrested in Hyde Park, having in his possession a bag of day-old rolls and other baked goods from that bakery ... none of them chocolate.”

“What does this have to do with me?” asked Wolverton.

“Where were you in June of this year?” asked Firstenaw.

“What business is that of yours?”

“Answer the question, Wolverton,” said Haversham.

“All will be revealed, Professor. So. June?”

“I was on vacation ... in Bohemia.”

“Studying?”

“It was a working vacation. I was studying local folk literature. I couldn’t let the Germans have all the glory in that field.” He looked at Firstenaw. “Or the wolvens.”

“I assure you that we Germans are delighted to share that glory. My teachers Wilhelm and Jakob—humans, perhaps you’ve heard of them—would be proud to know that their work is being carried on. So. Did you find anything of interest? Did you bring anything back with you? Any bite marks, perhaps?”

“What?! How did—” Realizing too late he had given that away, Wolverton sighed. “A wolf bit me.”

“Let’s see it.”

Wolverton unbuttoned his left sleeve and rolled it up, revealing a healed bite mark on his forearm. The marks from the teeth were still clear.

“See how deep those marks are!” he complained.

“I’m sure it was quite painful.”

“Sure was. Damned wolves.”

“No, Professor, this was not the bite of a wolf.”

“But I saw it!”

“I’m sure you did. But count the tooth marks. See here? Between the canines? Four incisors. Couldn’t have been a wolf. Or a wolvern. Mr. Croft, please bare your teeth for the Lieutenant. Potter, I want you to count his teeth.”

Croft tentatively bared his teeth. Potter cringed a little, took a breath, and counted.

“I count two incisors—I mean two canines and six incisors on top, and the same below.”

“Thank you, Mr. Croft. Now, Lieutenant, please return the favor and bare your teeth. Inspector Haversham, please count his teeth.”

“Two canines and four incisors, top and bottom,” said Haversham.

“What’s the point of all this?” asked Wolverton.

“The point, professor, is that whatever bit you could not have been a wolf or a wolvern. It was human. On what date did this unfortunate accident occur?”

“June 12.”

Firstenaw and Kirby traded glances.

“A full moon, was it not?”

“Why, yes, it was. That’s why I could see the wolf so clearly.”

“Professor, I hope you don’t take it as too personal a question. Where were you on August 9? You missed your lecture that day.”

Wolverton closed his eyes for a moment. “I was suffering a migraine headache.”

“And on September 8 and 9?”

“Another migraine.”

“Isn’t it curious that your migraines are all occurring on the full moon, and that they began following your being bitten by ... something not a wolf ... also on a full moon?”

“What are you suggesting?” asked Wolverton.

“Werewolf,” said Potter. “Wolverton’s a werewolf.”

“Potter,” said Haversham.

“Sorry, Sir. But it seems obvious.”

Wolverton stared at Potter.

“We haven’t seen werewolves in London in over thirty years,” said Haversham. “Thanks mostly to our Wolven friends.”

Potter produced his notebook and wrote something in it. “Isn’t tomorrow night...”

“The full moon,” finished Kirby.

“Yes, it is,” said Firstenaw. “That is why I have brought you all here tonight.”

“What are you saying?” asked Wolverton. “That I’m a werewolf? That I’m one of you?”

“Yes. No,” said Firstenaw. “No, you’re not a wolver. Yes, you are a werewolf. There is a difference. Here. Have some chocolate. Mrs. Miggins?”

Mrs. Miggins produced a bar of chocolate: fine, unsweetened bakers’ chocolate.

“Professor Wolverton,” she said. “This is from my bakery. It’s the same kind as went missing last month. Firstenaw says it might help with your headache. I hope you like it.” She held it out to him.

“Go ahead, Wolverton,” said Firstenaw. “It won’t kill you. It would probably make me or Mister Croft mighty sick, but you will have some benefit.”

Wolverton, looking somewhat pale, reached for the chocolate. He groaned and collapsed onto the floor with a thud. Before their eyes, Wolverton’s shape changed. His face elongated: his nose and mouth extended into a snout; as he writhed they could occasionally see his teeth. It seemed as though they became more prominent. Strange things happened to his feet and wrists: they elongated and narrowed.

“The transformation is beginning just as I expected it would. Men —” Firstenaw looked at Croft, Kirby, Potter, and Haversham. “— We’re going to have to hold him tightly and tie him up. Do it now while he’s helpless.”

The detectives gaped.

“Come on!” said Firstenaw. “What are you waiting for? Restrain him before he comes to.”

Wolverton’s eyes opened. He looked around at the people surrounding him in the coffee shop. His eyes fixed on Firstenaw, who bared his teeth and emitted a growl. Potter produced a pistol and aimed it at Firstenaw; Haversham aimed his at Wolverton.

“Potter! The werewolf, not the professor!” shouted Kirby.

Potter shook himself and shifted his aim to the werewolf.

Wolverton lunged at Firstenaw, who backed up and raised his arms defensively.

A shot was fired — Haversham — and another — Potter. Mrs. Miggins screamed. Wolverton twitched and fell short of its target; his body fell in a heap on the wooden floor of the bakery. Firstenaw looked at the detectives and their weapons. He held out his hands and tried to look nonthreatening. He tried even more not to reveal his annoyance at their dangerous aim. Haversham and Potter holstered their weapons.

Firstenaw looked at Miggins and offered an embrace; looking ready to cry, she accepted. Firstenaw hugged her gently and made gentle-parent noises. He caught Haversham's eye and glanced at Croft.

Haversham said, "Well, Mister Croft, it seems we've made an error in your arrest. Please accept our apology. You're free to go."

"No, Mister Croft," said Mrs. Miggins. "Please stay here a while and have a chamomile tea and a bear claw. You, too, Professor Firstenaw. Detectives, Kirby, there's coffee and chocolate crullers."