

Contemporary Romance Writing Sample 1

Context: A single father brings a new girlfriend into his life

Ana's favorite park is a block down the street. We walk together, and I am amazed by the incredible weather. There were only a few fluffy white clouds in the sky. The sun shone bright, right around them, and seemed to light up the whole park just for us. A light breeze went by, making Emily's hair blow with the wind.

"Push me!" Ana says, and pulls on Emily's arm toward the direction of the swingset.

"What do you say, Ana?" I prompt.

"Push me, *please*?"

The girls walk over to the playground, and I lean against a nearby tree. I watch as Emily helps my daughter onto the rubber seat, then gently push her into the air. It was something Melissa used to do all the time, carefully bumping Ana just enough to make her go higher without pushing her off. It baffles me how seamlessly Emily has fit into that role.

Hours go by as my daughter pulls every trick to tire out Emily and I. We take alternating turns pushing her on the swing. The sensation of the wind whipping through my hair each time Ana flies past me is one of the most exhilarating experiences imaginable. The pure joy on her face as she flies through the air would be enough to melt anyone's heart. Every time she screams with delight, I can't help but laugh along with her. It's a moment of pure magic that I'll cherish forever.

After Emily gets tired of pushing, Ana pumps off the rubber seat. She runs over to me and taps my leg. "Tag!" she yells, and runs away.

I look at Emily, who also begins to run away. "You'll never catch me!" She jokes along.

So, the afternoon turned into a game of tag. Emily and I run around the playground like children, letting my daughter release her energy. Ana was laughing and running around, and we moved at a slow pace to pretend as though we couldn't catch her. It was a fun and playful atmosphere, and everyone was having a great time. Hours go by, other park goers come and go.

After a while, Emily and I find ourselves sitting on a bench. It's made of rigid metal, but somehow feels comfortable. A bright green tree stands tall directly behind it, casting an umbrella of shade. It's the perfect spot to watch Ana try the monkey bars.

"She's really an incredible girl. I know it couldn't have been easy raising her on your own," Emily says.

I watch as my daughter hangs from the steel bars and reaches her tiny arm out toward the next rung. Ana backs out at the last moment and falls, tumbling onto the soft padding below. "I'm okay!" She yells, and runs back up the stairs.

"It wasn't. But it's been worth it."

"Whenever you're around her, you're like a different man. It's like I said, you act as though you're tough and in control. But, you have a soft side." Emily puts her head on my shoulders.

I realize that's the second time that Emily sounded exactly like Melissa. The coincidences are unreal. I shake my head, "Whatever you say."

We had been at the park for a while now, and many people have come and gone. Families playing on the playground, people jogging through the fields, people walking their dogs. At this moment, however, I realize that we were alone. That's okay, I think. A little privacy is good. I turn and kiss Emily on the cheek.

"Daddy! Daddy!" Ana runs up to us. "Did you bring the frisbee?"

"I sure did!" I answer. I grin and hold up the purple disc, "Go long!"

Ana squeals and runs out into the grassy field behind the playground. I follow her, leaving the backpack in the dirt under the bench. I toss Ana the frisbee and, like usual, she misses.

"Practice makes perfect," I remind her as her little legs run to retrieve it.

Emily comes up beside me. "I think this must be the first time I've seen a three year old so invested in frisbee".

"Janet started her on it, and she can't stop," I say as Ana tosses it back at me. The three of us spread out and toss the disc in a circle between ourselves.

"Over here!" I yell after a few rotations, running father out into the grassy field. Emily tosses the purple disc in my direction. I reach out to grab it, but my sneaker hits a rock and I find myself tumbling into a patch of dirt.

"Daddy! Are you okay?" Ana yells. Both girls come rushing toward me.

I realize that my clothes are covered with dirt. I spread my arm out and realize the patch is larger than I'd thought. Hatching a plan, I reach out my hands. "I don't know, I think I need your help to get up!"

The girls pause, look at each other, and then each grabs one hand. In one strong movement, I pull them down into the dirt with me. We tumble in a heap, laughing as we get covered in muck.

Still laughing, I roll onto my back and look up. Waves of pink had begun to creep into the bright blue sky. I turn to see Emily and Ana on the grass beside me, laughing just as hard as I am. At that moment, an unexpected and startling thought occurred to me- We look like a happy family.

