



# The Wolf at Number 4

A NOVEL

Ayo Tamakloe-Garr

# prologue

---

MAYBE ALL THIS HAPPENED BECAUSE MR. ADDISON tried to rape me. For a man old enough to be my father, he sure was strong.

Mike would have slapped his palm against his forehead if he had found out. Then he would have hugged me or something, and then after, gone to break Mr. Addison's jaw. Mike was wonderful like that. When I asked him what he saw in Hannah, he said she was "some woman." Noticing my expression, he added, "You've always been more person to me." Half an hour later he married Hannah in the suit I had bought for him.

So maybe it was Hannah after all.

A cold gust brings me out of my thoughts. I am cold and numb. My throat is dry and cries out for something warm and sweet and comforting. Uncle Johnny gave me my first taste of wine when I was fourteen. I remember that night so vividly.

Maybe it was Uncle Johnny, rather.

I bite back the tears welling up behind my eyes. Kind of the way Augustine had attempted to. Augustine had not been one

of my best decisions. I hadn't told Wolf this, but Augustine had sort of gone off the rails afterwards. I had not been good for Augustine.

Wolf—maybe it was him.

Or maybe his father or his mother?

Or Nii?

Or was it the cancer that took my father?

Or the miscarriage?

Maybe it was Junior.

Maybe it was Jeff being so self-absorbed.

Maybe it was the Fire-Eater's animosity towards me.

Or maybe, maybe it was me.

Maybe all this happened because I was *me*. But then could I be anything else?

I shake my head. I'm beginning to sound like Wolf already.

Another chilly breeze hits me.

“Ɔɔ!” calls the young dreadlocked man in the BMW to my left. He licks his lips. His invitation hangs in the air like a disembodied hand, caressing my chin and beckoning me towards warmth.

I look around the filling station in the middle of nowhere. I have to find somewhere to go soon, but everywhere—Cape Coast, Accra—is the deep blue sea. And the sea has proven to be anything but warm.

The devil is still looking at me, *all* of the me he can see.

I wrap my arms around myself. Boy, is it cold out here.

Boy, am I cold.

# 1

---

MR. ADDISON SEEMED GENUINELY NICE WHEN HE hired me five minutes into my interview, not even asking what happened with my old job in Accra.

When I told him about my mother and I having to relocate to a dingy compound house after my father died, he gave me a cosy little colonial era bungalow to live in. He then suggested a fun trip to the Grand Cape resort in Elmina that Saturday night, after I had moved in.

And it was fun at first.

Then came the touchiness—holding my hand, wrapping another round my waist, then “playfully” smacking my rear. Nevertheless, I followed him up to the hotel room. Maybe I wanted to believe that he would turn out different, that Cape Coast would be different, a fresh start. Anyway, what saved me was his heart giving up on him.

In the emergency room after the heart attack, the nurses rushed past, and each one of them gave me the eyes. It was not hard to know what they were thinking. He was married and

old and rich. I was unmarried and young and my dress was high above my knees.

What the nurses thought, Mr. Addison's driver said. When he dropped me off at the junction leading into West End Ridge, he muttered "Ashawo" before slamming the door and speeding off.

My house, number 3, sat atop the ridge and was the farthest from the main road. But fortunately, West End Ridge was a small neighborhood with the houses far apart and surrounded by trees and shrubs. I hadn't seen a single neighbor since I moved in the day before, and I was glad no one was around to see my puffy eyes and the bright red stain on the white, polka-dotted dress I was wearing.

I had met many Mr. Addisons; I just never learned. The doctors said this latest one would be fine but he would have to live life at a much slower pace. Not that I cared anyway. I just wanted to fall into bed and wash the previous night's events from my memory.

But it was then that I met my first neighbor.

The bungalows in West End Ridge all had the same basic format. Two bedrooms, a bathroom, kitchen, and living room. The back door opened into a garage, and the front door opened into a porch bounded by a low wall and a small wooden gate. Well, perched on my porch wall was a little boy.

He looked no more than ten or eleven, and he sat perfectly still. I dragged my feet to get his attention, but he kept on staring off into the distance. Even as I unlocked the porch gate, he just sat there, unmoving.

"Hello," I called out.

There was no response.

I took cautious steps towards him. Nothing.

