

The novel opens with an explanation of how Santiago, the old Cuban fisherman, has not caught a single fish in eighty-four days. For the initial forty-four days, a boy named Manolin had kept company with the old man. Then Santiago, because of his ill fortune, is termed 'Salao,' meaning bad luck. As a result, Manolin's parents forbid the boy from travelling with Santiago and order him to go on another boat, which catches many fish. The boy is saddened at the prospect of deserting old Santiago, whom he admires as a father. The old man also sorely misses the company of the young boy, who ran small errands for him, often brought him food, and was like a son. It is not the first time that Santiago has had a stretch of bad luck in his fishing career. He tells Manolin that he once went without catching a fish for eighty-seven days, but then his luck changed. Now Santiago is quite confident that he will succeed again because he knows a few "tricks" about the sea and is still strong enough to land a really big fish. He feels hopeful that his luck will soon turn again. Some of the other fisherman make fun of old Santiago and his bad luck; other fisherman, who know Santiago's real worth and talent, regard his situation with sadness. The old man lets neither the teasing nor the pity affect him in any measure. On the morning of the eighty-fifth day, Santiago plans to set out early and go far out into the sea. Before he departs, Manolin comes to wish the old man good luck and bring him coffee. Before it is light, Santiago rows his weather beaten skiff away from the shore, starting his fateful trip. At his age, Santiago should probably fish close to the shore, but he ventures far out. His bravery is not the foolhardiness of an unthinking and blind hero; nor is it the last resort of a desperate man whose patience has run thin, after waiting eighty-four days to catch a fish. Instead his bravery comes with selfconfidence; his alert mind and active body are fully prepared to face any contingency. Santiago is a sensitive soul who loves mankind and nature. He sees different types of birds and feels a oneness with them. He considers the flying fish and the dolphins his friends. He thinks of the sea as a kind and beautiful, but willful, woman, who showers both favors and curses when one least expects them. He is also a cautious and observant fisherman. He slowly and carefully puts out his hooks, covered with tuna and sardines, at different depths and rows. Santiago also refuses to let his past luck cast a shadow over his present opportunity. At about noon on the first day, Santiago spies a bird in the sky; it is a man-of-war, come to feed on fish. It is a significant sign for the old fisherman, because the bird has probably spied flying fish, which are also eaten by dolphins. The dolphins, in turn, will attract the tuna, which attract the marlin. It is a big marlin that Santiago really wants to catch. Before long, he hooks a large fish, which seems to be a marlin; he wishes he knew its size so he could estimate what he is up against. When Santiago tries to pull the fish in, the catch is so heavy that the line threatens to break and the boat almost capsizes. The fish begins to pull the boat in a northwestern direction. Santiago lets the marlin continue to tug, hoping it will tire out and come to the surface. He is also waiting for dusk, because the setting sun often attracts fish to the surface. The day draws to a close; the sun goes down, and the stars start glittering in the sky, but the fish still does not come to the surface or alter its course. Santiago prepares to wait out the night, even though the big fish is taking him further from the shore and the glimmering lights of Havana. Santiago begins to think about the fish on the end of the line and empathizes with it. Although he has caught many giant marlins in the past, this fish seems different and special; it knows to stay away from the shore, where it can be more easily caught. Other fish start taking Santiago's bait, but he cuts off all the

