The Old Man And The Sea

Chapter one

The Worst Kind of Mark

He was an old man who fished alone in a skiff in the Gulf Stream and he had gone eighty-four days now without catching a fish. During the first forty days without a fish, the boy's parents had told him that the old man was now definitely and finally salao, which is the worst form of unlucky. The boy's parents had ordered him to go in another boat, which caught three good fish the first week. It made the boy sad to see the old man come back each day with his skiff empty. He always went down to help him carry the lines, or the gaff and harpoon and the sail patched with flour sacks, so that when it was furled it looked like the flag of permanent defeat.

The old man was thin and gaunt with deep wrinkles on the back of his neck and deep scars on his hands from handling lines of heavy fish. The dark spots of the benign skin cancer that the tropical sun brings were on his cheeks. His scars were as old as forgotten memories.

Everything about him was old except his eyes. They were the same color as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated.

"Santiago," the boy said to him, "I could go with you again. We've made some money."

The old man had taught the boy to fish and the boy loved him.

"No," the old man said. "You're with a lucky boat. Stay there."

"But remember how you went eighty-seven days without fish and then we caught big ones every day for three weeks."

"I remember," the old man said. "I know you did not leave me because you doubted."

"It was papa who made me leave. I am a boy and I must obey him."

"I know," the old man said.

"He hasn't much faith."

"No, but we have. Haven't we?"

"Yes. Can I offer you a beer on the Terrace and then we'll take the stuff home."

"Why not?" the old man said. "Between fishermen."

They sat on the Terrace and many of the fishermen made fun of the old man, but he was not angry. The older fishermen looked at him and were sad, but they did not show it. The successful fishermen of that day had already butchered their marlin and carried them to the ice truck that would take them to the market in Havana. Those who had caught sharks had taken them to the shark factory on the other side of the cove. When the wind came from the east a smell came from the shark factory.

"Santiago," the boy said.

"Yes," the old man said. He was thinking of many years ago.

"Can I go out and get sardines for you for tomorrow?"

"No. Go and play baseball. I can still row and Rogelio will throw the net."

"I would like to go. If I cannot fish with you, I would like to serve in some way."

"You bought me a beer." the old man said. "You are already a man."

"How old was I when you first took me in a boat?"

"Five and you were nearly killed when I brought the fish in too green and it nearly destroyed the boat. Can you remember?"

"I can remember the tail slapping and the noise of the clubbing."

"Can you really remember that?"

"I remember everything from when we went together."

The old man looked at him with his confident, loving eyes. "If you were my boy I'd take you out," he said. "But you are your father's and your mother's and you are in a lucky boat."

"May I get the sardines? I know where I can get four baits too."

"I have mine left from today."

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"Let me get four fresh ones."

"One," the old man said. His hope and his confidence had never left him.

"Two." the boy said.

"Two," the old man agreed. "Yon didn't steal them?"

"I would," the boy said. "But I bought these."

"Thank you," the old man said. "Tomorrow is going to be a good day with this current." He was too simple to wonder when he had attained humility. But he knew it carried no loss of pride.

"Where are you going?" the boy asked.

"Far out. I want to be out before it is light."

"Are you strong enough now for a truly big fish?"

"I think so. And there are many tricks."

"Let us take the stuff home," the boy said, "so I can get the cast net and go after the sardines.

They picked up the things from the boat. The old man carried the mast on his shoulder and the boy carried the wooden box with the fishing gear.

They walked to the old man's shack and went in through its open door. The shack was made of the tough part of the royal palm called guano.

In the shack there was a bed, a table, one chair and a place on the dirt floor to cook with charcoal. On the brown walls there was a color picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and another of the Virgin of Cobre, both relics of his wife. Once there had been a photograph of his wife on the wall but he had taken it down because it had made him lonely. Now it was on the shelf in the corner under his clean shirt.

"What do you have to eat?" the boy asked.

"A pot of yellow rice with fish. Do you want some?"

"No. I will eat at home. Do you want me to make a fire?"

"No. I will make it later on."

"May I take the cast net?"

"Of course."

There was no cast net and the boy remembered when they had sold it. But they went through this fiction every day. There was no pot of yellow rice and fish and the boy knew this too.

"Eighty-five is a kicky number," the old man said.

"How would you like to see me bring one in that weighed over a thousand pounds?"

"I'll get the cast net and go for sardines. Will you sit in the sun in the doorway?"

"Yes. I have yesterday's paper and I will read about baseball."

The boy did not know whether yesterday's paper was fiction too. But the old man brought it out from under the bed.

"Perico gave it to me at the bodega." he explained.

"I'll be back when I have the sardines. I'll keep yours and mine together on ice and we can share them in the morning. When I come back you can tell me about baseball. Now keep warm, old man. Remember we are in September," the boy said.

"The month when the great fish come," the old man said. "Anyone can be a fisherman in May."

'I'm going for the sardines now," the boy said.

When the boy came back the old man was asleep in the chair and the sun was down. The boy took the old army blanket off the bed and spread it over the back of the chair and over the old mail's strange but powerful shoulders. His shirt had been patched so many times that it was like a sail. The old man's head was very old and with his eyes closed there was no life in his face. He was barefoot.

The boy left him there and when he came back the old man was still asleep.

"Wake up, old man," the boy said.

The old man opened his eyes and for a moment he was coming back from a long way away. Then he smiled.

"What have you got?" he asked.

"Supper," said the boy. "We're going to have supper."

"I'm not very hungry-"

"Come on and eat. You can't fish and not eat."

"What are we eating?"

"Black beans and rice, fried bananas and some stow."

The boy had brought them in a metal container from the Terrace.

"That's very kind of you," the old man said. "Should we eat?"

"I've been asking you to," the boy told him gently. "I didn't want to open the container until you were ready."

"I'm ready now," the old man said. "I only needed time to wash."

Where did he wash? the boy thought. The village water supply was two streets down the road. I must have water here for him, and soap and a towel. Why am I so thoughtless? I must got him another shirt and a jacket for the winter and some sort of shoes and another blanket.

