

## How I learnt my SAT words

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1. *Pernicious (adj.); extremely destructive or harmful.*

His middle name. That should have been a warning, not an invitation, but I always misread the signals, and when he took my hand under the party lights I didn't pull away. I should have. In the backyard that night, talking under the apple tree, I compared us to Romeo and Juliet, but I was drunk and forgot that wasn't a love story.

2. *Scathing (adj.); sharp, critical, hurtful.*

The remarks he made when we talked. He told me of his family, and exactly when 'home' became synonymous with 'hell'. Intricate plans laid out in his head, to escape, to be happy. How could I tell him that happiness was not an x on a map, a dotted line across the Atlantic? How could I tell him that I could not save him if he drowned, that clinging to me would only drown us both? I think he already knew that.

3. *Abate (v.); to reduce, lessen.*

He taught me a lot in that time when I thought I loved him. I didn't know he had me lying to myself while he lied to me. He laced my insides with metaphors of constellations shining in my eyes. I thought it was beautiful until I realised he was just looking for something bigger (than me). It's funny how he made me so small when he wanted something so big. Back then, I didn't know his sadness was an infectious

disease; I thought it was an illness I could cure by loving him. We would look up at the same sky and I started to see what he saw, and it made me sick.

4. *Expurgate (v.); to remove offensive or incorrect parts, usually of a book.*

I spent my nights crying, trying to teach myself to be what he wanted, and trying to believe that this was right. That they don't write these love stories into novels for the same reason they don't put plus size models on the cover of magazines. It is not ideal; it is too real and bloody. They hide the women who weigh over 40 kilograms from the magazines like they hide the ugly fights from the romance films. But I don't know when exactly I stopped smiling when people said his name and started trembling. It was probably around the time that I started flinching when he reached out his hand to me.

5. *Morass (n.) a wet swampy bog; figuratively, something that traps and confuses.*

Where he had spent his nights, tangled in the darkness of my nightmares, conferring with them on how best to hurt me.

But there were others, nights when he called me at one in the morning, breathing hard and whispering under his breath that he has to leave, he can't stay here anymore, they are killing him, could he please come over? And I would grab the bandages and unlock the back door.

Sometimes the dog bites, but you don't put it down, and when it comes to you, hungry and cold, you feed it.

6. *Latent (adj.); hidden, but capable of being exposed.*

I placed these secrets and bruises in a jar. Jars were easier to carry. I could pretend they didn't exist, that this pain was not real, because the truth was somewhere very far off, locked in a safe. How long could I keep this up?

7. *Evince (v.); to show, reveal.*

When he handed me a bruise for my collection and told me he didn't love me, and all I could do was cry. I asked if this was another one of those lies that he loved to fill my ears with, and he asked, did I really think that? Did I really think I was capable of being loved? He had taught me the answer to that question, tattooed on every inch of my skin.

8. *Abscond (v.); run away, depart secretly.*

When I changed my number and handed back his formal ticket. When I told him this wasn't working out, and he said, 'you were everything I needed' and I wanted to tell him I could have just bought him a punching bag. When he said he was sorry that this didn't work, and I tried to be nice but I was too sarcastic and rude. And his shoulders tensed and I collapsed into myself but I knew he would not hit me. I was no longer the insolent toddler he must discipline, and he was no longer my burden to carry. When I finally got out, and it still hurt.

9. *Extricate (v.); to disentangle.*

I did not know then how to differentiate a sine curve, or that ostentatious does not have a C, or that when he tells you 'I love you' he does not have to tell the truth. I did not know then that when you walk away from him, it does not mean you will stop looking over your shoulder or apologising for opinions you are entitled to. It means you walked away from a haunted house disguised as a temple and the ghosts followed you.

10. *Absolution (n.); freedom from blame, guilt, sin.*

It is not my fault that I believed every word he said. It is not my fault that when he raised his hand, I lessened myself until I was so small that he could not touch me. It seems that in between English essays and biology pracs, I had never learnt that I could walk away. He had me so convinced that he was the air in my lungs and I had to teach myself how to breathe

again. But Ancient History essays and Maths tests are there to remind you that the world is not suffocating when you are.

But it still hurts. And it will not stop hurting. Not until much later, when I finally empty that jar of secrets and bruises onto someone who is not:

*Pernicious (adj.); extremely destructive and harmful.*



**Julia Brieger** wrote this in 2013 when she was in Year 12 at SCEGGS Darlinghurst in New South Wales.