

Abrupt

“My mother's reaction was always abrupt, bordering on the angry.”

Happening without warning: sudden.

Adjacent

“Against the adjacent wall there was a battered bureau and beside it there was a closet which held his single ill-fitting serge suit,”

Next to or near something.

Adrift

“Twice the big boats have come from forty and fifty miles... and twice they have returned to find their buoys cut adrift and their gear lost and destroyed.”

Floating on the water without being tied to anything or controlled by anyone.

Annotate

“The former had been assiduously annotated by a very fine hand using a very blue-inked fountain pen while the latter had been studied by someone with... large thumbs”

To add notes or comments to (a text, book, drawing, etc.)

Archaic

“An archaic goose-necked reading light, a battered table radio, a mound of wooden matches... a deck of cigarette papers and an overflowing ashtray cluttered its surface.”

Old and no longer useful.

Articulate

“The young men were very articulate and handsome and wore fine clothes and drove expensive cars and my sisters... were tired of darning socks and baking bread.”

Able to express ideas clearly and effectively in speech or writing.

Assiduous

“The former had been assiduously annotated by a very fine hand using a very blue-inked fountain pen while the latter had been studied by someone with... large thumbs”

Showing great care, attention, and effort.

Baffling

“They filled a baffling and unknowable cave beneath the bed, and in the corner by the bureau they spilled from the walls and grew up from the floor.”

Extremely confusing or difficult to understand.

Bait

“Through the summer we baited the tubs of trawl in the afternoon and set them at sunset and revisited them in the darkness of the early morning.”

Something (such as a piece of food) that is used to attract fish or animals so they can be caught.

Batter

“An archaic goose-necked reading light, a battered table radio, a mound of wooden matches... a deck of cigarette papers and an overflowing ashtray cluttered its surface.”

To beat with repeated violent blows.

Barometer

“There was also, on this wall, a barometer, a map of the marine area and a shelf which held a tiny radio.”

An instrument that measures air pressure and is used to forecast changes in the weather.

Boil

“His arms... still broke out into the oozing salt-water boils as they had ever since as a child I had first watched him... bathing them in a variety of ineffectual solutions.”

A red painful lump in the skin that contains pus and is caused by infection.

Boulder

“But neither is it easy to know that your father was found... wedged between two boulders at the base of the rock-strewn cliffs where he had been hurled”

A very large stone or rounded piece of rock.

Bow

“And on into November when... the trochoidal waves rolled rough and high and washed across our bows and decks as we ran within their troughs.”

The forward part of a ship.

Brocade

“They bought my mother a great many clothes of the type she was very fond of, the wide-brimmed hats and the brocaded dresses, but she... refused to wear any of them

A cloth with a raised design woven into it.

Brood

“She grew miraculous gardens and magnificent flowers and raised broods of hens and ducks.”

The young of birds hatched at the same time.

Buffer

“The kitchen was shared by all of us and was a buffer zone between the immaculate order of ten other rooms and the disruptive chaos of... my father's.”

Something that serves as a protective barrier.

Buoy

“Twice the big boats have come from forty and fifty miles... and twice they have returned to find their buoys cut adrift and their gear lost and destroyed.”

An object that floats on water in a lake, bay, river, etc., to show areas that are safe or dangerous for boats.

Burden

“The south wall was dominated by a window which faced the sea and on the north there was a... board which bore a variety of clothes hooks and the burdens of each.”

Something that is hard to endure.

Bureau

“Magazines and books covered the bureau and competed with the clothes for domination of the chair.”

A low chest of drawers for use in a bedroom.

Capsize

“Sitting on the thwarts where the newspapers were spread to cover the... fish entrails, crowding to one side so that they were in danger of capsizing the boat,”

(Of a boat) overturn in the water.

Cater

“The restaurant was run by a big American concern from Boston and catered to the tourists that flooded the area during July and August.”

To supply what is needed or wanted.

Celt

“Impulsive, emotional Catholic Celts who could not bear to live with England and shrewd, determined Protestant Puritans who... could not bear to live without.”

A member of a group of people (such as the Irish or Welsh) who lived in ancient Britain and parts of western Europe.

