

The Old Man and the Sea Summary

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Summary

Day One

Santiago, an old fisherman, has gone 84 days without catching a fish. For the first 40 days, a boy named Manolin worked with him. But Manolin's parents made him leave Santiago. They made Manolin work on a **"luckier"** boat. Even though Manolin now works elsewhere, he still helps Santiago to carry his empty skiff (boat) at the end of each day. Santiago's face and hands are scarred from years of handling fishing gear and large fish. Though he is old, his eyes are still bright like the color of the sea. His eyes remain **"cheerful and undefeated."** After another unsuccessful day, Manolin helps Santiago bring in his boat and equipment. Manolin tells Santiago that he has made some money working on the luckier boat. He offers to fish with Santiago again. Santiago advises him to stay with the lucky boat. But they both agree that they believe Santiago will catch a big fish soon.

Manolin offers to buy Santiago a beer at the Terrace, a small restaurant by the docks. The other fishermen there tease Santiago. But Manolin does not care about them. He talks with Santiago about the time they first fished together when Manolin was just five years old. Manolin offers to bring Santiago fresh sardines for bait. As Santiago drinks beer, he tells Manolin that he plans to fish far out at sea the next day. Manolin wonders how Santiago's vision remains so sharp after all these years. Santiago smiles and says, "I am a strange old man." After the beer, Manolin helps Santiago carry his fishing gear to his small shack. Santiago used to have a photo of his wife hanging on the wall of his shack. But he took it down because it made him feel too lonely.

That night, Santiago offers Manolin some food. But Manolin knows Santiago has very little food. They sit on the porch and read about baseball in the newspaper. Santiago tells Manolin that he believes tomorrow, the 85th day, will be lucky. Manolin jokes, asking why Santiago does not wait until the 87th day to break his longest unlucky streak (It means Santiago had gone 86 days without catching a fish before). Santiago laughs and says such a long streak could not happen twice. Later, Manolin goes to get the sardines for Santiago for the bait. When he returns, Santiago is asleep. Manolin covers him with a blanket. When Santiago wakes up, Manolin gives him food that Martin, the owner of the Terrace, gave as a gift. Santiago is

grateful and says he must thank Martin by giving him a part of the next big fish he catches. Santiago and Manolin talk about baseball. They talk about Santiago's favorite player, Joe DiMaggio, whose father was a fisherman. Manolin tells Santiago that he thinks Santiago is the best fisherman. Santiago humbly disagrees but admits that while he is no longer strong, he has **"tricks"** and determination. After Manolin leaves, Santiago lies down to sleep. He no longer dreams of storms, women, or fish. He only dreams of the beaches of Africa and the lions he saw there when he was young.

Day Two

Santiago wakes up early. He goes to Manolin's house to wake him. Santiago drinks coffee and heads out to fish. He won't eat anything the whole day because eating bores him now. Manolin helps Santiago load his boat. They wish each other luck. Santiago rows into the water. Santiago rows over a deep part of the ocean, called "the great well." In this part of the ocean, fish usually gather. He hears flying fish around him and thinks of them as his friends. He feels sorry for the birds that struggle to catch the fish. He admires how hard they must work to survive. Santiago calls the sea "la mar." It means he thinks of the sea as a woman who can either give or withhold favors, depending on her mood. Younger fishermen, however, call the sea "el mar," as if it were a masculine force to battle. Santiago disagrees with them. (Santiago loves nature and thinks of himself as a part of it.)

By sunrise, Santiago finds a good spot and drops his baited lines. Each line is measured to a specific depth. He is proud of how straight he keeps his lines, unlike the younger fishermen, who let their lines drift. As the sun rises higher, he marvels at how his eyesight is still good. Santiago notices a seabird diving. It is a sign that fish are nearby. He rows further out but arrives too late. The big fish has moved on, but Santiago remains confident. Later in the morning, Santiago catches a 10-pound tuna. He plans to use the tuna as bait. He talks to himself. He then wonders when he started talking to himself. He realizes it was probably when Manolin stopped fishing with him.

Around noon, one of his lines tightens. Santiago feels a marlin nibbling on the sardine bait 600 feet below. He patiently waits until he thinks the marlin has taken the hook, and then tries to reel it in. The marlin does not move. It is a massive fish. The marlin begins to pull Santiago's boat far out to sea. As night falls, Santiago holds onto the line. He loses sight of Cuba's shore but knows he can find his way back by following Havana's lights. As night deepens, Santiago wishes Manolin could see his catch. He pities the marlin and wonders if it is an old fish, like him. Santiago knows that the marlin is male and feels they are now connected. Two creatures alone in the vast sea. Santiago recalls a time when he and Manolin caught a female marlin. The

male marlin had stayed beside her until the very end, loyal and unwavering. When they caught the female, the male followed their boat, heartbroken.

