

Greetings, everyone! My name is Laurence and this is *English in Practice*!

MUSIC

Welcome to this bonus episode of *English in Practice*. Today, you are going to listen to a piece of microfiction by Lori Cramer, a widely published American writer. The story is called *Playing with Fire* and is under 200 words. However, writing is all about quality not quantity, and I expect that you will find the story as entertaining and powerful as I have. It was published by *The Fiction Pool* in August 2019 and is written in the second person.

As always, you can download the transcript from my website: www.jamesfable.com. Remember, James Fable is my pen name, a fake name I use for writing. For those wishing to read the short story as they listen to me reading it out, simply click the link in the description or search for *Playing with Fire* on the following website: www.thefictionpool.com.

Okay, just a few more things to mention before we start. As this is the first short story episode, I would be especially pleased to hear from you and get your feedback. Let me know if you have found this episode helpful, if you managed to follow the story, if you thought the length of the story was appropriate for the podcast, etc.

You can reach me one of two ways. The best is to email me using the following address: englishinpracticepodcast@gmail.com. Otherwise, you can contact me through the Facebook page, 'English in Practice: A Podcast for Intermediate-Advanced Learners.' A 'like' there would also be greatly appreciated.

Splendid. Let's have a quick look now at some of the key terms that come up in the story, *Playing with Fire*.

MUSIC

I do love that slightly cheesy podcast music. Anyway, I'm going to cover a few of the important words and phrases that appear in this story. There may be others you don't know, but these are the ones that I think are key to understanding the story:

1 – *playing with fire* = This can have the literal meaning of playing with matches or a lighter, for example. More often, though, it has the figurative, or metaphoric, meaning of do something that is dangerous or risky, something that could harm you in one way or the other. For example, if one of your friends were sleeping with their boss, if they were sexually involved with their boss, you might say, 'You are playing with fire there.' After all, having a relationship with your boss can turn out very badly. Another example: if you were to go rock climbing without any safety equipment, without anything to stop you from falling, someone might say that you clearly enjoy playing with fire – that is, you enjoy taking risks.

2 – *ignite* = This verb means to start a fire. For example: 'He used oil to ignite the wood.' That essentially means that he poured oil onto the wood and then lit it. As you know, oil is very flammable, meaning it catches fire easily, and so people sometimes use it to get the fire going.

3 – *singed, seared, scorched* = These are three different ways of saying 'burnt'. *Singed* is slightly burnt; *seared* is more seriously burnt; and *scorched* is very seriously burnt.

4 – *embers* = These are the burning, or smouldering, remains of a fire when the flames have died, when the fire is almost out. Embers glow a red-orange colour. You can use them to relight a fire.

Finally, number – *charred* = This is the state of something that has been completely burnt, that has been reduced to charcoal, which is the black substance left after a fire. For example: 'By the time they put out the fire in the kitchen, everything was charred.' Imagine a kitchen in which everything has turned to charcoal; that kitchen is *charred*.

Excellent. Hopefully, that is clear. So, without further ado, let's read Lori Cramer's *Playing with Fire*.

SOUND EFFECT

STORY. READ ALONG USING THIS LINK: <https://thefictionpool.com/2019/08/13/playing-with-fire-by-lori-cramer/>

SOUND EFFECT

So, how did you find the story? Did you enjoy it? Feel you understood everything? Well, no worries if you didn't, because I am going to summarise *Playing with Fire* in a moment. If you want to have another read of the story first, I suggest you pause the podcast now.

Okay. Lori Cramer's story recounts, or relates, different ways of playing with fire. In the first paragraph of three, you are asked to imagine finding matches as a child and playing with them. That is, *literally* playing with fire.

In the second paragraph, you are asked to imagine that you are thirteen years old and are smoking a cigarette for the first time, in a car park. Here, smoking is a form of playing with fire *literally*, since you need fire to light a cigarette, but it is also a *figurative* form of playing with fire, since tobacco is a dangerous drug. Therefore, you can think of smoking as both a literal and metaphorical way of playing with fire.

This leads nicely into the third and final paragraph, when the story transitions to a fully *figurative* form of playing with fire. You are asked to imagine that you have already had relationships with 'safe boys, boring boys.' Then came a boy who was 'the definition of danger'; he was different in an exciting way. 'Sparks flew': that is, there was passion in your relationship with him. It was intense, burning love.

However, it ended badly. You got 'singed, seared, scorched.' When the fire died, when the flames were gone, when the passionate part of your relationship was over, you were left with a burnt heart, a 'charred' heart. You are left to fill in some of the details yourself, but perhaps you have a charred heart because you miss that fiery, exciting relationship; perhaps your heart is charred because the boy left you suddenly. The writer does not

spell this out, which leaves room for interpretation. The only thing for certain is that you had a relationship with this dangerous, exciting boy, but it ended with you being hurt. In other words, you played with fire and got burnt.

I hope that is a little clearer now, and that this quick explanation has enriched your understanding of *Playing with Fire*. Perhaps reading through the story once more would be a good idea. I enjoyed Lori Cramer's story even more on the second read.

It is interesting, actually, for English uses many different fire metaphors to describe love and sexual attraction. For example, the word 'ardent' – which means passionate, especially in a sexual sense – comes from the Latin word *ardere*, meaning 'to glow' or 'burn'. In colloquial English, we sometimes describe someone who is good-looking, sexy, as 'hot'. In novels, you might even come across the saying 'burning with desire', which means that a person is sexually aroused, sexually excited. It's a metaphor that the dating app Tinder uses as well – just have a think why it is named Tinder.

Very well, that's enough on the topic of sexual metaphors. We don't want to take this much further or I may have to place some sort of warning on the podcast. I hope you enjoyed the story, *Playing with Fire* by Lori Cramer, and that you learnt a few things as well.

As mentioned at the beginning, I enjoy hearing from my listeners – so please do get in contact and tell me a bit about yourself etc. Once again, the email address is englishinpracticepodcast@gmail.com, and the Facebook page is called, 'English in Practice: A Podcast for Intermediate-Advanced Learners.' Don't be afraid of making mistakes in your message; it would simply be nice to hear from you. Also, if you have found this podcast helpful, please tell your friends about it, share the Facebook page on social media, and, most of all, subscribe.

If you would like to read more of Lori Cramer's work, you can find a link to her website at the bottom of the transcript. There you will also find the link to the Facebook page of *Se Habla Español*, a helpful podcast from Felipe Galán for learning Spanish, and a link to the homepage of *The Fiction Pool*.

That's all from me for today. I hope you have enjoyed this episode of *English in Practice*. Look out for another interview episode next week. All the best. Over and out.

Lori Cramer's website: <https://loricramerfiction.wordpress.com/>

Se Habla Español: <https://www.facebook.com/sehablaespanolpodcast/>

The Fiction Pool: <https://thefictionpool.com/>