CHAPTER - IV
DEFEAT AND TRIUMPH

Based on The Old Man and the Sea
"But man is not made for defeat. A man can be destroyed but not defeated." This lofty idea forms the central theme of the novel The Old Man And The Sea. A Farewell To Arms and For Whom The Bell Tolls were stories based on political chaos and war. Intermingled and in between each story was a story of love. The Old Man And The Sea, on the other hand, is a story of fishing and man's eternal and vain struggle against the elemental forces of nature.

This novel is Hemingway's high water-mark in the art of fiction for it most comprehensively represents the novelist's tragic vision. It is certainly one of the greatest accounts of man's struggle against odds. Here he also comes to the conclusion of his belief that the tragic is very much a part and parcel of life and it is to be treated as such without nervousness or fear but with stoic fortitude and with courage and nobility. For it is in the conduct alone, against adversity, that man finds his true self and is able to come to terms with the tragic element of his being.

1. The Old Man And The Sea - Ernest Hemingway


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Hemingway enjoyed life immensely especially the life associated with athletic sports. His father, the elder Hemingway, initiated and inculcated in him the thrill of sport at a very tender age. He was given his first fire-arm, a gun, when he was barely eleven years old. But even at that tender age he also became aware of the meaning of pain. His first confrontation with pain was in the tranquil Michigan woods when he had taken a trip with his father who was a doctor. His father had performed a Caesarean operation on an Indian squaw without any anaesthetic and he had then sewed her up with fishing leaders. The Indian who had apparently been watching had not been able to bear the sight and had slit his throat in the bunk.

While fishing in "Big Two-hearted River", away and free in the woods, he had been conscious in a curious way of the cruelty inflicted on the fish, even of the silent agonies endured by the live bait, the grass-hoppers kicking on the hook.

But never even for a moment does he deny that life is not enjoyable. Talking and drinking with his friends was great fun and fishing in "Big Two-Hearted River" was a tranquil and exhilarating experience but at the same time he also never allows us to forget that the brutality of life
is always there and that it is somehow bound up to the enjoyment. He makes a sincere attempt to impress upon us that "the condition of life is pain; and the joys of the most innocent surface are somehow tied to its stifled pangs."\(^2\) We are made to suffer and in turn we make suffer. "Besides, everything kills everything else in the same way"\(^3\) and everybody loses out in the long run. What counts and is of significance is the manner in which we take our way out. The idea consistently advocated was that man should make the exit with honour, with dignity and with "grace under pressure".

Being outwardly all about the physical sports—hunting, skiing, bull-fighting, horse-racing and fishing—\(^*\) often tend to lead us away from his actual intentions. He was essentially a writer with a philosophical bent of mind, and his main interest was to represent human life and to consistently set man against the background of his world and universe; to examine the human situation from different angles and points of view. And despite Hemingway's pre-occupation with physical contests, his heroes are almost always defeated,—physically, nervously and practically. But though defeated in every aspect, they still retain their dignity, for the moral victory belongs to them alone.

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2. *Literature In America*; Philip Rahv; Meridian Books, New York. 1957. pp 373,374

3. *The Old Man And The Sea* — Ernest Hemingway

Santiago, "He was an old man who fished alone in a skiff in the Gulf stream ——"5, the hero of The Old Man And The Sea, is an aged Cuban fisherman dwelling off the coast of Havana. Though vastly experienced he is shown to presently going through a bad phase and has gone rewardless

4. Literally Saint James. Professor Robert M. Brown first noted the point. Melvin Backman in "Modern Fiction Studies " I (August 1955 ) p 10, observes the connection between Santiago and the "fisherman, apostle, and martyr from the Sea of Galilee ". See Mathew 4: 18-22. When we reach The Old Man And The Sea, says Professor Backman "we seem to have come a long way from the early works, but there is a pattern into which all of them fall. It is true that the old man is the only hero who is not left alone, at the end of the story, with death or despair. He is old and womanless and humble. Yet in him we have a blending of the two dominant motifs — the matador and the crucified." Santiago's suffering is, however, more remarkable than his matador-like act of killing, "Etched on the readers mind ", says Backman, "is the image of the old man as he settled against the wood of the bow —— and took his suffering as it came, telling himself, Rest gently now ——— Suffering and gentle and wood blend magically into an image of Christ on the Cross." (Carlos Baker ; The Writer As Artist; Princeton University Press; New Jersey, 1972. Footnote, p 293)