"Your stew is excellent," the old man said.

"Tell me about baseball," the boy asked him.

"In the American League it is the Yankees as I said," the old man said happily.

"They lost today," the boy told him.

"That means nothing. The great DiMaggio is himself again."

"They have other men on the team."

"Naturally. But he makes the difference," the old man said. "Do you remember when he used to come to the Terrace? I wanted to take him fishing but I was too timid to ask him. Then I asked you to ask him and you were too timid. I would like to take the great DiMaggio fishing. They say his father was a fisherman. Maybe he was as poor as we are and would understand."

"I used to sail on a big ship that went to Africa and I have seen lions on the beaches in the evening."

"I know. You told me."

"Should we talk about Africa or about baseball?"

"Baseball. Tell me about the great John Jota McGraw," the boy said.

"He used to come to the Terrace sometimes in the older days. But he was rough and harsh-spoken when he drank too much."

"Who is the greatest manager, really, Luque or Mike Gonzalez?"

"I think they are equal."

"And the best fisherman is you."

"No. I know others that are better."

"Que va," the boy said, "There are many good fishermen and some great ones, but there is only you."

"Thank you. You make me happy. I hope no fish will come along so great that he will prove us wrong."

"There is no such fish if you are still strong as you say."

"I may not be as strong as I think," the old man said.

"But I know many tricks and I have resolution.

"You ought to go to bed now so that you will be fresh in the morning."

"Good night then. I will wake you in the morning." "You're my alarm clock," the boy said.

"Age is my alarm clock," the old man said. "Why do old men wake so early? Is it to have longer days?"

"I don't know," the boy said. "All I know is that young boys sleep late and hard. Sleep well, old man." They had eaten with no light on the table. The old man rolled his trousers up to make a pillow, putting the newspaper inside them. He rolled himself in the blanket and slept on the other old newspapers that covered the springs of the bed.

Chapter two

Far Out to Sea

The old man dreamed of Africa when he was a boy and the long, golden beaches. He lived along that coast now every night and in his dreams he heard the surf roar and saw the native boats come riding through it. As he slept he smelled the smell of Africa that the land breeze brought in the morning.

He no longer dreamed of storms, nor of women, nor of great events, nor of great fish, nor of fights, nor of contests of strength, nor of his wife. Now he only

dreamed of places and of the lions on the beach. They played like young cats in the dusk and he loved their, as he loved the boy. He never dreamed about the boy.

He woke up, looked out the open door at the moon and unrolled his trousers and put them on. He went up the road to wake the boy. The door of the house where the boy lived was unlocked and the old man opened it and walked in quietly. He took hold of the boy's foot gently and held it until the boy woke and turned and looked at him. The old man nodded and the boy took his trousers from the chair by the bed and, sitting on the bed, pulled them on.

The old man went out the door and the boy came after him. He was sleepy and the old man put his arm across his shoulders and said. "I am sorry."

"Que va," the boy said. "It is what a man must do."

They walked down the road to the old man's shack and all along the road, in the dark, barefoot men were moving, carrying the masts of their boats.

When they reached the old man's shack the boy took the rolls of lute in the basket, the harpoon and gaff, and the old man carried the mast with the furled sail on his shoulder.

"Do you want coffee?" the boy asked.

"We'll put the gear in the boat and then get some."

They had coffee from condensed-milk cans at an early morning place that served fishermen.

"How did you sleep, old man?" the boy asked. He was waking up now although it was still hard for him to leave his sleep.

"Very well, Manolin," the old man said. "I feel confident today."

"So do I." the boy said. "Now I must get your sardines and mine and your fresh baits."

"I'll be right back." the boy said. "Have another coffee. We have credit here."

The old man drank his coffee slowly. It was all he would have all day and he knew that he should drink it. For a long time now eating had bored him and he never carried a lunch. He had a bottle of water in the bow of the skiff and that was all he needed for the day.

The boy was back now with the sardines and the two baits, and they went down to the skiff, feeling the pebbled sand under their feet. They lifted the skiff and slid her into the water.

"Good luck, old man."

"Good luck," the old man said.

He fitted the rope lashings of the oars onto the thole pins and, leaning forward, he began to row out of the harbor in the dark. There were other boats going out to sea and the old man heard the dip and push of their oars even though he could not see them.

The old man knew he was going far out and he left the smell of the laud behind and rowed out into the clean early morning smell of the ocean.

In the dark the old man could feel the morning coming and as he rowed he heard the sound of flying fish leaving the water. He was very fond of flying fish as they were his principal friends on the ocean. He was sorry for the birds, especially the small delicate dark terns that were always flying and looking and almost never finding. And he thought, the birds have a harder life than we do except for the robber birds and the heavy strong ones. Why did they make birds so delicate and fine as those sea swallows when the ocean can be so cruel? She is kind and very beautiful. But she can be so cruel.

He always thought of the sea as la mar which is what people call her in Spanish when they love her. Sometimes those who love her say bad things about her but they always speak of the sea as though she were a woman. Some of the younger fishermen, who had motorboats, speak of her as el mar which is masculine. They speak of her as a contestant or a place or even as an enemy. But the old man always thought of her as feminine and as something that gave or withheld great favors, and if She did wild or wicked things it was because she could not help them. The moon affects her as it does a woman, he thought.

He was rowing steadily and it was no effort for him.

"Today I'll row out where the schools of albacore are and maybe there will be a big one with them."

Before it was really light he had his four baits out at different depths and he was drifting with the current. There was no part of the hook that a great fish could feel which was not sweet-smelling and good-tasting.

The boy had given him two small fresh tunas which hung on the two deepest lines and on the others, he had a big blue runner and a yellow jack. Each line was as thick as a big pencil and was looped onto a stick so that any pull or touch on the bait would make the stick dip.