He only reacted when I tapped him on the shoulder. His thick, bushy eyebrows slanted down towards each other, and his large, bulging, owl-like eyes fixed themselves intently on me.

“Nevermore,” he whispered.

“What?”

“Thus quoth the raven.”

“What?”

“Never mind,” he said. He hopped off the short porch wall and into the grass. “I don’t think you’re coming from church.”

I folded my arms. “No, I’m not.”

“I saw you yesterday. You went out with Mr. Addison. Is this your house?”

“Yes it is,” I replied. “Who are you? What is your name?”

“My name is Wolfgang. But you should call me Wolf. It’s shorter. And . . .” He paused and mischief crept onto his face. “Do you want me to tell you a secret?”

My curiosity got the better of my desire to just fall into my bed, so I nodded.

He beckoned me closer and whispered into my ear. “I may look like one, but I’m not a human. I’m a wolf.”

I laughed and he set his jaw and balled his fists.

“Look, little boy,” I said to him. “Where do you live?”

He pointed behind me. I turned to look.

“Number 4. That’s my house.”

“I see. Well, you can’t just come sit on someone else’s wall like that. People don’t do that. It’s an invasion of my privacy. Do you understand?”

He nodded.

“Good boy.”

“I’m going home,” he announced. He started to walk away but turned back to me and said, “Edgar Allan Poe. You should read more.”

I couldn’t help making a face. “I probably read ‘The Raven’ before you were born.”

He stopped. “Then you may be of some use to me,” he said. “Maybe.” And then he continued on his way.

I kissed my teeth and went inside. I immediately stepped out of my dress and took it to the sink. The dress was a gift from a dear old friend. In his attempt to get at me, Mr. Addison had knocked over a bottle of Merlot that I had ordered. Having had the entire night to set and dry, the stain refused to come out. So I threw the dress onto one of the unpacked suitcases that lay strewn about my living room.

I contemplated calling my mother, but I couldn't bear to hear the disappointment in her voice when she found out that I had blown yet another, and possibly my last, chance. She worried about me far more than was healthy for someone with a blood pressure of 160 over 100.

When prostate cancer took my father, we lost everything. We lost the houses and the cars. I lost my opportunity to get my master's degree and eventually even my job.

That night, as I waited for sleep to arrive, I wondered if I should have just let Addison have his way. I wondered if I was too naïve and too soft for this world. Father had always said so, never in a harsh manner, but when I look back now, with a sort of remorse. Perhaps he knew how I was to end up. Father always knew.

I got up, dug into one of my suitcases, pulled out a bottle of red wine, downed a glass or two, and returned to my bed.

## 2

---

THE TEN-MINUTE WALK FROM MY HOUSE TO Lighthouse Academy would have been pleasant on any other day. It was a slow descent into a valley and up a gentle slope to the crest of another ridge. The road was shaded by tall and ancient-looking trees. In places, their canopies had merged to form arches. But as I walked through the chilly dawn air, only thoughts of my imminent sacking occupied my mind. Addison was going to have it done, if he couldn't do it himself.

The reporting time was at seven o'clock, but I was there at half past six. Mr. Addison had already given me a tour, so I knew where the staff common room was and which wooden table and chair was mine. I set my water bottle down on the desk and took a seat. I started to flip through the syllabus while I waited for the other teachers to show up. The first one arrived fifteen minutes past eight.

"Wow!" he exclaimed the moment he walked in. He was tall and reasonably good looking. He had his first button opened and his cuffs folded upwards. Unfortunately, he reeked of cockiness.



I gave him a wave and a smile.

He approached my desk and extended his hand. “You must be the new English teacher.”

I rose and took his hand. “Yes, I am. My name is Desire Mensah.”

“I’m Gerald Amponsah. But you call me Gerald, okay. You’re very pretty.”

“Thank you, Gerald. It’s nice to meet you,” I said, and sat.

“It’s my pleasure,” he said licking his lips. “Desire ampa.”

I smiled with my lips only and looked down at my books.

But he sat on the edge of my desk and crossed his legs. “So, you’re from Accra, I hear.” He opened his bag and brought out a sachet of yogurt, bit the edge off, spat it out onto the floor, and proceeded to drink. Beads of condensed water dropped on my desk and books.