5. The Old Man And The Sea — Ernest Hemingway Penguin Books, 1976. p 1
for the past eighty-four days. Such has been his ill-fortune that fellow fishermen refer to him as salao which is "the worst form of unlucky." Even young Manolin who used to assist him in his daily chores is withdrawn by his parents and put into another boat "which caught three good fish the first week". Manolin hated to leave the old man alone to fend for himself for it was he who had taught him fishing and the youngster had great respect and faith in the aged fisherman.

It is not as if the old man had not passed through a similar phase of ill-fortune before; he had. As Manolin kindly reminds him "remember how you went eighty-seven days without fish and then we caught big ones everyday for three weeks." He realises that unless his luck changes for the better and unless he made a catch soon it might become difficult for him to even keep body and soul together. As it was he was indebted to young Manolin who not only fed him but also tended to his needs. Though humble and simple he realises his precarious situation and is grateful to Manolin for the assistance and love given to him. Unwilling to submit to his ill luck he makes up his mind to try his luck yet again by venturing far out into waters he had never been before. When questioned by Manolin as to where he

6. Ibid. p 1
7. Ibid. p 1
8. Ibid. p 6
intended going he answers “Far out to come in when the wind shifts. I want to be out before it is light.”

Though Santiago was passing through a lean phase he was not disheartened nor was he lacking in self-confidence, "I may not be as strong as I think. But I know many tricks and I have many tricks and I have resolution."  

Early at dawn the next morning he sets sail far out into the sea to try his luck once again.

Aged, alone, and far out in the sea beyond the sight of his fellow fishermen he manages to make his prized catch, a marlin swimming a hundred feet below in the depths of the ocean. He did not realise what he was up against as he had not seen his quarry till then. For the next three days and two nights he wagers a grim battle to subdue his fish which tows his skiff further and further out into the sea. He suffers immensely, "Certainly his back cannot feel as badly as mine does. But he cannot pull this skiff for ever, no matter how great he is."  

His fierce pride and unflinching resolution makes him cry "Fish, I'll stay with you until I'm dead." With the resolution having been made, the battle-lines are drawn. His waning strength and his bruised and

9. Ibid. p 9
10. Ibid. p 18
11. Ibid. p 45
12. Ibid. p 45
bloody hands does not for even once turn his mind away from the task at hand. To reassure himself of his own strength and abilities he recalls to mind the time when he had challenged a big negro at arm-wrestling. Though the negro was bigger and had been favoured to win, he, Santiago had defeated him after a full day's tussle of changing fortunes. Afterwards everyone had called him "El Campeón". Thoughts of Manolin and also of the lions on the beach gave him strength as these thoughts reminded him of his youth.

Happy at having made a catch Santiago, at the same time, also feels pity for the fish. Despite his mixed feelings his resolution, however, remains unchanged and unshakable, "Fish, I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you before this day ends." 13

On the third day the fish finally emerges from the deep, in all its majesty. Santiago marvels at its size and beauty. The fish makes one last dying and desperate attempt to free away but Santiago has no difficulty in pulling it alongside his skiff and killing it with his harpoon. The old man makes the kill with reluctance and with remorse for he had had great respect for the fish and had triumphed over it only because of his "will and my intelligence." 14

13. Ibid.  p 46
14. Ibid.  p 56
After lashing the fish alongside his boat, he sets a weary sail homeward. All along, however, he has the premonition that his luck will not hold out. An hour later his worst fears come true when the first shark hits his trail. It was a Mako shark and "When the old man saw him coming he knew that this was a shark that had no fear at all and would do exactly what he wished." 15

With the arrival of the Mako shark " begins a tragedy of deprivation as piteous as that which King Lear undergoes at the hands of his shark-hearted daughters. Lear's hundred knights, the only remaining sign of his power and the badge of his kingly dignity, are taken from him in batches of twenty-five." 16 The forty-pound rippings and tearings which Santiago's fish undergoes, soon reduce his trophy to a skeleton; a pathetic reminder of his epic victory.

