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The Old Man and the Sea

By Ernest Hemingway

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To Charlie Shribner

And

To Max Perkins

He was an old man who fished alone in a sk iff in the Gulf Stream and he had gone

eighty-four days now with out taking a fish. In the first fo rty days a boy had been with him.

But after 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, and the boy had gone

at their orders in another boat which caught three good fish the first week. It made the

boy sad to see the old man come in each day with his skif f empty and he always went

down to help him carry either the coiled li nes or the gaff and harpoon and the sail that

was furled around the mast. Th e sail was patched with flour sacks and, furled, it looked

like the flag of permanent defeat.

The old man was thin and gaunt with deep wrinkles in the back of his neck. The

brown blotches of the benevolent skin cancer the sun brings fr om its [9] reflection on the

tropic sea were on his cheeks . The blotches ran well down the sides of his face and his

hands had the deep-creased scars from handli ng heavy fish on the cords. But none of

these scars were fresh. They were as old as erosions in a fishless desert.

Everything about him was old except his eyes and they were the same color as the

sea and were cheerful and undefeated.

“Santiago,” the boy said to him as they cl imbed the bank from where the skiff was

hauled up. “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 with them.”

“But remember how you went eighty-seven days without fish and then we caught big

ones every day for three weeks.”

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- 2 - “I remember,” the old man said. “I know yo u did not leave me because you doubted.”

“It was papa made me leave. I am a boy and I must obey him.”

“I know,” the old man said. “It is quite normal.” “He hasn’t much faith.”

[10] “No,” the old man said. “B ut we have. Haven’t we?”

“Yes,” the boy said. “Can I offe r you a beer on the Terrace an d 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 and he

was noteangry. Others, of the older fishermen, look ed at him and were sad. But they did

not show it and they spoke politely about the current and the depths they had drifted

their lines at and the steady good weather and of what they had seen. The successful

fishermen of that day were already in and had butchered their marlin out and carried

them laid full length across two planks, with two men staggering at the end of each plank,

to the fish house where they waited for the ice truck to ca rry them to the market in

Havana. Those who had caught sharks had take n them to the shark factory on the other

side of the cove where they were hoisted on a block and tackle, their livers removed, their

fins cut off and their hides skinned out and their flesh cut into strips for salting.

When the wind was in the east a smell came across the harbour from the shark

factory; but today there [11] was only the fa int edge of the odour because the wind had

backed into the north and then dropped off and it was pleasant and su nny on the Terrace.

“Santiago,” the boy said.

“Yes,” the old man said. He was holding his glass and thinking of many years ago.

“Can I go out to get sardines for you for tomorrow?”

“No. Go and play baseball. I can stil l 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 ma n said. “You are already a man.”

“How old was I when you firs t took me in a boat?”

“Five and you nearly were killed when I brought the fish in too green and he nearly

tore the boat to pieces. Can you remember?”

“I can remember the tail slapping and banging and the thwart breaking and the

noise of the clubbing. I can re member you throwing me into the bow where the wet coiled

lines were and feeling the whole boat shiver and the noise of you clubbing him like

chopping a tree down and the sw eet blood smell all over me.”

[12] “Can you really remember that or did I just tell it to you?”