

The Old Person and the Sea

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Gender Neutralized by Ryan MacDonald

They were an old person who fished alone in a skiff in the Gulf Stream and they had gone eighty-four days now without taking a fish. In the first forty days a person had been with them. But after forty days without a fish the person's parents had told them that the old person was now definitely and finally *salao*, which is the worst form of unlucky, and the person had gone at their orders in another boat which caught three good fish the first week. It made the person sad to see the old person come in each day with their skiff empty and they always went down to help them 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 person was thin and gaunt with deep wrinkles in the back of their neck. The brown blotches of the benevolent skin cancer the sun brings from its reflection on the tropic sea were on their cheeks. The blotches ran well down the sides of their face and their 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 them was old except their eyes and they were the same color as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated.

"Santiago," the person said to them 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 person had taught the person to fish and the person loved them.

"No," the old person 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 person said. "I know you did not leave me because you doubted."

"It was papa-momma made me leave. I am a person and I must obey them."

"I know," the old person said. "It is quite normal."

"They haven't much faith."

"No," the old person said. "But we have. Haven't we?"

"Yes," the person said. "Can I offer you a beer on the Terrace and then we'll take the stuff home."

"Why not?" the old person said. "Between fisherpeople."

They sat on the Terrace and many of the fisherpeople made fun of the old person and they were not angry. Others, of the older fisherpeople, looked at them 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 fisherpeople of that day were already in and had butchered their marlin out and carried them laid full length across two planks, with two people 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 person said.

"Yes," the old person said. They were holding their 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 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 person said. "You are already a person."

"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 they 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 them 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 person looked at them with their sun-burned, confident loving eyes.

"If you were my person I'd take you out and gamble," they said. "But you are your father-mother's and your mother-father'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 person said. Their hope and their confidence had never gone. But now they were freshening as when the breeze rises.

"Two," the person said.

"Two," the old person agreed. "You didn't steal them?"

"I would," the person said. "But I bought these."

"Thank you," the old person said. They were too simple to wonder when they had attained humility. But they knew they had attained it and they knew it was not disgraceful and it carried no loss of true pride.

"Tomorrow is going to be a good day with this current," they said.

"Where are you going?" the person asked.

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

"I'll try to get them to work far out," the person said. "Then if you hook something truly big we can come to your aid."

"They do not like to work too far out."

"No," the person said. "But I will see something that they cannot see such as a bird working and get them to come out after dolphin."

"Are their eyes that bad?"

"They are almost blind."

"It is strange," the old person said. "They never went turtle-ing. That is what kills the eyes."

"But you went turtle-ing for years off the Mosquito Coast and your eyes are good."

"I am a strange old person."

"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 person said. "So I can get the cast net and go after the sardines."

They picked up the gear from the boat. The old person carried the mast on their shoulder and the person 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 person but it was better to take the sail and the heavy lines home as the dew was bad for them and, though they were quite sure no local people would steal from them, the old person thought that a gaff and a harpoon were needless temptations to leave in a boat.

They walked up the road together to the old person's shack and went in through its open door. The old person leaned the mast with its wrapped sail against the wall and the person 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 fibered *guano* there was a picture in color of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and another of the Virgin of Cobre. These were relics of their partner. Once there had been a tinted photograph of their partner on the wall but they had taken it down because it made them too lonely to see it and it was on the shelf in the corner under their clean shirt.

"What do you have to eat?" the person 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 person 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 person knew this too.

"Eighty-five is a lucky number," the old person 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 person did not know whether yesterday's paper was a fiction too. But the old person brought it out from under the bed.

"Perico gave it to me at the *bodega*," they 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."

"Be careful or you will fear even the Reds of Cincinnati and the White Sox of Chicago."

"You study it and tell me when I come back."

"Do you think we should buy a terminal of the lottery with an eighty-five? Tomorrow is the eighty-fifth day."

"We can do that," the person said. "But what about the eighty-seven of your great record?"

"It could not happen twice. Do you think you can find an eighty-five?"

"I can order one."

"One sheet. That's two dollars and a half. Who can we borrow that from?"

"That's easy. I can always borrow two dollars and a half."

"I think perhaps I can too. But I try not to borrow. First you borrow. Then you beg."

"Keep warm old person," the person said. "Remember we are in September."

"The month when the great fish come," the old person said. "Anyone can be a fisherman in May."

"I go now for the sardines," the person said.

When the person came back the old person was asleep in the chair and the sun was down. The person took the old army blanket off the bed and spread it over the back of the chair and over the old person's shoulders. They were strange shoulders, still powerful although very old, and the neck was still strong too and the creases did not show so much when the old person was asleep and

their head fallen forward. Their shirt had been patched so many times that it was like the sail and the patches were faded to many different shades by the sun. The old person's head was very old though and with their eyes closed there was no life in their face. The newspaper lay across their knees and the weight of their arm held it there in the evening breeze. They were barefooted.

The person left them there and when they came back the old person was still asleep.

"Wake up old person," the person said and put their hand on one of the old person's knees.

The old person opened their eyes and for a moment they were coming back from a long way away. Then they smiled.

"What have you got?" they asked.

"Supper," said the person. "We're going to have supper."

"I'm not very hungry."

"Come on and eat. You can't fish and not eat."

"I have," the old person said getting up and taking the newspaper and folding it. Then they started to fold the blanket.

"Keep the blanket around you," the person said. "You'll not fish without eating while I'm alive."

"Then live a long time and take care of yourself," the old person said. "What are we eating?"

"Black beans and rice, fried bananas, and some stew."

The person had brought them in a two-decker metal container from the Terrace. The two sets of knives and forks and spoons were in their pocket with a paper napkin wrapped around each set.

"Who gave this to you?"

"Martin. The owner."

"I must thank them."

"I thanked them already," the person said. "You don't need to thank them."

"I'll give them the belly meat of a big fish," the old person said. "Have they done this for us more than once?"

"I think so."

"I must give them something more than the belly meat then. They are very thoughtful for us."

"They sent two beers."

"I like the beer in cans best."

"I know. But this is in bottles, Hatuey beer, and I take back the bottles."

"That's very kind of you," the old person said. "Should we eat?"

"I've been asking you to," the person told them gently. "I have not wished to open the container until you were ready."

"I'm ready now," the old person said. "I only needed time to wash."

Where did you wash? the person thought. The village water supply was two streets down the road. I must have water here for them, the person thought, and soap and a good towel. Why am I so thoughtless? I must get them another shirt and a jacket for the winter and some sort of shoes and another blanket.

"Your stew is excellent," the old person said.

"Tell me about the baseball," the person asked them.

"In the American League it is the Yankees as I said," the old person said happily.

"They lost today," the person told them.

"That means nothing. The great DiMaggio are themselves again."

"They have other people on the team."

"Naturally. But they make the difference. In the other league, between Brooklyn and Philadelphia I must take Brooklyn. But then I think of Dick Sisler and those great drives in the old park."

"There was nothing ever like them. They hit the longest ball I have ever seen."

"Do you remember when they used to come to the Terrace? I wanted to take them fishing but I was too timid to ask them. Then I asked you to ask them and you were too timid."

"I know. It was a great mistake. They might have gone with us. Then we would have that for all of our lives."

"I would like to take the great DiMaggio fishing," the old person said. "They say their father-mother was a fisherperson. Maybe they were as poor as we are and would understand."

"The great Sisler's father-mother was never poor and they, the father-mother, were playing in the big leagues when they were my age."

"When I was your age I was before the mast on a square rigged ship that ran to Africa and I have seen lions on the beaches in the evening."

"I know. You told me."

"Should we talk about Africa or about baseball?"

"Baseball I think," the person said. "Tell me about the great John J. McGraw." They said *Jota* for J.

"They used to come to the Terrace sometimes too in the older days. But they were rough and harsh-spoken and difficult when they were drinking. Their mind was on horses as well as baseball. At least they carried lists of horses at all times in their pocket and frequently spoke the names of horses on the telephone."

"They were a great manager," the person said. "My father-mother thinks they were the greatest."

"Because they came here the most times," the old person said. "If Durocher had continued to come here each year your father-mother would think them the greatest manager."

"Who is the greatest manager, really, Luque or Mike Gonzalez?"

"I think they are equal."

"And the best fisherperson is you."

"No. I know others better."

"*Qué va,*" the person said. "There are many good fisherpeople and some great ones. But there is only you."

"Thank you. You make me happy. I hope no fish will come along so great that they will prove us wrong."

"There is no such fish if you are still strong as you say."

"I may not be as strong as I think," the old person said. "But I know many tricks and I have resolution."

"You ought to go to bed now so that you will be fresh in the morning. I will take the things back to the Terrace."

"Good night then. I will wake you in the morning."

"You're my alarm clock," the person said.

"Age is my alarm clock," the old person said. "Why do old people wake so early? Is it to have one longer day?"

"I don't know," the person said. "All I know is that young people sleep late and hard."

"I can remember it," the old person said. "I'll waken you in time."

"I do not like for them to waken me. It is as though I were inferior."

"I know."

"Sleep well, old person."

The person went out. They had eaten with no light on the table and the old person took off their trousers and went to bed in the dark. They rolled their trousers up to make a pillow, putting the newspaper inside them. They rolled themselves in the blanket and slept on the other old newspapers that covered the springs of the bed.

They were asleep in a short time and they dreamed of Africa when they were a person and the long golden beaches and the white beaches, so white they hurt your eyes, and the high capes and the great brown mountains. They lived along that coast now every night and in their dreams they heard the surf roar and saw the native boats come riding through it. They smelled the tar and oakum of the deck as they slept and they smelled the smell of Africa that the land breeze brought at morning.

Usually when they smelled the land breeze they woke up and dressed to go and wake the person. But tonight the smell of the land breeze came very early and they knew it was too early in their dream and went on dreaming to see the white peaks of the Islands rising from the sea and then they dreamed of the different harbours and roadsteads of the Canary Islands.

They no longer dreamed of storms, nor of people, nor of great occurrences, nor of great fish, nor fights, nor contests of strength, nor of their partner. They only dreamed of places now and of the lions on the beach. They played like young cats in the dusk and they loved them as they loved the person. They never dreamed about the person. They simply woke, looked out the open door at the moon and unrolled their trousers and put them on. They urinated outside the shack and then went up the road to wake the person. They were shivering with the morning cold. But they knew they would shiver themselves warm and that soon they would be rowing.

The door of the house where the person lived was unlocked and they opened it and walked in quietly with their bare feet. The person was asleep on a cot in the first room and the old person could see them clearly with the light that came in from the dying moon. They took hold of one foot gently and held it until the person woke and turned and looked at them. The old person nodded and the person took their trousers from the chair by the bed and, sitting on the bed, pulled them on.

The old person went out the door and the person came after them. They were sleepy and the old person put their arm across their shoulders and said, "I am sorry."

"*Qué va,*" the person said. "It is what a person must do."

They walked down the road to the old person's shack and all along the road, in the dark, barefoot people were moving, carrying the masts of their boats.

When they reached the old person's shack the person took the rolls of line in the basket and the harpoon and gaff and the old person carried the mast with the furled sail on their shoulder.

"Do you want coffee?" the person asked.

"We'll put the gear in the boat and then get some."

They had coffee from condensed milk cans at an early morning place that served fisherpeople.

"How did you sleep old person?" the person asked. They were waking up now although it was still hard for them to leave their sleep.

"Very well, Manolin," the old person said. "I feel confident today."

"So do I," the person said. "Now I must get your sardines and mine and your fresh baits. They bring our gear themselves. They never want anyone to carry anything."

"We're different," the old person said. "I let you carry things when you were five years old."

"I know it," the person said. "I'll be right back. Have another coffee. We have credit here."

They walked off, bare-footed on the coral rocks, to the ice house where the baits were stored.

The old person drank their coffee slowly. It was all they would have all day and they knew that they should take it. For a long time now eating had bored them and they never carried a lunch. They had a bottle of water in the bow of the skiff and that was all they needed for the day.

The person was back now with the sardines and the two baits wrapped in a newspaper and they went down the trail to the skiff, feeling the pebbled sand under their feet, and lifted the skiff and slid it into the water.

"Good luck old person."

"Good luck," the old person said. They fitted the rope lashings of the oars onto the thole pins and, leaning forward against the thrust of the blades in the water, they began to row out of the harbour in the dark. There were other boats from the other beaches going out to sea and the old person heard the dip and push of their oars even though they could not see them now the moon was below the hills.