lines in order to concentrate on the huge fish. At times, he wishes that the boy were with him, but he does not let the fact that he is alone on the sea worry him; instead, he determines that he will kill the fish before sunset, no matter what happens. The fish, however, does not come up to the surface; consequently, Santiago is unable to kill it before the darkness sets in. The night is calm and uneventful. The second day dawns without any major change in either the fish or Santiago's position. The fish is still showing as much strength, courage, determination, and endurance as Santiago. He continues to swim and tow the boat against the current. Santiago hopes that soon the fish will turn into the current, proving that it is tiring. Santiago admits that he himself is beginning to feel a bit tired. In order to stay awake, Santiago has a steady conversation with himself, with the fish, or with the birds that come to rest on the boat. Suddenly the fish pulls the line with such a strong, quick jerk that if Santiago were not fully alert; the boat would have capsized. When it is calm again, he notices that his right hand has a deep gash in it and is bleeding profusely. He dips his bleeding hand in the water to stop the blood from flowing out. He believes that both he and the fish are now hurting. Santiago wishes he could see the fish that he has caught, but it remains tantalizingly beneath the surface of the water. Being a pragmatic man, Santiago knows that he will need both of his hands and his whole body in top working condition if he is to master the fish and then return safely to shore. He is worried about the cut in his right hand and the cramps in his left. He first tries to tend to his hurting hands; then in order to preserve his strength, he eats some raw tuna. While he eats, he worries that both of his hands are temporarily useless, one being cut, one having cramps, and both being used to help him eat. He wonders what he would do if the fish jumped when his hands were idle. At noon, the fish surfaces dramatically and majestically ahead of the boat. It is almost as if the noble creature were staging a magnificent drama before Santiago to show him exactly what he is up against. The giant marlin is more than eighteen feet long with a dark purple head and lavender-striped back and sides. Santiago imagines that the fish weighs more than fifteen hundred pounds. It is not the first time that Santiago has caught such a huge fish, but it is the first time that he is alone, waging a physical and psychological battle against a powerful giant. Although he marvels at the size and strength of the fish, Santiago feels that he has the upper hand because of his human will and intelligence. Though he is not overtly religious, Santiago begins to pray, begging for help in holding on to and killing the fish. Although the prayers do not ease his physical suffering, they encourage his mental tenacity. He declares that he will show the fish "what a man can do and what a man endure" and begins to concentrate on holding on to the line and preserving his strength. As Santiago's left hand is still cramping, he uses his right hand to hold line, but it cuts the hand more deeply. The fish turns east of north, still towing the boat, while Santiago holds the line. The old man tries to ignore his tiredness and the pain in his shoulders caused by the line. Instead, he thinks about lions on the beach and about Joe DiMaggio, the great American baseball player known for his supreme strength and courage; both images serve as inspirations to him. To bolster his courage further, Santiago remembers the time he had been victorious in a game that had been tied for more than a day. As the sun begins to sink below the western horizon on this second day, Santiago wonders what the night will bring. Thus far, the fish has not altered his course or changed its depth for long; therefore, the line remains as taut as ever in his right hand. With his left hand, Santiago catches a dolphin, which he immediately eats. He criticizes

himself for having come out to sea without salt or lime, thinking the dolphin meat would taste better with either. He also reproaches himself for not drying out some salt from the seawater during the heat of the day. Feeling a bit refreshed after eating, Santiago counts his blessings. His right hand is healing, his left hand is no longer cramping, and his legs are strong; additionally, Santiago still feels that he has a great advantage over the fish, which has a hook in its throat and an empty belly, since it has not eaten in two days. Then Santiago begins to admire the giant fish, feeling it has exhibited tremendous dignity in its bearing. He feels that the people who will eventually eat it are really not worthy of such a marvelous creature. Thinking such thoughts, the old man drifts off to sleep for about two hours; it is the first rest he has had in two days. Santiago knows that sleeping is necessary if he is to keep his head clear. As the third day dawns, the weather deteriorates. Santiago predicts that there will be a hurricane before long. The contest between the old man and the fish also grows more intense. Santiago is extremely fatigued, and the cramps return to his left hand. In truth, his whole body is racked with pain, but he convinces himself that "pain does not matter to a man." Santiago thinks that the fish must also be feeling pain, for it has started to circle. As a result, the old man increases the strain on the line, hoping that the circles will become shorter. He dreams of the fish coming to the surface, close to the boat, so close that Santiago can kill it. The old man sees the fish on its third turn and again appreciates its sheer size and beauty. He keeps his harpoon close by and ready, hoping that the fish will soon come close enough for him to kill, preferably by striking its heart not its head. After several failed tries, Santiago successfully spears the great fish just before noon. When it is still, the fisherman passes a line through its gills and mouth and makes a noose around its tail and another round its middle; he then ties the fish to the boat. Feeling triumphant, Santiago prepares to go home. Santiago is blissfully unaware of the presence of sharks that have been attracted by the blood of the giant fish. He catches and eats a few shrimps, trying to renew some of his energy. He then spies the first sharks and attacks them with his harpoon; unfortunately, he loses the harpoon in the battle. As a result, the sharks begin to bite off large chunks from the fish. The old man makes an improvised harpoon from his oar and fights all night to defend the giant fish he has caught. It is, however, a losing battle; during the night, the sharks devour the entire fish. By dawn, only the bare skeleton is left. Sad and in pain, Santiago departs for home with the skeleton tied to his boat.

Totally exhausted, Santiago reaches the shore; after caring for his boat, he begins to climb the hill towards his hut. He is so weak and weary that he falls several times. Finally reaching the hut, he falls on the bed and thankfully sinks into a deep slumber. Because of the storm, the fishermen have not gone out. They see the huge skeleton of the fish, admire its gigantic size, and feel pity for the old man whose incredible efforts have been wasted. They do not understand that Santiago has really won a victory. In catching the fish, the old man has demonstrated grace under pressure, man's supremacy over his circumstances, and his ability to withstand terrible odds. The boy Manolin goes to the hut to see Santiago, kindly bringing him coffee. The boy cries when he sees the old man's bleeding hands. The gentle Santiago comforts him. Together, they plan to go fishing again. Manolin leaves Santiago alone so he can sleep; the old man dreams of the lions on the African beach.