

The novel opens with an explanation of how Santiago, the old Cuban fisherman, has not caught a single fish in eighty-four days. The boy is saddened at the prospect of deserting old Santiago, whom he admires as a father. 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. 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. 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. Then Santiago begins to admire the giant fish, feeling it has exhibited tremendous dignity in its bearing. Then Santiago, because of his ill fortune, is termed 'Salao,' meaning bad luck. 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. 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. Santiago predicts that there will be a hurricane before long. Santiago is extremely fatigued, and the cramps return to his left hand. For the initial forty-four days, a boy named Manolin had kept company with the old man. 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. 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. As the third day dawns, the weather deteriorates. 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. The old man tries to ignore his tiredness and the pain in his shoulders caused by the line. 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. The contest between the old man and the fish also grows more intense.