Chafe

“The chafe-preventing bracelets of brass linked chain that all the men wore about their wrists in early spring were his the full season”

To cause soreness or damage by rubbing against something (such as your skin).

Chap

“Because he had already been singing for some time, his lips, which chapped in the winds of spring and burned in the water glare of summer, had already cracked”

A crack in or a sore roughening of the skin caused by exposure to wind or cold.

Chantey

“He sang all the old sea chanteys that had come across from the old world and by which men like him had pulled ropes for generations,”

A song sung by sailors in rhythm with their work.

Chaos

“The kitchen was shared by all of us and was a buffer zone between the immaculate order of ten other rooms and the disruptive chaos of... my father's.”

Complete confusion and disorder.

Clammy

“I stood there in the porch... feeling the damp, moist mackerel with their silver glassy eyes growing clammy against my leg.”

Unpleasantly wet and cold.

Clamour

“It was as if the wind which so often clamoured about the house succeeded in entering this single room and after whipping it into turmoil stole quietly away”

A loud continuous noise.

Clever

“All of them were very clever in school and helped my mother a great deal about the house.”

Intelligent and able to learn things quickly.

Clutter

“An archaic goose-necked reading light, a battered table radio, a mound of wooden matches... a deck of cigarette papers and an overflowing ashtray cluttered its surface.”

A large amount of things that are not arranged in a neat or orderly way.

Colossal

“There she had read Ivanhoe and considered it a colossal waste of time.”

Very large or great.

Compass

“And almost every day we would leave for home before noon... charting our course from the compass and the sea, running with the waves and between them”

A device that is used to find direction by means of a needle that always points north.

Complexion

“My father did not tan—he never tanned—because of his reddish complexion, and the salt water irritated his skin as it had for sixty years.”

The colour or appearance of the skin and especially of the face.

Conventional

“The magazines were the most conventional: Time, Newsweek, Life, Maclean's, The Family Herald, The Reader's Digest.”

Common and ordinary.

Debase

“I even thought that perhaps he had had to marry my mother... and I felt myself then very dirty and debased for my lack of faith and for what I had thought and done.”

To make (someone or something) less respected.

Deft

“And the Jenny Lynn went too, all day, with my uncle tall and dark... standing at the tiller with his legs wide apart and guiding her deftly between the floating pans of ice”

Able to do something quickly and accurately.

Despise

“My mother despised the room and all it stood for and she had stopped sleeping in it after I was born.”

To dislike (something or someone) very much.

Dimension

“A heavy wooden table with leaves that expanded or reduced its dimensions stood in the middle of the floor.”

The length, width, height, or depth of something.

Disarray

“Between the kitchen clothes rack and barometer, a door opened into my father's bedroom. It was a room of disorder and disarray.”

A confused or messy condition.

Discard

“My father spent most of his time lying on the bed in his socks, the top two buttons of his trousers undone, his discarded shirt on the ever-ready chair”

Get rid of (someone or something) as no longer useful or desirable.

Discontent

“The houses and their people... were the result of Ireland's discontent and Scotland's Highland Clearances and America's War of Independence.”

Not pleased or satisfied.

Disfigure

“The once-varnished surface of the table was disfigured by numerous black scars and gashes inflicted by the neglected burning cigarettes of many years.”

To spoil or damage the appearance of (something or someone).

Doze

“He seemed never to sleep, only to doze, and the light shone constantly from his window to the sea.”

To sleep lightly.

Drench

“And I stood at the tiller... turning to look at my father and to shout over the roar of the engine and the slop of the sea to where he stood in the stern, drenched”

To make completely wet.

Effeminate

“My mother never accepted any of the young men, for in her eyes they seemed always a combination of the lazy, the effeminate, the dishonest and the unknown.”

Having or showing qualities that are considered more suited to women than to men.

Emblazon

“And once I saw her slap my youngest sister so hard that the print of her hand was scarletly emblazoned upon her daughter's cheek”

To write or draw (a name, picture, etc.) on a surface so that it can be seen very clearly.

Entrails

“Sitting on the thwarts where the newspapers were spread to cover the... fish entrails, crowding to one side so that they were in danger of capsizing the boat,”

The internal organs of an animal.

