

## **Adderley's Bride**

### *Excerpt*

Sofie burned up inside when she thought about all the time she'd spent in the studio coaching the Bitch. It was pretty safe to say Candace wasn't a natural-born singer.

Sofie shook her head absently. The thing was, singing did come naturally to her. It just wasn't her passion. Music was Levi's dream and she sometimes thought she'd joined the band just to be with him. One day, he'd heard her singing in the shower and the next, she was in the studio putting down vocals with his guidance.

To be honest, she wasn't as upset as she should be about not making the tour. But she distinctly remembered evading the issue of telling Sal she would be away for weeks. She'd waited as long as she could and she'd told herself it was to see if the tour fell through. In hindsight, it was clear she just didn't want to leave the bakery and her passion that long.

There would be royalties in this so-called divorce. Curt would deal with it for her, thank God. Instead of being happy to finally get paid for her music, she was swiping at tears.

From outside, she heard a horse neigh. She looked up at the window to see a dark horse and rider bound across the lawn.

Blinking away tears for a better look, she watched as the large black horse jumped gracefully and so high.

She squinted, trying to get a better look. The horse's hooves didn't appear to touch the ground. The rider sat expertly through the cavorting as if letting the horse have its head.

She couldn't see the horse and rider clearly because they were too far away. With the darkness, they appeared in silhouette. Horse and rider arched once more and then as quickly as they had appeared, disappeared into the stand of trees beyond.

The Danvers must have a horse, but why ride across her lawn? She'd check in the morning to see if the horse's hooves had damaged the landscaping. Maybe she would pay the Danvers a visit.

In the reflection of the glass, she caught a movement behind her. A tall man stared at her from the soft forest glow in the room. Against the backdrop of the green leaves in the wallpaper, there was an impression of short, dark hair and sharp angular features before his light eyes bore

into hers. They glowed with such intensity that she could not look away. It was an effort to fight the pull but she managed to jerk her eyes away from the window.

She jumped up and the tray and bowl of stew clanged to the floor. “How did you get in here?”

The spot on the throw rug in front of the bed where she’d just seen the man was empty.

As her eyes scanned every corner of the room, she grabbed the heavy silver tray and brandished it before her like a battle-axe. She was alone in her room. The crackling fire was the only other sound in her brain besides her racing heartbeat.

Adrenaline pumping through her veins made her rigid. She held the tray out before her stiffly as she crept towards the bedroom door. The wall sconce at the center of the hall was still on. She could see clear across to the staircase landing but the opposite side of the hall leading to the other wing was in darkness.

Stepping out of her room, she was hit with a blast of cold air that whistled around the empty corridors. She didn’t have her slippers on and hopped from one foot to the next. It was forty degrees tonight and it felt like she was standing on an ice block. Belatedly, she realized she was making so much noise in her agitation that whoever was in the house could certainly hear her fumbling around. She returned to her room for the slippers.

Back in the hall, she stood quietly listening. But it wasn’t so much what she could hear as it was what she could feel. The hair on the back of her neck prickled. There was an expectant energy in the air, and she waited.

*‘Beautiful Sofie...’*

The words wafted on the breeze, swept through the corridor and curled past her ear in an intimate caress. They were seductive, hypnotic and somehow calmed her fears. Lowering the tray, she closed her eyes and leaned toward the caress.

Startled by her reaction to this phenomenon, she blinked her eyes open. She couldn’t let her guard down, no matter who he was. She didn’t know him.

*Didn’t know who?*

She shook sense into her head. She didn’t know anyone in Wynter Hollow, much less a ‘him.’ Realizing the ridiculous direction of her thoughts was no comfort. As she stood there, the feeling that someone was with her grew stronger.

“Where are you?” Her voice was shaking with a strange anticipation and she stepped forward.