It is true that he does put up a great fight " with a knife lashed to the tiller." He even manages to kill a few of the sharks. But, like Maria in *For Whom The Bell Tolls*, he is overpowered by sheer weight of numbers and succumbs to the inevitable. Sadly and wearily he turns his patched sail homeward. He admits he is defeated physically but not

15. Ibid. p 90
spiritually as he himself explains, "But man is not made for defeat." "A man can be destroyed but not defeated." 17 A tinge of remorse overcomes the old man and he says "Half fish, fish that you were, I am sorry that I went too far out. I ruined us both." 18 Going out far was to negate the given. That is the paradox of the fortunate fall that he wins even by losing. He redeems himself and mankind through his suffering. His triumph over the fish shows his mastery over the physical and sensual element of his being.

The consequent mutilation of the fish shows that what he achieves is taken away by sheer physical force in the natural process. Only the skeleton remains as a token of his victory. Like the tragic hero he has attempted to do the impossible and has attained ripeness through suffering and purgation and self-purification.

Carlos Baker in his book *Hemingway: The Writer As Artist* has this to say of Santiago, "he has reached a condition of absolute physical exhaustion as well as, on the moral plane, an absolute but not abject humility. Both have cost him very little less than everything, which is of course the price one must always finally pay. Santiago's

17. *The Old Man And The Sea* - Ernest Hemingway


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18. Ibid. p 104
victory is the moral victory of having lasted without permanent impairment of his beliefs in the worth of what he has been doing."¹⁹ Like all tragic heroes he remains undefeated only because he has gone on trying.

One of the essential demands of a tragedy is that the conflicting parties should be of equal stature and bearing. In the novel The Old Man And The Sea, both the old man and the fish are of equal strength and noble bearing and proper adversaries, pitting their strength, skill, and cunning against each other. It is the old man's intelligence against the baser instincts of the fish which ultimately triumphs but not without the accompanying pangs of pain, sorrow and suffering.

When the old man at first hooks the fish, he immediately realises the great strength of his adversary and that "I can do nothing with him and he can do nothing with me."²⁰ His feeble attempts to gain some line end in failure for "the line had been taut up to the very edge of the breaking point since he had hooked the fish and he felt the harshness as he leaned back to pull and knew he could put no more strain on it."²¹ Having met and gauged

¹⁹. Hemingway: The Writer As Artist - Carlos H. Baker
Princeton University Press, New Jersey 1972. p 294
²⁰. The Old Man And The Sea - Ernest Hemingway
²¹. Ibid. p 46
each other up, both the parties settle down for the ensuing battle as both the adversaries were unwilling to concede any ground. Santiago realises that he "must impoverise to his because of his great size."22 He knows that if the fish surfaces, he can kill it easily but if the fish refused to surface ______. Steeling his mind, he decides "Then I will stay down with him for ever."23 Such was the old man's resolve.

Two days later when the fish rises from the depths of the sea and begins to jump, the old man wonders if the fish was doing that to "show me how big he was."24 He, however, was not the type to be cowed down and he thinks, "I wish I could show him what sort of man I am ______ I am more man than I am and I will be so."25

To prove himself, he suffers. But being courageous "he does not admit his suffering at all."26 He wanted to show the fish "What a man can do and what a man endures."27 He recalls having told young Manolin that he was a strange old man. Now was his chance of proving it. The fact that he had proved it so many times before meant nothing to him. All that did matter to him now was that he was going to prove it yet again because each time it was, for him, a new

22. Ibid. p 52
23. Ibid. p 52
24. Ibid. p 56
25. Ibid. p 56
26. Ibid. p 56
27. Ibid. p 57
experience. But never before had he come upon such a noble adversary. This fact, however, does not deter him in any way for he had unbounded confidence in himself and is sure of his impending victory as he reasons aloud "If you're not tired fish, you must be very strange." Ironical and proper that the conflict is between two strange* beings.