Sometimes someone would speak in a boat. But most of the boats were silent except for the dip of the oars. They spread apart after they were out of the mouth of the harbour and each one headed for the part of the ocean where they hoped to find fish. The old person knew they were going far out and they left the smell of the land behind and rowed out into the clean early morning smell of the ocean. They saw the phosphorescence of the Gulf weed in the water as they rowed over the part of the ocean that the fisherpeople called the great well because there was a sudden deep of seven hundred fathoms where all sorts of fish congregated because of the swirl the current made against the steep walls of the floor of the ocean. Here there were concentrations of shrimp and bait fish and sometimes schools of squid in the deepest holes and these rose close to the surface at night where all the wandering fish fed on them.

In the dark the old person could feel the morning coming and as they rowed they heard the trembling sound as flying fish left the water and the hissing that their stiff set wings made as they soared away in the darkness. They were very fond of flying fish as they were their principal friends on the ocean. They were sorry for the birds, especially the small delicate dark terns that were always flying and looking and almost never finding, and they thought, "The birds have a harder life than we do except for the robber birds and the heavy strong ones. Why did they make birds so delicate and fine as those sea swallows when the ocean can be so cruel? She is kind and very beautiful. But she can be so cruel and it comes so suddenly and such birds that fly, dipping and hunting, with their small sad voices are made too delicately for the sea."

They always thought of the sea as *la mar* which is what people call it in Spanish when they love it. Sometimes those who love it say bad things of it but they are always said as though it were a person. Some of the younger fisherpeople, those who used buoys as floats for their lines and had motorboats, bought when the shark livers had brought much money, spoke of it as *el mar* which is masculine, for some reason. They spoke of it as a contestant or a place or even an enemy. But the old person always thought of it as masculine-

feminine and as something that gave or withheld great favours, and if it did wild or wicked things it was because it could not help them. The moon affects it as it does a person, they thought.

They were rowing steadily and it was no effort for them since they kept well within their speed and the surface of the ocean was flat except for the occasional swirls of the current. They were letting the current do a third of the work and as it started to be light they saw they were already further out than they had hoped to be at this hour.

I worked the deep wells for a week and did nothing, they thought. Today I'll work out where the schools of bonita and albacore are and maybe there will be a big one with them.

Before it was really light they had their baits out and were drifting with the current. One bait was down forty fathoms. The second was at seventy-five and the third and fourth were down in the blue water at one hundred and one hundred and twenty-five fathoms. Each bait hung head down with the shank of the hook inside the bait fish, tied and sewed solid and all the projecting part of the hook, the curve and the point, was covered with fresh sardines. Each sardine was hooked through both eyes so that they made a half-garland on the projecting steel. There was no part of the hook that a great fish could feel which was not sweet smelling and good tasting.

The person had given them two fresh small tunas, or albacores, which hung on the two deepest lines like plummets and, on the others, they had a big blue runner and a yellow jack that had been used before; but they were in good condition still and had the excellent sardines to give them scent and attractiveness. Each line, as thick around as a big pencil, was looped onto a green-sapped stick so that any pull or touch on the bait would make the stick dip and each line had two forty-fathom coils which could be made fast to the other spare coils so that, if it were necessary, a fish could take out over three hundred fathoms of line.

Now the person watched the dip of the three sticks over the side of the skiff and rowed gently to keep the lines straight up and down and at their proper depths. It was quite light and any moment now the sun would rise.

The sun rose thinly from the sea and the old person could see the other boats, low on the water and well in toward the shore, spread out across the current. Then the sun was brighter and the glare came on the water and then, as it rose clear, the flat sea sent it back at their eyes so that it hurt sharply and they

rowed without looking into it. They looked down into the water and watched the lines that went straight down into the dark of the water. They kept them straighter than anyone did, so that at each level in the darkness of the stream there would be a bait waiting exactly where they wished it to be for any fish that swam there. Others let them drift with the current and sometimes they were at sixty fathoms when the fisherpeople thought they were at a hundred.

But, they thought, I keep them with precision. Only I have no luck any more. But who knows? Maybe today. Every day is a new day. It is better to be lucky. But I would rather be exact. Then when luck comes you are ready.

The sun was two hours higher now and it did not hurt their eyes so much to look into the east. There were only three boats in sight now and they showed very low and far inshore.

All my life the early sun has hurt my eyes, they thought. Yet they are still good. In the evening I can look straight into it without getting the blackness. It has more force in the evening too. But in the morning it is painful.

Just then they saw a person-of-war bird with their long black wings circling in the sky ahead of them. They made a quick drop, slanting down on their back-swept wings, and then circled again.

"They've got something," the old person said aloud. "They're not just looking."

They rowed slowly and steadily toward where the bird was circling. They did not hurry and they kept their lines straight up and down. But they crowded the current a little so that they were still fishing correctly though faster than they would have fished if they were not trying to use the bird.

The bird went higher in the air and circled again, their wings motionless. Then they dove suddenly and the old person saw flying fish spurt out of the water and sail desperately over the surface.

"Dolphin," the old person said aloud. "Big dolphin."

They shipped their oars and brought a small line from under the bow. It had a wire leader and a medium-sized hook and they baited it with one of the sardines. They let it go over the side and then made it fast to a ring bolt in the stern. Then they baited another line and left it coiled in the shade of the bow.

They went back to rowing and to watching the long-winged black bird who was working, now, low over the water.

As they watched the bird dipped again slanting their wings for the dive and then swinging them wildly and ineffectually as they followed the flying fish. The old person could see the slight bulge in the water that the big dolphin raised as they followed the escaping fish. The dolphin were cutting through the water below the flight of the fish and would be in the water, driving at speed, when the fish dropped. It is a big school of dolphin, they thought. They are wide spread and the flying fish have little chance. The bird has no chance. The flying fish are too big for them and they go too fast.

They watched the flying fish burst out again and again and the ineffectual movements of the bird. That school has gotten away from me, they thought. They are moving out too fast and too far. But perhaps I will pick up a stray and perhaps my big fish is around them. My big fish must be somewhere.

The clouds over the land now rose like mountains and the coast was only a long green line with the gray blue hills behind it. The water was a dark blue now, so dark that it was almost purple. As they looked down into it they saw the red sifting of the plankton in the dark water and the strange light the sun made now. They watched their lines to see them go straight down out of sight into the water and they were happy to see so much plankton because it meant fish. The strange light the sun made in the water, now that the sun was higher, meant good weather and so did the shape of the clouds over the land. But the bird was almost out of sight now and nothing showed on the surface of the water but some patches of yellow, sun-bleached Sargasso weed and the purple, formalized, iridescent, gelatinous bladder of a Portuguese person-of-war floating close beside the boat. It turned on its side and then righted itself. It floated cheerfully as a bubble with its long deadly purple filaments trailing a yard behind it in the water.

"*Agua mala*," the person said. "You whore."

From where they swung lightly against their oars they looked down into the water and saw the tiny fish that were coloured like the trailing filaments and swam between them and under the small shade the bubble made as it drifted. They were immune to its poison. But people were not and when some of the filaments would catch on a line and rest there slimy and purple while the old person was working a fish, they would have welts and sores on their arms and hands of the sort that poison ivy or poison oak can give. But these poisonings from the *agua mala* came quickly and struck like a whiplash.

The iridescent bubbles were beautiful. But they were the falsest thing in the sea and the old person loved to see the big sea turtles eating them. The turtles saw them, approached them from the front, then shut their eyes so they were completely carapaced and ate them filaments and all. The old person loved to see the turtles eat them and they loved to walk on them on the beach after a storm and hear them pop when they stepped on them with the horny soles of their feet.

They loved green turtles and hawks-bills with their elegance and speed and their great value and they had a friendly contempt for the huge, stupid loggerheads, yellow in their armour-plating, strange in their love-making, and happily eating the Portuguese people-of-war with their eyes shut.

They had no mysticism about turtles although they had gone in turtle boats for many years. They were sorry for them all, even the great trunk backs that were as long as the skiff and weighed a ton. Most people are heartless about turtles because a turtle's heart will beat for hours after they have been cut up and butchered. But the old person thought, I have such a heart too and my feet and hands are like theirs. They ate the white eggs to give themselves strength. They ate them all through May to be strong in September and October for the truly big fish.

They also drank a cup of shark liver oil each day from the big drum in the shack where many of the fisherpeople kept their gear. It was there for all fisherpeople who wanted it. Most fisherpeople hated the taste. But it was no worse than getting up at the hours that they rose and it was very good against all colds and gripes and it was good for the eyes.

Now the old person looked up and saw that the bird was circling again.

"They've found fish," they said aloud. No flying fish broke the surface and there was no scattering of bait fish. But as the old person watched, a small tuna rose in the air, turned and dropped head first into the water. The tuna shone silver in the sun and after they had dropped back into the water another and another rose and they were jumping in all directions, churning the water and leaping in long jumps after the bait. They were circling it and driving it.

If they don't travel too fast I will get into them, the old person thought, and they watched the school working the water white and the bird now dropping and dipping into the bait fish that were forced to the surface in their panic.

"The bird is a great help," the old person said. Just then the stern line came taut under their foot, where they had kept a loop of the line, and they dropped their oars and felt the weight of the small tuna's shivering pull as they held the line firm and commenced to haul it in. The shivering increased as they pulled in and they could see the blue back of the fish in the water and the gold of their sides before they swung them over the side and into the boat. They lay in the stern in the sun, compact and bullet shaped, their big, unintelligent eyes staring as they thumped their life out against the planking of the boat with the quick shivering strokes of their neat, fast-moving tail. The old person hit them on the head for kindness and kicked them, their body still shuddering, under the shade of the stern.

"Albacore," they said aloud. "They'll make a beautiful bait. They'll weigh ten pounds."

They did not remember when they had first started to talk aloud when they were by themselves. They had sung when they were by themselves in the old days and they had sung at night sometimes when they were alone steering on their watch in the smacks or in the turtle boats. They had probably started to talk aloud, when alone, when the person had left. But they did not remember. When they and the person fished together they usually spoke only when it was necessary. They talked at night or when they were storm-bound by bad weather. It was considered a virtue not to talk unnecessarily at sea and the old person had always considered it so and respected it. But now they said their thoughts aloud many times since there was no one that they could annoy.

"If the others heard me talking out loud they would think that I am crazy," they said aloud. "But since I am not crazy, I do not care. And the rich have radios to talk to them in their boats and to bring them the baseball."

Now is no time to think of baseball, they thought. Now is the time to think of only one thing. That which I was born for. There might be a big one around that school, they thought. I picked up only a straggler from the albacore that were feeding. But they are working far out and fast. Everything that shows on the surface today travels very fast and to the north-east. Can that be the time of day? Or is it some sign of weather that I do not know?

They could not see the green of the shore now but only the tops of the blue hills that showed white as though they were snow-capped and the clouds that looked like high snow mountains above them. The sea was very dark and the light made prisms in the water. The myriad flecks of the plankton were annulled now by the high sun and it was only the great deep prisms in the blue

water that the old person saw now with their lines going straight down into the water that was a mile deep.

The tuna, the fisherpeople called all the fish of that species tuna and only distinguished among them by their proper names when they came to sell them or to trade them for baits, were down again. The sun was hot now and the old person felt it on the back of their neck and felt the sweat trickle down their back as they rowed.

I could just drift, they thought, and sleep and put a bight of line around my toe to wake me. But today is eighty-five days and I should fish the day well.

Just then, watching their lines, they saw one of the projecting green sticks dip sharply.

"Yes," they said. "Yes," and shipped their oars without bumping the boat. They reached out for the line and held it softly between the thumb and forefinger of their right hand. They felt no strain nor weight and they held the line lightly. Then it came again. This time it was a tentative pull, not solid nor heavy, and they knew exactly what it was. One hundred fathoms down a marlin was eating the sardines that covered the point and the shank of the hook where the hand-forged hook projected from the head of the small tuna.

The old person held the line delicately, and softly, with their left hand, unleashed it from the stick. Now they could let it run through their fingers without the fish feeling any tension.

This far out, they must be huge in this month, they thought. Eat them, fish. Eat them. Please eat them. How fresh they are and you down there six hundred feet in that cold water in the dark. Make another turn in the dark and come back and eat them.