Contemporary Romance Writing Sample 1

Context: A man rescuing his lover from danger

I'm glad I wore a seatbelt, I think as I sit white-knuckled and sweating in the passenger seat. The white SWAT van careens around corners and speeds through red lights. I almost yell for Jimmy to slow down, but then I remember the urgency of the situation.

"Speed up!" I yell instead. In response, Jimmy laughs harder and presses down on the gas pedal. I suddenly become positive that we're going to die before we ever reach Emily. Silently, I hope for a quick and painless death. We race past my home and get closer and closer to the park. My heart is pounding so hard that I think that it might burst out of my chest. I'm sure that Jimmy can hear it. Finally, we skid to a stop just before the line of police cars barricading the park. Their flashing red and blue lights seem menacing and foreboding.

I leap out of the van, my heart still racing. "That's the last time I drive with you!" I call to Jimmy.

"I'll remember that!" He yells back.

I can barely hear him as I push past what seems like an endless crowd of people. Some are civilians; Dressed in light jackets, holding briefcases, and holding the handles of baby strollers, they had no business being here. Others are other officers, dressed in full uniform with a gun held firmly in their hands. I finally make it to the edge of the crowd, which is marked by a border of yellow caution tape.

It's then that I see her. Emily, tied to a tree. She's in that purple dress that I'd seen on television. She'd put on silver heels to complement the outfit, but both pieces were tattered with dirt. Her hair was carefully curled, but that too has begun to fray from her attempts at escape. Next to her is Micah. He towers over her, his large shadow covering her small, crouched frame. They seem to be talking to each other. Emily's mouth moves with a fiery speed that can only be interpreted as passion. If her hands were free, I'd imagine her flailing them around her head in frustration. Micah just shakes his head, and picks up a bottle that I recognize as red wine. He raises the bottle from his lips and takes a large swallow.

"Are we ready?" A voice says in my earpiece. The static makes it difficult to tell whose voice is on the other end.

"Almost. I've got an eye on Micah," Another voice says.

"We need to separate the victim from the target," a third voice chimes in. I finally recognize that voice as belonging to Jimmy. He must have left the SWAT van and fallen into position.

"How do we do that?" I chime in. Micah looks like nothing more than a dark, ominous figure in front of me. He seems to glide back and forth in front of Emily. With every pace, my pulse quickens. I feel a bead of sweat begin to make its way down my forehead. I want to scream.

The looming danger suddenly reminds me of what it was like in Gaza, the anticipation of utter destruction bound to happen any minute. I'm transported back to the chaos before we evacuated people into the tunnels. Civilians moving in every direction. Some running, some limping, others just walking at a quick pace. Their arms full of their possessions, their cherished belongings. Everyone seemed to feel the same terrified anticipation, bubbling inside them.

I've always dreaded the thought of something bad like that again, especially it happening to me or my loved ones. It's like a dark cloud hanging over my head, constantly reminding me of the possibility of something terrible happening. At this moment, I can't shake the feeling, no matter how hard I try. I want to scream, I want to cry.

Instead, I keep an even voice. "We need to get out there. *Now.*"

"Let me give you a two," I hear Jimmy's voice. "Give me a minute-"

At that moment, the figure that is Micah lifts his right hand into the air. In it is a black remote with a flashing light. Knowing that it must be the remote controlling the bombs, I panic. "There's no time!" I yell.

I push my way through the yellow caution tape. It breaks with a *snap*, and each half gently makes its way down to the grass below. I run as fast as my legs can take me, as if nothing else matters in the world than making sure Emily is okay.

"Hey!" I yell.

Micah turns around. I'd never been this close to him before this. His features are dark, and his frame is so thin that it sent a tingle of fear down my spine. His glossy eyes seem to take me in from head to toe. When he realizes who I am, a menacing grin forms on his face. The smile is almost wider than his head, and one golden molar glints as it catches a flicker of sunlight.

"It seems as though you were right, girl," Micah says, turning back to Emily. "He came for you after all."

I look at Emily. That confidant, carefree woman who had played Legos with my daughter, now tied to a tree. Coated in a dusting of dirt, streaked with sweat, and purely terrified. I wonder, *How did we get here?*

“Logan,” Emily’s voice is exhausted. I wish I could run to her, set her free, and just hold her. But, it wasn’t the time.