“Yes, I am,” I said, slowly.

“And you were a teacher there?”

“Yes, I taught at Cantonments International School.”

“Wow! CIS paah. So why did you leave?” He was chewing noisily on the frozen yogurt through the sachet now.

“The school board and I didn’t see eye to eye on certain issues.”

“What issues?”

I almost sighed out loud.

Fortunately, the door opened and in walked two people. One was a lanky, stern-looking man and the other an even sterner-looking woman. I recognized the man from my interview; he was the HR. The woman was new to me. She looked masculine, with her natural hair shaved low, square shoulders, and severe expression. I wondered if these were my executioners.

“Mr. Gyamfi!” exclaimed Gerald, jumping up off my desk and wiping his wet palms on his trousers. “Good morning.”

Mr. Gyamfi’s eyes roamed about the room. “Morning, Gerald. The others are not in?”

“No, sir. It’s just me, sir. Me and Miss Mensah.”

Mr. Gyamfi’s gaze fixed itself on me. “Ah, Miss Mensah. How are you settling in?”

I stepped forward and shook his hand. “Just fine, sir.” I nodded in the direction of the woman, but her hard and set expression remained unchanged.

“Good,” he said. “Anyway, Mr. Addison unfortunately suffered a heart attack on Saturday night, if you haven’t heard already.”

Gerald covered his mouth. “Ow!”

My heart started to pound through my ears.

“Yes, it’s unfortunate. So he has to go on immediate retirement. It’s overdue anyway.” He turned to the woman beside him. “So the school board has selected Mrs. Providencia Anaglate here to take over as headmistress.”

The woman nodded.

“You’re welcome, madam,” said Gerald, shaking her hand.

The disdain in the woman’s eyes was evident as she observed Gerald from behind her bifocals. After a moment, she said, “Thank you.” She then glanced at her wristwatch. “It’s half past eight, right?”

“Yes, it is, madam,” said Gerald, oblivious to what she actually meant.

Providencia Anaglate then made it clear to him. “We’ll fix the tardiness. Anyway, that will be all for now. Nice to meet you, Mr. Gerald, and welcome, Miss Mensah.” I was too nervous to speak, so I just shook her hand as well. Her grip was firm. “I hope you enjoy working here.”

I mumbled my thanks as they left the room.

Gerald turned to me and started to talk, but I didn’t hear a thing he said. The relief was incredible. I found myself grinning.

“ . . . it happens to you too, eh?” Gerald said, and laughed.

He hadn’t noticed my mind was elsewhere. My grin turned into laughter, and I nodded in agreement to whatever he had said.

“Can I drink some of your water?” he asked, his eyes on my water bottle.

I smiled and shook my head.

The other teachers arrived not too long after that, and the news of Mr. Addison’s heart attack spread through the common room like wildfire.

After one teacher asked what happened, Mr. Baiden, the RME teacher, got up with a roguish look on his face and said, “Hmm, mmaasem oh. You know Papa Addison already.”

Everyone erupted in raucous laughter. Everyone except me. I just tried to look amused.

Baiden continued, “I heard he was at the resort with a woman, some fine woman bi like that.”

“Ei Baiden,” cried someone.

“Oh true thing I de talk,” he protested. “They said eh . . .” He then lowered his voice after glancing around. “They said Papa Addison and the girl went to chill and he spread the girl fine fine. And when they went inside for the dessert, then he had the heart attack.”

The ensuing laughter was even louder than the first. “Ei Baiden!” someone exclaimed.

“He couldn’t handle it, eh?” came Gerald.

Baiden returned to his seat. “E no be easy koraa.” He then pretended to zip his lips. “But me I didn’t say anything oh.”

I pretended to laugh along with everyone, although I was horrified at how much they knew.

Fortunately, the topic switched to Providencia Anaglate. Baiden apparently had a friend whose brother-in-law’s cousin had worked with someone who taught under her at her previous school. And according to that person, she did not play around at all. They called her Madam Fire-Eater. They said when she discovered her husband in bed with a level 100 girl, she whipped the two of them with a belt and sent her husband howling down the street naked.

At the moment, I didn't care about her. I didn't even care that Gerald had perched himself on my desk again. I was just glad I had my job and that my identity as the mystery woman from that infamous night remained secret.