They felt the light delicate pulling and then a harder pull when a sardine's head must have been more difficult to break from the hook. Then there was nothing.

"Come on," the old person said aloud. "Make another turn. Just smell them. Aren't they lovely? Eat them good now and then there is the tuna. Hard and cold and lovely. Don't be shy, fish. Eat them."

They waited with the line between their thumb and their finger, watching it and the other lines at the same time for the fish might have swum up or down. Then came the same delicate pulling touch again.

"They'll take it," the old person said aloud. "God help them to take it."

They did not take it though. They were gone and the old person felt nothing.

"They can't have gone," they said. "Christ knows they can't have gone. They're making a turn. Maybe they have been hooked before and they remember something of it."

Then they felt the gentle touch on the line and they were happy.

"It was only their turn," they said. "They'll take it."

They were happy feeling the gentle pulling and then they felt something hard and unbelievably heavy. It was the weight of the fish and they let the line slip down, down, down, unrolling off the first of the two reserve coils. As it went down, slipping lightly through the old person's fingers, they still could feel the great weight, though the pressure of their thumb and finger were almost imperceptible.

"What a fish," they said. "They have it sideways in their mouth now and they are moving off with it."

Then they will turn and swallow it, they thought. They did not say that because they knew that if you said a good thing it might not happen. They knew what a huge fish this was and they thought of them moving away in the darkness with the tuna held crosswise in their mouth. At that moment they felt them stop moving but the weight was still there. Then the weight increased and they gave more line. They tightened the pressure of their thumb and finger for a moment and the weight increased and was going straight down.

"They've taken it," they said. "Now I'll let them eat it well."

They let the line slip through their fingers while they reached down with their left hand and made fast the free end of the two reserve coils to the loop of the two reserve coils of the next line. Now they were ready. They had three forty-fathom coils of line in reserve now, as well as the coil they were using.

"Eat it a little more," they said. "Eat it well."

Eat it so that the point of the hook goes into your heart and kills you, they thought. Come up easy and let me put the harpoon into you. All right. Are you ready? Have you been long enough at table?

"Now!" they said aloud and struck hard with both hands, gained a yard of line and then struck again and again, swinging with each arm alternately on the cord with all the strength of their arms and the pivoted weight of their body.

Nothing happened. The fish just moved away slowly and the old person could not raise them an inch. Their line was strong and made for heavy fish and they held it against their back until it was so taut that beads of water were jumping from it. Then it began to make a slow hissing sound in the water and they still held it, bracing themselves against the thwart and leaning back against the pull. The boat began to move slowly off toward the North-West.

The fish moved steadily and they travelled slowly on the calm water. The other baits were still in the water but there was nothing to be done.

"I wish I had the person," the old person said aloud. "I'm being towed by a fish and I'm the towing bitt. I could make the line fast. But then they could break it. I must hold them all I can and give them line when they must have it. Thank God they are travelling and not going down."

What I will do if they decide to go down, I don't know. What I'll do if they sound and die I don't know. But I'll do something. There are plenty of things I can do.

They held the line against their back and watched its slant in the water and the skiff moving steadily to the North-West.

This will kill them, the old person thought. They can't do this forever. But four hours later the fish was still swimming steadily out to sea, towing the skiff, and the old person was still braced solidly with the line across their back.

"It was noon when I hooked them," they said. "And I have never seen them."

They had pushed their straw hat hard down on their head before they hooked the fish and it was cutting their forehead. They were thirsty too and they got down on their knees and, being careful not to jerk on the line, moved

as far into the bow as they could get and reached the water bottle with one hand. They opened it and drank a little. Then they rested against the bow. They rested sitting on the un-stepped mast and sail and tried not to think but only to endure.

Then they looked behind them and saw that no land was visible. That makes no difference, they thought. I can always come in on the glow from Havana. There are two more hours before the sun sets and maybe they will come up before that. If they don't maybe they will come up with the moon. If they do not do that maybe they will come up with the sunrise. I have no cramps and I feel strong. It is they that have the hook in their mouth. But what a fish to pull like that. They must have their mouth shut tight on the wire. I wish I could see them. I wish I could see them only once to know what I have against me.

The fish never changed their course nor their direction all that night as far as the person could tell from watching the stars. It was cold after the sun went down and the old person's sweat dried cold on their back and their arms and their old legs. During the day they had taken the sack that covered the bait box and spread it in the sun to dry. After the sun went down they tied it around their neck so that it hung down over their back and they cautiously worked it down under the line that was across their shoulders now. The sack cushioned the line and they had found a way of leaning forward against the bow so that they were almost comfortable. The position actually was only somewhat less intolerable; but they thought of it as almost comfortable.

I can do nothing with them and they can do nothing with me, they thought. Not as long as they keep this up.

Once they stood up and urinated over the side of the skiff and looked at the stars and checked their course. The line showed like a phosphorescent streak in the water straight out from their shoulders. They were moving more slowly now and the glow of Havana was not so strong, so that they knew the current must be carrying them to the eastward. If I lose the glare of Havana we must be going more to the eastward, they thought. For if the fish's course held true I must see it for many more hours. I wonder how the baseball came out in the grand leagues today, they thought. It would be wonderful to do this with a radio. Then they thought, think of it always. Think of what you are doing. You must do nothing stupid.

Then they said aloud, "I wish I had the person. To help me and to see this."

No one should be alone in their old age, they thought. But it is unavoidable. I must remember to eat the tuna before they spoil in order to keep strong. Remember, no matter how little you want to, that you must eat them in the morning. Remember, they said to themselves.

During the night two porpoise came around the boat and they could hear them rolling and blowing. They could tell the difference between the blowing noise one porpoise made and the sighing blow a different porpoise made.

"They are good," they said. "They play and make jokes and love one another. They are our sister-brothers like the flying fish."

Then they began to pity the great fish that they had hooked. They are wonderful and strange and who knows how old they are, they thought. Never have I had such a strong fish nor one who acted so strangely. Perhaps they are too wise to jump. They could ruin me by jumping or by a wild rush. But perhaps they have been hooked many times before and they know that this is how they should make their fight. They cannot know that it is only one person against them, nor that it is an old person. But what a great fish they are and what they will bring in the market if the flesh is good. They took the bait like a porpoise and they pull like a porpoise and their fight has no panic in it. I wonder if they have any plans or if they are just as desperate as I am?

They remembered the time they had hooked one of a pair of marlin. The marlin fish always let the marlin fish feed first and the hooked fish, the marlin, made a wild, panic-stricken, despairing fight that soon exhausted it, and all the time the other marlin had stayed with it, crossing the line and circling with it on the surface. They had stayed so close that the old person was afraid they would cut the line with their tail which was sharp as a scythe and almost of that size and shape. When the old person had gaffed it and clubbed it, holding the rapier bill with its sandpaper edge and clubbing it across the top of its head until its colour turned to a colour almost like the backing of mirrors, and then, with the person's aid, hoisted it aboard, the other fish had stayed by the side of the boat. Then, while the old person was clearing the lines and preparing the harpoon, the other fish jumped high into the air beside the boat to see where the first fish was and then went down deep, their lavender wings, that were their pectoral fins, spread wide and all their wide lavender stripes showing. They were beautiful, the old person remembered, and they had stayed.

That was the saddest thing I ever saw with them, the old person thought. The person was sad too and we begged it pardon and butchered it promptly.

"I wish the person was here," they said aloud and settled themselves against the rounded planks of the bow and felt the strength of the great fish through the line they held across their shoulders moving steadily toward whatever they had chosen.

When once, through my treachery, it had been necessary to them to make a choice, the old person thought.

Their choice had been to stay in the deep dark water far out beyond all snares and traps and treacheries. My choice was to go there to find them beyond all people. Beyond all people in the world. Now we are joined together and have been since noon. And no one to help either one of us.

Perhaps I should not have been a fisherperson, they thought. But that was the thing that I was born for. I must surely remember to eat the tuna after it gets light.

Some time before daylight something took one of the baits that were behind them. They heard the stick break and the line begin to rush out over the gunwale of the skiff. In the darkness they loosened their sheath knife and taking all the strain of the fish on their left shoulder they leaned back and cut the line against the wood of the gunwale. Then they cut the other line closest to them and in the dark made the loose ends of the reserve coils fast. They worked skillfully with the one hand and put their foot on the coils to hold them as they drew their knots tight. Now they had six reserve coils of line. There were two from each bait they had severed and the two from the bait the fish had taken and they were all connected.

After it is light, they thought, I will work back to the forty-fathom bait and cut it away too and link up the reserve coils. I will have lost two hundred fathoms of good Catalan *cordel* and the hooks and leaders. That can be replaced. But who replaces this fish if I hook some fish and it cuts them off? I don't know what that fish was that took the bait just now. It could have been a marlin or a broadbill or a shark. I never felt them. I had to get rid of them too fast.

Aloud they said, "I wish I had the person."

But you haven't got the person, they thought. You have only yourself and you had better work back to the last line now, in the dark or not in the dark, and cut it away and hook up the two reserve coils.

So they did it. It was difficult in the dark and once the fish made a surge that pulled them down on their face and made a cut below their eye. The blood ran down their cheek a little way. But it coagulated and dried before it reached their chin and they worked their way back to the bow and rested against the wood. They adjusted the sack and carefully worked the line so that it came across a new part of their shoulders and, holding it anchored with their shoulders, they carefully felt the pull of the fish and then felt with their hand the progress of the skiff through the water.

I wonder what they made that lurch for, they thought. The wire must have slipped on the great hill of their back. Certainly their back cannot feel as badly as mine does. But they cannot pull this skiff forever, no matter how great they are. Now everything is cleared away that might make trouble and I have a big reserve of line; all that a person can ask.

"Fish," they said softly, aloud, "I'll stay with you until I am dead."

They'll stay with me too, I suppose, the old person thought and they waited for it to be light. It was cold now in the time before daylight and they pushed against the wood to be warm. I can do it as long as they can, they thought. And in the first light the line extended out and down into the water. The boat moved steadily and when the first edge of the sun rose it was on the old person's right shoulder.

"They're headed north," the old person said. The current will have set us far to the eastward, they thought. I wish they would turn with the current. That would show that they were tiring.

When the sun had risen further the old person realized that the fish was not tiring. There was only one favorable sign. The slant of the line showed they were swimming at a lesser depth. That did not necessarily mean that they would jump. But they might.

"God let them jump," the old person said. "I have enough line to handle them."

Maybe if I can increase the tension just a little it will hurt them and they will jump, they thought. Now that it is daylight let them jump so that they'll fill the sacks along their backbone with air and then they cannot go deep to die.

They tried to increase the tension, but the line had been taut up to the very edge of the breaking point since they had hooked the fish and they felt the

harshness as they leaned back to pull and knew they could put no more strain on it. I must not jerk it ever, they thought. Each jerk widens the cut the hook makes and then when they do jump they might throw it. Anyway I feel better with the sun and for once I do not have to look into it.

There was yellow weed on the line but the old person knew that only made an added drag and they were pleased. It was the yellow Gulf weed that had made so much phosphorescence in the night.

"Fish," they said, "I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you dead before this day ends."

Let us hope so, they thought.

A small bird came toward the skiff from the north. They were a warbler and flying very low over the water. The old person could see that they were very tired.

The bird made the stern of the boat and rested there. Then they flew around the old person's head and rested on the line where they were more comfortable.

"How old are you?" the old person asked the bird. "Is this your first trip?"

The bird looked at them when they spoke. They were too tired even to examine the line and they teetered on it as their delicate feet gripped it fast.

"It's steady," the old person told them. "It's too steady. You shouldn't be that tired after a windless night. What are birds coming to?"

The hawks, they thought, that come out to sea to meet them. But they said nothing of this to the bird who could not understand them anyway and who would learn about the hawks soon enough.

"Take a good rest, small bird," they said. "Then go in and take your chance like any person or bird or fish."

It encouraged them to talk because their back had stiffened in the night and it hurt truly now.

"Stay at my house if you like, bird," they said. "I am sorry I cannot hoist the sail and take you in with the small breeze that is rising. But I am with a friend."

Just then the fish gave a sudden lurch that pulled the old person down onto the bow and would have pulled them overboard if they had not braced themselves and given some line.

The bird had flown up when the line jerked and the old person had not even seen them go. They felt the line carefully with their right hand and noticed their hand was bleeding.