Before I can respond, Micah speaks first. “I wouldn’t take another step further.” He says. “And, not just because of this,” He holds up the remote, “But also because of this”. Micah pulls out a large knife from the waistband of his cargo pants. It glimmers with the reflection of the setting sun above us.

“I’d like to warn you that you are surrounded,” I make my nervous voice sound strong and confident. Unphased. “You have two choices, to surrender or be incarcerated.”

Emily lets out an exasperated sigh. “Logan, just go!” She shrieks. It makes Micah and I both freeze and look at her. She’s taking ragged, deep breaths. Still tied to the tree, her chest heaves with each pitiful inhale.

“Just go,” She repeats. “Think about Ana!”

I pause.

“What would she do if something happened to you right now?” Emily says. Now her voice is calm. But her eyes look like they want to scream. “You need to think about Ana.”

My eyes lock with Emily’s. What she says is right, and it hits hard. Ana, the most important thing in my life. She means the world to me, and I would do anything for her. But looking into Emily’s eyes, I understand that she’s trying to tell me something behind her words. I understand that she was trying to stall. She must know that my tea has surrounded us, she’s giving her trust to them.

“You’re right. I don’t want anything to happen to her if I wasn’t around anymore,” I play off Emily’s lead.

Micah begins to laugh. He puts the knife away, then replaces it with the bottle of wine. He takes one last swig of the red liquid, and then hurls into the grass at his feet. The bottle shatters, and red liquid explodes like paint all over his pants and the grass around us. I see that it matches a smaller red puddle at Emily’s feet. *This guy is insane*, I think to myself.

“You won’t have to worry about anyone else once you’re dead,” Micah gurgles. “All three of us are about to be blown to bits,” He laughs. “There’s nothing else you need to even worry about.”

Micah fiddles with the remote. Instantly I know we’re running out of time. *Stall*, I think

“I have him locked,” Jimmy’s voice suddenly appears in my earpiece and startles me. “He’s within range, keep him in that spot”.

“Micah, why would you blow yourself up? I mean, Emily I understand. She ruined your business. But yourself? Come on, you have so much more to work for. You’re gonna learn everything that you’ve done so far that will go to waste?”

“I’m a smart man,” Micah says. “I know there’s no turning back now.”

He holds the remote closer to his face, as if to examine it. Then, time seems to slow down all around me. Everything from the wind breezing through my hair to the bead of sweat making its way down my face moves at a slower pace. I can hear each individual beat of my own heart as I watch Micah’s finger hover over the remote’s button. Like a hawk, my eyes are glued to his finger, slowly moving downward.

Come on Jimmy, I think. Come on. Shoot already.

The finger slowly begins to lower.

“Micah, you don’t have to do this-” I begin, then all we can hear is a loud *pop*.

Micah’s large body falls in a clump to the ground.

The sound of a dead body hitting the floor after being shot is one that is not easily forgotten. It is a sickening thud that seems to echo in the air long after the body has come to rest. Every time I witness it, the image of the body lying there, lifeless and still, becomes seared into my memory. It is a reminder of the finality of death, and the cold reality that violence can strike at any moment.

“Is he dead?” Emily gasps.

The sense of finality that rushes over me as I look at the body makes me believe he’s gone. But, that’s what we thought before. I take a deep breath. Tentatively, I walk closer to the heap on the ground. Micah is laying with his back in the dirt. His eyes seem to be gazing at the clouds. When I look into them, however, all I see in those eyes is a lifeless glaze. I kneel down and press my fingers against his wrist, searching for a pulse. But, the skin is cold and there’s no movement.

“He’s dead.” I say.

Emily hangs her head and delicate curls of hair fall across her face. I kneel down beside her and tuck a strand behind her hair. “You were so brave, Emily.”

My fingers begin to pull at the knot holding the rope in place. I am very aware of how close I am to Emily. Our faces almost touch, and I can smell her sweet perfume. “Not to mention, I couldn’t bear the thought of losing you.”

Our eyes lock, and inside hers I see a swelling sadness. “He sent me a letter that I thought was from you. I should’ve known that you wouldn’t have sent me flowers. You could’ve just texted me if you wanted to go out to dinner.” She shakes her head in embarrassment. “I should’ve known that it was him. But I was too blindsided by the excitement that I didn’t see it. I could’ve found a way to get him help. He could’ve survived. We could have saved him.”

