

# PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT



## BONUS EPILOGUE

Have you ever woken up in Paris, France, next to a dark-haired man with smoldering blue eyes and black ink tattoos down his muscular arm and thigh? If not, I highly recommend it.

The crisp, white pillow beside mine dents as Will rolls his head to look at me—a rebellious smile popping. “Annie, this is the second morning in a row I’ve woken up to you staring at me.”

I trace my finger over one of his dark brows. “Because you’re so pretty.”

“Giving big stalker vibes, Anna-banana,” he says, catching my wrist and hauling me onto him before quickly rolling us over and pinning me down in a maneuver I’ve become a huge fan of. He’s my favorite weighted blanket.

My absolutely gorgeous boyfriend smiles down at me as that rogue lock of hair falls over his blue eyes. “I love it,” he admits before bending to kiss me.

“Wait,” I squeak, angling my face away. “I already spritzed. It’s rule number one of kissing me in the morning. Must spritz away dragon breath first.”

He shakes his head but complies, leaning over the edge of the bed to grab the breath spray I leave there. “Where’d you learn this, anyway?”

“I read it in a romance book.”

“Pirates carry breath spray on their bedside tables?”

“No. But football players do.”

Will takes two hits of breath spray and then prowls over me again. For the thousandth time this week I think, *How is this my life? How did I get so lucky to be in Paris with the man I love?*

Yes, the flight over was terrifying and long. But as promised, Will held my hand. And now I can't believe that I ever imagined a different life than this one. I am happier than anyone has any business being.

“What's on the agenda for today, Sunshine?” Will asks, pressing one minty fresh kiss to my mouth. The heat of his body seeps through my (his) T-shirt and brushes against my bare legs. “Reading in the park? Visit the Louvre? Tour the Eiffel tower?”

“How about never leave the hotel room and make love all day?”

He grins like a dirty, rotten pirate. “We did that yesterday.”

“And it was the best sightseeing I've done in the history of my life,” I say, wrapping my arms around his neck and squeezing, because I love him so much I think I might burst sometimes.

Will bends and kisses a line down my throat, talking as he does. “If we spend all our time in this room, we'll never get to take any scenic photos.” *Kiss.* “And if we don't take any scenic photos . . .” Open-mouth kiss. “Harriet is going to know we spent the whole trip in our room, and then she'll ask what we did the whole time, and you'll turn the color of a strawberry.” *Toe-curling kiss.* “And then Mabel will notice and say something to embarrass you so hard you won't let us go to the diner for a week to avoid seeing anyone, and I'll become malnourished.” He licks my collarbone.

“So dramatic.” I run my hands down his delicious back. I love the way he looks from this angle, hovering over me as the warm morning sunlight spills into the room, playing over his muscles and tattoos like Michelangelo himself is crafting this work of art in real time. I've never seen anything so magical as Will Griffin.

“But I’ve caught you taking plenty of pictures on the trip already. I’m sure you at least got a few good ones to knock Harriet off our scent. Here, let’s see . . .” I slide out from under him and reach for his phone.

Before I can grab it, though, his butterfly hand juts out and laces with my fingers, holding me back. “Uh—no. They’re blurry. You don’t need to see them.”

He’s climbing over me to get to his phone.

“That’s ridiculous,” I say, while laughing. “Let me look, Wilburn.”

“No,” he grumbles as we’re both trying to maneuver the other out of the way to get to the phone first. “Believe me. They’re terrible. Let’s go take new ones today.”

“Okay, now you’re being weird. I’ve absolutely got to see what photos you’re hiding. Have you been taking pickle pictures or something?”

We’re both fighting over his phone now, and because he’s holding back so he doesn’t actually hurt me, I snag it first. I don’t waste a second before leaping off the bed with the intent to run across the room and see what in the Jiminy Crickets he’s hiding.

Unfortunately, he snags the fabric of my oversize sleep shirt and uses it to slingshot me backward. I stumble two steps—cell phone in hand—and he catches me with two firm hands on my hips, spinning me around so I’m standing between his black boxer brief-clad legs. But, oddly, he doesn’t try to take the phone from me.