Towards the end of the third day the old man begins to tire. He says that he felt good whereas "He did not truly feel good because the pain from the chord across his back had almost passed pain and gone into a dullness---" The redeeming feature was that "now I have gained on him in the question of sustenance." No sooner is this thought dissolved in his mind when the fish begins to jump and it takes all of his cunning and experience to restrain the fish from breaking away. The speed of the running line cuts his hands badly but he had expected this to happen and he philosophically consoles himself by saying "pain does not matter to man," driving home the point that man can never be the slave of pain and that pain can be endured and overcome. Santiago knew this fact. He also knew that if the pain was sustained and prolonged the poor fish, which was also suffering, would be driven to a frenzied madness.

26. Ibid. p 59
28. Ibid. p 59
29. Ibid. p 65
30. Ibid. p 66
31. Ibid. p 75
32. Ibid. p 75
and thereby invite his doom. But the wily fish is also unwilling to give in easily which leads the old man to cry, "Fish, you are going to have to die anyway. Do you have to kill me too?" The epic struggle for supremacy drives Santiago to call upon every ounce of his strength from his ageing body. Often the lonely old man wishes that the boy Manolin were there to aid him. He suffers immensely but he knows "how to suffer like a man."  

At long last his superior intelligence wins and he succeeds in bringing the fish alongside his boat and kills it. But he does not truly rejoice in his victory for no one loves the fall of a noble adversary. 

Any conflict must logically end in a resolution. The conflict between the old man and the fish is resolved in the victory of the former over the latter. Both the parties suffer greatly and the defeat and death of the fish is noble and honourable.

The victory over the fish, however, does not end the old man's agony. His suffering is further prolonged by marauding sharks who attack his frail boat carrying the prized catch. The old man stands up to them manfully but bows down in the face of superior weight of numbers. He

32. Ibid. p 52
33. Ibid. p 52
loses his fish but not his honour and self-respect for he has lost by resisting and fighting till the bitter end. He bears his loss proudly and philosophically saying, "everything kills everything in some way. Fishing kills me exactly as it keeps me alive." His only regret is the realisation that he had gone too far, "I shouldn't have gone out so far fish. Neither for you nor for me. I'm sorry fish." By going beyond the limit he had violated his own luck and had only himself to blame for it.

On his return back to shore Manolin questions him, "How much did you suffer?" It is only then that Santiago admits his pain and suffering by simply replying, "Plenty". The last page of the book tells us that Santiago has again fallen asleep, that deep sleep of renewal and resurrection, "He was still sleeping on his face and the boy was sitting by him watching him. The old man was dreaming about the lions." He was dreaming of his youth, his strength, and of hope.

Death plays a prominent role in Hemingway's tragic design. Santiago's suffering, fall and defeat is a direct result of his attempt to hook the fish and the subsequent

34. Ibid. p 95
35. Ibid. p 99
36. Ibid. p 113

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* Ibid. p 114
death of the fish. The fish itself has to die only because Santiago had gone too far out. And having gone there he is determined to prove himself. In order to be able to kill the fish, far out at sea, he has to sustain himself. This he does by killing a dolphin, for food, even though he found the taste of dolphin repulsive. Even the little shrimps are not spared by Santiago, in order to curb his hunger. Quite a few of the maraudering sharks who scent Santiago’s kill and come to feed upon it meet their end in Santiago’s hand as he was unwilling to give up his prize without a fight.

Then again we are told of the time when he and the boy had hooked a female marlin. All throughout the struggle that followed the male had stayed by their boat and refused to leave his mate. But eventually the female marlin was hauled into the boat and begging her pardon, for both the old man and the boy felt sad, they "butchered her promptly."³⁷ They could have spared her life but they did not. That was the way it was meant to be.