Now the old man rowed gently to keep the lines straight and at their proper depths. The sun rose thinly from the sea and the old man could see the other boats, low on the water and well in toward the shore. He looked down into the water and watched the lines that went straight down into the dark water. He kept them straighter titan any other fisherman.

I keep them with precision, he thought. Only I have no luck anymore. But who knows? Maybe today. Every day is a new day. It is better to be lucky. But I would rather be exact. Then when luck comes you are ready.

Just then he saw a man-of-war bird with his long black wings circling in the sky ahead of him. He made a quick drop and then circled again.

"He's got something," the old man said aloud. "He's not just looking."

"Dolphin," the old man said aloud. "Big dolphin."

As the old man watched, a small tuna rose in the air, turned and dropped into the water. Another and another rose and they were leaping in long jumps alter the bait. After a while the stern line became taut under his foot.

He dropped his oars and felt the weight of the small tuna's shivering pull. He could see the fish in the water as he pulled it in. The old man hit him on the head for kindness and kicked him under the stern.

"Albacore," he said aloud. "He'll make a beautiful bait."

He did not remember when he first started talking to himself. Probably when the boy had left him, but he did not remember.

The sun was hot now and the old man felt it on the back of his neck, and felt the sweat trickle down his back as he rowed. Just then, watching his lines, he saw one of the projecting green sticks dip sharply.

"Yes." he said. "Yes," and he moved his oars inside the boat. He reached out for the line and held it delicately between the thumb and forefinger of his right hand.

Then it came again. This time it was a tentative pull and he knew exactly what it was. One hundred fathoms below a marlin was eating the sardines that covered the point of the hook.

This far out, he must be huge, he thought. Eat them, fish. Please eat them. He felt the light delicate pull and then a harder pull when a sardine's head must have been more difficult to break from the hook. Then there was nothing.

"Come on," the old man said aloud. "Just smell them. Aren't they lovely? Eat them now and then there is the tuna. Don't be shy, fish. Eat them."

Then he felt something hard and unbelievably heavy. It was the weight of the fish and he let the line slip down, down, down. Now he was ready. He had three forty-fathom coils of line in reserve, as well as the coil he was using.

"Eat it a little more." he said. "Eat it well."

Eat it so that the point of the hook goes into your heart and kills you, he thought. Come up easy and let me put the harpoon into you. Are you ready? Have you been at the table long enough?

"Now!" he said aloud and struck hard with both hands, gained a yard of line and then struck again and again, swinging with all the strength of his arms and the weight of his body.

Nothing happened. The fish just moved away slowly and the old man could not raise him an inch. The boat began to move slowly toward the northwest. The fish moved steadily and they traveled slowly on the calm water.

"I wish I had the boy," the old man said aloud. "I'm being towed by a fish. I must hold him all I can and give him the line when he wants it. Thank God he is traveling and not going down."

Four hours later the fish was still swimming out to sea, towing the skiff, and the old man was still braced solidly with the line across his back.

Chapter three

The Battle Begins

He looked behind him and saw that no land was visible. That makes no difference, he thought. I can always come in on the glow from Havana. Maybe he will come up before sunset, or with the moon. I have no cramps and I feel strong. It is he that

has the hook in his mouth. But what a fish to pull like that. I wish I could see him only once to know what I have against me.

The fish never changed his course. It was cold after the sun went down, he tied the sack that covered the bait box around his neck so that it hung down over his back and he cautiously worked it down under the line that was across his shoulders now.

I can do nothing with him and he can do nothing with me, he thought. Once he stood up and urinated over the side of the skiff and looked at the stars and checked his course. They were moving more slowly now and the glow of Havana was not so strong, so he knew the current must be carrying them eastward.

I wonder how the baseball came out in the grand leagues today, he thought. It would be wonderful to do this with a radio. Think of what you are doing, you must do nothing stupid.

Then he said aloud, "I wish I had the boy. To help me and to see this.'

No one should be alone in their old age, he thought. But it is unavoidable. I must remember to eat the tuna before he spoils in order to keep strong. Remember, you must eat him in the morning, he said to himself.

During the night two porpoise came around the boat and he could hear them rolling and blowing.

"They are good," he said. "They play and make jokes and love one another. They are our brothers like the flying fish."

Then he began to pity the great fish that he had hooked. He is wonderful and strange and who knows how old he is, he thought. Never have I had such a strong fish nor one who acted so strangely. Perhaps he is too wise to jump. He could ruin me by jumping. But what a great fish he is and what he will bring in the market if the flesh is good, he took the bait like a male and he pulls like a male and his fight has no panic in it. I wonder if he has any plans or if he is just as desperate as I am.

"I wish the boy were here," he said aloud and settled himself against the bow and felt the strength of the great fish through the line he held across his shoulders. My choice was to go out to find him beyond all people in the world. Now we are joined together and no one to help either one of us.

The fish made a surge that pulled him down on his face and made a cut below his eye. The blood ran down his cheek a little way. But it coagulated and dried before

it reached his chin and he worked his way back to the bow and rested against the wood.

I wonder why he made that surge, he thought. The wire must have slipped on the great hill of his back. Certainly his back cannot feel as bad as mine does. But he cannot pull this skiff forever, no matter how great he is.

"Fish." he said softly, aloud. "I'll stay with you until I am dead."

When the sun had risen further the old man realized that the fish was not getting tired. There was only one favorable sign. The slam of the line showed he was swimming at a lesser depth. That did not mean that he would jump. But he might.

"God, let him jump," the old man said. "I have enough line to handle him."

"Fish," he said, "I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you dead before this day ends."

A small bird came toward the skiff from the north. He was a warbler and the old man could see he was very tired. He flew around the old man's head and rested on the line.

"How old are you?" the old man asked the bird. "Is this your first trip?" The bird was very tired and he teetered on the line as his delicate feet gripped it.

"Take a good rest, small bird," he said. "Then go and take your chance like any man or bird or fish."