Day Three

Before dawn, another fish bites on one of Santiago's other baited lines. Santiago quickly cuts the other lines to focus solely on the marlin. The marlin suddenly dives. The fish pulls Santiago and cuts his face on the line. Santiago vows to fight the marlin until one of them dies. The fish pulls the boat northeast. If the marlin dies deep underwater, Santiago knows he won't have the strength to pull it up. Santiago praises the marlin's strength but vows to kill it. A small bird lands on the marlin's line. Santiago talks to the bird. He thinks the bird is very tired and feels pity. The bird flies off when the marlin moves suddenly and cuts Santiago's hand. He curses himself for losing focus. Santiago washes his wound and eats the tuna he caught earlier to keep up his strength. His hand soon cramps. As Santiago nurses his cramped hand, he sees a flock of ducks. He feels that no man is ever truly alone on the sea. He wishes Manolin were there to rub his cramped hands.

Suddenly, the marlin jumps out of the water. It is an enormous, dark purple fish. The fish is two feet longer than Santiago's boat. Santiago struggles to keep the line tight. He thinks the marlin must be over 1,000 pounds. He feels proud. He also feels nervous about catching such a giant fish alone. Santiago prays, promising to say 10 Hail Marys and 10 Our Fathers if he catches the fish. He feels comforted by the prayers, though his pain does not lessen. As the day ends, Santiago prepares to catch more food. He thinks about why he is catching the marlin. By catching the fish, he wants to show ***"what a man can do and what a man endures."*** He also wants to prove to Manolin that he is indeed a "strange old man."

Santiago is very tired and in pain. To distract himself, Santiago thinks about baseball. He tells himself that he must try to be worthy of the great DiMaggio, "who does all things perfectly even with the pain of the bone spur in his heel." He wonders if DiMaggio would stay with the marlin fish as long as he stays with it. He knows that DiMaggio would. Then, Santiago thinks that men may be inferior to the "great birds and beasts." For a moment, Santiago wishes that he were the marlin. That is, unless sharks were to come. If the sharks come, Santiago thinks, both he and the marlin would be in trouble. To prop up his confidence, Santiago remembers when, as a young man in Casablanca, he arm-wrestled a great "negro." The negro was the strongest man on the docks. The arm-wrestling lasted a day and a night, and finally, Santiago won. For a long time after that, he was known as "The Champion."

As night falls, Santiago eats some of the dolphinfish he caught. He wonders why the lions are the only thing he dreams about now.

Day Four

The marlin suddenly jumps, waking Santiago. In the dark, it leaps again and again. The fish pulls Santiago forward and reopens the cuts on his hand. Santiago holds tight. He is determined not to let the fish go. At sunrise, the marlin begins circling Santiago's boat. It is a sign that the fish is tiring. Santiago pulls it closer inch by inch, but the struggle takes hours. Santiago finally drives his harpoon into the marlin's heart. The fish makes a final leap, then falls into the water, dead. Santiago lashes (ties with rope) the fish alongside his boat. He estimates it weighs 1,500 pounds. The fish is far too big to bring on board (on his boat). He begins sailing toward Cuba. He imagines how much money the fish will bring and how proud Manolin will be.

An hour later, a Mako shark appears. The shark is drawn by the marlin's blood. Santiago kills the shark with his harpoon, but loses the harpoon in the process. The shark's bite took a 40-pound hunk of flesh from the marlin. More blood now pours from the marlin into the water. Santiago knows this will attract more sharks. It seems to Santiago that his battle with the marlin was worthless. More sharks will just come and eat the marlin. But Santiago quickly reminds himself that **"a man can be destroyed but not defeated."** He will fight till the end.

Two more sharks attack. Santiago kills them with a knife tied to an oar. However, they eat a quarter of the marlin. Santiago feels ashamed and apologizes to the marlin. As night falls, more sharks come. Santiago fights them with whatever he has left—a club and finally the boat's tiller. By the time he drives off the last shark, nothing is left of the marlin but its skeleton. Santiago arrives at the harbor before dawn. He drags his boat's mast on his shoulder to his shack. He stops on the way to rest several times.

Day Five

In the morning, Manolin comes to Santiago's shack and finds him sleeping. He is relieved to see that Santiago is alive. He notices the cuts on Santiago's hands and begins to cry. Manolin quietly goes outside to get some coffee for him.

Down by the water, several fishermen are gathered around Santiago's boat. They are looking at the huge skeleton of the marlin tied to it. They estimate that the fish was about 18 feet long. When they see Manolin, they ask how Santiago is doing. They feel guilty for all the times they had laughed at him.

When Santiago wakes up, Manolin is there with the coffee. Santiago tells him to give the marlin's head to Pedrico to use as bait for his fish traps. Manolin tells Santiago that the Coast Guard and search planes had been looking for him for days. He then promises Santiago that he

will fish with him again, no matter what his family says. When Manolin asks how much he suffered at sea, Santiago simply replies, "Plenty." Manolin then goes out to get Santiago some food and the daily newspapers. Later, some tourists at the Terrace notice the big skeleton of the marlin in the water. They ask the waiter what it is. The waiter tells them "Tiburón," meaning shark. The tourists misunderstand and think the skeleton belongs to a shark.

When Manolin returns to the shack, Santiago is asleep again. Manolin quietly watches over him as Santiago dreams of lions playing on the beach.

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