Santiago, an old fisherman, has gone eighty-four days without catching a fish. For the first forty days, a boy named Manolin had fished with him, but Manolin's parents, who call Santiago *salao,* or "the worst form of unlucky," forced Manolin to leave him in order to work in a more prosperous boat. The old man is wrinkled, splotched, and scarred from handling heavy fish on cords, but his eyes, which are the color of the sea, remain "cheerful and undefeated."

Having made some money with the successful fishermen, the boy offers to return to Santiago's skiff, reminding him of their previous eighty-seven-day run of bad luck, which culminated in their catching big fish every day for three weeks. He talks with the old man as they haul in Santiago's fishing gear and laments that he was forced to obey his father, who lacks faith and, as a result, made him switch boats. The pair stops for a beer at a terrace café, where fishermen make fun of Santiago. The old man does not mind. Santiago and Manolin reminisce about the many years the two of them fished together, and the boy begs the old man to let him provide fresh bait fish for him. The old man accepts the gift with humility. Santiago announces his plans to go "far out" in the sea the following day.

Manolin and Santiago haul the gear to the old man's shack, which is furnished with nothing more than the barest necessities: a bed, a table and chair, and a place to cook. On the wall are two pictures: one of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and one of the Virgin of Cobre, the patroness of Cuba. The old man has taken down the photograph of his wife, which made him feel "too lonely." The two go through their usual dinner ritual, in which the boy asks Santiago what he is going to eat, and the old man replies, "yellow rice with fish," and then offers some to the boy. The boy declines, and his offer to start the old man's fire is rejected. In reality, there is no food.

Excited to read the baseball scores, Santiago pulls out a newspaper, which he says was given to him by Perico at the bodega. Manolin goes to get the bait fish and returns with some dinner as well, a gift from Martin, the café owner. The old man is moved by Martin's thoughtfulness and promises to repay the kindness. Manolin and Santiago discuss baseball. Santiago is a huge admirer

of “the great DiMaggio,” whose father was a fisherman. After discussing with Santiago the greatest ballplayers and the greatest baseball managers, the boy declares that Santiago is the greatest fisherman: “There are many good fishermen and some great ones. But there is only you.” Finally, the boy leaves, and the old man goes to sleep. He dreams his sweet, recurring dream, of lions playing on the white beaches of Africa, a scene he saw from his ship when he was a very young man.

The old man hit him on the head for kindness and kicked him, his body still shuddering, under the shade of the stern.

(See Important Quotations Explained)

The next morning, before sunrise, the old man goes to Manolin’s house to wake the boy. The two head back to Santiago’s shack, carry the old man’s gear to his boat, and drink coffee from condensed milk cans. Santiago has slept well and is confident about the day’s prospects. He and Manolin part on the beach, wishing each other good luck.

The old man rows steadily away from shore, toward the deep waters of the Gulf Stream. He hears the leaps and whirs of the flying fish, which he considers to be his friends, and thinks with sympathy of the small, frail birds that try to catch them. He loves the sea, though at times it can be cruel. He thinks of the sea as a woman whose wild behavior is beyond her control. The old man drops his baited fishing lines to various measured depths and rows expertly to keep them from drifting with the current. Above all else, he is precise.

The sun comes up. Santiago continues to move away from shore, observing his world as he drifts along. He sees flying fish pursued by dolphins; a diving, circling seabird; Sargasso weed, a type of seaweed found in the Gulf Stream; the distasteful purple Portuguese man-of-war; and the small fish that swim among the jellyfish-like creatures’ filaments. Rowing farther and farther out, Santiago follows the seabird that is hunting for fish, using it as a guide. Soon,

one of the old man’s lines goes taut. He pulls up a ten-pound tuna, which, he says out loud, will make a lovely piece of bait. He wonders when he developed the habit of talking to himself but does not remember. He thinks that if the other fishermen heard him talking, they would think him crazy, although he knows he isn’t. Eventually, the old man realizes that he has sailed so far out that he can no longer see the green of the shore.

When the projecting stick that marks the top of the hundred-fathom line dips sharply, Santiago is sure that the fish tugging on the line is of a considerable size, and he prays that it will take the bait. The marlin plays with the bait for a while, and when it does finally take the bait, it starts to move with it, pulling the boat. The old man gives a mighty pull, then another, but he gains nothing. The fish drags the skiff farther into the sea. No land at all is visible to Santiago now.

All day the fish pulls the boat as the old man braces the line with his back and holds it taut in his hands, ready to give more line if necessary. The struggle goes on all night, as the fish continues to pull the boat. The glow given off by the lights of Havana gradually fades, signifying that the boat is the farthest from shore it has been so far. Over and over, the old man wishes he had the boy with him. When he sees two porpoises playing in the water, Santiago begins to pity his quarry and consider it a brother. He thinks back to the time that he caught one of a pair of marlin: the male fish let the female take the bait, then he stayed by the boat, as though in mourning. Although the memory makes him sad, Santiago’s determination is unchecked: as the marlin swims out, the old man goes “beyond all people in the world” to find him.