"Something hurt them then," they said aloud and pulled back on the line to see if they could turn the fish. But when they were touching the breaking point they held steady and settled back against the strain of the line.

"You're feeling it now, fish," they said. "And so, God knows, am I."

They looked around for the bird now because they would have liked them for company. The bird was gone.

You did not stay long, the person thought. But it is rougher where you are going until you make the shore. How did I let the fish cut me with that one quick pull they made? I must be getting very stupid. Or perhaps I was looking at the small bird and thinking of them. Now I will pay attention to my work and then I must eat the tuna so that I will not have a failure of strength.

"I wish the person were here and that I had some salt," they said aloud.

Shifting the weight of the line to their left shoulder and kneeling carefully they washed their hand in the ocean and held it there, submerged, for more than a minute watching the blood trail away and the steady movement of the water against their hand as the boat moved.

"They have slowed much," they said.

The old person would have liked to keep their hand in the salt water longer but they were afraid of another sudden lurch by the fish and they stood up and braced themselves and held their hand up against the sun. It was only a line burn that had cut their flesh. But it was in the working part of their hand. They knew they would need their hands before this was over and they did not like to be cut before it started.

"Now," they said, when their hand had dried, "I must eat the small tuna. I can reach them with the gaff and eat them here in comfort."

They knelt down and found the tuna under the stern with the gaff and drew it toward them keeping it clear of the coiled lines. Holding the line with their left shoulder again, and bracing on their left hand and arm, they took the tuna off the gaff hook and put the gaff back in place. They put one knee on the fish and cut strips of dark red meat longitudinally from the back of the head to the tail. They were wedge-shaped strips and they cut them from next to the back bone down to the edge of the belly. When they had cut six strips they spread them out on the wood of the bow, wiped their knife on their trousers, and lifted the carcass of the bonito by the tail and dropped it overboard.

"I don't think I can eat an entire one," they said and drew their knife across one of the strips. They could feel the steady hard pull of the line and their left hand was cramped. It drew up tight on the heavy cord and they looked at it in disgust.

"What kind of a hand is that," they said. "Cramp then if you want. Make yourself into a claw. It will do you no good."

Come on, they thought and looked down into the dark water at the slant of the line. Eat it now and it will strengthen the hand. It is not the hand's fault and you have been many hours with the fish. But you can stay with them forever. Eat the bonito now.

They picked up a piece and put it in their mouth and chewed it slowly. It was not unpleasant.

Chew it well, they thought, and get all the juices. It would not be bad to eat with a little lime or with lemon or with salt.

"How do you feel, hand?" they asked the cramped hand that was almost as stiff as rigor mortis. "I'll eat some more for you."

They ate the other part of the piece that they had cut in two. They chewed it carefully and then spat out the skin.

"How does it go, hand? Or is it too early to know?"

They took another full piece and chewed it.

"It is a strong full-blooded fish," they thought. "I was lucky to get them instead of dolphin. Dolphin is too sweet. This is hardly sweet at all and all the strength is still in it."

There is no sense in being anything but practical though, they thought. I wish I had some salt. And I do not know whether the sun will rot or dry what is left, so I had better eat it all although I am not hungry. The fish is calm and steady. I will eat it all and then I will be ready.

"Be patient, hand," they said. "I do this for you."

I wish I could feed the fish, they thought. They is my sister-brother. But I must kill them and keep strong to do it. Slowly and conscientiously they ate all of the wedge-shaped strips of fish.

They straightened up, wiping their hand on their trousers.

"Now," they said. "You can let the cord go, hand, and I will handle them with the right arm alone until you stop that nonsense." They put their left foot on the heavy line that the left hand had held and lay back against the pull against their back.

"God help me to have the cramp go," they said. "Because I do not know what the fish is going to do."

But they seem calm, they thought, and following their plan. But what is their plan, they thought. And what is mine? Mine I must improvise to theirs because of their great size. If they will jump I can kill them. But if they stay down forever. Then I will stay down with them forever.

They rubbed the cramped hand against their trousers and tried to gentle the fingers. But it would not open. Maybe it will open with the sun, they thought. Maybe it will open when the strong raw tuna is digested. If I have to have it, I will open it, cost whatever it costs. But I do not want to open it now by force. Let it open by itself and come back of its own accord. After all I abused it much in the night when it was necessary to free and unite the various lines.

They looked across the sea and knew how alone they were now. But they could see the prisms in the deep dark water and the line stretching ahead and the strange undulation of the calm. The clouds were building up now for the trade wind and they looked ahead and saw a flight of wild ducks etching themselves against the sky over the water, then blurring, then etching again and they knew no person was ever alone on the sea.

They thought of how some people feared being out of sight of land in a small boat and knew they were right in the months of sudden bad weather. But

now they were in hurricane months and, when there are no hurricanes, the weather of hurricane months is the best of all the year.

If there is a hurricane you always see the signs of it in the sky for days ahead, if you are at sea. They do not see it ashore because they do not know what to look for, they thought. The land must make a difference too, in the shape of the clouds. But we have no hurricane coming now.

They looked at the sky and saw the white cumulus built like friendly piles of ice cream and high above were the thin feathers of the cirrus against the high September sky.

"Light *brisa*," they said. "Better weather for me than for you, fish."

Their left hand was still cramped, but they were unknotting it slowly.

I hate a cramp, they thought. It is a treachery of one's own body. It is humiliating before others to have a diarrhoea from ptomaine poisoning or to vomit from it. But a cramp, they thought of it as a *calambre*, humiliates oneself especially when one is alone.

If the person were here they could rub it for me and loosen it down from the forearm, they thought. But it will loosen up.

Then, with their right hand they felt the difference in the pull of the line before they saw the slant change in the water. Then, as they leaned against the line and slapped their left hand hard and fast against their thigh they saw the line slanting slowly upward.

"They're coming up," they said. "Come on hand. Please come on."

The line rose slowly and steadily and then the surface of the ocean bulged ahead of the boat and the fish came out. They came out unendingly and water poured from their sides. They were bright in the sun and their head and back were dark purple and in the sun the stripes on their sides showed wide and a light lavender. Their sword was as long as a baseball bat and tapered like a rapier and they rose their full length from the water and then re-entered it, smoothly, like a diver and the old person saw the great scythe-blade of their tail go under and the line commenced to race out.

"They are two feet longer than the skiff," the old person said. The line was going out fast but steadily and the fish was not panicked. The old person was

trying with both hands to keep the line just inside of breaking strength. They knew that if they could not slow the fish with a steady pressure the fish could take out all the line and break it.

They are a great fish and I must convince them, they thought. I must never let them learn their strength nor what they could do if they made their run. If I were them I would put in everything now and go until something broke. But, thank God, they are not as intelligent as we who kill them; although they are more noble and more able.

The old person had seen many great fish. They had seen many that weighed more than a thousand pounds and they had caught two of that size in their life, but never alone. Now alone, and out of sight of land, they were fast to the biggest fish that they had ever seen and bigger than they had ever heard of, and their left hand was still as tight as the gripped claws of an eagle.

It will uncramp though, they thought. Surely it will uncramp to help my right hand. There are three things that are sister-brothers: the fish and my two hands. It must uncramp. It is unworthy of it to be cramped. The fish had slowed again and was going at their usual pace.

I wonder why they jumped, the old person thought. They jumped almost as though to show me how big they were. I know now, anyway, they thought. I wish I could show them what sort of person I am. But then they would see the cramped hand. Let them think I am more person than I am and I will be so. I wish I were the fish, they thought, with everything they have against only my will and my intelligence.

They settled comfortably against the wood and took their suffering as it came and the fish swam steadily and the boat moved slowly through the dark water. There was a small sea rising with the wind coming up from the east and at noon the old person's left hand was uncramped.

"Bad news for you, fish," they said and shifted the line over the sacks that covered their shoulders.

They were comfortable but suffering, although they did not admit the suffering at all.

"I am not religious," they said. "But I will say ten Our Fathers and ten Hail Marys that I should catch this fish, and I promise to make a pilgrimage to the Virgen de Cobre if I catch them. That is a promise."

They commenced to say their prayers mechanically. Sometimes they would be so tired that they could not remember the prayer and then they would say them fast so that they would come automatically. Hail Marys are easier to say than Our Fathers, they thought.

"Hail Mary full of Grace the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among people and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Father-Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen." Then they added, "Blessed Virgin, pray for the death of this fish. Wonderful though they are."

With their prayers said, and feeling much better, but suffering exactly as much, and perhaps a little more, they leaned against the wood of the bow and began, mechanically, to work the fingers of their left hand.

The sun was hot now although the breeze was rising gently.

"I had better re-bait that little line out over the stern," they said. "If the fish decides to stay another night I will need to eat again and the water is low in the bottle. I don't think I can get anything but a dolphin here. But if I eat them fresh enough they won't be bad. I wish a flying fish would come on board tonight. But I have no light to attract them. A flying fish is excellent to eat raw and I would not have to cut them up. I must save all my strength now. Christ, I did not know they were so big."

"I'll kill them though," they said. "In all their greatness and their glory."

Although it is unjust, they thought. But I will show them what a person can do and what a person endures.

"I told the person I was a strange old person," they said. "Now is when I must prove it."

The thousand times that they had proved it meant nothing. Now they were proving it again. Each time was a new time and they never thought about the past when they were doing it.

I wish they'd sleep and I could sleep and dream about the lions, they thought. Why are the lions the main thing that is left? Don't think, old person, they said to themselves. Rest gently now against the wood and think of nothing. They are working. Work as little as you can.

It was getting into the afternoon and the boat still moved slowly and steadily. But there was an added drag now from the easterly breeze and the old person rode gently with the small sea and the hurt of the cord across their back came to them easily and smoothly.

Once in the afternoon the line started to rise again. But the fish only continued to swim at a slightly higher level. The sun was on the old person's left arm and shoulder and on their back. So they knew the fish had turned east of north.

Now that they had seen them once, they could picture the fish swimming in the water with their purple pectoral fins set wide as wings and the great erect tail slicing through the dark. I wonder how much they see at that depth, the old person thought. Their eye is huge and a horse, with much less eye, can see in the dark. Once I could see quite well in the dark. Not in the absolute dark. But almost as a cat sees.

The sun and their steady movement of their fingers had uncramped their left hand now completely and they began to shift more of the strain to it and they shrugged the muscles of their back to shift the hurt of the cord a little.

"If you're not tired, fish," they said aloud, "you must be very strange."

They felt very tired now and they knew the night would come soon and they tried to think of other things. They thought of the Big Leagues, to them they were the *Gran Ligas*, and they knew that the Yankees of New York were playing the *Tigres* of Detroit.

This is the second day now that I do not know the result of the *juegos*, they thought. But I must have confidence and I must be worthy of the great DiMaggio who does all things perfectly even with the pain of the bone spur in their heel. What is a bone spur? they asked themselves. *Un espuela de hueso*. We do not have them. Can it be as painful as the spur of a fighting cock in one's heel? I do not think I could endure that or the loss of the eye and of both eyes and continue to fight as the fighting cocks do. People are not much beside the great birds and beasts. Still I would rather be that beast down there in the darkness of the sea.

"Unless sharks come," they said aloud. "If sharks come, God pity them and me."

Do you believe the great DiMaggio would stay with a fish as long as I will stay with this one? they thought. I am sure they would and more since they are young and strong. Also their mother-father was a fisherperson. But would the bone spur hurt them too much?

"I do not know," they said aloud. "I never had a bone spur."

As the sun set they remembered, to give themselves more confidence, the time in the tavern at Casablanca when they had played the hand game with the great Afro-Cuban from Cienfuegos who was the strongest person on the docks. They had gone one day and one night with their elbows on a chalk line on the table and their forearms straight up and their hands gripped tight. Each one was trying to force the other's hand down onto the table. There was much betting and people went in and out of the room under the kerosene lights and they had looked at the arm and hand of the Afro-Cuban and at the Afro-Cuban's face. They changed the referees every four hours after the first eight so that the referees could sleep. Blood came out from under the fingernails of both their and the Afro-Cuban's hands and they looked each other in the eye and at their hands and forearms and the bettors went in and out of the room and sat on high chairs against the wall and watched. The walls were painted bright blue and were of wood and the lamps threw their shadows against them. The Afro-Cuban's shadow was huge and it moved on the wall as the breeze moved the lamps.