Errand

“My father never approved of their playing about the wharf like the other children, and they went there only when my mother sent them on an errand.”

A short journey undertaken in order to deliver or collect something, especially on someone else's behalf.

Excursion

“When we returned to the house everyone made a great fuss over my precocious excursion and asked, "How did you like the boat?"

A short trip especially for pleasure.

Expedition

“She would walk miles on berry-picking expeditions and hoist her skirts to dig for clams when the tide was low.”

A journey especially by a group of people for a specific purpose.

Former

“The former had been assiduously annotated by a very fine hand using a very blue-inked fountain pen while the latter had been studied by someone with... large thumbs”

First in order of two or more things cited or understood.

Gaelic

“Gradually he shifted to the seemingly unending Gaelic drinking songs with their twenty or more verses and inevitable refrains,”

Of or relating to the Celtic people of Scotland and Ireland.

Gale

“And it takes longer than you would believe to check a boat that has been running before a gale and turn her ever so carefully in a wide and stupid circle,”

A very strong wind.

Galumph

“Then he climbed up on the little iron ladder that led to the wharf's cap, placed me once more upon his shoulders and galumphed off again.”

To move in a loud and clumsy way.

Gigantic

“My earliest recollection of my father is a view from the floor of gigantic rubber boots and then of... having my face pressed against the stubble of his cheek,”

Extremely large.

Gulf

“The seals that had drifted down from distant Labrador wept and moaned like human children on the ice-floes of the Gulf.”

A large area of ocean that is partly surrounded by land.

Gunwale

“On the first day of May the boats raced out as they had always done, laden down almost to the gunwales with their heavy cargoes of traps.”

The upper edge of a ship's or boat's side.

Harpoon

“And I knew then that I could never leave him alone to suffer the iron-tipped harpoons which my mother would forever hurl into his soul because he was a failure”

A barbed spear or javelin used especially in hunting large fish or whales.

Hoist

“She would walk miles on berry-picking expeditions and hoist her skirts to dig for clams when the tide was low.”

To raise (something) especially by using ropes or machinery.

Illuminate

“The pillows propped up the whiteness of his head and the goose-necked lamp illuminated the pages in his hands.”

To supply or brighten with light.

Immaculate

“The kitchen was shared by all of us and was a buffer zone between the immaculate order of ten other rooms and the disruptive chaos of... my father's.”

Perfectly clean.

Impose

“She would go in with the ideal hope of imposing order... and later she would be found spellbound by the volume in her hand.”

To force someone to accept or put up with.

Impulsive

“Impulsive, emotional Catholic Celts who could not bear to live with England and shrewd, determined Protestant Puritans who... could not bear to live without.”

Doing things or tending to do things suddenly and without careful thought.

Incongruous

“My father looked both massive and incongruous in the setting.”

Strange because of not agreeing with what is usual or expected.

Ineffectual

“His arms... still broke out into the oozing salt-water boils as they had ever since as a child I had first watched him... bathing them in a variety of ineffectual solutions.”

Not producing the proper or intended effect.

Jumble

“Beneath the board there was a jumble of odd footwear, mostly of rubber.”

To cause (things) to be mixed together in a way that is not neat or orderly.

Kindling

“Behind the stove was a box of kindlings and beside it a coal scuttle.”

Dry twigs, pieces of paper, etc., that burn easily and are used to start a fire.

Lament

“Later as the sun was setting he switched to the laments and the wild and haunting Gaelic war songs of those spattered Highland ancestors he had never seen,”

A sad song or poem.

Languid

“At such times they almost always overstayed... shouting down to the perch that swam languidly about the wharf's algae-covered piles, or jumping in and out of the boats”

Showing or having very little strength, energy, or activity.

Latter

“The former had been assiduously annotated by a very fine hand using a very blue-inked fountain pen while the latter had been studied by someone with... large thumbs”

Relating to or being the last thing or person mentioned.

Lemming

“I say this again as if it all happened at once and as if all of my sisters were of identical ages and like so many lemmings going into another sea,”

A small animal that lives in northern areas of North America, Europe, and Asia.

