

## Chapter One

*Addie.*

It was *his* Addie.

Bram O'Donovan stared across the busy Irish bar, his gaze on the woman who'd haunted his dreams for months.

*She is not yours, you eejit.*

No. Not his. But...they'd spent ten days together. For ten days, he'd gorged himself on her.

He'd thought...

Well, it didn't matter what he'd thought. Adaline Harris was young, blonde, beautiful, an amazing dancer, and sweet. She was too good for him.

He was an older, battered, ex-military man who would never be good enough for her. While he'd been away with work, she'd wised up.

He barely registered the sounds of the people in the bar. Addie looked up and met his gaze, and all the color drained out of her face, leaving her whiter than the sheets his ma used to have flapping outside on the line when he was a boy.

That's when his brain registered that Addie wore the uniform of the staff at the bar—black shirt and pants, and a dark-green apron.

And that apron sat snug over a small mound of a belly that she hadn't possessed the last time he'd seen her.

Shock rocketed through him.

*Addie was pregnant.*

She whirled and ran behind the bar, disappearing through a doorway.

*Pregnant.* It'd been several months since she'd disappeared from his life. He'd returned home to find she'd left her dance show and her apartment, and her phone had been disconnected.

That baby in her belly was his.

His friends at the table where he sat had fallen silent. Without a word, he rose and strode after Addie. He shouldered past several bargoers.

“Hey.” One man spun around, took in Bram's size, and snapped his mouth closed.

Bram charged around the bar and through the door, ignoring a shout behind him.

*Where was she?*

There were several rooms off a long hallway. He heard the noise of the kitchen nearby. Then he detected the faint scent of spring flowers. It made him think of a sunny meadow. Her scent was embedded in his senses. He'd know it anywhere. He'd damn well dreamed about it over the last few months.

*Addie.*

He stalked to a door at the end of the hall and nudged it open.

It was filled with stacked tables, St. Patrick's Day decorations, and racks of unused glasses.

Addie stood in the center of the space, and spun to face him.

“Addie,” he murmured.

She swallowed. “Bram, I...”

“You disappeared,” he said.

Her head jerked. Her blonde hair was up in a jumbled bun on top of her head. It always

made him think of strands of golden sunshine.

She lifted her chin. “You wanted nothing to do with us.” She placed a protective hand over her belly.

His mind boiled. *Nothing to do with her? Feck.*

There was a baby in there. *His* baby.

Confusion made him cock his head. “You disappeared, Addie. I thought it was a pretty clear way of telling me you didn’t want me. A baby...” He scraped a hand through his short hair. “I had a right to know about that.”

Splotches of color appeared on her cheeks. “I called. I tried to get in touch. I left you messages.”

His brows drew together. “I didn’t get any messages.”

“I called Sentinel Security. And I went there. *Twice.*” The color left her cheeks again, the look in her eyes stark. “I was told to stop bothering you. I got the message, Bram.” Her voice hitched.

His gut knotted. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Just leave me alone.” She grabbed the edge of the table. Her knuckles were white. “I’ve been doing just fine on my own.”

The pain and hurt in her voice cut him. His throat was as dry as dust. He couldn’t handle the idea of her alone. “You left the show.”

“Show?” She frowned at him.

“*On the Street.* Where you were dancing.”

She gave a short laugh. “I’m pregnant, Bram. No one wants a pregnant dancer.”

“Addie—”

“And I was sick for a while.”

His own stomach cramped at the thought.

“I couldn’t afford my apartment anymore! I couldn’t find any work, and I was puking constantly.”

His body jerked. He hadn’t meant to, but he’d left her all alone.

“I couldn’t even pay for my phone.” She lifted her chin. “I was lucky Paddy took me on here.”

“I didn’t get your messages, sunshine.”

If it was possible, her cheeks went even paler. “Don’t call me that,” she whispered.

He’d called her that during the nights they’d spent together. Wrapped up together in her small double bed, where there had barely been enough room for him, let alone both of them. But he’d held her tight. He’d learned every inch of that beautiful dancer’s body. He’d cherished pleasing her, hearing her cries as she’d come for him.

Now there was so much pain in her pretty, blue eyes, and he was desperate to fix it.