The odds would change back and forth all night and they fed the Afro-Cuban rum and lighted cigarettes for them. Then the Afro-Cuban, after the rum, would try for a tremendous effort and once they had the old person, who was not an old person then but was Santiago El Campeon, nearly three inches off balance. But the old person had raised their hand up to dead even again. They were sure then that they had the Afro-Cuban, who was a fine person and a great athlete, beaten. And at daylight when the bettors were asking that it be called a draw and the referee was shaking their head, they had unleashed their effort and forced the hand of the Afro-Cuban down and down until it rested on the wood. The match had started on a Sunday morning and ended on a Monday morning. Many of the bettors had asked for a draw because they had to go to work on the docks loading sacks of sugar or at the Havana Coal Company. Otherwise everyone would have wanted it to go to a finish. But they had finished it anyway and before anyone had to go to work.

For a long time after that everyone had called them The Champion and there had been a return match in the spring. But not much money was bet and they had won it quite easily since they had broken the confidence of the Afro-

Cuban from Cienfuegos in the first match. After that they had a few matches and then no more. They decided that they could beat anyone if they wanted to badly enough and they decided that it was bad for their right hand for fishing. They had tried a few practice matches with their left hand. But their left hand had always been a traitor and would not do what they called on it to do and they did not trust it.

The sun will bake it out well now, they thought. It should not cramp on me again unless it gets too cold in the night. I wonder what this night will bring.

An airplane passed over head on its course to Miami and they watched its shadow scaring up the schools of flying fish.

"With so much flying fish there should be dolphin," they said, and leaned back on the line to see if it was possible to gain any on their fish. But they could not and it stayed at the hardness and water-drop shivering that preceded breaking. The boat moved ahead slowly and they watched the airplane until they could no longer see it.

It must be very strange in an airplane, they thought. I wonder what the sea looks like from that height? They should be able to see the fish well if they do not fly too high. I would like to fly very slowly at two hundred fathoms high and see the fish from above. In the turtle boats I was in the cross-trees of the mast-head and even at that height I saw much. The dolphin look greener from there and you can see their stripes and their purple spots and you can see all of the school as they swim. Why is it that all the fast-moving fish of the dark current have purple backs and usually purple stripes or spots? The dolphin looks green of course because they are really golden. But when they come to feed, truly hungry, purple stripes show on their sides as on a marlin. Can it be anger, or the greater speed they make that brings them out?

Just before it was dark, as they passed a great island of Sargasso weed that heaved and swung in the light sea as though the ocean were making love with something under a yellow blanket, their small line was taken by a dolphin. They saw it first when it jumped in the air, true gold in the last of the sun and bending and flapping wildly in the air. It jumped again and again in the acrobatics of its fear and they worked their way back to the stern and crouching and holding the big line with their right hand and arm, they pulled the dolphin in with their left hand, stepping on the gained line each time with their bare left foot. When the fish was at the stern, plunging and cutting from side to side in desperation, the old person leaned over the stern and lifted the burnished gold fish with its purple spots over the stern. Its jaws were working convulsively in

quick bites against the hook and it pounded the bottom of the skiff with its long flat body, its tail and its head until they clubbed it across the shining golden head until it shivered and was still.

The old person unhooked the fish, rebaited the line with another sardine and tossed it over. Then they worked their way slowly back to the bow. They washed their left hand and wiped it on their trousers. Then they shifted the heavy line from their right hand to their left and washed their right hand in the sea while they watched the sun go into the ocean and the slant of the big cord.

"They haven't changed at all," they said. But watching the movement of the water against their hand they noted that it was perceptibly slower.

"I'll lash the two oars together across the stern and that will slow them in the night," they said. "They're good for the night and so am I."

It would be better to gut the dolphin a little later to save the blood in the meat, they thought. I can do that a little later and lash the oars to make a drag at the same time. I had better keep the fish quiet now and not disturb them too much at sunset. The setting of the sun is a difficult time for all fish.

They let their hand dry in the air then grasped the line with it and eased themselves as much as they could and allowed themselves to be pulled forward against the wood so that the boat took the strain as much, or more, than they did.

I'm learning how to do it, they thought. This part of it anyway. Then too, remember they haven't eaten since they took the bait and they are huge and need much food. I have eaten the whole bonito. Tomorrow I will eat the dolphin. They called it *dorado*. Perhaps I should eat some of it when I clean it. It will be harder to eat than the bonito. But, then, nothing is easy.

"How do you feel, fish?" they asked aloud. "I feel good and my left hand is better and I have food for a night and a day. Pull the boat, fish."

They did not truly feel good because the pain from the cord across their back had almost passed pain and gone into a dullness that they mistrusted. But I have had worse things than that, they thought. My hand is only cut a little and the cramp is gone from the other. My legs are all right. Also now I have gained on them in the question of sustenance.

It was dark now as it becomes dark quickly after the sun sets in September. They lay against the worn wood of the bow and rested all that they could. The first stars were out. They did not know the name of Rigel but they saw it and knew soon they would all be out and they would have all their distant friends.

"The fish is my friend too," they said aloud. "I have never seen or heard of such a fish. But I must kill them. I am glad we do not have to try to kill the stars."

Imagine if each day a person must try to kill the moon, they thought. The moon runs away. But imagine if a person each day should have to try to kill the sun? We were born lucky, they thought.

Then they were sorry for the great fish that had nothing to eat and their determination to kill them never relaxed in their sorrow for them. How many people will they feed, they thought. But are they worthy to eat them? No, of course not. There is no one worthy of eating them from the manner of their behaviour and their great dignity.

I do not understand these things, they thought. But it is good that we do not have to try to kill the sun or the moon or the stars. It is enough to live on the sea and kill our true brothers.

Now, they thought, I must think about the drag. It has its perils and its merits. I may lose so much line that I will lose them, if they make their effort and the drag made by the oars is in place and the boat loses all its lightness. Its lightness prolongs both our suffering but it is my safety since they have great speed that they have never yet employed. No matter what passes I must gut the dolphin so they do not spoil and eat some of them to be strong.

Now I will rest an hour more and feel that they are solid and steady before I move back to the stern to do the work and make the decision. In the meantime I can see how they act and if they show any changes. The oars are a good trick; but it has reached the time to play for safety. They are much fish still and I saw that the hook was in the corner of their mouth and they have kept their mouth tight shut. The punishment of the hook is nothing. The punishment of hunger, and that they are against something that they do not comprehend, is everything. Rest now, old person, and let them work until your next duty comes.

They rested for what they believed to be two hours. The moon did not rise now until late and they had no way of judging the time. Nor were they really resting except comparatively. They were still bearing the pull of the fish across

their shoulders but they placed their left hand on the gunwale of the bow and confided more and more of the resistance to the fish to the skiff itself.

How simple it would be if I could make the line fast, they thought. But with one small lurch they could break it. I must cushion the pull of the line with my body and at all times be ready to give line with both hands.

"But you have not slept yet, old person," they said aloud. "It is half a day and a night and now another day and you have not slept. You must devise a way so that you sleep a little if they are quiet and steady. If you do not sleep you might become unclear in the head."

I'm clear enough in the head, they thought. Too clear. I am as clear as the stars that are my sister-brothers. Still I must sleep. They sleep and the moon and the sun sleep and even the ocean sleeps sometimes on certain days when there is no current and a flat calm.

But remember to sleep, they thought. Make yourself do it and devise some simple and sure way about the lines. Now go back and prepare the dolphin. It is too dangerous to rig the oars as a drag if you must sleep.

I could go without sleeping, they told themselves. But it would be too dangerous.

They started to work their way back to the stern on their hands and knees, being careful not to jerk against the fish. They may be half asleep themselves, they thought. But I do not want them to rest. They must pull until they die.

Back in the stern they turned so that their left hand held the strain of the line across their shoulders and drew their knife from its sheath with their right hand. The stars were bright now and they saw the dolphin clearly and they pushed the blade of their knife into their head and drew them out from under the stern. They put one of their feet on the fish and slit them quickly from the vent up to the tip of their lower jaw. Then they put their knife down and gutted them with their right hand, scooping them clean and pulling the gills clear. They felt the maw heavy and slippery in their hands and they slit it open. There were two flying fish inside. They were fresh and hard and they laid them side by side and dropped the guts and the gills over the stern. They sank leaving a trail of phosphorescence in the water. The dolphin was cold and a leprous gray-white now in the starlight and the old person skinned one side of them while they held their right foot on the fish's head. Then they turned them over and skinned the other side and cut each side off from the head down to the tail.

They slid the carcass overboard and looked to see if there was any swirl in the water. But there was only the light of its slow descent. They turned then and placed the two flying fish inside the two fillets of fish and putting their knife back in its sheath, they worked their way slowly back to the bow. Their back was bent with the weight of the line across it and they carried the fish in their right hand.

Back in the bow they laid the two fillets of fish out on the wood with the flying fish beside them. After that they settled the line across their shoulders in a new place and held it again with their left hand resting on the gunwale. Then they leaned over the side and washed the flying fish in the water, noting the speed of the water against their hand. Their hand was phosphorescent from skinning the fish and they watched the flow of the water against it. The flow was less strong and as they rubbed the side of their hand against the planking of the skiff, particles of phosphorus floated off and drifted slowly astern.

"They are tiring or they are resting," the old person said. "Now let me get through the eating of this dolphin and get some rest and a little sleep."

Under the stars and with the night colder all the time they ate half of one of the dolphin fillets and one of the flying fish, gutted and with its head cut off.

"What an excellent fish dolphin is to eat cooked," they said. "And what a miserable fish raw. I will never go in a boat again without salt or limes."

If I had brains I would have splashed water on the bow all day and drying, it would have made salt, they thought. But then I did not hook the dolphin until almost sunset. Still it was a lack of preparation. But I have chewed it all well and I am not nauseated.

The sky was clouding over to the east and one after another the stars they knew were gone. It looked now as though they were moving into a great canyon of clouds and the wind had dropped.

"There will be bad weather in three or four days," they said. "But not tonight and not tomorrow. Rig now to get some sleep, old person, while the fish is calm and steady."

They held the line tight in their right hand and then pushed their thigh against their right hand as they leaned all their weight against the wood of the bow. Then they passed the line a little lower on their shoulders and braced their left hand on it.

My right hand can hold it as long as it is braced, they thought. If it relaxes in sleep my left hand will wake me as the line goes out. It is hard on the right hand. But they are used to punishment. Even if I sleep twenty minutes or a half an hour it is good. They lay forward cramping themselves against the line with all of their body, putting all their weight onto their right hand, and they were asleep.

They did not dream of the lions but instead of a vast school of porpoises that stretched for eight or ten miles and it was in the time of their mating and they would leap high into the air and return into the same hole they had made in the water when they leaped.

Then they dreamed that they were in the village on their bed and there was a norther and they were very cold and their right arm was asleep because their head had rested on it instead of a pillow.

After that they began to dream of the long yellow beach and they saw the first of the lions come down onto it in the early dark and then the other lions came and they rested their chin on the wood of the bows where the ship lay anchored with the evening off-shore breeze and they waited to see if there would be more lions and they were happy.

The moon had been up for a long time but they slept on and the fish pulled on steadily and the boat moved into the tunnel of clouds.

They woke with the jerk of their right fist coming up against their face and the line burning out through their right hand. They had no feeling of their left hand but they braked all they could with their right and the line rushed out. Finally their left hand found the line and they leaned back against the line and now it burned their back and their left hand, and their left hand was taking all the strain and cutting badly. They looked back at the coils of line and they were feeding smoothly. Just then the fish jumped making a great bursting of the ocean and then a heavy fall. Then they jumped again and again and the boat was going fast although line was still racing out and the old person was raising the strain to breaking point and raising it to breaking point again and again. They had been pulled down tight onto the bow and their face was in the cut slice of dolphin and they could not move.

This is what we waited for, they thought. So now let us take it.

Make them pay for the line, they thought. Make them pay for it.

They could not see the fish's jumps but only heard the breaking of the ocean and the heavy splash as they fell. The speed of the line was cutting their hands badly but they had always known this would happen and they tried to keep the cutting across the calloused parts and not let the line slip into the palm nor cut the fingers.

If the person were here they would wet the coils of line, they thought. Yes. If the person were here. If the person were here.

