

THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA

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They sailed well and **the old man** soaked his hands in the salt water and tried to keep his head clear. There were high cumulus clouds and enough cirrus above them so that the old man knew the breeze would last all night. The old man looked at **the fish** constantly to make sure it was true. It was an hour before the first shark hit him.

The shark was not an accident. He had come up from deep down in the water as the dark cloud of blood had settled and dispersed in the mile deep sea. He had come up so fast and absolutely without caution that he broke the surface of the blue water and was in the sun. Then he fell back into the sea and picked up the scent and started swimming on the course the skiff and the fish had taken.

Sometimes he lost the scent. But he would pick it up again, or have just a trace of it, and he swam fast and hard on the course. He was a very big Mako shark built to swim as fast as the fastest fish in the sea and everything about him was beautiful except his jaws. His back was as blue as a sword fish's and his belly was silver and his hide was smooth and handsome. He was built as a sword fish except for his huge jaws which were tight shut now as he swam fast, just under the surface with his high dorsal fin knifing through the water without wavering. Inside the closed double lip of his jaws all of his eight rows of teeth were slanted inwards. They were not the ordinary pyramid-shaped teeth of most sharks. They were shaped like a man's fingers when they are crisped like claws. They were nearly as long as the fingers of the old man and they had razor-sharp cutting edges on both sides. This was a fish built to feed on all the fishes in the sea,

that were so fast and strong and well armed that they had no other enemy. Now he speeded up as he smelled the fresher scent and his blue dorsal fin cut the water.

When the old man saw him coming he knew that this was a shark that had no fear at all and would do exactly what he wished. He prepared the harpoon and made the rope fast while he watched the shark come on. The rope was short as it lacked what he had cut away to lash the fish.

The old man's head was clear and good now and he was full of resolution but he had little hope. It was too good to last, he thought. He took one look at the great fish as he watched the shark closing. It might as well have been a dream he thought. I cannot keep him from hitting me but maybe I can get him. *Dentuso*, he thought. Bad luck to your mother.

The shark closed fast astern and when he hit the fish the old man saw his mouth open and his strange eyes and the clicking chop of the teeth as he drove forward in the meat just above the tail. The shark's head was out of water and his back was coming out and the old man could hear the noise of skin and flesh ripping on the big fish when he rammed the harpoon down onto the shark's head at a spot where the line between his eyes intersected with the line that ran straight back from his nose. There were no such lines. There was only the heavy sharp blue head and the big eyes and the clicking, thrusting all-swallowing jaws. But that was the location of the brain and the old man hit it. He hit it with his blood mused hands driving a good harpoon with all his strength. He hit it without hope but with resolution and complete malignancy.

The shark swung over and the old man saw his eye was not alive and then he swung over once again, wrapping himself in two loops of the rope. The old man knew that he was dead but the shark would not accept it. Then, on his back, with his tail lashing and his jaws clicking, the shark plowed over the water as a speedboat does. The water was white where his tail beat it and

three-quarters of his body was clear above the water when the rope came taut, shivered, and then snapped. The shark lay quietly for a little while on the surface and the old man watched him. Then he went down very slowly.

“He took about forty pounds,” the old man said aloud. He took my harpoon too and all the rope, he thought, and now my fish bleeds again and there will be others.

He did not like to look at the fish anymore since he had been mutilated. When the fish had been hit it was as though he himself were hit.

But I killed the shark that hit my fish, he thought. And he was the biggest *dentuso* that I have ever seen. And God knows that I have seen big ones.

It was too good to last, he thought. I wish it had been a dream now and that I had never hooked the fish and was alone in bed on the newspapers.

“But man is not made for defeat,” he said. “A man can be destroyed but not defeated.” I am sorry that I killed the fish though, he thought. Now the bad time is coming and I do not even have the harpoon. The *dentuso* is cruel and able and strong and intelligent. But I was more intelligent than he was. Perhaps not, he thought. Perhaps I was only better armed.

