

Man from the South – *Roald Dahl* Uncut version
(The cut version follows this one)

It was getting on towards six o'clock so it thought I'd buy myself a beer and go out and sit in a deckchair by the swimming pool and have a little evening sun.

I went to the bar and got the beer and carried it outside and wandered down the garden to the pool. In the pool there were three or four girls and about a dozen boys all splashing about and making a lot of noise.

The girls were English girls from the hotel. The boys sounded American, and I thought they were probably naval cadets who'd come ashore from the US naval training vessel which had arrived in harbour that morning.

It was very pleasant sitting there in the sunshine with a beer and a cigarette.

Just then I noticed a small, oldish man walking briefly around the edge of the pool. He was immaculately dressed in a white suit and he walked very quickly with little bouncing strides, pushing himself high up on his toes with each step. He stopped beside me and smiled, showing two rows of very small, uneven teeth, slightly tarnished, I smiled back.

'Excuse pleess, but may I sit here?'

'Certainly,' I said. 'Go ahead.'

He sat down and crossed his legs.

'A fine evening,' he said. 'They are all evenings fine here in Jamaica.'

I couldn't tell if the accent were Italian or Spanish, but I felt fairly sure he was some sort of a South American. And old too, when you saw him close. Probably around sixty-eight or seventy.

'Yes,' I said. 'It is wonderful here, isn't it?'

Suddenly one of the American cadets was standing in front of us. He was dripping wet from the pool and one of the English girls was standing there with him.

'Are these chairs taken?' he said.

'No,' I answered.

'Mind if I sit down?'

'Go ahead.'

'Thanks,' he said. He had a towel in his hand and when he sat down he unrolled it and produced a packet of cigarettes and a lighter. He offered the cigarettes to the girl and she refused; then he offered them to me and I took one. The little man said, 'Tank you, no, but I think I have a cigar.' He pulled out a crocodile case and got himself a cigar.

'Here, let me give you a light.' The American boy held up his lighter.

'Dat will not work in dis wind.'

'Sure it'll work. It always works.'

The little man removed his unlighted cigar from his mouth, cocked his head on one side and looked at the boy.

'*All-ways?*' he said slowly.

'Sure, it never fails. Not with me anyway.'

The little man's head was still cocked over on one side and he was watching the boy.

'Shall we perhaps make a little bet on dat?' he smiled at the boy. 'Shall we make a little bet on whether your lighter lights?'

'Sure, I'll bet,' the boy said. 'Why not?'

'You like to bet?'

'Sure, I'll always bet.'

The man paused. 'I like to bet too. Why we don't have a good big bet on dis ting? A good big bet.'

'Now wait a minute,' the boy said. 'I can't do that. But I'll bet you a quarter.'

The little man waved his hand. 'Listen to me. Now we have some fun. We make a bet. Den we go up to my room here in de hotel where iss no wind and I bet you you cannot light dis famous lighter of yours ten times running without missing once.'

'I'll bet I can,' the boy said.

'All right. Good. I make you a very good bet. I am rich man and I am sporting man also. Listen to me. Outside de hotel iss my car. Iss very fine car. American car from your country. Cadillac. You strike lighter successfully ten times running and Cadillac is yours. You like to have dis Cadillac, yes?'

'Sure, I'd like to have a Cadillac,' the boy said grinning.

'All right. Fine. We make a bet and I put up my Cadillac.'

'And what do I put up?'

The little man carefully removed the red band from his still unlighted cigar. 'I never ask you, my friend, to bet something you cannot afford. You understand?'

'Then what do I bet?'

'Some small ting you can afford to give away, and if you did happen to lose it you would not feel too bad. Right?'

'Such as what?'

'Such as, perhaps, da little finger on your left hand?'

'My *what?*' The boy stopped grinning.

'Yes. Why not? You win, you take de car. You looss, I take de finger.'

'I don't get it. How d'you mean, you take the finger?'

'I chop it off.'

'Jumping jeepers! That's a crazy bet? I think I'll just make it a dollar.'

The little man leaned back, spread out his hands palms upwards and gave a tiny contemptuous shrug of the shoulders, 'Well, well, well,' he said. 'I do not understand. You say it lights but you will not bet. Den we forget it, yes?'

The boy sat quite still, staring at the bathers in the pool.

'Now, just let me check up on this bet of yours. You say we go up to your room and if I make this lighter light ten times running I win a Cadillac. If it misses just once then I forfeit the little finger of my left hand. Is that right?'

'Certainly. Dat is de bet. But I tink you are afraid.'

'What do we do if I lose? Do I have to hold my finger out while you chop it off?'

'On, no! Dat would be no good. And you might be tempted to refuse to hold it out. What I should do I should tie one of your hands to de table before we started and I should stand dere with a knife ready to go chop de momint your lighter missed.'

'What year is the Cadillac?' the boy asked.

'Excuse. I not understand.'

'What year – how old is the Cadillac?'

'Ah! How old? Yes. It is last year. Quite new car. But is see you are not betting man. Americans never are.'

The boy paused for a moment and he glanced first at the English girl, then at me. 'Yes,' he said sharply. 'I'll bet you.'