The sun rises and the fish has not tired, though it is now swimming in shallower waters. The old man cannot increase the tension on the line, because if it is too taut it will break and the fish will get away. Also, if the hook makes too big a cut in the fish, the fish may get away from it. Santiago hopes that the fish will jump, because its air sacs would fill and prevent the fish from going too deep into the water, which would make it easier to pull out. A yellow weed attaches to the line, helping to slow the fish. Santiago can do nothing but

hold on. He pledges his love and respect to the fish, but he nevertheless promises that he will kill his opponent before the day ends.

A small, tired warbler (a type of bird) lands on the stern of the skiff, flutters around Santiago's head, then perches on the taut fishing line that links the old man to the big fish. The old man suspects that it is the warbler's first trip, and that it knows nothing of the hawks that will meet the warbler as it nears land. Knowing that the warbler cannot understand him, the old man tells the bird to stay and rest up before heading toward shore. Just then the marlin surges, nearly pulling Santiago overboard, and the bird departs. Santiago notices that his hand is bleeding from where the line has cut it.

Aware that he will need to keep his strength, the old man makes himself eat the tuna he caught the day before, which he had expected to use as bait. While he cuts and eats the fish with his right hand, his already cut left hand cramps and tightens into a claw under the strain of taking all the fish's resistance. Santiago is angered and frustrated by the weakness of his own body, but the tuna, he hopes, will reinvigorate the hand. As he eats, he feels a brotherly desire to feed the marlin too.

While waiting for the cramp in his hand to ease, Santiago looks across the vast waters and thinks himself to be completely alone. A flight of ducks passes overhead, and he realizes that it is impossible for a man to be alone on the sea. The slant of the fishing line changes, indicating to the old fisherman that the fish is approaching the surface. Suddenly, the fish leaps magnificently into the air, and Santiago sees that it is bigger than any he has ever witnessed; it is two feet longer than the skiff itself. Santiago declares it "great" and promises never to let the fish learn its own strength. The line races out until the fish slows to its earlier pace. By noon, the old man's hand is uncramped, and though he claims he is not religious, he says ten Hail Marys and ten Our Fathers and promises that, if he catches the fish, he will make a pilgrimage to the Virgin of Cobre. In case his struggle with the marlin should continue for another night, Santiago baits another line in hopes of catching another meal.

The second day of Santiago's struggle with the marlin wears on. The old man alternately questions and justifies seeking the death of such a noble opponent. As dusk approaches, Santiago's thoughts turn to baseball. The great DiMaggio, thinks the old man, plays brilliantly despite the pain of a bone spur in his heel. Santiago is not actually sure what a bone spur is, but he is sure he would not be able to bear the pain of one himself. (A bone spur is an outgrowth that projects from the bone.) He wonders if DiMaggio would stay with the marlin. To boost his confidence, the old man recalls the great all-night arm-wrestling match he won as a young man. Having beaten "the great negro from Cienfuegos [a town in Cuba]," Santiago earned the title *El Campeón,* or "The Champion."

Just before nightfall, a dolphin takes the second bait Santiago had dropped. The old man hauls it in with one hand and clubs it dead. He saves the meat for the following day. Although Santiago boasts to the marlin that he feels prepared for their impending fight, he is really numb with pain. The stars come out. Santiago considers the stars his friends, as he does the great marlin. He considers himself lucky that his lot in life does not involve hunting anything so great as the stars or the moon. Again, he feels sorry for the marlin, though he is as determined as ever to kill it. The fish will feed many people, Santiago decides, though they are not worthy of the creature's great dignity. By starlight, still bracing and handling the line, Santiago considers rigging the oars so that the fish will have to pull harder and eventually tire itself out. He fears this strategy would ultimately result in the loss of the fish. He decides to "rest," which really just means putting down his hands and letting the line go across his back, instead of using his own strength to resist his opponent.

After "resting" for two hours, Santiago chastises himself for not sleeping, and he fears what could happen should his mind become "unclear." He butchers the dolphin he caught earlier and finds two flying fish in its belly. In the chilling night, he eats half of a fillet of dolphin meat and one of the flying fish. While the marlin is quiet, the old man decides to sleep. He has several dreams: a school

of porpoises leaps from and returns to the ocean; he is back in his hut during a storm; and he again dreams of the lions on the beach in Africa

The marlin wakes Santiago by jerking the line. The fish jumps out of the water again and again, and Santiago is thrown into the bow of the skiff, facedown in his dolphin meat. The line feeds out fast, and the old man brakes against it with his back and hands. His left hand, especially, is badly cut. Santiago wishes that the boy were with him to wet the coils of the line, which would lessen the friction.

The old man wipes the crushed dolphin meat off his face, fearing that it will make him nauseated and he will lose his strength. Looking at his damaged hand, he reflects that “pain does not matter to a man.” He eats the second flying fish in hopes of building up his strength. As the sun rises, the marlin begins to circle. For hours the old man fights the circling fish for every inch of line, slowly pulling it in. He feels faint and dizzy and sees black spots before his eyes. The fish riots against the line, battering the boat with its spear. When it passes under the boat, Santiago cannot believe its size. As the marlin continues to circle, Santiago adds enough pressure to the line to bring the fish closer and closer to the skiff. The old man thinks that the fish is killing him, and admires him for it, saying, “I do not care who kills who.” Eventually, he pulls the fish onto its side by the boat and plunges his harpoon into it. The fish lurches out of the water, brilliantly and beautifully alive as it dies. When it falls back into the water, its blood stains the waves.