There is also the incident wherein a small bird, a warbler, comes to rest awhile on his skiff. Santiago wonders as to what would be the fate of the poor bird if it was met

³⁷. Ibid. p 42
and attacked by the hawks who preyed upon them. He gently tells the bird, "Take a good rest, small bird. Then go in and take your chance like any man or bird or fish." 38

And lastly, Santiago's future itself is left to the imagination of the reader. Whereas critics such as Carlos Baker and Philip Young are of the opinion that Santiago survives his ordeal and looks forward to going fishing again, others argue that, that is not so. After having achieved so much dignity it would indeed be a pathetic sight to see Santiago dying. His having been left alone in his hut to die is in a manner not very dissimilar to the situation of Robert Jordan in *For Whom The Bell Tolls*. This argument is substantiated by the fact that Santiago's plans to go fishing with the boy are a piece of fiction, similar to what he had indulged in before —

"That do you have to eat?" the boy asked. "A pot of yellow rice with fish. Do you want some?" "No. I will eat at home. Do you want me to make the fire?" "No, I will make it later on. Or I may eat the rice cold." "May I take the cast net?" "Of course."

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

38. Ibid. p 47
boy knew this too." 39

Towards the end of the story, their plan to get a good killing lance which they can get made from a spring leaf of an old Ford is also a piece of fiction because when the boy says "I will have everything in order --- You get your hands well, old man", the old man answers, "I know how to care for them. In the night I spat something strange and felt something in my chest was broken." And, the boy tells him "Get that well too." 40

The boy very well knows that the old man cannot cure that something which is broken in the chest. He wants Santiago to keep the illusion that he will recover. There is no remedy for something broken in the chest, at least, at his age. It is a piece of fiction similar to the yellow rice and the cast net, especially the latter which the old man pretends he still had even though there was no cast net. It is here that the old man's identification with the turtles become relevant. He has been killed by the sharks but, as he is like a turtle, his heart will continue to beat hours after he has been killed.

Pity, which is an integral factor of tragedy, is largely absent in Hemingway's writings. " Until now, his

39. Ibid. p 11
40. Ibid. p 113
men and women had made themselves, shaped themselves out of their own clay; their victories and their defeats were at the hands of each other." 41 They, one and all, wanted to prove to themselves and to one another how strong and tough they could be. But here, in The Old Man And The Sea, he wrote about pity, "about something somewhere that made them all: the old man had to catch the fish then lose it, the fish that had to be caught and then lost, the sharks that had to rob the old man of the fish; made them all and loved them all and pitied them all. 42 We do feel grief at the old man's plight, and pity him for he has lost nothing less than everything.

It is easy to find many a symbol in The Old Man And The Sea even though Hemingway had no intention whatsoever to represent anything he wrote, symbolically. * As he himself

41. Ernest Hemingway; Carlos Baker; Pelican Biographies; Penguin Books 1972.  p 768
42. Ibid.  p 768
43. Ibid.  p 770

* Hemingway's remark to a reporter: "No good book has ever been written that has in it symbols arrived at beforehand and stuck in. " In The Old Man And The Sea I tried to make a real old man, a real boy, a real sea and a real fish and real sharks. But if I made them good and true enough they would mean many things." ( Hemingway: The Writer As Artist ; Carlos Baker; Princeton University Press, New Jersey 1972. p 323 Footnote )
said of the book that "there wasn’t any symbolism." Perhaps his portrayal of Santiago as a symbol of Christ as also the consequent suffering depicted, was only a off-shoot and could be attributed to Hemingway’s racial memory. For was it his intention to write an allegory. As C.M. Halliday writes in his essay that "Hemingway as far as I know has never written an allegory ---." Notwithstanding the various arguments given for and against and also what Hemingway had himself stated, we cannot ignore the fact that Santiago is a symbol of Christ. He has the fatherly and kindly disposition, raw courage, determination and the ability to accept and bear suffering as it came,— "Rest gently now against the wood and think of nothing." The suffering, the gentleness and the wood blend magically into an image of Christ on the Cross. One should not be taken by surprise at Hemingway’s portrayal of Santiago as a symbol of Christ. Much earlier on itself he had provided definite pointers towards this end in his portrayal of the young priest in _A Farewell To Arms_, and then again in his portrayal of old Anselmo in _For Whom The Bell Tolls_. Though they were not symbols of

43. _Ernest Hemingway_; Carlos Baker; Pelican Biographies; Penguin Books 1972. p 770

44. _Interpretations of American Literature_; Edited by Charles Feidelson Jr. and Paul Brodtkorb Jr.; O.U.P. 1959. p 301

Christ in the way Santiago is, nevertheless they, the priest and Anselmo, were portrayals of good men worthy to be the children of God, just as Christ himself was the son of God.