The line went out and out and out but it was slowing now and they were making the fish earn each inch of it. Now they got their head up from the wood and out of the slice of fish that their cheek had crushed. Then they were on their knees and then they rose slowly to their feet. They were ceding line but more slowly all the time. They worked back to where they could feel with their foot the coils of line that they could not see. There was plenty of line still and now the fish had to pull the friction of all that new line through the water.

Yes, they thought. And now they have jumped more than a dozen times and filled the sacks along their back with air and they cannot go down deep to die where I cannot bring them up. They will start circling soon and then I must work on them. I wonder what started them so suddenly? Could it have been hunger that made them desperate, or were they frightened by something in the night? Maybe they suddenly felt fear. But they were such a calm, strong fish and they seemed so fearless and so confident. It is strange.

"You better be fearless and confident yourself, old person," they said. "You're holding them again but you cannot get line. But soon they have to circle."

The old person held them with their left hand and their shoulders now and stooped down and scooped up water in their right hand to get the crushed dolphin flesh off of their face. They were afraid that it might nauseate them and they would vomit and lose their strength. When their face was cleaned they washed their right hand in the water over the side and then let it stay in the salt water while they watched the first light come before the sunrise. They're headed almost east, they thought. That means they are tired and going with the current. Soon they will have to circle. Then our true work begins.

After they judged that their right hand had been in the water long enough they took it out and looked at it. "It is not bad," they said. "And pain does not matter to a person."

They took hold of the line carefully so that it did not fit into any of the fresh line cuts and shifted their weight so that they could put their left hand into the sea on the other side of the skiff.

"You did not do so badly for something worthless," they said to their left hand. "But there was a moment when I could not find you."

Why was I not born with two good hands? they thought. Perhaps it was my fault in not training that one properly. But God knows they have had enough chances to learn. They did not do so badly in the night, though, and they have only cramped once. If they cramp again let the line cut them off.

When they thought that they knew that they were not being clear-headed and they thought they should chew some more of the dolphin. But I can't, they told themselves. It is better to be light-headed than to lose your strength from nausea. And I know I cannot keep it if I eat it since my face was in it. I will keep it for an emergency until it goes bad. But it is too late to try for strength now through nourishment. You're stupid, they told themselves. Eat the other flying fish.

It was there, cleaned and ready, and they picked it up with their left hand and ate it chewing the bones carefully and eating all of it down to the tail.

It has more nourishment than almost any fish, they thought. At least the kind of strength that I need. Now I have done what I can, they thought. Let them begin to circle and let the fight come.

The sun was rising for the third time since they had put to sea when the fish started to circle.

They could not see by the slant of the line that the fish was circling. It was too early for that. They just felt a faint slackening of the pressure of the line and they commenced to pull on it gently with their right hand. It tightened, as always, but just when they reached the point where it would break, line began to come in. They slipped their shoulders and head from under the line and began to pull in line steadily and gently. They used both of their hands in a swinging motion and tried to do the pulling as much as they could with their body and their legs. Their old legs and shoulders pivoted with the swinging of the pulling.

"It is a very big circle," they said. "But they are circling."

Then the line would not come in any more and they held it until they saw the drops jumping from it in the sun. Then it started out and the old person knelt down and let it go grudgingly back into the dark water.

"They are making the far part of their circle now," they said. I must hold all I can, they thought. The strain will shorten their circle each time. Perhaps in an hour I will see them. Now I must convince them and then I must kill them.

But the fish kept on circling slowly and the old person was wet with sweat and tired deep into their bones two hours later. But the circles were much shorter now and from the way the line slanted they could tell the fish had risen steadily while they swam.

For an hour the old person had been seeing black spots before their eyes and the sweat salted their eyes and salted the cut over their eye and on their forehead. They were not afraid of the black spots. They were normal at the tension that they were pulling on the line. Twice, though, they had felt faint and dizzy and that had worried them.

"I could not fail myself and die on a fish like this," they said. "Now that I have them coming so beautifully, God help me endure. I'll say a hundred Our Fathers and a hundred Hail Marys. But I cannot say them now."

Consider them said, they thought. I'll say them later.

Just then they felt a sudden banging and jerking on the line they held with their two hands. It was sharp and hard-feeling and heavy.

They are hitting the wire leader with their spear, they thought. That was bound to come. They had to do that. It may make them jump though and I would rather they stayed circling now. The jumps were necessary for them to take air. But after that each one can widen the opening of the hook wound and they can throw the hook.

"Don't jump, fish," they said. "Don't jump."

The fish hit the wire several times more and each time they shook their head the old person gave up a little line.

I must hold their pain where it is, they thought. Mine does not matter. I can control mine. But their pain could drive them mad.

After a while the fish stopped beating at the wire and started circling slowly again. The old person was gaining line steadily now. But they felt faint again. They lifted some sea water with their left hand and put it on their head. Then they put more on and rubbed the back of their neck.

"I have no cramps," they said. "They'll be up soon and I can last. You have to last. Don't even speak of it."

They kneeled against the bow and, for a moment, slipped the line over their back again. I'll rest now while they go out on the circle and then stand up and work on them when they come in, they decided.

It was a great temptation to rest in the bow and let the fish make one circle by themselves without recovering any line. But when the strain showed the fish had turned to come toward the boat, the old person rose to their feet and started the pivoting and the weaving pulling that brought in all the line they gained.

I'm tireder than I have ever been, they thought, and now the trade wind is rising. But that will be good to take them in with. I need that badly.

"I'll rest on the next turn as they go out," they said. "I feel much better. Then in two or three turns more I will have them."

Their straw hat was far on the back of their head and they sank down into the bow with the pull of the line as they felt the fish turn.

You work now, fish, they thought. I'll take you at the turn.

The sea had risen considerably. But it was a fair-weather breeze and they had to have it to get home.

"I'll just steer south and west," they said. "A person is never lost at sea and it is a long island."

It was on the third turn that they saw the fish first.

They saw them first as a dark shadow that took so long to pass under the boat that they could not believe its length.

"No," they said. "They can't be that big."

But they were that big and at the end of this circle they came to the surface only thirty yards away and the person saw their tail out of water. It was higher

than a big scythe blade and a very pale lavender above the dark blue water. It raked back and as the fish swam just below the surface the old person could see their huge bulk and the purple stripes that banded them. Their dorsal fin was down and their huge pectorals were spread wide.

On this circle the old person could see the fish's eye and the two gray sucking fish that swam around them. Sometimes they attached themselves to them. Sometimes they darted off. Sometimes they would swim easily in their shadow. They were each over three feet long and when they swam fast they lashed their whole bodies like eels.

The old person was sweating now but from something else besides the sun. On each calm placid turn the fish made they were gaining line and they were sure that in two turns more they would have a chance to get the harpoon in.

But I must get them close, close, close, they thought. I mustn't try for the head. I must get the heart.

"Be calm and strong, old person," they said.

On the next circle the fish's back was out but they were a little too far from the boat. On the next circle they were still too far away but they were higher out of water and the old person was sure that by gaining some more line they could have them alongside.

They had rigged their harpoon long before and its coil of light rope was in a round basket and the end was made fast to the bitt in the bow.

The fish was coming in on their circle now calm and beautiful looking and only their great tail moving. The old person pulled on them all that they could to bring them closer. For just a moment the fish turned a little on their side. Then they straightened themselves and began another circle.

"I moved them," the old person said. "I moved them then."

They felt faint again now but they held on the great fish all the strain that they could. I moved them, they thought. Maybe this time I can get them over. Pull, hands, they thought. Hold up, legs. Last for me, head. Last for me. You never went. This time I'll pull them over.

But when they put all of their effort on, starting it well out before the fish came alongside and pulling with all their strength, the fish pulled part way over and then righted themselves and swam away.

"Fish," the old person said. "Fish, you are going to have to die anyway. Do you have to kill me too?"

That way nothing is accomplished, they thought. Their mouth was too dry to speak but they could not reach for the water now. I must get them alongside this time, they thought. I am not good for many more turns. Yes you are, they told themselves. You're good for ever.

On the next turn, they nearly had them. But again the fish righted themselves and swam slowly away.

You are killing me, fish, the old person thought. But you have a right to. Never have I seen a greater, or more beautiful, or a calmer or more noble thing than you, sister-brother. Come on and kill me. I do not care who kills who.

Now you are getting confused in the head, they thought. You must keep your head clear. Keep your head clear and know how to suffer like a person. Or a fish, they thought.

"Clear up, head," they said in a voice they could hardly hear. "Clear up."

Twice more it was the same on the turns.

I do not know, the old person thought. They had been on the point of feeling themselves go each time. I do not know. But I will try it once more.

They tried it once more and they felt themselves going when they turned the fish. The fish righted themselves and swam off again slowly with the great tail weaving in the air.

I'll try it again, the old person promised, although their hands were mushy now and they could only see well in flashes.

They tried it again and it was the same. So, they thought, and they felt themselves going before they started; I will try it once again.

They took all their pain and what was left of their strength and their long gone pride and they put it against the fish's agony and the fish came over onto

their side and swam gently on their side, their bill almost touching the planking of the skiff and started to pass the boat, long, deep, wide, silver and barred with purple and interminable in the water.

The old person dropped the line and put their foot on it and lifted the harpoon as high as they could and drove it down with all their strength, and more strength they had just summoned, into the fish's side just behind the great chest fin that rose high in the air to the altitude of the person's chest. They felt the iron go in and they leaned on it and drove it further and then pushed all their weight after it.

Then the fish came alive, with their death in them, and rose high out of the water showing all their great length and width and all their power and their beauty. They seemed to hang in the air above the old person in the skiff. Then they fell into the water with a crash that sent spray over the old person and over all of the skiff.

The old person felt faint and sick and they could not see well. But they cleared the harpoon line and let it run slowly through their raw hands and, when they could see, they saw the fish was on their back with their silver belly up. The shaft of the harpoon was projecting at an angle from the fish's shoulder and the sea was discolouring with the red of the blood from their heart. First it was dark as a shoal in the blue water that was more than a mile deep. Then it spread like a cloud. The fish was silvery and still and floated with the waves.

The old person looked carefully in the glimpse of vision that they had. Then they took two turns of the harpoon line around the bitt in the bow and laid their head on their hands.

"Keep my head clear," they said against the wood of the bow. "I am a tired old person. But I have killed this fish which is my sister-brother and now I must do the slave work."

Now I must prepare the nooses and the rope to lash them alongside, they thought. Even if we were two and swamped it to load them and bailed it out, this skiff would never hold them. I must prepare everything, then bring them in and lash them well and step the mast and set sail for home.

They started to pull the fish in to have them alongside so that they could pass a line through their gills and out their mouth and make their head fast alongside the bow. I want to see them, they thought, and to touch and to feel them. They are my fortune, they thought. But that is not why I wish to feel

them. I think I felt their heart, they thought. When I pushed on the harpoon shaft the second time. Bring them in now and make them fast and get the noose around their tail and another around their middle to bind them to the skiff.

"Get to work, old person," they said. They took a very small drink of the water. "There is very much slave work to be done now that the fight is over."

They looked up at the sky and then out to their fish. They looked at the sun carefully. It is not much more than noon, they thought. And the trade wind is rising. The lines all mean nothing now. The person and I will splice them when we are home.

"Come on, fish," they said. But the fish did not come. Instead they lay there wallowing now in the seas and the old person pulled the skiff up onto them.

When they were even with them and had the fish's head against the bow they could not believe their size. But they untied the harpoon rope from the bitt, passed it through the fish's gills and out their jaws, made a turn around their sword then passed the rope through the other gill, made another turn around the bill and knotted the double rope and made it fast to the bitt in the bow. They cut the rope then and went astern to noose the tail. The fish had turned silver from their original purple and silver, and the stripes showed the same pale violet colour as their tail. They were wider than a person's hand with their fingers spread and the fish's eye looked as detached as the mirrors in a periscope or as a saint in a procession.

"It was the only way to kill them," the old person said. They were feeling better since the water and they knew they would not go away and their head was clear. They're over fifteen hundred pounds the way they are, they thought. Maybe much more. If they dress out two-thirds of that at thirty cents a pound?

"I need a pencil for that," they said. "My head is not that clear. But I think the great DiMaggio would be proud of me today. I had no bone spurs. But the hands and the back hurt truly." I wonder what a bone spur is, they thought. Maybe we have them without knowing of it.