Just then the fish gave a sudden lurch that pulled the old man down to the bow and would have pulled him overboard if he had not braced himself and given some line. The bird flew away and he felt the line carefully with his right hand and noticed his hand was bleeding. Shifting the weight of the line to his left shoulder and kneeling carefully, he washed his hand in the ocean. The cut was in the working part of his hand. He knew he would need his hands before this was over and he did not like to be cut before it started. "Now," he said, "I must eat the small tuna." he knelt down and found the tuna under the stem. He put one knee on the fish and cut strips of dark red meat from the back of the head to the tail.

"I don't think I can eat an entire one," he said. He could feel the steady hard pull of the line and his left hand was cramped.

"What kind of a hand is that," he said. "Cramp then if you want. Make yourself into a claw. It will do you no good."

He picked up a piece of tuna and put it in his mouth and chewed it slowly. It was not unpleasant.

"How do you feel, hand?" he asked the cramped hand that was almost as stiff as rigor mortis, "I'll eat some more for you."

I wish I could feed the fish, he thought. He is my brother. But I must kill him and keep strong to do it. Slowly he ate all the strips of fish.

"God help me to have the cramp go," he said. "Because I do not know what the fish is going to do." What is his plan, he thought. And what is mine?

His left hand was still cramped, but he was unknotting it slowly.

I hate cramps, he thought. It is a treachery of one's own body. Then, with his right hand he felt the difference in the pull of the line.

"He's coming up." he said. "Come on, hand. Please come on."

The line rose slowly and steadily and then the surface of the ocean bulged ahead of the boat and the fish came out. He came out unendingly and water poured from his sides. He was bright in the sun and his head and his sides were wide and colored a light lavender. His sword was as long as a baseball bat and tapered like a rapier and he rose his full length from the water and then re-entered it, smoothly, like a diver and the old man saw the great scythe-blade of his tail go under, and the line started to race out.

"He is two feet longer than the skiff," the old man said. He was trying with both hands to keep the line just inside of breaking strength. He knew that if he could not slow the fish with a steady pressure, the fish could take out all the line and break it.

He is a great fish but I must convince him that he is no match for me, he thought. I must never let him learn his strength nor what he could do if he made his run.

The old man had seen many great fish. He had seen many that weighed more than a thousand pounds and he had caught two of that size in his life, but never alone. Now alone, and out of sight of land, he was tied fast to the biggest fish that he had ever seen and bigger than he had ever heard of, and his left hand was still cramped.

I wonder why he jumped, the old man thought. He jumped almost as though to show me how big he was. I wish I could show him what sort of man I am. But then he would see the cramped hand.

At noon the old man's left hand was uncramped. He was comfortable but suffering, although he did not admit the suffering at all.

"I am not religious," he said. "But I will say ten Our Fathers and ten Hail Marys so that I can catch this fish, and I promise to make a pilgrimage to the Virgin de Cobre if I catch him. Christ, I did not know he was so big."

"I'll kill him though," he said. "In all his greatness."

Although it is unjust, he thought. But I will show him what a man can do and what a man endures.

"I told the boy I was a strange old man," he said. "Now is when I must prove it."

The thousand times that he had proved it meant nothing. Now he was proving it again.

"If you're not tired, fish." he said aloud, "you must be very strange."

He felt very tired now and he tried to think of other things. He thought of the Big Leagues, and he knew the Yankees of New York were playing the Tigers of Detroit.

This is the second day that I do not know the result of the juegos, he thought. But I must have confidence and I must be worthy of the great DiMaggio who does all things perfectly.

Do you believe the great DiMaggio would stay with a fish as long as I will stay with this one? he thought. I am sure he would and more since he is young and strong. Also his father was a fisherman.

Chapter four

An Even Eight

As the sun set, to give himself more confidence, he remembered the time in the tavern at Casablanca when he had played the hand game with the great negro from Cienfuegos, who was the strongest man on the docks.

They had gone one day and one night with their elbows on a chalk line on the table. Each one was trying to force the other's hand down onto the table. They changed the referee every four hours so that the referees could sleep.

The odds would change back and forth all night. Once the negro had the old man, who was not an old man then but was Santiago El Campeon, nearly three inches

off balance. But the old man had raised his hand again. He was sure then that he had the negro, who was a fine man and a great athlete, beaten. And at daylight he had forced the hand of the negro down and down until it rested on the table. The match had started on a Sunday morning and ended on a Monday morning.

For a long time everyone had called him "the Champion." After that he had a few matches and then no more. He decided that he could beat anyone if he wanted to badly enough and he decided that it was bad for his right hand for fishing.

Just before it was dark, as they passed a great island of Sargasso weed, his small line was taken by a dolphin. He saw it first when it jumped in the air, bending and flapping wildly. When it was at the stern the old man leaned over and lifted the burnished gold fish with its purple spots over the stem. Its jaws were working convulsively in quick bites against the hook. It pounded the bottom of the skiff with its long flat body, its tail and its head until he clubbed it. Then it shivered and was still.

The old man watched the sun go into the ocean and the slant of the big cord.

"He hasn't changed at all," he said. But watching the movement of the water against his hand he noted that it was a bit slower.

"I'll lash the two oars together across the stern and that will slow him in the night," he said. "He's good for the night and so am I."

I'm learning how to do it, he thought. This part of it anyway. Then, too, remember he hasn't eaten since he took the bait and he is huge and needs much food. I have eaten the whole tuna, tomorrow I will eat the dolphin.

"How do you feel, fish?" he asked aloud. "I feel good and my left hand is better and I have food for a night and a day. Pull the boat, fish."

He did not truly feel good because the pain from the cord across his back had almost passed pain and gone into a dullness that worried him.

But I have had worse things than that, he thought. My hand is only cut a little and the cramp is gone from the other. My legs are all right.

It was dark now as it becomes dark quickly after the sun sets in September. The first stars were out. He did not know the name of Rigel but he saw it and knew that soon they would all be out and he would have all his distant friends.

"The fish is my friend too," he said aloud. "I have never seen or heard of such a fish. But I must kill him, I am glad we do not have to try to kill the stars."