“They’re not dick pics. But . . .” He runs a hand through his messy hair and sighs. “Okay, fine. Just look for yourself.”

“Wait, now I’m scared,” I say, apprehension picking at me. Suddenly I’m wondering if this really was too good to be true. Maybe the other shoe is about to drop. There is something terrible on this camera roll, and we’re going to break up in Paris and I’m going to have to hold my own hand on the flight home.

But Will sees the fear in my eyes and cradles my face in his big hands. My body instinctively relaxes as his blue eyes blaze into mine. “You never have to be scared of anything with me, Annie. Look at my photos.”

I swallow and then slide the little bar to unlock his phone before clicking the photos app. Will then reaches between us and swipes down through his albums until he clicks one labeled FOR ANNIE.

And then my breath catches as I scroll through photo after photo after photo of . . . me.

Me in my mom’s flower garden. Me in the shop. Me at the farmer’s market. Me helping Mabel prune her rose bushes. Me wheeling my luggage through the airport. Me looking out the airplane window.

And they’re somehow all great photos. Dare I say even . . . beautiful. I look so happy. So at ease in my own skin. I’ve never seen myself like this before.

“Will . . .” I start, looking up at my boyfriend who doesn’t seem the least bit guilty for hoarding dozens of photos of me. “Now who’s the stalker?”

He smiles. “It was going to be a present for you. Because you said . . . well, a while ago you said you don’t have any photos of yourself. And . . . I don’t know, that just broke my heart, Annie. Because you used to be so content to fade into the background. To offer to hold the camera to take everyone else’s photo. And I wanted to give you something that would show you how beautiful you are. How vibrant. I want you to see how I see you every day. Everyone deserves to have good photos of themselves—you more than anyone.” He takes my hand, and his thumb brushes over my knuckles. “I was going to have it printed in a little book for you when we got home from this trip. I just wanted to get a photo of you in a Parisian flower market first. Do you like it—”

I cut him off as I collide my mouth with his so hard that I topple him backward onto the bed. He laughs as I continue to kiss him. A messy, raw kiss with zero finesse. “How dare you!” I say, pulling my

mouth away to look at him, straddling his abdomen in a way that feels second nature at this point but no less exhilarating.

He laughs as I pin his arms above his head, hovering over him nose to nose. "How dare you be this sweet, William! This thoughtful!" I kiss him once more. "This wonderful to me."

"And yet you seem upset."

My shoulders sag slightly, struggling to find the words to describe what I feel. "Yes, I am. Because . . . I'm upset at how much I love you," I admit, a little quieter and softer.

I still have his hands pinned above his head, but his brows pull together sympathetically, as if this was any normal moment and he's not being restrained. "It's overwhelming, isn't it?" he says, because he's the only other person in the entire world who gets this. Who understands this exactly as I do. Somehow we're in this together, and it's magical and terrifying and wondrous all at the same time.

I nod.

Sometimes I worry about the way I love him. It feels so reckless. So intense. How would I ever survive without him at this point? I never want to find out.

"Marry me, Annie," he says with a soft smile, already knowing my answer.

It's exactly what I need to pull me from my onslaught of feelings, and he knows it. I tip forward again with a grin of my own, whispering against his lips, "No."

He grunts in frustration, even though he knew I'd reject him. He's been asking me at least once a week since we started dating, and I continue to say no. It's a playful little game between us at this point, and I wonder what he'd do if one of these times I said yes? I'll find out eventually, because there's no question in my mind that Will Griffin is it for me. But I'm not in a hurry to rush this blissful stage yet either.

"Fine. But if you're going to turn me down again, you at least need to have your wicked way with me."

I smirk. "I thought you said we needed to go out today and experience Paris."

"That was before you sat on top of me in only a flimsy T-shirt and underwear with your hair looking all incredible and messy like a damn seductress."

And then I get a display of Will Griffin the dangerous bodyguard.

Even though I use all my strength to keep his hands restrained above his head, he easily breaks them free and flips me over in one swift motion until we're the mirror image of us a moment ago: my hands above my head and his butterfly hand pinning my wrists gently in place. His thumb brushes over my thundering pulse.

