

DAY ONE

Summary From Santiago's return from the eighty-fourth consecutive day without catching a fish to his dreams of lions on the beach. He only dreamed of places now and of the lions on the beach. They played like young cats in the dusk and he loved them as he loved the boy. 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 "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. Analysis The opening pages of the book establish Santiago’s character and set the scene for the action to follow. Even though he loves Manolin and is loved dearly by the boy, the old man lives as an outsider. The greeting he receives from the fishermen, most of whom mock him for his fruitless voyages to sea, shows Santiago to be an alienated, almost ostracized figure. Such an alienated position is characteristic of Hemingway’s heroes, whose greatest achievements depend, in large part, upon their isolation. In Hemingway’s works, it is only once a man is removed from the numbing and false confines of modern society that he can confront the larger, universal truths that govern him. In A Farewell to 16 • The Old Man and the Sea Arms, for instance, only after Frederic Henry abandons his post in the army and lives in seclusion is he able to learn the dismal lesson that death renders meaningless such notions as honor, glory, and love. Yet, although Hemingway’s message in *The Old Man and the Sea* is tragic in many respects, the story of Santiago and the destruction of his greatest catch is far from dismal. Unlike Frederic, Santiago is not defeated by his enlightenment. The narrator emphasizes Santiago’s perseverance in the opening pages, mentioning that the old man’s eyes are still “cheerful and undefeated” after suffering nearly three months without a single catch. And, although Santiago’s struggle will bring about defeat—the great marlin will be devoured by sharks—Santiago will emerge as a victor. As he tells the boy, in order for this to happen, he must venture far out, farther than the other fishermen are willing to go. In Hemingway’s narrative, Santiago is elevated above the normal stature of a protagonist, assuming near-mythical proportions. He belongs to a tradition of literary heroes whose superior qualities necessitate their distance from ordinary humans and endeavors. Because Manolin constantly expresses his devotion to, reverence for, and trust of Santiago, he establishes his mentor as a figure of significant moral and professional stature, despite the difficulties of the past eighty-four days.

While other young fishermen make fun of the old man, Manolin knows Santiago's true worth and the extent of Santiago's knowledge. In the old man, Hemingway provides the reader with a model of good, simple living: Santiago transcends the evils of the world—hunger, poverty, the contempt of his fellow men—by enduring them. In these first few scenes, Hemingway introduces several issues and images that will recur throughout the book. The first is the question of Santiago's endurance. The descriptions of his crude hut, almost nonexistent eating habits, and emaciated body force the reader to question the old man's physical capacities. How could Santiago, who subsists on occasional handouts from kind café owners or, worse, imaginary meals, wage the terrific battle with the great marlin that the novel recounts? As the book progresses, we see that the question is irrelevant. Although Santiago's battle is played out in physical terms, the stakes are decidedly spiritual. This section also introduces two important symbols: the lions playing on the beaches of Africa and baseball's immortal Joe DiMaggio. Day One • 17 Throughout his trial at sea, Santiago's thoughts will return to DiMaggio, for to him the baseball player represents a kind of triumphant survival. After suffering a bone spur in his heel, DiMaggio returned to baseball to become, in the eyes of many, the greatest player of all time. The lions are a more enigmatic symbol. The narrator says that they are Santiago's only remaining dream. When he sleeps, he no longer envisions storms or women or fish, but only the "young cats in the dusk," which "he love[s] . . . as he love[s] the boy." Because the image of the lions has stayed with Santiago since his boyhood, the lions connect the end of the old man's life with the beginning, giving his existence a kind of circularity. Like Santiago, the lions are hunters at the core of their being. The fact that Santiago dreams of the lions at play rather than on the hunt indicates that his dream is a break—albeit a temporary one—from the vicious order of the natural world.