Then he was sorry for the great fish that had nothing to eat and his determination to kill him never relaxed in his sorrow for him. How many people will he feed, he thought. But are they worthy to eat him? No, of course not. There is no one worthy of eating a fish with such great dignity.

The old man rested for what he believed to be two hours. The moon did not rise until late now and he had no way of judging the time. He was still bearing the pull of the fish across his shoulders.

"But you have not slept yet, old man. It is half a day and a night and now another day and you have not slept," he said aloud. "I must devise a way so that you sleep a little if he is quiet and steady. If you do not sleep you might become unclear in the head."

I could go without sleeping, he told himself. But it would be too dangerous.

He worked his way back to the stern. The stars were bright now and he saw the dolphin clearly and he pushed the blade of his knife into his head and pulled him out from under the stern. The dolphin was cold and gray-white now in the starlight and the old man skinned one side of him while he held his right foot on the fish's head. Then he skinned the other side and cut fillets. He leaned over the side and put his hand in the water. The flow of the water against it was less strong.

"He is tired or he is resting. Now let me eat this dolphin and get some rest and a little sleep."

Under the stars he ate half of one of the dolphin fillets.

"What an excellent fish dolphin is to eat cooked," he said. "And what a miserable fish raw. I will never go in a boat again without salt or limes."

The sky was clouding over to the east and one after another the stars he knew were gone. It looked now as though he were moving into a great canyon of clouds and the wind had dropped.

"There will be bad weather in three or four days," he said. "But not tonight or tomorrow. Right now to get some sleep, old man, while the fish is calm and steady."

The moon had been up for a long time but he slept on and the fish pulled on steadily and the boat moved into the tunnel of clouds. He woke with the jerk of his right fist coming up against his face and the line burning out through his right hand. He could not feel the line with his left hand but he braked all he could with his right and the line rushed out.

Finally his left hand found the line and he leaned back against it and now it burned his back and his left hand. His left hand was taking all the strain and it was cutting badly.

Just then the fish jumped making a great bursting of the ocean and then a heavy fall. Then he jumped again and again and the boat was going fast although line was still racing out and the old man was raising the strain to the breaking point. He had been pulled down tight onto the bow and his face was in the cut slice of dolphin and he could not move.

This is what we waited for, he thought. So now let us take it.

Make him pay for the line. Make him pay for it.

He could not see the fish's jumps but only heard the breaking of the ocean and the heavy splash as he fell. The speed of the line was cutting his hands badly but he had always known this would happen.

If the boy were here he would wet the coils of line, he thought. Yes. If the boy were here.

The line went out but it was slowing now and he was making the fish earn each inch of it. Now he got his head up from the wood and out of the slice of fish that his cheek had crushed. He was on his knees and then he rose to his feet.

He was giving line but more slowly all the time.

I wonder what started him so suddenly? Could it have been hunger that made him desperate, or was he frightened by something in the night?

Maybe he suddenly felt fear. But he was such a calm, strong fish and he seemed so fearless and so confident. It is strange.

"You better be fearless and confident yourself, old man," he said.

The old man held him with his left hand and stooped down and scooped up water in his right hand to get the crushed dolphin flesh off his face. He was afraid that it might nauseate him and cause him to vomit and lose his strength. He washed his

right hand in the water and then let it stay in the salt water while he watched the first light come before the sunrise. He's headed almost east, he thought. That means he is tired and going with the current. Soon he will have to circle. Then our true work begins.

After he judged that his right hand had been in the water long enough he took it out and looked at it.

"It is not bad," he said. "And pain does not matter to a man."

He took hold of the line carefully so that it did not fit into any of the fresh line cuts and shifted his weight so that he could put his left hand into the sea on the other side of the skiff.

"You did not do so badly for something worthless," he said to his left hand. 'But there was a moment when I could not find you."

Why was I not born with two good hands? he thought. Perhaps it was my fault in not training the left one properly. But God knows he had enough chances to leant. He did not do so badly in the night, though, and he has cramped only once. If he cramps again let the line cut him off.

The sun was rising for the third time since he had got out to sea when the fish started to circle.

"It is a very big circle," he said. "But he is circling."

I must hold all I can, he thought. The strain will shorten his circle each lime. Perhaps in an hour I will see him. Now I must convince him and then I must kill him.

But the fish kept on circling slowly and the old man was wet with sweat and tired deep into his bones two hours later. But the circles were much shorter now and from the way the line slanted he could tell the fish had risen steadily while he swam.

For an hour the old man had been seeing black spots before his eyes and the sweat salted his eyes and salted the cut under his eye and on his forehead. He was not afraid of the black spots. Twice, though, he had felt faint and dizzy and that had worried him.

"I cannot fail and die on a fish like this," he said. "Now that I have him coming so beautifully. God help me endure. I'll say a hundred Our Fathers and a hundred Hail

Marys. But I cannot say them now." Consider them said, he thought. I'll say them later. Just then he felt a sudden banging and jerking on the line he held with his two hands. It was sharp and heavy.

He is hitting the wire with his sword, he thought. He may jump and I would rather he circled now. The jumps wore necessary for him to take air. But after that each jump can widen the opening of the hook wound and he can throw the hook.

"Don't jump, fish," he said. "Don't jump. The fish hit the wire several times more, and each time the old man gave up a little line.

After a while the fish stopped beating at the wire and started circling slowly again. The old man was gaining line steadily now. But he felt faint again. He lifted some sea water with his left hand and put it on his head. Then he put more on and rubbed the back of his neck.

"I have no cramps," ho said. "He'll go up soon and I can last. You have to last. Don't oven speak of it." He kneeled against the bow and, for a moment, slipped the line over his back again. I'll rest now while he circles and then stand up and work on him when he comes in, he decided.

I'm more tired than I have ever been, he thought, and now the trade wind is rising. But that will be good to take him in with. The sea had risen considerably. But it was a fair weather breeze and he had to have it to get home.