“Well, for the record, I almost did send you flowers. I guess the madman beat me to it.” The knot finally gives way, and the rope around Emily falls to the ground. She gives me a small smile, then stretches her arms as I continue. “Look, you did everything you could. No person in their right mind could have guessed that a man they watched die would come back to life and capture them a few days later.” I sit down beside her and put my hand on her knee, which had a thin layer of dirt on it from her struggle. “You did everything you could.”

She turns to me, and I can see that the sadness in her eyes was starting to give way to relief. The corners of her mouth turn upward in a smile. We’re sitting so close to each other, that our faces are inches apart. Her lips are so close to mine. I lean forward, and our lips meet. When they do, I feel a rush as the surge of feelings I’d been holding onto are released. As we kiss, so much fear, anxiety, and adrenaline run through me, until I finally feel peace. We kiss slowly and deeply, and I let my fingers run through her curled hair.

As I feel her soft, warm lips on mine, I let emotion run through me. It’s unexpected but wonderful. I think about what I would have done if Micah had let those bombs go off, what would have happened if Emily had died. I feel a sharp pain in my chest and realize that I wouldn’t have been able to bear it. Emily was a strong woman. Brave, independent, and capable of doing anything on her own. But she was also affectionate and caring. She was able to make me smile even during these difficult times. She played with and talked to my young daughter. She treated Ana like an equal, rather than like a little kid like most people do. In fact, she’s close to taking on a motherly role. She has meshed her way into my mind, into my heart. Into my life. She’s the best thing that’s ever happened to me.

I break the kiss to look into Emily’s eyes. Time slows down as the light breeze makes a strand of her hair dance in front of her beautiful eyes. In a single movement, I brush it behind her hair.

“I love you, Emily.” I whisper. The words escape me before I realize what I’ve said. But when I do, I know the truth behind them. I love this woman to the core. I know she will never replace Melissa, and my feelings for Ana’s mother will never change. Yet, with Emily, the feeling is strong and true.

Emily’s eyes widen, and her lips part as if to respond.

“Logan, the bomb” the Chief’s voice booms in my ear unexpectedly. I’d almost forgotten where we were, almost forgotten the terrifying situation we had just been in.

“Right! Right!” I respond. Emily, who could not hear the transmission, looks at me questioningly.

“Stand up,” I say to her. I rise and reach out my hand, which she immediately takes. She wobbles slightly as she gets her bearings in those silver heels. I watch as she makes futile attempts to brush off dirt from her purple dress. I can’t help but admire her figure as she does this. When she begins to tug at the short ends of the dress, repositioning it around her thighs, I almost lose it. *Wow, this woman has me wrapped around her finger*, I think. I compose myself and tell her, “We, uh, have to get these bombs deactivated.”

“Right,” Emily says with a smile. She takes a few steps back, watching her step around the shards of Micah’s broken wine bottle. I can tell she had been just as distracted as I was. I wonder how my sudden declaration made her feel. Was she surprised? Dumbstruck? Joyful? Or, was she mortified?

I force myself to concentrate. I kneel back down around the small black devices on the ground. Luckily these are simple bombs, and can easily be taken apart by pulling a red colored wire. I do this to each of them, careful not to make any unnecessary movements. One wrong bump could potentially set them off, and that would be the end of that.

“We’re clear.” I say into my earpiece once all of the bombs are deactivated. “All threats are terminated.”

There’s a pause as the news spreads to the other officers, outward to the units standing by that have been blocking off the park. I watch as the news reporter with the blonde ponytail moves in front of the recording camera and begins talking animatedly. The news makes it’s way through the crowd of bystanders, and as it does I begin to hear a dull roar. The sound gets louder and louder, until I realize it’s the sound of applause.

I stand again, and put my arm around Emily’s waist. We look around us, at the crowd of people cheering for us.

“You did it,” Emily whispers into my ear as I lead us in the direction that I know my team is waiting.

“We did it together,” I respond, “Kinda.” I give Emily a wink, and she punches me playfully on the shoulder.

“It was all you, and you know it” She has a huge smile on her face.

“You were brave, and kept a level head. Other girls might have been hysterical. You’re one of a kind, and we make a great team.”

She stands on her tiptoes to kiss me on the cheek as we reach the yellow caution tape that had been used to block off the park.

“We do,” She says.