She rubbed both hands over her belly.

“Addie, come with me. We need to talk.”

“I’m at work, I—”

“I’m not leaving you alone.” Not again. A part of Bram panicked at the thought of leaving her, worried he’d lose her.

She wasn’t disappearing from his life again.

“Bram, I think it’s best you go.” Her voice wobbled.

“No,” he growled.

Her lips pressed together. Addie was kind and good, but he knew she had an inner strength when things were important to her. She could dig her heels in.

“Bram?” His boss Killian’s voice sounded behind him.

“I think she needs some time, Bram. You both do.” That voice belonged to Devyn, Killian’s new, badass wife. For some reason, the stubborn CIA agent had claimed Bram as a

friend.

He turned his head and met her gaze. The redhead nodded at him.

Bram hadn't known Devyn long, but he knew she'd have his back. They'd saved each other's lives on a recent mission. He released a breath and looked back at Addie, who was staring at Devyn.

"Addie?" he said.

Her head jerked back to him, a strange look on her face.

He frowned. "Sunshine?"

Her mouth opened, but then her legs collapsed, and she started to fall.

Bram had never moved so fast in his life. He lunged across the room to catch her.

\*\*\*

Addie blinked open her eyes, fighting the grogginess in her head.

Strong arms held her, and a part of her just wanted to snuggle into them. It felt nice to be held. It was nice to lean on someone else.

She'd been alone a long time. Ever since she'd left that tiny house belonging to her parents in Hickory Ridge, Georgia. She loved her parents, even when they could be distant and unsupportive. They were always too worn down and tired, and had been her entire life. They'd both worked and had six kids to feed. Her father worked at a factory, and drank too much. Her mom worked two jobs and was always exhausted.

Addie had learned that her mother had wanted to be a singer when she'd been younger. Once, Addie had caught her mom singing as she'd folded laundry. She had a beautiful voice, and Addie had told her. But her mom had clammed up and snapped at her.

*When your father put you in my belly, my life, my dream, was over. Never trust a man, Adaline. Only trust yourself.*

Shirley Harris had given up her dream.

Addie had wanted more than that. More than a rundown house, threadbare clothes, and constant tiredness.

She'd wanted to make something of herself. She hadn't been the most amazing student at school, but she'd been good at computers and dancing. She'd decided to make it as a dancer.

And secretly, she'd always wanted a man who'd love her.

Not a perfect prince. She wanted a solid, trustworthy man, who looked at her like she was the most precious thing in the world.

Her mother had told her that she was an idiot with her head in the clouds, and bound for disappointment.

Addie was *never* going to believe that.

She snuggled against a hard chest. A *very* hard chest.

Memories stabbed at her.

Of a powerfully strong body, a rugged face, sexy red hair, and big hands touching her with desperate need.

*Bram.*

She could even smell him now. Leather and spice.

*No.* Bram had left her. Bram didn't want her.

Pain cut at her. She'd already cried too many tears for the quiet Irishman who'd broken her heart. Bram was gone.

She opened her eyes and stared into green ones.

*Bram.*

Her heart squeezed. He was holding her.

"God, sunshine, are you okay?" His voice was a deep rumble with that accent she loved.

"I—" She shifted, and her head swam. She let out a low moan.

She saw panic flare in his eyes before he hid it.

No, that couldn't be right. Bram was solid and unshakable as a rock. Nothing panicked him.

"She needs a doctor." He rose with her in his arms. "Don't move, Addie. Take it easy."

Addie wasn't small. She was tall, but he lifted her like she weighed nothing.

Then, she noticed the healing bruises on his face. They circled his eye, and there was a bandage at his temple. Her fingers reached up to touch him.

"You're hurt," she murmured.

"It's nothing," he mumbled.

It didn't look like nothing. A part of her hated the idea of him injured.

"She needs a doctor," he said again. "Get Daniel. I'm taking her back to the Sentinel Security warehouse."

She realized that he was talking to the other two people in the room.

Addie tried to think. She couldn't leave. "I'm work—"

"Shh, Addie. We'll get you checked first."

Her head was fuzzy, and she felt faint. She thought it best not to tell him about the wave of nausea rushing over her.

The worst of her morning sickness had passed, thank the stars, but every now and then, she did feel unsteady.