"I'll just steer south and west," he said. "A man is never lost at sea and it is a long island."

It was on the third turn that he saw the fish for the first time. He saw him first as a dark shadow that took so long to pass under the boat that he could not believe its length.

"No," he said. "He can't be that big." But he was that big and at the end of this circle he came to the surface only thirty yards away and the man saw his tail out of the water. It was higher than a big scythe blade and a very pale lavender above the dark blue water.

As the fish swam just below the surface the old man could see his huge bulk and purple stripes. His dorsal fin was down and his huge pectorals were spread wide. Then the old man could see the fish's eye.

The old man was sweating now but from something else besides the sun. On each placid turn the fish made he was gaining line and he was sure that in two turns he would have a chance to get the harpoon in.

But I must get him close, close, close, he thought. I mustn't try for the head. I must get the heart.

"Be calm and strong, old man," he said.

The fish was coming in on his circle now, calm and beautiful with only his great tail moving. The old man pulled on him to bring him closer. For just a moment the fish turned a little on his side. Then he straightened himself and began another circle.

"I moved him." the old man said. "I moved him then."

He felt faint again but he held on to the great fish with all his strength. I moved him, he thought. Maybe this time I can get him over. Pull, hands, he thought. Hold up, legs. Last for me, head. Last for me. You never went. This time I'll pull him over.

But when he put forth, all of his effort, the fish righted himself and swam away.

"Fish." the old man said. "Fish, you are going to have to die anyway. Do you have to kill me too?"

That way nothing is accomplished, he thought. His mouth was too dry to speak but he could not reach for the water now. I must get him alongside this time, he thought. I am not good for many more turns. Yes, you are, he told himself. You're good forever.

On the next turn, he nearly had him. But again the fish righted himself and swam away slowly.

You are killing me, fish, the old man thought. But you have a right to. Never have I seen a greater or more beautiful or a calmer or more noble thing than you, brother. Come on and kill me. I do not care who kills who. Now you are getting confused in the head, he thought. You must keep your head clear and know how to suffer like a man or a fish.

"Clear up, head." he said in a voice he could hardly hear. "Clear up."

He tried it once more and he felt himself going when he turned the fish. The fish righted himself and swam off again slowly with the great tail moving in the air.

I'll try it again, the old man promised, although his hands were mushy now and he could only see well in flashes.

Chapter five

Shark Attack

He took all his pain and what was left of his strength and his long-gone pride and he put it against the fish's agony.

The fish came over onto his side and swam gently and started to pass the boat.

The old man dropped the line and put his foot on it and lifted the harpoon as high as he could and drove it down with all his strength into the fish's side just behind the great chest fin. He felt the iron go in and he leaned on it and drove it further and then pushed all his weight after it.

Then the fish came alive, with his death in him, and rose high out of the water showing all his great length and width and all his power and his beauty. He seemed to hang in the air above the old man in the skiff. Then he fell into the water with a crash.
The old man felt faint and sick and he could not see well. But he cleared the harpoon line and let it run slowly through his raw hands and when he could see, he saw the fish was on his back with his silver belly up. The shaft of the harpoon was projecting at an angle from the fish's shoulder and the sea was red with the blood from his heart. The fish was silvery and still and floated with the waves. The old man laid his head on his hands.

"Keep my head clear," he said. "I am a tired old man. But I have killed this fish which is my brother and now I must do the slave work."

Now I must prepare the rope to tie him alongside the skiff, he thought. This skiff will never hold him.

He started to pull the fish in to have him alongside the skiff. I want to see him, he thought, and to touch and to feel him. He is my fortune, he thought. But that is not why I wish to feel him. I think I felt his heart when I pushed on the harpoon the second time. Bring him in now and get the noose around his tail and another around his middle to tie him to the skiff.

"Get to work, old man," he said. He took a very small drink of water.

"There is much slave work to do now that the fight is over."

He looked up at the sky and then out to his fish.

"Come on, fish," he said. But the fish did not come, instead he lay there and the old man pulled the skiff up to him.

When the fish's head was against the bow he could not believe his size.

"It was the only way to kill him," the old man said, he was feeling better and his head was clear, he's over fifteen hundred pounds, he thought. Maybe much more.

"I think the great DiMaggio would be proud of me today."

He fastened the fish, to the bow, to the stem and to the middle thwart. He was so big it was like lashing a much bigger skiff alongside. He could see the fish and he had only to look at his hands and feel his back against the stem to know that this had truly happened and was not a dream.

They were sailing together lashed side by side and the old man thought, let him bring me in if it pleases him. I am only better than him through trickery and he meant me no harm.

It was an hour before the first shark hit him. The shark had come up from deep down in the water as the dark cloud of blood had settled and dispersed in the mile-deep sea. He had come up so fast that he broke the surface of the blue water and was in the sun. Then he fell back into the sea and picked up the scent and started following the skiff and the fish.

Sometimes he lost the scent. But he would pick it up again and he swam fast and hard. He was a very big Mako shark built to swim as fast as the fastest fish in the sea and everything about him was beautiful except his jaws. His back was as blue as a swordfish's and his belly was silver and his hide was smooth and handsome. Inside the closed double lip of his jaws all of his eight rows of teeth were slanted inwards. They were not the ordinary pyramid-shaped teeth of most sharks. They wore shaped like a man's fingers when they are curled like claws. They were nearly as long as the fingers of the old man and they had razor-sharp cutting edges on both sides.

When the old man saw him coming he knew that this was a shark that had no fear at all and would do exactly what he wished. He prepared the harpoon and the rope while he watched the shark come forward.

The old man's head was clear and good now and he was full of resolution but he had little hope. It was too good to last, he thought, it might as well have been a

dream. I cannot keep him from hitting me but maybe I can get him. Dentuso, he thought. Bad luck to your mother.