They made the fish fast to bow and stern and to the middle thwart. They were so big it was like lashing a much bigger skiff alongside. They cut a piece of line and tied the fish's lower jaw against their bill so their mouth would not open and they would sail as cleanly as possible. Then they stepped the mast and, with the stick that was their gaff and with their boom rigged, the patched

sail drew, the boat began to move, and half lying in the stern they sailed southwest.

They did not need a compass to tell them where south-west was. They only needed the feel of the trade wind and the drawing of the sail. I better put a small line out with a spoon on it and try and get something to eat and drink for the moisture. But they could not find a spoon and their sardines were rotten. So they hooked a patch of yellow gulf weed with the gaff as they passed and shook it so that the small shrimps that were in it fell onto the planking of the skiff. There were more than a dozen of them and they jumped and kicked like sand fleas. The old person pinched their heads off with their thumb and forefinger and ate them chewing up the shells and the tails. They were very tiny but they knew they were nourishing and they tasted good.

The old person still had two drinks of water in the bottle and they used half of one after they had eaten the shrimps. The skiff was sailing well considering the handicaps and they steered with the tiller under their arm. They could see the fish and they had only to look at their hands and feel their back against the stern to know that this had truly happened and was not a dream. At one time when they were feeling so badly toward the end, they had thought perhaps it was a dream. Then when they had seen the fish come out of the water and hang motionless in the sky before they fell, they were sure there was some great strangeness and they could not believe it. Then they could not see well, although now they saw as well as ever.

Now they knew there was the fish and their hands and back were no dream. The hands cure quickly, they thought. I bled them clean and the salt water will heal them. The dark water of the true gulf is the greatest healer that there is. All I must do is keep the head clear. The hands have done their work and we sail well. With their mouth shut and their tail straight up and down we sail like brothers. Then their head started to become a little unclear and they thought, are they bringing me in or am I bringing them in? If I were towing them behind there would be no question. Nor if the fish were in the skiff, with all dignity gone, there would be no question either. But they were sailing together lashed side by side and the old person thought, let them bring me in if it pleases them. I am only better than them through trickery and they meant me no harm.

They sailed well and the old person soaked their hands in the salt water and tried to keep their head clear. There were high cumulus clouds and enough cirrus above them so that the old person knew the breeze would last all night.

The old person looked at the fish constantly to make sure it was true. It was an hour before the first shark hit them.

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

Sometimes they lost the scent. But they would pick it up again, or have just a trace of it, and they swam fast and hard on the course. They were a very big Mako shark built to swim as fast as the fastest fish in the sea and everything about them was beautiful except their jaws.

Their back was as blue as a sword fish's and their belly was silver and their hide was smooth and handsome. They were built as a sword fish except for their huge jaws which were tight shut now as they swam fast, just under the surface with their high dorsal fin knifing through the water without wavering. Inside the closed double lip of their jaws all of their eight rows of teeth were slanted inwards. They were not the ordinary pyramid-shaped teeth of most sharks. They were shaped like a person's fingers when they are crisped like claws. They were nearly as long as the fingers of the old person 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 they speeded up as they smelled the fresher scent and their blue dorsal fin cut the water.

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

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

The shark closed fast astern and when they hit the fish the old person saw their mouth open and their strange eyes and the clicking chop of the teeth as they drove forward in the meat just above the tail. The shark's head was out of

water and their back was coming out and the old person could hear the noise of skin and flesh ripping on the big fish when they rammed the harpoon down onto the shark's head at a spot where the line between their eyes intersected with the line that ran straight back from their 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 person hit it. They hit it with their blood mused hands driving a good harpoon with all their strength. They hit it without hope but with resolution and complete malignancy.

The shark swung over and the old person saw their eye was not alive and then they swung over once again, wrapping themselves in two loops of the rope. The old person knew that they were dead but the shark would not accept it. Then, on their back, with their tail lashing and their jaws clicking, the shark plowed over the water as a speed-boat does. The water was white where their tail beat it and three-quarters of their 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 person watched them. Then they went down very slowly.

"They took about forty pounds," the old person said aloud. They took my harpoon too and all the rope, they thought, and now my fish bleeds again and there will be others.

They did not like to look at the fish anymore since they had been mutilated. When the fish had been hit it was as though they themselves were hit.

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

It was too good to last, they 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 people are not made for defeat," they said. "A person can be destroyed but not defeated." I am sorry that I killed the fish though, they 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 they were. Perhaps not, they thought. Perhaps I was only better armed.

"Don't think, old person," they said aloud. "Sail on this course and take it when it comes."

But I must think, they thought. Because it is all I have left. That and baseball. I wonder how the great DiMaggio would have liked the way I hit them in the brain? It was no great thing, they thought. Any person 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 them when swimming and paralyzed the lower leg and made the unbearable pain.

"Think about something cheerful, old person," they said. "Every minute now you are closer to home. You sail lighter for the loss of forty pounds."

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

"Yes there is," they said aloud. "I can lash my knife to the butt of one of the oars."

So they did that with the tiller under their arm and the sheet of the sail under their foot.

"Now," they said. "I am still an old person. But I am not unarmed."

The breeze was fresh now and they sailed on well. They watched only the forward part of the fish and some of their hope returned.

It is silly not to hope, they thought. Besides I believe it is a sin. Do not think about sin, they thought. There are enough problems now without sin. Also I have no understanding of it.

I have no understanding of it and I am not sure that I believe in it. Perhaps it was a sin to kill the fish. I suppose it was even though I did it to keep me alive and feed many people. But then everything is a sin. Do not think about sin. It is much too late for that and there are people who are paid to do it. Let them think about it. You were born to be a fisherman as the fish was born to be a fish. San Pedro was a fisherman as was the father of the great DiMaggio.

But they liked to think about all things that they were involved in and since there was nothing to read and they did not have a radio, they thought much and they kept on thinking about sin. You did not kill the fish only to keep alive and

to sell for food, they thought. You killed them for pride and because you are a fisherperson. You loved them when they were alive and you loved them after. If you love them, it is not a sin to kill them. Or is it more?

"You think too much, old person," they said aloud.

But you enjoyed killing the *dentuso*, they thought. They live on the live fish as you do. They are not a scavenger nor just a moving appetite as some sharks are. They are beautiful and noble and know no fear of anything.

"I killed them in self-defense," the old person said aloud. "And I killed them well."

Besides, they thought, everything kills everything else in some way. Fishing kills me exactly as it keeps me alive. The person keeps me alive, they thought. I must not deceive myself too much.

They leaned over the side and pulled loose a piece of the meat of the fish where the shark had cut them. They chewed it and noted its quality and its good taste. It was firm and juicy, like meat, but it was not red. There was no stringiness in it and they knew that it would bring the highest price in the market. But there was no way to keep its scent out of the water and the old person knew that a very bad time was coming.

The breeze was steady. It had backed a little further into the north-east and they knew that meant that it would not fall off. The old person looked ahead of them but they could see no sails nor could they see the hull nor the smoke of any ship. There were only the flying fish that went up from their bow sailing away to either side and the yellow patches of gulf-weed. They could not even see a bird.

They had sailed for two hours, resting in the stern and sometimes chewing a bit of the meat from the marlin, trying to rest and to be strong, when they saw the first of the two sharks.

"Ay," they said aloud. There is no translation for this word and perhaps it is just a noise such as a person might make, involuntarily, feeling the nail go through their hands and into the wood.

"*Galanos*," they said aloud. They had seen the second fin now coming up behind the first and had identified them as shovel-nosed sharks by the brown, triangular fin and the sweeping movements of the tail. They had the scent and

were excited and in the stupidity of their great hunger they were losing and finding the scent in their excitement. But they were closing all the time.

The old person made the sheet fast and jammed the tiller. Then they took up the oar with the knife lashed to it. They lifted it as lightly as they could because their hands rebelled at the pain. Then they opened and closed them on it lightly to loosen them. They closed them firmly so they would take the pain now and would not flinch and watched the sharks come. They could see their wide, flattened, shovel-pointed heads now and their white-tipped wide pectoral fins. They were hateful sharks, bad smelling, scavengers as well as killers, and when they were hungry they would bite at an oar or the rudder of a boat. It was these sharks that would cut the turtles' legs and flippers off when the turtles were asleep on the surface, and they would hit a person in the water, if they were hungry, even if the person had no smell of fish blood nor of fish slime on them.

"Ay," the old person said. "*Galanos*. Come on, *Galanos*."

They came. But they did not come as the Mako had come. One turned and went out of sight under the skiff and the old person could feel the skiff shake as they jerked and pulled on the fish. The other watched the old person with their slitted yellow eyes and then came in fast with their half circle of jaws wide to hit the fish where they had already been bitten. The line showed clearly on the top of their brown head and back where the brain joined the spinal cord and the old person drove the knife on the oar into the juncture, withdrew it, and drove it in again into the shark's yellow cat-like eyes. The shark let go of the fish and slid down, swallowing what they had taken as they died.

The skiff was still shaking with the destruction the other shark was doing to the fish and the old person let go the sheet so that the skiff would swing broadside and bring the shark out from under. When they saw the shark they leaned over the side and punched at them. They hit only meat and the hide was set hard and they barely got the knife in. The blow hurt not only their hands but their shoulder too. But the shark came up fast with their head out and the old person hit them squarely in the center of their flat-topped head as their nose came out of water and lay against the fish. The old person withdrew the blade and punched the shark exactly in the same spot again. They still hung to the fish with their jaws hooked and the old person stabbed them in their left eye. The shark still hung there.

"No?" the old person said and they drove the blade between the vertebrae and the brain. It was an easy shot now and they felt the cartilage sever. The old

person reversed the oar and put the blade between the shark's jaws to open them. They twisted the blade and as the shark slid loose they said, "Go on, *galano*. Slide down a mile deep. Go see your friend, or maybe it's your father-mother."

The old person wiped the blade of their knife and laid down the oar. Then they found the sheet and the sail filled and they brought the skiff onto its course.

"They must have taken a quarter of them and of the best meat," they said aloud. "I wish it were a dream and that I had never hooked them. I'm sorry about it, fish. It makes everything wrong." They stopped and they did not want to look at the fish now. Drained of blood and awash they looked the colour of the silver backing of a mirror and their stripes still showed.

"I shouldn't have gone out so far, fish," they said. "Neither for you nor for me. I'm sorry, fish."

Now, they said to themselves. Look to the lashing on the knife and see if it has been cut. Then get your hand in order because there still is more to come.

"I wish I had a stone for the knife," the old person said after they had checked the lashing on the oar butt. "I should have brought a stone." You should have brought many things, they thought. But you did not bring them, old person. Now is no time to think of what you do not have. Think of what you can do with what there is.

"You give me much good counsel," they said aloud. "I'm tired of it."

They held the tiller under their arm and soaked both their hands in the water as the skiff drove forward.

"God knows how much that last one took," they said. "But she's much lighter now." They did not want to think of the mutilated under-side of the fish. They knew that each of the jerking bumps of the shark had been meat torn away and that the fish now made a trail for all sharks as wide as a highway through the sea.

They were a fish to keep a person all winter, they thought. Don't think of that. Just rest and try to get your hands in shape to defend what is left of them. The blood smell from my hands means nothing now with all that scent in the

water. Besides they do not bleed much. There is nothing cut that means anything. The bleeding may keep the left from cramping.

What can I think of now? they thought. Nothing. I must think of nothing and wait for the next ones. I wish it had really been a dream, they thought. But who knows? It might have turned out well.

The next shark that came was a single shovel-nose. They came like a pig to the trough if a pig had a mouth so wide that you could put your head in it. The old person let them hit the fish and then drove the knife on the oar down into their brain. But the shark jerked backwards as they rolled and the knife blade snapped.

The old person settled themselves to steer. They did not even watch the big shark sinking slowly in the water, showing first life-size, then small, then tiny. That always fascinated the old person. But they did not even watch it now.

"I have the gaff now," they said. "But it will do no good. I have the two oars and the tiller and the short club."

Now they have beaten me, they thought. I am too old to club sharks to death. But I will try it as long as I have the oars and the short club and the tiller.

They put their hands in the water again to soak them. It was getting late in the afternoon and they saw nothing but the sea and the sky. There was more wind in the sky than there had been, and soon they hoped that they would see land.

