

THE UNTITLED  
BOUDICEA PROJECT  
A SHORT VOCABULARY STORY



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VOCABBETT  
*BIG WORDS MADE SIMPLE.*

## **The Untitled Boudicea Project: A Vocabulary-Boosting Story**

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### **Disclaimer in plain English:**

I’m going to do the very best I can to help you, but ultimately, the only person who can improve your vocabulary (and SAT/ACT score) is you. Please don’t sue me.

"Please don't call me that," I said gently.

"But it's your name!" my lab partner expostulated.

There was no denying the validity of his statement. Boudicea was, in fact, my name, a curse bestowed upon me by my father, a man as eccentric as he was kind-hearted.

He didn't view it as a curse, of course. An absent-minded professor if there ever was one, my father viewed the name as a blessing, a paean to one of the greatest female warriors in history, the woman who brought the mighty Roman Empire to its knees.

But with the advent of elementary school came a barrage of nicknames. Few five-year-olds can wrap their tongue around a name as polysyllabic as mine, hence the abbreviation "Bou." Simple enough, and it stuck out little from the nicknames of the other elementary schoolers, but by middle school, some of the boys uncovered a treacherous fact about my namesake.

While some scholars pronounce the name Boudicea, others preferred Boudica.

My peers thought a nickname played off the *back* half of that word was an absolute riot, hurling it at me for years, always with a self-satisfied smirk. They'd make some asinine comment at tennis practice like, "Hey, dic, are these your balls?" before preening themselves on their cleverness.

I hated them, and I hated my school — which was complicated by the fact that I really did enjoy learning.

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**Expostulated** - Protested; expressed strong disagreement

**Validity** - The state of being logically or factually sound

**Bestowed** - Gave or presented something of honor or importance

**Eccentric** - Unconventional; slightly strange

**Paean** - Something expressing enthusiastic praise

**Advent** - Arrival

**Barrage** - A concentrated outpouring, usually of military bombardments

**Polysyllabic** - Consisting of many syllables

**Hence** - For this reason; as a consequence

**Treacherous - Guilt involving betrayal or deceit**

**Asinine** - Extremely stupid or foolish

**Preening** - Congratulating oneself; a bird cleaning its feathers with its beak

Eschewing considerations of companionship with the insufferable individuals in my grade, I assumed things would get better as I got older. Since accelerating the clock was regrettably out of my power, I opted for summer school, advancing into 9th grade a year early, putting a refreshing amount of space between myself and my tormentors.

Things did get better. So much better, in fact, that I couldn't help but wonder if the trend would continue if I skipped *another* grade. I hadn't grown overly attached to the current crop of 9th graders, fond of them as I was, so I skipped another year that summer.

11th grade was brilliant. My classes started to challenge me, and my father was delighted that I was finally studying Roman England. He's a professor on the subject at Yale, and regaled me with all the facts they *don't* teach you in school, like how Boudicea used her soldiers' own sexism against them to prevent them from retreating.

"Win the battle or perish, that is what I, a *woman*, will do," she cried. "You men can live on in slavery if you wish."

And faced with that, how could a good old-fashioned misogynist possibly back down?

As much as I enjoyed evenings talking history with my father, I still couldn't help but resent the woman for the years of torment I'd endured on her behalf. It also didn't help that I'd grown into the name, physically speaking. "Fierce in eye and harsh in voice," sources say Boudicea had thick, red hair that fell past her waist.

I didn't let mine grow nearly that long, but it was undeniably red and undeniably thick. I had to work on the "fierce in eye" part — it was one of the termagant's traits that I thought might *actually* come in handy. It took a few days in

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**Eschewing** - Deliberately avoiding or forsaking

**Regaled** - Entertained or amused (someone) greatly

**Perish** - Die, usually in a violent or dramatic way

**Misogynist** - Someone who dislikes or is strongly prejudiced against women

**Endured** - Suffered or survived through

**Termagant** - A harsh-tempered or overbearing woman

front of the hallway mirror, but eventually I grew quite confident in my ability to deliver a withering gaze.

I entered university the next year, now accustomed to skipping a year's worth of classes over the summer. I'd chosen Yale, like my father, though I opted to study a subject as far from history as I could get.

I'd settled on biological science and now, at age 22, I was about to graduate with a doctorate. I wasn't the youngest graduate ever — a couple of bona fide geniuses came before me — but a doctorate from Yale at age 22 is no small feat, and I'd already received offers from some of the finest research institutions in the country.

Returning to my lab partner, I said with a weary smile, "Please, just call me Bou."

Gustav shrugged. Hailing from Germany, I could tell already that he was a man of formidable intellect. That's probably why they'd matched us as lab partners; he was the second-youngest student in our program, after me.

If I didn't have less than a semester left, I might've enjoyed working with him. Blonde hair tumbled over his furrowed brow as he looked under the microscope. As he leaned forward, no little layer of fat rolled over his pants, as it does with most sedentary scholars. Perfectly trim, he wore his lab coat with an easy elegance, like a J Crew model with a peacoat.

"Vat do you sink of zis?" he asked me, gesturing to the microscope.

We compared notes, and as I packed my books and made my way towards student housing, just a ten minute, tree-lined walk from class, I had no idea what dastardly fate was about to befall me.

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**Accustomed (to)** - Used to; considering something normal

**Bona Fide** - Genuine; real

**Feat** - Great achievement

**Formidable** - Impressively large, powerful, or capable

**Furrowed** - Wrinkled; grooved

**Sedentary** - Inactive; tending to spend a lot of time seated

**Dastardly** - Wicked and cruel

**Befall - Happen (to someone)**

Indeed, even as a pair of arms dragged me into the back of a vehicle, I barely had time to register more than a moment's alarm. I would have fought tooth and nail, of course, had I not recognized a familiar face inside: my father's.