"What's going on here?"

The deep, raspy voice belonged to her new boss. Paddy Ryan was Irish-American through and through. He took great pride in his newest Irish bar, On the Rocks. He'd taken her on when no one else would. She tried to straighten in Bram's arms.

But Bram's hold tightened, and she was distracted by the way his huge biceps strained against his white shirt. He gently set her down, but kept his arms around her.

"Addie fainted," Bram said. "I'm taking her to get checked by a doctor."

“Paddy, I’m fine,” she rushed to assure her boss.

Paddy stood in the doorway with his arms crossed. He was in his early sixties, with gray hair, and a scruffy gray beard. “You always say that, even when you’re not.”

She huffed out a breath. “That’s not true.”

“Yes, it is.” Paddy’s gaze never left Bram. “And who are you?” her boss demanded.

“We’re friends of Addie’s,” the stunning, redheaded woman said. She shot Paddy a dazzling smile.

“As far as I know, she doesn’t have any friends.” Paddy scowled. “She’s alone and pregnant.”

Again, Addie felt Bram’s arms convulse.

“We were out of the country,” Killian said. “Bram’s been looking for Addie, but she’d left her apartment, and her phone was disconnected.”

The words echoed in her head. Bram had been looking for her? That couldn’t be right.

She focused on Killian Hawke. He was dressed in an expensive, dark-blue suit but still managed to look dangerous. She’d met her friend Saskia Hawke’s brother a couple of times before. Saskia had been one of the country’s best ballerinas, but she’d recently retired to start her own school.

Saskia and Addie had become friends in the worst of circumstances—when a wealthy Russian businessman had become obsessed with Saskia and had her abducted. Of course, Addie had been in the wrong place at the wrong time, and gotten snatched as well. It had been terrifying. Her throat tightened.

Thankfully, Killian loved his sister and had used his resources to rescue her, Addie, and the other women who’d been kept by Yaroslav Mikhailov. To be honest, Killian scared Addie. She knew he was ex-CIA, and now owned a private security company, Sentinel Security. That was where Bram worked.



She assumed the beautiful redhead worked at Sentinel Security, too. She wore stylish wide-legged dark-green pants and a fitted black shirt tucked into them. Addie couldn't tuck her shirts in anymore, and the woman suddenly made her feel very dowdy. The way the redhead and Bram had looked at each other...it was clear they were close.

Addie's stomach took an unhappy nosedive. Was this woman his girlfriend?

Suddenly Bram, who was glaring at Paddy, slid a huge palm over her belly. She gasped at the sensation. Her body remembered just how those big, scarred hands had touched her.

When she'd first found out she was pregnant, she'd dreamed of Bram touching her belly, talking to their baby. Those dreams had withered and died.

"I'm the father of the baby," Bram said.

At this, Paddy's face darkened. The older man was not afraid of letting his temper loose. "Then why the fuck was she alone in the first place?"

Addie held out a hand. "Paddy—"

"She was bloody desperate when she came in here. No money for rent. No one to help her."

Another wave of dizziness hit her, and she slumped back against Bram's chest.

He made a growling sound and pulled her closer. "She needs a doctor." He lifted her into his arms again, without a single sign of strain, then shouldered toward the door.

"Bram, I'll be fine." She didn't want to go with him. Being around him hurt too much.

A muscle in his jaw flexed. "I'm going to make sure you're okay." His gaze flicked to her belly, an unreadable look in his green eyes.

"We have an excellent doctor on staff," Killian said to Paddy. "We'll take good care of her."

Paddy frowned, finally taking a good look at Killian. "You're Killian Hawke."

"I am. Bram works for me."

The bar owner sniffed. “Then I couldn’t stop you taking her if I tried.”

Killian’s sharp face was cool and composed. “We have Adaline’s best interests at heart.”

Addie just closed her eyes. Bram had wanted nothing to do with her and the baby. He’d made that obvious.

But when she told him she’d left him messages, he’d looked so confused.

She squeezed her eyes closed harder. Her brain was too foggy to think right now.

Bram walked out of the room, holding her tight.

“I’m going to take care of you, I promise,” he said.

She wanted that to be true, but her heart was too broken to believe him.