“Don’t think, old man,” he said aloud. “Sail on this course and take it when it comes.”

But I must think, he thought. Because it is all I have left. That and baseball. I wonder how the great **DiMaggio** would have liked the way I hit him in the brain? It was no great thing, he thought. Any man could do it. But do you think my hands were as great a handicap as the bone spurs? I cannot know. I never had anything wrong with my heel except the time **the sting ray** stung it when I stepped on him when swimming and paralyzed the lower leg and made the unbearable pain.

“Think about something cheerful, old man,” he said. “Every minute now you are closer to home. You sail lighter for the loss of forty pounds.”

He knew quite well the pattern of what could happen when he reached the inner part of the current. But there was nothing to be done now.

“Yes there is,” he said aloud. “I can lash my knife to the bottom of one of the oars.”

So he did that with the tiller under his arm and the sheet of the sail under his foot.

“Now,” he said. “I am still an old man. But I am not unarmed.”

The breeze was fresh now and he sailed on well. He watched only the forward part of the fish and some of his hope returned.

ANALYZING THE SCENE

A STORY EVENT is an active change of life value for one or more characters as a result of conflict (one character's desires clash with another's).

A WORKING SCENE contains at least one story event.

To determine a scene's story event, answer these four questions:

What are the characters literally doing?

Santiago (the old man) is sailing home with the big fish that he caught when a shark attacks.

What is the essential action of what the characters are doing in this scene?

Santiago is defending his prize.

The shark is surviving by finding food in the sea.

What life value has changed for one or more of the characters in the scene?

Santiago:

- **Pride to Regret to Resolve:** Santiago is proud of his catch until he sees the noble body of the fish damaged by the shark. He loses his faith in the morality of what he has done and begins to despair. He regrets engaging with the fish at all. After reflection, he realizes that he is all that stands between the fish and the sharks — between success and total loss, between honoring the fish's death and allowing it to be meaningless, between respect for his prize and the shame of coming home empty handed once again. He resolves to carry on the battle.
- **Successful to Challenged:** Santiago has prevailed in the fight against the fish at the beginning of the scene. When the shark attacks, it initiates a new battle that Santiago must fight to keep his prize. He is fighting out of respect for the fish, and he is fighting for respect for himself when he returns home. He does not want the shame of extending his streak of bad luck.

The shark:

- **Life to Death:** Santiago kills the shark.

The fish:

- **Death to Desecration:** The fish has met a noble death in combat with the old man, and he is going to feed a village and become a legend. The shark's attack desecrates the fish's body, and

threatens the meaning that Santiago ascribes to the fish's death.

Which life value should I highlight on my Story Grid Spreadsheet?

Successful to Challenged. This is a value shift for the protagonist, Santiago, and it tracks on the value spectrum of the global genre (Performance - Business; Respect/Shame).

HOW THE SCENE ABIDES THE FIVE COMMANDMENTS OF STORYTELLING

Inciting Incident (causal/coincidental):

Causal: The shark attacks the fish.

Turning Point (revelatory/active):

Active: The shark takes forty pounds of the fish's flesh and Santiago's harpoon to the bottom of the sea with him when he dies.

Crisis (best bad choice/irreconcilable goods):

Best bad choice: Will Santiago give up hope and abandon his prize to the sharks, guaranteeing shame for himself upon his return home empty-handed and shame for the fish as his death will have been in vain? Or will he risk further injury by fighting a battle, unarmed and weakened, against the many sharks that he knows will follow the scent of blood in the water, only to preserve a prize that is already damaged and humiliated?

Climax:

Santiago lashes his knife to the tiller to form a weapon, symbolizing his resolve to fight for the fish.

Resolution:

Santiago will fight the sharks as they come and will focus on "the forward part of the fish." He is focusing on what he can still preserve rather than mourning what he has lost.