Literal

“My mother was of the sea, as were all of her people, and her horizons were the very literal ones she scanned with her dark and fearless eyes.”

Involving the ordinary or usual meaning of a word.

Lunge

“And I stood at the tiller now, on these homeward lunges, stood in the place and in the manner of my uncle, turning to look at my father”

To move or reach forward in a sudden, forceful way.

Melancholy

“And when his voice ceased, the savage melancholy of three hundred years seemed to hang over the peaceful harbour”

A sad mood or feeling.

Miraculous

“She grew miraculous gardens and magnificent flowers and raised broods of hens and ducks.”

Very wonderful or amazing like a miracle.

Mound

“An archaic goose-necked reading light, a battered table radio, a mound of wooden matches... a deck of cigarette papers and an overflowing ashtray cluttered its surface.”

A heap or pile of something.

Neglect

“The once-varnished surface of the table was disfigured by numerous black scars and gashes inflicted by the neglected burning cigarettes of many years.”

To fail to take care of or to give attention to (someone or something).

Oblong

“The most important room in our house was one of those oblong old-fashioned kitchens heated by a wood- and coal-burning stove.”

Different from a square, circle, or sphere by being longer in one direction than the other.

Permeate

“The floor of the boat was permeated with the same odour and in its constancy I was not aware of change.”

To pass or spread through (something).

Pier

"There are times when I... realize that I am foolishly alone, that no one waits at the base of the stairs and no boat rides restlessly in the waters by the pier."

A structure built out into the water as a place for boats to dock or for people to walk or to protect or form a harbor.

Practical

"She would go in with the ideal hope of imposing order or with the more practical objective of emptying the ashtray,"

Capable of being put to use: reasonable to do or use.

Precocious

"When we returned to the house everyone made a great fuss over my precocious excursion and asked, "How did you like the boat?"

Having or showing the qualities or abilities of an adult at an unusually early age.

Prim

"They tried to look both prim and wind-blown like the girls in the Pepsi-Cola ads and did the best they could,"

Very neat in appearance.

Prosaic

"I... checked the dates on the flyleaf of the Bible where I learned that my oldest sister had been born a prosaic eleven months after the marriage,"

Dull or ordinary.

Provocation

"At the slightest provocation it would open almost automatically to particularly graphic and well-smudged pages."

An action or occurrence that causes someone to become angry or to begin to do something.

Puritan

"Impulsive, emotional Catholic Celts who could not bear to live with England and shrewd, determined Protestant Puritans who... could not bear to live without."

A member of a Protestant group in England and New England in the 16th and 17th centuries that opposed many customs of the Church of England.

Recollection

"My earliest recollection of my mother is of being alone with her in the mornings while my father was away in the boat."

Something from the past that is remembered.

Resent

“At first he sent for them himself, although my mother resented the expense, but in later years they came... more often from my sisters who had moved to the cities.”

To feel annoyance or anger at.

Resolute

“So I told him one night very resolutely and very powerfully that I would remain with him as long as he lived and we would fish the sea together.”

Having or showing a lot of determination.

Restless

“There are times when I... realize that I am foolishly alone, that no one waits at the base of the stairs and no boat rides restlessly the waters of the pier.”

Continuously moving.

Ruddy

“His usually ruddy face was drawn and grey, reflecting the exhaustion of a man of sixty-five who had been working in those rubber boots for eleven hours”

Having a healthy reddish colour.

Savage

“And sometimes there would be bitter savage arguments.”

Very cruel or violent.

Scarlet

“And once I saw her slap my youngest sister so hard that the print of her hand was scarletly emblazoned upon her daughter's cheek”

A bright red colour.

Serge

“Against the adjacent wall there was a battered bureau and beside it there was a closet which held his single ill-fitting serge suit,”

A strong cloth that is used to make clothes.

Shanty

“The next day he went with the rest of the men to bait his trawl in the shanties.”

A small crudely built dwelling or shelter usually of wood.

Shrewd

“Impulsive, emotional Catholic Celts who could not bear to live with England and shrewd, determined Protestant Puritans who... could not bear to live without.”

Having or showing an ability to understand things and to make good judgments.