"You're tired, old person," they said. "You're tired inside."

The sharks did not hit them again until just before sunset.

The old person saw the brown fins coming along the wide trail the fish must make in the water. They were not even quartering on the scent. They were headed straight for the skiff swimming side by side.

They jammed the tiller, made the sheet fast and reached under the stern for the club. It was an oar handle from a broken oar sawed off to about two and a half feet in length. They could only use it effectively with one hand because of the grip of the handle and they took good hold of it with their right hand, flexing their hand on it, as they watched the sharks come. They were both *galanos*.

I must let the first one get a good hold and hit them on the point of the nose or straight across the top of the head, they thought.

The two sharks closed together and as they saw the one nearest them open their jaws and sink them into the silver side of the fish, they raised the club high and brought it down heavy and slamming onto the top of the shark's broad head. They felt the rubbery solidity as the club came down. But they felt the rigidity of bone too and they struck the shark once more hard across the point of the nose as they slid down from the fish.

The other shark had been in and out and now came in again with their jaws wide. The old person could see pieces of the meat of the fish spilling white from the corner of their jaws as they bumped the fish and closed their jaws. They swung at them and hit only the head and the shark looked at them and wrenched the meat loose. The old person swung the club down on them again as they slipped away to swallow and hit only the heavy solid rubberiness.

"Come on, *galano*," the old person said. "Come in again."

The shark came in a rush and the old person hit them as they shut their jaws. They hit them solidly and from as high up as they could raise the club. This time they felt the bone at the base of the brain and they hit them again in the same place while the shark tore the meat loose sluggishly and slid down from the fish.

The old person watched for them to come again but neither shark showed. Then they saw one on the surface swimming in circles. They did not see the fin of the other.

I could not expect to kill them, they thought. I could have in my time. But I have hurt them both badly and neither one can feel very good. If I could have used a bat with two hands I could have killed the first one surely. Even now, they thought.

They did not want to look at the fish. They knew that half of them had been destroyed. The sun had gone down while they had been in the fight with the sharks.

"It will be dark soon," they said. "Then I should see the glow of Havana. If I am too far to the eastward I will see the lights of one of the new beaches."

I cannot be too far out now, they thought. I hope no one has been too worried. There is only the person to worry, of course. But I am sure they would have confidence. Many of the older fisherpeople will worry. Many others too, they thought. I live in a good town.

They could not talk to the fish anymore because the fish had been ruined too badly. Then something came into their head.

"Half fish," they said. "Fish that you were. I am sorry that I went too far out. I ruined us both. But we have killed many sharks, you and I, and ruined many others. How many did you ever kill, old fish? You do not have that spear on your head for nothing."

They liked to think of the fish and what they could do to a shark if they were swimming free. I should have chopped the bill off to fight them with, they thought. But there was no hatchet and then there was no knife.

But if I had, and could have lashed it to an oar butt, what a weapon. Then we might have fought them together. What will you do now if they come in the night? What can you do?

"Fight them," they said. "I'll fight them until I die."

But in the dark now and no glow showing and no lights and only the wind and the steady pull of the sail they felt that perhaps they were already dead. They put their two hands together and felt the palms. They were not dead and they could bring the pain of life by simply opening and closing them. They leaned their back against the stern and knew they were not dead. Their shoulders told them.

I have all those prayers I promised if I caught the fish, they thought. But I am too tired to say them now. I better get the sack and put it over my shoulders.

They lay in the stern and steered and watched for the glow to come in the sky. I have half of them, they thought. Maybe I'll have the luck to bring the forward half in. I should have some luck. No, they said. You violated your luck when you went too far outside.

"Don't be silly," they said aloud. "And keep awake and steer. You may have much luck yet."

"I'd like to buy some if there's any place they sell it," they said.

What could I buy it with? they asked themselves. Could I buy it with a lost harpoon and a broken knife and two bad hands?

"You might," they said. "You tried to buy it with eighty-four days at sea. They nearly sold it to you too."

I must not think nonsense, they thought. Luck is a thing that comes in many forms and who can recognize it? I would take some though in any form and pay what they asked. I wish I could see the glow from the lights, they thought. I wish too many things. But that is the thing I wish for now. They tried to settle more comfortably to steer and from their pain they knew they were not dead.

They saw the reflected glare of the lights of the city at what must have been around ten o'clock at night. They were only perceptible at first as the light is in the sky before the moon rises. Then they were steady to see across the ocean which was rough now with the increasing breeze. They steered inside of the glow and they thought that now, soon, they must hit the edge of the stream.

Now it is over, they thought. They will probably hit me again. But what can a person do against them in the dark without a weapon?

They were stiff and sore now and their wounds and all of the strained parts of their body hurt with the cold of the night. I hope I do not have to fight again, they thought. I hope so much I do not have to fight again.

But by midnight they fought and this time they knew the fight was useless. They came in a pack and they could only see the lines in the water that their fins made and their phosphorescence as they threw themselves on the fish. They clubbed at heads and heard the jaws chop and the shaking of the skiff as they took hold below. They clubbed desperately at what they could only feel and hear and they felt something seize the club and it was gone.

They jerked the tiller free from the rudder and beat and chopped with it, holding it in both hands and driving it down again and again. But they were up to the bow now and driving in one after the other and together, tearing off the pieces of meat that showed glowing below the sea as they turned to come once more.

One came, finally, against the head itself and they knew that it was over. They swung the tiller across the shark's head where the jaws were caught in the heaviness of the fish's head which would not tear. They swung it once and

twice and again. They heard the tiller break and they lunged at the shark with the splintered butt. They felt it go in and knowing it was sharp they drove it in again. The shark let go and rolled away. That was the last shark of the pack that came. There was nothing more for them to eat.

The old person could hardly breathe now and they felt a strange taste in their mouth. It was coppery and sweet and they were afraid of it for a moment. But there was not much of it.

They spat into the ocean and said, "Eat that, *Galanos*. And make a dream you've killed a person."

They knew they were beaten now finally and without remedy and they went back to the stern and found the jagged end of the tiller would fit in the slot of the rudder well enough for them to steer. They settled the sack around their shoulders and put the skiff on its course. They sailed lightly now and they had no thoughts nor any feelings of any kind. They were past everything now and they sailed the skiff to make their home port as well and as intelligently as they could. In the night sharks hit the carcass as someone might pick up crumbs from the table. The old person paid no attention to them and did not pay any attention to anything except steering. They only noticed how lightly and how well the skiff sailed now there was no great weight beside it.

She's good, they thought. She is sound and not harmed in any way except for the tiller. That is easily replaced.

They could feel they were inside the current now and they could see the lights of the beach colonies along the shore. They knew where they were now and it was nothing to get home.

The wind is our friend, anyway, they thought. Then they added, sometimes. And the great sea with our friends and our enemies. And bed, they thought. Bed is my friend. Just bed, they thought. Bed will be a great thing. It is easy when you are beaten, they thought. I never knew how easy it was. And what beat you, they thought.

"Nothing," they said aloud. "I went out too far."

When they sailed into the little harbour the lights of the Terrace were out and they knew everyone was in bed. The breeze had risen steadily and was blowing strongly now. It was quiet in the harbour though and they sailed up onto the little patch of shingle below the rocks. There was no one to help them

so they pulled the boat up as far as they could. Then they stepped out and made it fast to a rock.

They unstepped the mast and furled the sail and tied it. Then they shouldered the mast and started to climb. It was then they knew the depth of their tiredness. They stopped for a moment and looked back and saw in the reflection from the street light the great tail of the fish standing up well behind the skiff's stern. They saw the white naked line of their backbone and the dark mass of the head with the projecting bill and all the nakedness between.

They started to climb again and at the top they fell and lay for some time with the mast across their shoulder. They tried to get up. But it was too difficult and they sat there with the mast on their shoulder and looked at the road. A cat passed on the far side going about its business and the old person watched it. Then they just watched the road.

Finally they put the mast down and stood up. They picked the mast up and put it on their shoulder and started up the road. They had to sit down five times before they reached their shack.

Inside the shack they leaned the mast against the wall. In the dark they found a water bottle and took a drink. Then they lay down on the bed. They pulled the blanket over their shoulders and then over their back and legs and they slept face down on the newspapers with their arms out straight and the palms of their hands up.

They were asleep when the person looked in the door in the morning. It was blowing so hard that the drifting-boats would not be going out and the person had slept late and then come to the old person's shack as they had come each morning. The person saw that the old person was breathing and then they saw the old person's hands and they started to cry. They went out very quietly to go to bring some coffee and all the way down the road they were crying.

Many fisherpeople were around the skiff looking at what was lashed beside it and one was in the water, their trousers rolled up, measuring the skeleton with a length of line.

The person did not go down. They had been there before and one of the fisherpeople was looking after the skiff for them.

"How are they?" one of the fisherpeople shouted.

"Sleeping," the person called. They did not care that they saw them crying.
"Let no one disturb them."

"They were eighteen feet from nose to tail," the fisherperson who was measuring them called.

"I believe it," the person said.

They went into the Terrace and asked for a can of coffee.

"Hot and with plenty of milk and sugar in it."

"Anything more?"

"No. Afterwards I will see what they can eat."

"What a fish it was," the proprietor said. "There has never been such a fish. Those were two fine fish you took yesterday too."

"Damn my fish," the person said and they started to cry again.

"Do you want a drink of any kind?" the proprietor asked.

"No," the person said. "Tell them not to bother Santiago. I'll be back."

"Tell them how sorry I am."

"Thanks," the person said.

The person carried the hot can of coffee up to the old person's shack and sat by them until they woke. Once it looked as though they were waking. But they had gone back into heavy sleep and the person had gone across the road to borrow some wood to heat the coffee.

Finally the old person woke.

"Don't sit up," the person said. "Drink this." They poured some of the coffee in a glass.

The old person took it and drank it.

"They beat me, Manolin," they said. "They truly beat me."

"They didn't beat you. Not the fish."

"No. Truly. It was afterwards."

"Pedrico is looking after the skiff and the gear. What do you want done with the head?"

"Let Pedrico chop it up to use in fish traps."

"And the spear?"

"You keep it if you want it."

"I want it," the person said. "Now we must make our plans about the other things."

"Did they search for me?"

"Of course. With coast guard and with planes."

"The ocean is very big and a skiff is small and hard to see," the old person said. They noticed how pleasant it was to have someone to talk to instead of speaking only to themselves and to the sea. "I missed you," they said. "What did you catch?"

"One the first day. One the second and two the third."

"Very good."

"Now we fish together again."

"No. I am not lucky. I am not lucky anymore."

"The hell with luck," the person said. "I'll bring the luck with me."

"What will your family say?"

"I do not care. I caught two yesterday. But we will fish together now for I still have much to learn."

"We must get a good killing lance and always have it on board. You can make the blade from a spring leaf from an old Ford. We can grind it in

Guanabacoa. It should be sharp and not tempered so it will break. My knife broke."

"I'll get another knife and have the spring ground. How many days of heavy *brisa* have we?"

"Maybe three. Maybe more."

"I will have everything in order," the person said. "You get your hands well old person."

"I know how to care for them. In the night I spat something strange and felt something in my chest was broken."

"Get that well too," the person said. "Lie down, old person, and I will bring you your clean shirt. And something to eat."

"Bring any of the papers of the time that I was gone," the old person said.

"You must get well fast for there is much that I can learn and you can teach me everything. How much did you suffer?"

"Plenty," the old person said.

"I'll bring the food and the papers," the person said. "Rest well, old person. I will bring stuff from the drug-store for your hands."

"Don't forget to tell Pedrico the head is their."

"No. I will remember."

As the person went out the door and down the worn coral rock road they were crying again.

That afternoon there was a party of tourists at the Terrace and looking down in the water among the empty beer cans and dead barracudas a woman saw a great long white spine with a huge tail at the end that lifted and swung with the tide while the east wind blew a heavy steady sea outside the entrance to the harbour.

"What's that?" she asked a waitperson and pointed to the long backbone of the great fish that was now just garbage waiting to go out with the tide.

"Tiburón," the waitperson said, "Eshark." They were meaning to explain what had happened.

"I didn't know sharks had such handsome, beautifully formed tails."

"I didn't either," their companion said.

Up the road, in their shack, the old person was sleeping again. They were still sleeping on their face and the person was sitting by them watching them. The old person was dreaming about the lions.