The old man pulls the skiff up alongside the fish and fastens the fish to the side of the boat. He thinks about how much money he will be able to make from such a big fish, and he imagines that DiMaggio would be proud of him. Santiago’s hands are so cut up that they resemble raw meat. With the mast up and the sail drawn, man, fish, and boat head for land. In his light-headed state, the old man finds himself wondering for a moment if he is bringing the fish in or vice versa. He shakes some shrimp from a patch of gulf weed and eats them raw. He watches the marlin carefully as the ship sails on. The old man’s wounds remind him that his battle with the marlin was real and not a dream.

An hour later, a mako shark arrives, having smelled the marlin's blood. Except for its jaws full of talonlike teeth, the shark is a beautiful fish. When the shark hits the marlin, the old man sinks his harpoon into the shark's head. The shark lashes on the water and, eventually, sinks, taking the harpoon and the old man's rope with it. The mako has taken nearly forty pounds of meat, so fresh blood from the marlin spills into the water, inevitably drawing more sharks to attack. Santiago realizes that his struggle with the marlin was for nothing; all will soon be lost. But, he muses, "a man can be destroyed but not defeated."

Santiago tries to cheer himself by thinking that DiMaggio would be pleased by his performance, and he wonders again if his hands equal DiMaggio's bone spurs as a handicap. He tries to be hopeful, thinking that it is silly, if not sinful, to stop hoping. He reminds himself that he didn't kill the marlin simply for food, that he killed it out of pride and love. He wonders if it is a sin to kill something you love. The shark, on the other hand, he does not feel guilty about killing, because he did it in self-defense. He decides that "everything kills everything else in some way."

Two hours later, a pair of shovel-nosed sharks arrives, and Santiago makes a noise likened to the sound a man might make as nails are driven through his hands. The sharks attack, and Santiago fights them with a knife that he had lashed to an oar as a makeshift weapon. He enjoyed killing the mako because it was a worthy opponent, a mighty and fearless predator, but he has nothing but disdain for the scavenging shovel-nosed sharks. The old man kills them both, but not before they take a good quarter of the marlin, including the best meat. Again, Santiago wishes that he hadn't killed the marlin. He apologizes to the dead marlin for having gone out so far, saying it did neither of them any good.

Still hopeful that the whole ordeal had been a dream, Santiago cannot bear to look at the mutilated marlin. Another shovel-nosed shark arrives. The old man kills it, but he loses his knife in the process. Just before nightfall, two more sharks approach. The old man's arsenal has been reduced to the club he uses to kill bait fish. He manages to club the sharks into retreat, but not before they

repeatedly maul the marlin. Stiff, sore, and weary, he hopes he does not have to fight anymore. He even dares to imagine making it home with the half-fish that remains. Again, he apologizes to the marlin carcass and attempts to console it by reminding the fish how many sharks he has killed. He wonders how many sharks the marlin killed when it was alive, and he pledges to fight the sharks until he dies. Although he hopes to be lucky, Santiago believes that he "violated [his] luck" when he sailed too far out.

Around midnight, a pack of sharks arrives. Near-blind in the darkness, Santiago strikes out at the sounds of jaws and fins. Something snatches his club. He breaks off the boat's tiller and makes a futile attempt to use it as a weapon. When the last shark tries to tear at the tough head of the marlin, the old man clubs the shark until the tiller splinters. He plunges the sharp edge into the shark's flesh and the beast lets go. No meat is left on the marlin.

The old man spits blood into the water, which frightens him for a moment. He settles in to steer the boat, numb and past all feeling. He asks himself what it was that defeated him and concludes, "Nothing . . . I went out too far." When he reaches the harbor, all lights are out and no one is near. He notices the skeleton of the fish still tied to the skiff. He takes down the mast and begins to shoulder it up the hill to his shack. It is terrifically heavy, and he is forced to sit down five times before he reaches his home. Once there, the old man sleeps.

Early the next morning, Manolin comes to the old man's shack, and the sight of his friend's ravaged hands brings him to tears. He goes to fetch coffee. Fishermen have gathered around Santiago's boat and measured the carcass at eighteen feet. Manolin waits for the old man to wake up, keeping his coffee warm for him so it is ready right away. When the old man wakes, he and Manolin talk warmly. Santiago says that the sharks beat him, and Manolin insists that he will work with the old man again, regardless of what his parents say. He reveals that there had been a search for Santiago involving the coast guard and planes. Santiago is happy to have someone to talk to, and after he and Manolin make plans, the old man sleeps again. Manolin leaves to find food and the newspapers for the old man, and to tell Pedrico that the marlin's

head is his. That afternoon two tourists at the terrace café mistake the great skeleton for that of a shark. Manolin continues to watch over the old man as he sleeps and dreams of the lions.