When the shark hit the fish the old man saw his mouth open and his strange eyes. He heard the clicking sound of the teeth as he tore into the meat just above the tail. He rammed the harpoon down into the shark's head and into his brain. He hit it with his bloody hands driving the harpoon with all his strength. He hit it without hope but with resolution and complete malignancy.

The shark swung over and the old man saw his eye was not alive. The old man knew that he was dead but the shark would not accept it. It ploughed over the water as a speed boat does. Then he lay quietly for a little while and went down very slowly.

"He took about forty pounds and my harpoon," the old man said. He did not like to look at the fish any more since he had been mutilated. When the fish had been hit it was as though he himself were hit.

It was too good to last, he thought. I wish it had been a dream now and that I had never hooked the fish and was alone in bed on the newspapers.

"But man is not made for defeat," he said. "A man can be destroyed but not defeated." I am sorry that I killed the fish though, he thought. Now the bad time is coming and I do not even have the harpoon.

"Don't think, old man," he said aloud. "Sail on and take it when it comes."

He knew quite well the pattern of what could happen when he readied the inner part of the current. But there was nothing to be done now.

"Yes, there is," he said aloud. "I can lash my knife to the butt of one of the oars."

So he did that.

"Now, I am still an old man. But I am not unarmed."

He watched only the forward part of the fish and some of his hope returned.

It is silly not to hope, he thought. Besides I believe it is a sin. Do not think about sin. There are enough problems now without sin.

I have no understanding of it and I am not sure that I believe in it. Perhaps it was a sin to kill the fish. I suppose it was though I did it to keep me alive and feed many

people. But then everything is a sin. Do not think about sin. You were born to be a fisherman.

You did not kill the fish only to keep alive and to sell for food, he thought. You killed him for pride and because you are a fisherman. You loved him when he was alive and you loved him after. If you love him it is not a sin to kill him. Or is it more?

But you enjoyed killing the dentuso, he thought.

"I killed him in self-defense," the old man said aloud. "And I killed him well."

Besides, he thought, everything kills everything else in some way. Fishing kills me exactly as it keeps me alive. The boy keeps me alive. I must not deceive myself too much.

Chapter six

The Final Battle

He had been sailing for two hours when he saw the first of the two sharks.

"Galanos," he said aloud.

He took up the oar with the knife lashed to it. He lifted it as lightly as he could because his hands rebelled at the pain, and he watched the sharks come.

They were hateful sharks, bad-smelling scavengers as well as killers, and when they were hungry they would bite at an oar or the rudder of a boat.

"Ay," the old man said. "Galanos. Come on, Galanos."

They came. One turned and went out of sight under the skiff and the old man could feel the skiff shake as he jerked and pulled on the fish. The other watched the old man with his yellow eyes and then came in fast to hit the fish where he had already been bitten. A line showed clearly on the top of his brown head and back where the brain joined the spinal cord and the old man drove the knife on the oar into the brain, withdrew it, and drove it in again into the shark's yellow cat-like eyes. The shark let go of the fish and slid down, swallowing what he had taken as he died.

When he saw the other shark he leaned over the side and punched him. The blow hurt his hands and his shoulder. But the shark came up fast with his head out and the old man hit him squarely in the center of his flat-topped head. The old man

withdrew the blade and punched the shark exactly in the same spot again. The old man stabbed him in his left eye but the shark still hung there.

"No?" the old man said and he drove the blade between the vertebrae and the brain and he felt the cartilage break.

"Go on, galano. Slide down a mile deep. Go and see your friend, or maybe it's your mother."

The old man wiped the blade of his knife and laid down the oar. Then he brought the skiff onto her course.

"They must have taken a quarter of him and of the best meat," he said aloud. "I wish it were a dream and that I had never hooked him. I'm sorry about it, fish. It makes everything wrong." He stopped and he did not want to look at the fish now.

"I shouldn't have gone out so far, fish," he said. "Neither for you nor for me. I'm sorry, fish. God knows how much that last one took," he continued. "But she's much lighter now." He did not want to think of the mutilated under-side of the fish.

He was a fish to keep a man all winter, he thought. Don't think of that. Just rest and try to get your hands in shape to defend what is left of him.

The next shark that came was a single shovel-nose.

He came like a pig to the trough if a pig had a mouth so wide that you could put your head in it. The old man let him hit the fish and then drove the knife on the oar down into his brain. But tire shark jerked backwards as he rolled and the knife blade snapped.

The old man did not even watch the big shark sinking slowly in the water.

"I have the gaff now." he said. "But it will do no good. I have the two oars and the tiller and the short dub."

Now they have beaten me, he thought. I am too old to club sharks to death. But I will try it as long as I have the oars and the short club and the tiller.

It was getting late in the afternoon and he saw nothing but the sea and the sky.

"You're tired, old man," he said. "You're tired inside." The sharks did not hit him again until just before sunset.

He blocked the tiller and reached under the stern for the club. It was an oar handle from a broken oar.

The two sharks closed together and as he saw the one nearest him open his jaws and sink them into the silver side of the fish, he raised the club high and brought it down heavy on the top of the shark's broad head. He struck the shark once more hard across the point of the nose as he slid down from the fish.

The other shark now came in again with his jaws wide. The old man could see pieces of the meat of the fish spilling white from the corner of his jaws. He swung at him and hit only the head and the shark looked at him and tore the meat loose. The old man swung the club down on him again.

"Come on, galano," the old man said. "Come in again."

The shark came in and the old man hit him as he shut his jaws. He hit him solidly and front as high up as he could raise the club. This time he felt the bone at the base of the brain and he hit him again in the same place. The old man watched but neither shark returned.

He did not want to look at the fish. He knew that half of him had been destroyed. The sun had gone down while he had been fighting the sharks.

"It will be dark soon." he said. "Then I should see the glow of Havana. If I am too far to the east I will see the lights of one of the new beaches."

He could not talk to the fish anymore because the fish had been ruined too badly. Then something came into his head.

"Half-fish," he said. "Fish that you were. I am sorry that went too far out. I ruined us both. But we have killed many sharks, you and I, and ruined many others. How many did you ever kill, old fish? You do not have that spear on your head for nothing."

