



Afterglow Bonus Epilogue

By Aria Wyatt

Solana

While Declan deemed my tiny house a she-shed, I'd say *palace* is a more accurate descriptor. Situated next to Declan's workshop, it's my own private oasis, or, as Ethan calls it, my *mellow yellow relaxation station*. I do all my studying out here, books spread across the solid oak table they built. Since the tiny palace isn't my primary residence, we kept the design simple. I don't need a full kitchen or a bedroom. However, I *have* been known to doze off while reading one of my beloved romance novels in the hammock he strung across the far side of the room—AKA my reading nook. The gleaming built-in bookshelves display all my favorite titles. I've got a little fridge, a coffeemaker, and a pantry full of snacks. The half-bathroom is yellow and white with sunflower details. There's plenty of seating if visitors pop by and a changing table and portable crib for Olivia. What more could a woman need?

Sunlight streams through the bay window facing the lake, casting a soft glow on the cushioned bench beneath. I'm lounging in a rocker nearby, absorbing the warmth as I breastfeed my daughter. My engagement ring sparkles beautifully, so I wiggle my fingers to watch the color dance.

Outside, preparations for Liam's surprise sixth birthday party are in full swing. This is Declan's first time hosting, so we went all-out. The shindig is pirate-themed with mandatory costumes. Yesterday, Declan, Cody, Ethan, and Will joined forces to build an *enormous* pirate ship swing-set playhouse as a surprise gift for Liam. Not going to lie—it's epic! Watching them all working together for the little boy we love pulled on my heartstrings. I can't wait to see Liam's excitement when he gets here.

Everything is nearly ready for the party. We're just waiting for a few last-minute supplies. We erected a huge tent on the off chance it rains. Ethan will be here soon, armed with the tent stakes and other items Declan requested from Hughes Hardware. Moira is currently sulking in the cabin because Declan and Will wouldn't let her inside the massive bouncy house they inflated. I can't blame her—the thing looks hella fun. Ethan picked up Declan's father from the airport this morning. Eamon is inside assisting River, who has taken over the kitchen for food prep. I ducked into my mini palace to feed Olivia after I laid out the tablecloths and themed partyware and blew up a *ton* of balloons.

River taps on the door. "Can I come in?"

“Sure. Be forewarned . . . my boobs are out.”

She snorts and steps into the room. “That’s nothing new.”

“What can I say? The child has a big appetite.” I brush my fingers through Olivia’s dark auburn hair. She gazes up at me while she nurses, milk-drunk and blissful. Her amber-colored eyes match mine.

“She’s getting so big.” River settles on my yellow corduroy couch with a sigh. “I can’t even handle those cheeks.”

“You should see her thigh rolls and chunky knees.” I have a soft spot for smushy babies, and my daughter is a freaking cherub. Even her wrists have adorable little rolls.

She laughs. “Oh, I saw them when I changed her. She’s beautiful, Sunny. Absolutely perfect. You and Declan are so blessed.”

“Thank you. We really are. She’s such a good baby.”

“All the food is good to go. Eamon is a champ.”

“Well, he *does* own a pub. I’d imagine his *mise en place* skills are stellar.”

“True story.” She chuckles and fiddles with her necklace. “What was it you wanted to talk to me about?”

“I need to know your schedule for the weekends in November and December.”

River meets my gaze. “Outside of studying, I don’t have anything planned. Why?”

“Declan and I met with Father Peters about having Olivia baptized. We’re not overly religious, but it’s something my mom would’ve liked, being a big Catholic and all. Anyway, we would love for you to be Olivia’s godmother.” The decision was a no-brainer for us. River and her family have been nothing but supportive of me, so it only makes sense to select her for the role.

“I would be honored.” River’s eyes grow wet, and she leans in and takes one of Olivia’s hands in hers. “What do you think, sugar? You want Auntie Riv to be your godmama?”

Olivia coos and wraps her plush little fingers around River’s thumb.

“I guess there’s your answer.” I tuck my breast away and fix my shirt, then wipe Olivia’s chin and sit her up. I give her back a gentle pat, and she rewards me with a burp. “Good girl.”

“May I hold her?”

“Of course.” I place Olivia in River’s arms. “I need to freshen up and change into my costume before the guests start arriving.”

“Does Livi have a pirate costume?”

“Nope. She has the honor of being Tinkerbell.” I seriously can’t wait to slip her into the green velour onesie I ordered from that cute online retailer. I even found her a set of wings and little leaf booties.

“Oh my God. She’s going to be *adorable*!”