Hemingway's tragic vision essentially leads one into an exploration of life and confrontation with it at close quarters. Like the existentialists he had fully realised that man is essentially alone, pitting his puny self against the hostile unknown and the unbeatable odds of the universe. Keeping this realisation in mind he advocated that man, in whichever way he can, has to make his way through life in the best possible manner. Hampered as he is by his own limitations, he must always endeavour to present himself with honour, with determination, with nobility and with courage as had been depicted in the case of Santiago. The unsavoury truth that the winner takes nothing and that death is the ultimate and a stark reality is savagely driven home.

Santiago's suffering and loss is a result of circumstances activated by Santiago himself. Santiago had the choice to fish elsewhere. He could have stayed closer to the shore and tried his luck. But being what he is and as he himself says "My choice was to go there
to find him beyond all people. Beyond all people in the world. Now we are joined together.\textsuperscript{46} Since his predicament is a direct result of his own free choice, he himself is also responsible for the consequences that follow. Logically, he has to accept the consequences: his trial, his suffering and his loss of the fish he so much prized.

\textit{Man's loneliness is poignantly portrayed in the old man's longing for company, for Manolin, when alone at sea. Far out at sea "aged and alone" he does not even own a radio because of his poverty, and which could at least have kept him in contact with civilization. Time and again he keeps wishing "I wish the boy were here."\textsuperscript{47} All throughout his ordeal, Santiago keeps yearning for the company and assistance of the boy, Manolin. In spite of his craving for the boy's company, the old man realises and knows that loneliness is man's lot and he has to "Think of what you can do with what there is."\textsuperscript{48} His nobility lies in his ability to accept and live with his terrible fate.}

In conclusion, one cannot help but examine the factor of fate. If tragedy arises out of conflict, conflict itself is pre-determined by fate. Fate destined that Santiago go rewardless for eighty-four days. It was also destined that

\textsuperscript{46} \textit{The Old Man And The Sea} – Ernest Hemingway; Penguin Books, 1976. p 43
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid. pp 42, 47
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid. p 99
he go further into the sea than he ever had done before. And having gone there he should hook the fish he did. That he should win his prize and then lose it to the sharks is, also, a result of fate. Fate had destined that Santiago should get his fish and then lose it after an epic struggle if only to show man's indomitable spirit and that "A man can be destroyed but not defeated."49

The Old Man And The Sea differs from the earlier novels, A Farewell To Arms and For Whom The Bell Tolls, in many respects. The conflicts are different. Whereas in the former it is a conflict between man and fish, in the latter it is a conflict of ideals in which man is pitted against man. The conflict in A Farewell To Arms and For Whom The Bell Tolls arises out of political chaos and war but in The Old Man And The Sea the struggle emerges because Santiago chooses to prove his capabilities and abilities to himself and because he attempts to transcend his limitations.

The action in A Farewell To Arms and in For Whom The Bell Tolls takes place on land. On the other hand, the setting for The Old Man And The Sea is the vast and endless ocean.

49. Ibid. p 93
Then, again, the earlier novels were stories of love in the background of war. The Old Man And The Sea is a story of fishing.

What is common to all these novels is the depiction of the situation in which man is placed. He is brought into direct conflict with the natural elements and with the menacing unknown which is always attempting to stifle and thwart his every design and aspiration. Under such circumstances, Hemingway advocates, man, alone as he is, is expected to live within his limitations and confront his terrible fate calmly, with courage, with honour and with dignity.

All the heroes in the novels under discussion, do stand up to the inevitable with fortitude. Henry gains and loses a wife. Robert Jordan goes down fighting and in the process loses a new life. The old man gets his marlin but he too loses out to the sharks. In spite of their defeat Hemingway's heroes are in no way humiliated. They retain their dignity, pride and self-respect for they have fully realised their situation in life and also that, they, being only expressions of the universal will, for them there can be no dying, - "In my end is my beginning." 50

50. Hemingway: The Writer As Artist ; Carlos H. Baker ; Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey ; p 320