

ernest
hemingway

The Old Man and the Sea



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Ernest Hemingway



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The Old Man and the Sea

Ernest Miller Hemingway was born in 1899. His father was a doctor and he was the second of six children. Their home was at Oak Park, a Chicago suburb.

In 1917 Hemingway joined the *Kansas City Star* as a cub reporter. The following year he volunteered to work as an ambulance driver on the Italian front where he was badly wounded but twice decorated for his services. He returned to America in 1919 and married in 1921. In 1922 he reported on the Greco-Turkish war, then two years later resigned from journalism to devote himself to fiction. He settled in Paris where he renewed his earlier friendship with such fellow-American expatriates as Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein. Their encouragement and criticism were to play a valuable part in the formation of his style.

Hemingway's first two published works were *Three Stories and Ten Poems* and *In Our Time*, but it was the satirical novel, *The Torrents of Spring*, which established his name more widely. His international reputation was firmly secured by his next three books: *Fiesta*, *Men Without Women* and *A Farewell to Arms*.

He was passionately involved with bullfighting, big-game hunting and deep-sea fishing, and his writing reflected this. He visited Spain during the Civil War

and described his experiences in the bestseller, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

His direct and deceptively simple style of writing spawned generations of imitators but no equals. Recognition of his position in contemporary literature came in 1954 when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, following the publication of *The Old Man and the Sea*.

Ernest Hemingway died in 1961.

By the same author

Novels

The Torrents of Spring

Fiesta

A Farewell to Arms

To Have and Have Not

For Whom the Bell Tolls

Across the River and Into the Trees

Islands in the Stream

The Garden of Eden

True at First Light

Stories

Men Without Women

Winner Take Nothing

The Snows of Kilimanjaro

General

Death in the Afternoon

Green Hills of Africa

A Moveable Feast

The Dangerous Summer

Drama

The Fifth Column

Collected Works

The Essential Hemingway

The First Forty-Nine Stories

By-Line

To Charles Scribner and to Max Perkins

The Old Man and the Sea

He was an old man who fished alone in a skiff in the Gulf Stream and he had gone eighty-four days now without taking a fish. In the first forty 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 skiff empty and he always went down to help him carry either the coiled lines or the gaff and harpoon and the sail that was furled around the mast. The 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 from its 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 handling 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 colour as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated.

‘Santiago,’ the boy said to him as they climbed 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.’

‘I remember,’ the old man said. ‘I know you 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.’

‘No,’ the old man said. ‘But we have. Haven’t we?’

‘Yes,’ the boy said. ‘Can I offer you a beer on the Terrace and 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 not angry. Others, of the older fishermen, looked 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 carry them to the market in Havana. Those who had caught sharks had taken 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 was only the faint edge of the odour because the wind had backed into the north and then dropped off and it was pleasant and sunny 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 and get sardines for you for tomorrow?’

‘No. Go and play baseball. I can still 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 man said. ‘You are already a man.’

‘How old was I when you first 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 remember 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 sweet blood smell all over me.’

‘Can you really remember that or did I just tell it to you?’

‘I remember everything from when we first went together.’

The old man looked at him with his sunburned, confident, loving eyes.

‘If you were my boy I’d take you out and gamble,’ he said. ‘But you are your father’s and your mother’s and you are in a lucky boat.’

‘May I get the sardines? I know where I can get four baits too.’

‘I have mine left from today. I put them in salt in the box.’

‘Let me get four fresh ones.’

‘One,’ the old man said. His hope and his confidence had never gone. But now they were freshening as when the breeze rises.

‘Two,’ the boy said.

‘Two,’ the old man agreed. ‘You didn’t steal them?’

‘I would,’ the boy said. ‘But I bought these.’

‘Thank you,’ the old man said. He was too simple to

wonder when he had attained humility. But he knew he had attained it and he knew it was not disgraceful and it carried no loss of true pride.

‘Tomorrow is going to be a good day with this current,’ he said.

‘Where are you going?’ the boy asked.

‘Far out to come in when the wind shifts. I want to be out before it is light.’

‘I’ll try to get him to work far out,’ the boy said. ‘Then if you hook something truly big we can come to your aid.’

‘He does not like to work too far out.’

‘No,’ the boy said. ‘But I will see something that he cannot see such as a bird working and get him to come out after dolphin.’

‘Are his eyes that bad?’

‘He is almost blind.’

‘It is strange,’ the old man said. ‘He never went turtling. That is what kills the eyes.’

‘But you went turtling for years off the Mosquito Coast and your eyes are good.’

‘I am a strange old man.’

‘But are you strong enough now for a truly big fish?’

‘I think so. And there are many tricks.’

‘Let us take the stuff home,’ the boy said. ‘So I can get the cast net and go after the sardines.’

They picked up the gear from the boat. The old man carried the mast on his shoulder and the boy carried the wooden box with the coiled, hard-braided brown

lines, the gaff and the harpoon with its shaft. The box with the baits was under the stern of the skiff along with the club that was used to subdue the big fish when they were brought alongside. No one would steal from the old man but it was better to take the sail and the heavy lines home as the dew was bad for them and, though he was quite sure no local people would steal from him, the old man thought that a gaff and a harpoon were needless temptations to leave in a boat.

They walked up the road together to the old man's shack and went in through its open door. The old man leaned the mast with its wrapped sail against the wall and the boy put the box and the other gear beside it. The mast was nearly as long as the one room of the shack. The shack was made of the tough bud-shields of the royal palm which are called *guano* and in it there was a bed, a table, one chair, and a place on the dirt floor to cook with charcoal. On the brown walls of the flattened, overlapping leaves of the sturdy-fibred *guano* there was a picture in colour of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and another of the Virgin of Cobre. These were relics of his wife. Once there had been a tinted photograph of his wife on the wall but he had taken it down because it made him too lonely to see it and it was on the shelf in the corner under his clean shirt.

‘What do you have to eat?’ the boy asked.

‘A pot of yellow rice with fish. Do you want some?’

‘No. I will eat at home. Do you want me to make the fire?’

‘No. I will make it later on. Or I may eat the rice cold.’

‘May I take the cast net?’

‘Of course.’

There was no cast net and the boy remembered when they had sold it. But they went through this fiction every day. There was no pot of yellow rice and fish and the boy knew this too.

‘Eighty-five is a lucky number,’ the old man said. ‘How would you like to see me bring one in that dressed out over a thousand pounds?’

‘I’ll get the cast net and go for sardines. Will you sit in the sun in the doorway?’

‘Yes. I have yesterday’s paper and I will read the baseball.’

The boy did not know whether yesterday’s paper was a fiction too. But the old man brought it out from under the bed.

‘Perico gave it to me at the *bodega*,’ he explained.

‘I’ll be back when I have the sardines. I’ll keep yours and mine together on ice and we can share them in the morning. When I come back you can tell me about the baseball.’

‘The Yankees cannot lose.’

‘But I fear the Indians of Cleveland.’

‘Have faith in the Yankees my son. Think of the great DiMaggio.’

‘I fear both the Tigers of Detroit and the Indians of Cleveland.’