“Well, duh. I mean . . . have you *seen* her parents?” I dramatically spin in a circle like a pompous prima donna, then launch into my rendition of Right Said Fred’s “I’m Too Sexy.”

River snorts. “She gets her beauty from Declan.”

I stick out my tongue at her. “Let’s get moving. I want to make sure everything’s perfect for Liam.”

We exit the tiny palace and make our way into the cabin. Will and Eamon are busy filling a parrot piñata with candy.

“Where’s Declan?” I ask.

“McFuck is upstairs showering.”

Eamon snorts a laugh. “That nickname gets me every time, Will.”

Will grins. “Sorry. I can’t help it.”

“You’re gonna have to modify it when my granddaughter gets bigger. I don’t love the idea of her repeatin’ language like that.”

“I’ll just substitute it with O’Sexy.” Will pops a few chocolates into his mouth.

“Nah, I’m claimin’ that one for myself. The ladies at the pub will get a kick out of it.” He winks and wraps his arm over my shoulder. “Right, love?”

My future father-in-law is a flirt. With his sparkling eyes, rosy cheeks, and thick Irish brogue, he captures the attention of many females during his visits to Colebury.

I giggle and wave a finger in his face. “You’d better behave today.”

“Ah, now you sound like Declan.” He grins. “I’ll do my best to stay in line, but no guarantees, darlin’.”

I pinch his cheek. “I’d expect nothing less.”

Declan enters the kitchen decked out as a pirate. And holy fuck. He looks good enough to throw myself off the plank for. His hair’s still damp from his shower, with pieces falling over his forehead. A fake sword is strapped to his hip. Thick muscles stretch the material of his black overcoat, adorned with a skull and crossbones.

“Well, look at *you*,” I murmur, sweeping my gaze over his body. “Shall I call you Captain O’Shaughnessy of the Seven Seas?”

He tugs me up against him and brushes his plush lips over mine. “Call me whatever you want, love. As long as you say it louder in bed.”

Will makes a barfing gesture. “Ugh, get a room.”

Declan laughs and kisses me again, then turns to face River. “Did Solana pop her big question yet?”

River nuzzles Olivia and presses a kiss to her cheek. “Yes, she did. I’m honored, Declan. Thank you.”

“You’re the best woman for the job. The other decision was a bit harder.” He squeezes Will’s shoulder.

“Naturally, we’ll need to have another kid, so no one’s left out.”

“No worries, McFuck. I still love ya.”

Eyes widening, River glances from Declan to Will. “Wait, *who’s* the godfather?” The rumble of an approaching motorcycle reaches our ears. Declan smirks instead of answering, and River’s gaze snaps to mine. “Solana Delgado . . . please tell me it isn’t who I think it is.”

Declan

And that’s my cue to leave.

“All right. Lemme get this tent secured before everyone arrives.” I make a beeline for the front door and bound down the steps to greet Ethan.

I already told Solana she’s on her own with the matchmaker gig—if it’s meant to happen, it’ll happen organically. That being said, it’s important to me that my best mate be our daughter’s godfather—even if it means giving River and him a gentle nudge.

“Ahoy, matey.” Ethan removes his helmet and hangs it on the handlebar of his motorcycle. “Nice get-up.”

“Thanks. Where’s your costume?”

He points to his backpack. “In here with the stuff you asked me to get.” He removes his bag and rummages inside, handing over the metal stakes.

“You’re the best.”

He grins. “So, I’ve been told.”

We quickly secure the tent. He ducks into the workshop to put on his costume, then returns a few minutes later. We put some finishing touches on the party setup, and once everything’s in place, I secure a big, red bow to the swing-set we built.

“Liam is gonna love this, bro. Wait until he sees the inside of the ship.” He wraps his arm over my shoulder.

“How does it feel to have everyone coming to *your* house to celebrate?”

“It’s fuckin’ perfect. I can’t wait to see Liam’s reaction. Oh, that reminds me. Would you mind takin’ pictures for us? I really want Solana to enjoy herself today instead of tryin’ to capture every moment.”

“Sure, dude. Got you covered.”

“Thanks.” I hand over my camera. “Plus, I’m sure she’ll have her hands full with Little Miss.”

He straightens. “Where is she? I wanna hold her before Cody gets here and tries to scoop her up.”

“She’s inside. River’s got her right now, so you’ll have to battle it out with her.” I laugh and elbow him. “But don’t worry about Cody. I’m sure you’ll be the favorite uncle.”

“Damn right, I will.”

I meet his gaze. “I’ve been meanin’ to ask you something.”

“What’s up?”

“Solana and I would like you to be Olivia’s godfather.”