He looks down at me, eyes devouring my body and the way I'm stretched out under him, the hem of my oversize T-shirt riding up my hip and showing the banana-print panties underneath. His eyes say he's planning on pulling them off with his teeth. Chills erupt over my skin while somehow simultaneously heating my body to the temperature of the sun. I'm feverish. Heaven help me.

I want him. I'll never stop wanting him no matter how many times we do this.

"Kiss me, Will. Please," I say, catching his gaze once again and mimicking the words he said to me all those nights ago in my room.

And he does. He leans over, and his mouth takes mine in a deep, hot, intimate kiss that nearly destroys me. His free hand bunches up my shirt in his fist, dragging it up over my head and off my body. He curses under his breath at the sight of me—as if this is the first time he's seeing me topless—and it makes me smile. Melt.

The kiss that started at my mouth veers, traversing my neck and collarbone, breasts and ribs and stomach. My hand moves to grip his hair, but he stops kissing me abruptly. "I put those hands up there for a reason. Keep them there, Sunshine."

We make love like this sometimes, because he says I spent too many years denying myself and what I need—and in our bed, he wants me to take, take, take.

I immediately throw my hands back up and gasp when he sucks the skin of my lowest rib. I hope it leaves a nice little mark. A souvenir from Paris.

His callused hands dance all around my body, squeezing the curve of my backside before sliding around my hips and dipping under the hem of my cotton panties. I arch shamelessly into him when those fingers intentionally never quite brush over where I need them. He grins against my navel when he sees me squirming, because this is exactly how he wants me. His tongue flattens against my pelvic bone and traces a line lower, leading down the path I know he loves to take, but I catch his shoulder and tug until he pauses and looks up at me.

“Not this time,” I say, my breath ragged.

“Tell me what you want then, Annie.” His voice is somehow tender and dripping with sensuality at the same time. The way he says things to me . . . sometimes I think it’ll send me over the edge all on its own.

“You,” I say simply, but it’s true.

He rises back up over me, grabs a foil from the bedside table, rips it with his teeth, and rolls it on. I marvel at the strength of his body the entire time—lavishly ogling the way his veins pop in his arms, the way his muscles swell and dip over every part of his body. And then I’m marveling at the look in his eyes when he does exactly what I’ve asked. And the way that, even in this moment, after he’d eased inside of me, he doesn’t immediately start taking the pleasure I know he’s craving just as much as I am, but he pauses and looks in my eyes and pushes my hair back from my face. It’s little moments like this that make me feel like the most precious thing in his life. Like he adores me.

I can’t handle the wait any longer. My need for him grips me so tightly I feel frantic. Like my love for him has built to such a pressure that if I don’t release it in some small way I’ll die.

I rise up and kiss him, gliding my tongue into his mouth and gripping his back—begging him to move. And move he does. The man consumes my body, driving my need higher and higher with every thrust of his hips. Every caress of his fingers. Every lick of his tongue.

“You’re so damn beautiful,” he murmurs in my ear, but he doesn’t stop moving until my toes curl and my muscles lock and finally my pleasure rockets through my body, hitting with a force that makes stars fly behind my eyes and tingles flood my limbs. His release takes him swiftly after mine, and together it feels like the earth shakes, mountains crumble somewhere in the distance, and hurricanes swell in the ocean. I’m convinced we both must be made of some sort of magic based on how good this is between us. Because loving Will is pure adrenaline. Luxurious comfort. Wishing on a star and having it answered. It’s . . . otherworldly.

As we both slowly sink back down to earth, Will tucks me into his chest, wrapping his arms tightly around me in a near-crushing hug. This is Will’s reserved brand of affection I’ve learned. This is his post-sex hug. This is *my* hug, and I’ll fight anyone to the death who tries to take it from me.

“William?”

“Yes, Annabell?”

“Don’t stop asking me, okay? That question. The big one.”

He kisses my temple. “Never.”

“Good,” I say with a smile against the warm skin of his chest. “Because one day, I plan to have a different answer.”