I have half of him. he thought. Maybe I'll have the luck to bring the forward half in. I should have some luck. "No," he said. "You violated your luck when you went too far outside."

"Don't be silly," he said aloud. "You may have much luck yet. I'd like to buy some if there were any place they sell it," he said.

What could I buy it with? he asked himself. Could I buy it with a lost harpoon and a broken knife and two bad hands?

"You might," he said. "You tried to buy it with eighty-four days at sea. They nearly sold it to you too." He saw the reflected glare of the lights of the city at what must

have been around ten o'clock at night. He steered inside of the glow and he thought that now, soon, he must hit the edge of the stream.

Now it is over, he thought. They will probably hit me again. But what can a man do against them in the dark without a weapon? I hope I do not have to fight again, he thought.

But by midnight he fought and this time he knew the fight was useless. They came in a pack. He dubbed desperately at what he could only feel and hear and he felt something seize the dub and it was gone. He jerked the tiller free from the rudder and beat and chopped with it holding it in both hands and driving it down again and again.

One came, finally, against the head itself and he knew that it was over. He swung the tiller across the shark's head. He swung it once and twice and again. The shark let go and rolled away. That was the last shark of the pack that came. There was nothing more for them to eat.

The old man could hardly breathe now and he felt a strange taste in his mouth. It was coppery and sweet and he was afraid of it for a moment. He spat into the ocean and said, "Eat that, galanos."

He knew he was beaten now finally and without remedy. He put the sack around his shoulders and put the skiff on her course. He had no thoughts nor any feelings of any kind. He only noticed how lightly and how well the skiff sailed now that there was no great weight beside her.

He could feel he was inside the current now and he could see the lights of the beach along the shore.

When he sailed into the little harbor the lights of the Terrace were out and he knew everyone was in bed. He pulled the boat up and then he stepped out and tied her to a rock. He took the mast out of its step and furled the sail and tied it. Then he put the mast on his shoulder and started to climb, it was then that he knew the depth of his tiredness. He stopped and looked back and saw the white naked line of the fish's backbone and the dark mass of the head with the bill and all the nakedness in between.

He started to climb again and at the top he fell and lay for some time with the mast across his shoulder. He tried to get up. But it was too difficult and he sat there with the mast on his shoulder.

Finally he put the mast down and stood up. He picked the mast up and put it on his shoulder and started up the road. He had to sit down five times before he reached his shack.

Inside the shack he leaned the mast against the wall. In the dark he found a water bottle and took a drink. Then he lay down on the bed. He pulled the blanket over his body and he slept face down on the newspapers with his arms out straight and the palms of his hands up.

He was asleep when the boy looked in the door in the morning. The boy saw the old man's hands and he started to cry. He went out very quietly to get some coffee and all the way down the road he was crying.

Many fishermen were around the skiff looking at what was lashed beside it and one was in the water, his trousers rolled up, measuring the skeleton.

The boy did not go down. He had been there before and one of the fishermen was looking after the skiff for him.

"How is he?" one of the fishermen shouted.

"Sleeping," the boy called. He did not care that they saw him crying. "Let no one disturb him."

"He was eighteen feet from nose to tail," the fisherman who was measuring him called.

"I believe it." the boy said.

He went into the Terrace and asked for a can of coffee.

"Hot and with plenty of milk and sugar in it."

"Anything more?"

"No. Afterwards I will see what he can eat."

"What a fish it was," the proprietor said. "There has never been such a fish. Tell him how sorry l am."

"Thanks," the boy said.

The boy carried the hot can of coffee up to the old man's shack and sat by him until he woke.

Finally the old man woke.

"Don't sit up," the boy said. "Drink this." He poured some of the coffee in a glass.

The old man took it and drank it.

"They beat me, Manolin," he said. "They truly beat me."

"He didn't beat you. Not the fish."

"No. Truly. It was afterwards."

"Pedrico is looking after the skiff and the gear. What do you want done with the head?"

"Let Pedrico chop it up to use in fish traps."

"And the spear?"

"You keep it if you want it."

"I want it," the boy said. "Now we must make our plans about the other things."

"Did they search for me?"

"Of course. With coast guard and with planes."

"The ocean is very big and a skiff is small and hard to see," the old man said. He noticed how pleasant it was to have someone to talk to instead of speaking only to himself and to the sea.

"I missed you," he said. "What did you catch?"

"One the first day. One the second and two the third."

"Very good."

"Now we can fish together again."

"No. I am not lucky. I am not lucky anymore."

"The hell with luck," the boy said. "I'll bring the luck with me."

"What will your family say?"

"I do not care. I caught two yesterday. But we will fish together now for I still have much to learn. You get your hands well, old man."

"I know how to care for them. In the night I spat something strange and felt something in my chest was broken."

"Get that well too," the boy said. "Lie down, old man. I will bring you your clean shirt. And something to eat."

"Bring any of the papers of the time that I was gone," the old man said.

"You must get well fast for there is much that I can learn and you can teach me everything. How much did you suffer?"

"Plenty," the old man said.

"I'll bring the food and the papers," the boy said. "Rest well, old man. I will bring something from the drugstore for your hands."

As the boy went out the door and down the road he was crying again.

That afternoon there was a party of tourists at the Terrace and looking down in the water among the empty beer cans and dead barracudas a woman saw a great long white spine with a huge tail at the end that lifted and swung with the tide.

"What's that?" she asked a waiter and pointed to the long backbone of the great fish that was now just garbage waiting to go out with the tide.

"Tiburon," the waiter said, "Eshark." He wanted to explain what had happened.

"I didn't know sharks had such handsome, beautifully formed tails."

"I didn't either." her male companion said.

Up the road, in his shack, the old man was sleeping again. He was still sleeping on his face and the boy was sitting by him watching him. The old man was dreaming about the lions.

- THE END –

Hope you have enjoyed the reading!