Slicker

“We wore heavy sweaters now and the awkward rubber slickers and the heavy woollen mitts which soaked and froze into masses of ice that hung from our wrists”

A long, loose raincoat.

Spellbound

“She would go in with the ideal hope of imposing order... and later she would be found spellbound by the volume in her hand.”

Having the interest or attention held by or as if by magic power.

Squall

“You cannot tell where you have been five minutes before and in the squalls of snow you cannot see.”

A sudden strong gust of wind often with rain or snow.

Steadfast

“The shorebound men are tossing pebbles against my window while blowing their hands and stomping their feet impatiently on the frozen steadfast earth.”

Firmly fixed in place: immovable.

Stencil

“She... was painted light green with the name Jenny Lynn stencilled in black letters on her bow and painted on an oblong plate across her stern.”

A piece of material (as a sheet of paper or plastic) that has lettering or a design cut out and is used as a guide (as in painting or drawing).

Stern

“She... was painted light green with the name Jenny Lynn stencilled in black letters on her bow and painted on an oblong plate across her stern.”

The back part of a boat or ship.

Stubble

“My earliest recollection of my father is a view from the floor of gigantic rubber boots and then of... having my face pressed against the stubble of his cheek,”

Short hairs growing from the face of a man who has not shaved very recently.

Subscription

"They were the result of various cut-rate subscriptions or of the gift subscriptions associated with Christmas, "the two whole years for only \$3.50."

An agreement to buy a publication or service for a stated period.

Sullen

"And on into November when we lost three tubs of trawl and the clear blue water turned to a sullen grey and the trochoidal waves rolled rough and high"

Gloomy.

Theological

"Or without theological aid, "I would like to know how books help anyone to live a life."

Relating to the study of religion and religious belief.

Thwart

"Sitting on the thwarts where the newspapers were spread to cover the... fish entrails, crowding to one side so that they were in danger of capsizing the boat,"

A structural crosspiece sometimes forming a seat for a rower in a boat.

Tiller

"And I stood at the tiller now, on these homeward lunges, stood in the place and in the manner of my uncle, turning to look at my father"

A lever used to turn the rudder of a boat from side to side.

Trawl

"Through the summer we baited the tubs of trawl in the afternoon and set them at sunset and revisited them in the darkness of the early morning."

A large net that a boat pulls along the bottom of the ocean to catch fish.

Trochoid

"And on into November when we lost three tubs of trawl and the clear blue water turned to a sullen grey and the trochoidal waves rolled rough and high"

The curve generated by a point on the radius of a circle or the radius extended as the circle rolls on a fixed straight line.

Trousers

"My father spent most of his time lying on the bed in his socks, the top two buttons of his trousers undone, his discarded shirt on the ever-ready chair"

Pants.

Turmoil

"It was as if the wind which so often clamoured about the house succeeded in entering this single room and after whipping it into turmoil stole quietly away"

A state of confusion or disorder.

Unceremonious

"The heavy woollen sweaters, mitts and socks which my mother knitted for him and the woollen and doeskin shirts, he dumped them unceremoniously on a... chair."

Happening or done very suddenly and quickly with no effort to be careful or polite.

Varnish

"The once-varnished surface of the table was disfigured by numerous black scars and gashes inflicted by the neglected burning cigarettes of many years."

A liquid that is spread on a surface and that dries to form a hard, shiny coating.

Wedge

"But neither is it easy to know that your father was found... wedged between two boulders at the base of the rock-strewn cliffs where he had been hurled"

To force (someone or something) into a very small or narrow space.

Wharf

"I rode the half-mile from our house to the wharf on his shoulders and I remember the sound of his rubber boots galumphing along the gravel beach,"

A flat structure that is built along the shore of a river, ocean, etc., so that ships can load and unload cargo or passengers.

Wistful

"Pictures of small red-haired grandchildren with baseball bats and dolls... which my mother gazed at wistfully when she thought no one would see."

Feeling or showing a quiet longing especially for something in the past.

Wreath

"And he made no protest but only smiled through the cigarette smoke that wreathed his bed and replied, "I hope you will remember what you've said."

Something twisted or woven into a circular shape.