“Really?” His eyes widen. “I’d love to, but are you sure I’m worthy of that honor? I mean, I honestly can’t tell you the last time I went to church. I’ve done some unsavory things. What if I’m not a good enough influence?”

“You’ll be a fine influence. Just don’t go givin’ her relationship advice.”

He snorts. “Yeah, I’m the *last* person who should be doing that.”

“So, what do you say?”

“Of course I’ll do it, man. I love Livi to pieces.” He hugs me tightly. “This means a lot to me, Dec.”

“I know it does.” I point to the cabin. “C’mon. Help me bring out the food.”

We make our way into the kitchen. My dad and River are bickering about which U2 song is the best, while Will and Solana stick mini treasure chests on the cupcakes we made.

“Hi, Ethan,” Solana says with a smile. “Great costume.”

“Thanks, Solana.” He gives her a quick hug. “What can I do to help?”

“Let’s bring some of the snacky stuff outside. We’ll keep the rest in here for now.”

“How’s it going, Wilde?” Will says with a grin. “Bet my sword’s bigger than yours.”

Ethan laughs. “Doubtful. I’d suggest a comparison, but I don’t wanna embarrass you.”

River rolls her eyes. “Here we go with the childish dick jokes.”

“What was that, Brooke Lincoln? Didn’t hear you.” She glares instead of answering, so Ethan flashes a cheeky grin. He points to Olivia, who’s tugging on River’s necklace. “You’d better get your fill because she’s mine next.”

“Sorry, Evan. But I had her first. You don’t get to decide when my time’s up.”

Solana waves a finger at them. “That’s enough, you two. No fighting over our daughter. Unless you wanna be on diaper duty for the whole party.”

He shakes his head. “Yeah, I’ll pass on that one.”

River gives him a smug look. “Looks like the Dread Pirate Wilde is a bit of a coward. What’s the matter? Can’t handle a diaper?” She points to the sword on his hip. “Can you handle that?”

Ethan doesn’t answer, just stares unblinkingly at her face until she flushes and looks away.

Oh, for fuck’s sake. It’s like this *every* time they’re in the same room. Their sexual tension makes *my* balls ache, and I’ve got plenty going on in the bedroom.

Dad peeks through the curtains. “Liam’s here!”

Everyone jumps into action with his announcement. We rush outside to greet him, all eager to witness his reaction to the party setup and, more importantly, his pirate ship. Darcy promised she’d blindfold him before they got to the end of the driveway.

Cody parks beside my truck. He hops out and opens the back door. “Okay, you ready?” He helps Liam out of the car, then grabs one of the lasagnas from Darcy.

Ethan stands at my side, ready with the camera.

Darcy nudges Liam along, then lifts a brow at me. “We good?”

I nod.

“Okay, Liam, let’s take off your blindfold.” She unties the knot and lifts the piece of fabric from his eyes.

Everyone shouts, “SURPRISE!”

His jaw drops open. “What’s happening? I thought we were having lunch with Grammy?”

She laughs. “Grammy will be here soon.”

I hold out my arms. “It’s time for your birthday party!”

He scans my property in disbelief, eyes widening when he spots the bouncy house. He motions to Solana and her friends, then to Ethan, who’s snapping pictures left and right. He spots my dad, and his eyes light up. “Pop-pop is here?” he squeaks.

“Everyone’s here,” Cody says, coming up beside him.

Realization dawns and Liam jumps up and down. “Wait, we’re *all* at Daddy’s house for my birthday? Together?”

“Yes, baby.” Darcy smiles and kisses his cheek. “Welcome to your surprise birthday party. Your friend Henry, and a few children from your class, will be here soon. And wait until you see what Daddy built for you!”

“This is the best day ever!” Liam charges in my direction.

I snatch him up, wrap him in a tight hug, and spin us around a few times. “Happy birthday, Liam.”

“I love you, Daddy!” He kisses my cheek, then pulls back to look at me. “You’re a pirate! Oh my goodness, so is Uncle Ethan! Everyone’s dressed up!”

I ruffle his hair. “Don’t worry. Mommy brought your costume too.”

Solana wraps her arms around us and kisses Liam. “Hey, sweetie. Happy birthday.”

I set him down, and he embraces Solana. “It’s your birthday too, Solana. I wanna share my party with you.”

“That’s very sweet of you, honey, but we can celebrate my birthday another time. Today is about you being six.” She flashes a huge smile. “Daddy has an important question for you.”

He meets my gaze. “A question?”

“Yeah, bud. So, tell me, have you ever seen the inside of a *real* pirate ship?”

[Want more Busy Bean series? Click here!](#)