"Dad?" I croaked.

The van was outfitted like a prison transport vehicle, with long metal benches on either side. I'd been roughly tossed on the left bench; my father sat opposite me. It was only now that I could see his hands were not merely resting on his lap, but ziptied. A burly man proceeded to do the same to mine before seating himself next to my father.

"Calm yourself, Miss Bertrand," another man said in clipped, British tones. He was standing near the driver's side of the van, holding a handle near the ceiling. "Your father is unharmed, and you will be equally fortunate if you choose to cooperate with us."

Olive-skinned with thick, black hair, he looked to be in his mid-twenties. He could've been another graduate student, but unlike my peers, he wore expensive-looking trousers that set off his lean frame. His shirt was white, highlighting his tan skin amid the drab New England surroundings.

"Tell them nothing!" my father said. "They're—"

Father gasped, interrupted by a fist in the gut. It was not Mr. Cambridge who'd administered the blow, but the man who ziptied my hands, whom I'd already deemed "The Muscle." He was seated next to my father, and administered the punch with as little thought as one might give to biting into an apple.

The Muscle returned to his normal seated position, pectorals popping and biceps bulging, and returned the floor to Mr. Cambridge.

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**Merely** - Just; only

**Lean** - Healthily thin

**Deemed** - Decided upon or considered in a certain way

“As I was saying,” his lips curled in distaste as he looked down at The Muscle, “neither of you is in any danger — no *great* danger, at any rate, should you choose to cooperate with us.”

“Cooperate on *what*?” I asked. “Dad, are you—”

“Tell them nothing!” my dad repeated.

Father winced, as if preparing for another blow, but a curt “*basta*” from Mr. Cambridge prevented it.

“As you know,” he continued, “your father is one of the foremost scholars on a rather niche subject.”

“He’s an expert on Boudicea and Roman Britain,” I said flatly.

My statement was common knowledge — available on any number of websites where my father had lectured and published — but my father paled at the words.

Mr. Cambridge seemed pleased by my response, lurching to the side as the van made an aggressive turn to the left, tires screeching.

A few moments later, when we were all once again seated upright, he continued. “We contacted him some months ago to acquire his assistance in procuring something of great value — a hoard of treasure hidden by Boudicea’s forces before the final battle with the Romans.”<sup>4567</sup>

This time I kept my mouth shut. Mr. Cambridge continued merrily, “Your father refused to cooperate, so we contacted a number of other eminent scholars, all of whom were equally — and surprisingly — abject in their refusal to work with us. Honestly, it’s no wonder professors are so impecunious,” he continued. “They’ll turn

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**Foremost** - Best; leading

**Niche** - Something highly specialized

**Procuring** - Obtaining, usually through care or effort

**Hoard (n.)** - A stock of money or valuable objects, typically one that has been kept secret or under guard

**Eminent** - Of great respect

**Abject** - Total; to the maximum degree

**Impecunious** - Poor

down perfectly good money just because they don't want to get their hands dirty. It's poor work ethic, really."

Heeding my father's warning, I said nothing, but gave Mr. Cambridge a look so withering it could've ignited a small fire. A loquacious criminal if there ever was one, he kept talking, merrily amused. <sup>123</sup>

"We tapped their phones, of course, as a precaution, and kept tabs on them for some months after. Your father was interested enough in the facts we gave him to do some additional research of his own, and now we believe he has found the hoard, the treasure, the find of a lifetime, really."

Veering to the side as the van turned again, Mr. Cambridge righted himself and pulled a sheet of paper from his pocket. "This morning, your father left messages with the head of the history department, the head of the university, and — how unoriginal! — a sealed envelope with his solicitor, with instructions only to open it in the event of his demise. This all rather points to a significant discovery, does it not?"<sup>45</sup>

Mr. Cambridge put the paper back in his pocket, looking at me expectantly.

We remained in that position, eyes locked, for a full 45 seconds — I was counting — until Mr. Cambridge chuckled.

Only then did I speak. "What's your name?" I asked.

"That's quite irrelevant to the discussion, darling."

"It's not, though," I replied, squeezing my hands together to stop their shaking. "My name, as I'm sure you know, is Boudicea. I ask you, what father in his right mind gives that kind of name to a helpless infant?"

Father blushed, but I continued. It was his life I was trying to save, as much as my own.

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**Heeding** - Paying attention to

**Ignited** - Caused to catch fire

**Loquacious** - Talkative

**Veering** - Changing direction suddenly; lurching

**Demise** - Death

“My mother died in childbirth, and father was mad with grief. Knowing his daughter would need to be strong to survive without a mother’s guidance, he gave me a name that he hoped would lend strength through the centuries.”

“I had wondered about that,” Mr. Cambridge said.

“You see, my father loves his work — he *really* loves it. What I’m trying to say is, if you dangled an ancient treasure under his nose, he wouldn’t be capable of ignoring it. Of course he’d keep looking into it! He’d make calls, he’d write letters. But that doesn’t mean he’s found anything! A few phone calls? It means nothing! Do you have any idea how many emails are exchanged at a school? How do you know they weren’t all communicating about comment cards, for Chrissake?”

“I argued that point myself, in fact,” Mr. Cambridge said. “But I was overruled. Once your father spoke, there’d be no containing it, so time was of the essence.”

“I see,” I responded, finding an alarming lack of saliva in my mouth. “So what’s next? He tells you where the treasure is, or I end up on the side of the road?”

“Theoretically,” Mr. Cambridge said, “but I truly see no reason for it to come to that. Do you?”

Pushing my hair out of my eyes with my zip-tied fists, I said, “Tell me more about this treasure.”

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