'Good!' The little man clapped his hands together quietly, once. 'Fine,' he said. 'We do it now. And you, sir,' he turned to me, 'you would perhaps be good enough to, what you call it – to referee.' He had pale, almost colourless eyes with tiny bright black pupils.

'Well alright' I said. 'But I think it's a crazy bet.' I don't think I like it very much.'

'Nor do I,' said the English girl. It was the first time she'd spoken. 'I think it's a stupid, ridiculous bet.'

'Are you serious about cutting off this boy's finger if he loses?' I said.

'Certainly I am. Also about giving him Cadillac if he win. Come now. We go to my room.'

The little man led the way back through the garden to the hotel. We followed him to his room. He unlocked his door and we all trooped into what was a large pleasant double

bedroom. There was a woman's dressing gown lying across the bottom of one of the beds.

'First,' he said, 'we ave a litle Martini.'

He began to make the Martini, but meanwhile he'd rung the bell and now there was a knock on the door and a maid came in.

'Ah!' he said, putting down the bottle of gin, taking a wallet from his pocket and pulling out a pound note. 'You will do something for me now, plees.' He gave the maid a pound. 'I want you to go off and fine me tree tings. I want some nails, I want a hammer, and I want a chopping knife, a butcher's chopping knife which you can borrow from the kitchen. You can get, yes?'

'A *chopping* knife!' The maid opened her eyes wide and clasped her hands in front of her. 'You mean a *real* chopping knife?'

'Yes, yes, of course. Come on now, pleess. You can find dose tings surely for me?'

'Yes, sir, I'll try, sir. Surely, I'll try to get them.' And she went.

The little man handed round the Martinis. We stood there and sipped them. I didn't know what to make of it all. The man seemed serious about the bet and he seemed serious about the business of cutting off the finger. But hell, what if the boy lost? Then we'd have to rush him to hospital in the Cadillac that he hadn't won.

'Don't you think this is a rather silly bet?' I said.

'I think it's a fine bet,' the boy answered. He had already dropped one large Martini.

'I think it's a stupid, ridiculous bet,' the girl said. 'What'll happen if you lose?'

'It won't matter. Come to think of it, I can't remember ever in my life having had any use for the little finger on my left hand. Here he is.' The boy took hold of the finger. 'Here he is and he hasn't ever done a thing for me yet. So why shouldn't I bet him? I think it's a fine bet.'

The little man smiled. 'Before we begin,' he said, 'I will present to de – to de referee de key of de car.' He produced a car key from his pocket and gave it to me.

The maid came in again. In one hand she carried a small chopper, the kind used by butchers for chopping meat bones, and in the other a hammer and a bag of nails.

'Good! You get dem all. Tank you, tank you. Now you can go.' Then to the boy, 'Help me, plees, with dis table. We carry it out a little.'

They carried it out into the room away from the wall.

'And now,' he said, 'a chair.' He picked up a chair and placed it beside the table. He was very brisk and very animated, like a person organising games at a children's party. 'And now de nails.'

We watched him hammer two nails into the table, about six inches apart.

Anyone would think the son of a bitch had done this before, I told myself. He never hesitates. Table, nails, hammer, kitchen chopper. He knows exactly what he needs and how to arrange it.

'And now' he said, 'at last we're ready. Will you plees to sit here at de table?' he said to the boy.

The boy put his glass away and sat down.

'Now place de left hand between dese two nails. De nails are only so I can tie your hand in place. All right, good. Now I tie your hand secure to the table – so.'

He wound the string around the boy's wrist, then several times around the wide part of the hand, then he fastened it tight to the nails. He made a good job of it and when he'd finished there wasn't any question about the boy being able to draw his hand away.

'Ex-cellent! Ex-cellent! Now we are ready. Wid your right hand you manipulate de lighter. But one moment, pleess.'

He skipped over to the bed and picked up the chopper. He came back and stood beside the table with the chopper in his hand.

'We are all ready? Mister referee, you must say to begin.' He lifted the chopper up in the air and held it there about two feet above the boy's finger, ready to chop.

'All right,' I said. 'Go ahead.'

The boy said, 'Will you please count aloud the number of times I light it.'

'Yes,' I said. 'I'll do that.'

With his thumb he raised the top of the lighter, and again with the thumb he gave the wheel a sharp flick. The flint sparked and the wick caught fire and burned with a small yellow flame.

'One!' I called.

He didn't blow the flame out; he closed the top of the lighter on it and waited for perhaps five seconds before opening it again.

He flicked the wheel very strongly and once more there was a small flame burning on the wick.

'Two!'

No one else said anything. The boy kept his eyes on the lighter. The little man held the chopper up in the air and he too was watching the lighter.

'Three!'

'Four!'

'Five!'

'Six!'

'Seven!'

'Eight!' is said, and as it is said the door opened. We all turned and we saw a woman standing in the doorway, a small, black-haired woman, rather old, who stood there for about two seconds then rushed forward, shouting, 'Carlos! Carlos!' She grabbed his wrist, took the chopper from him, threw it on the bed, took hold of the little man by the lapels of his white suit and began shaking him very vigorously, talking to him fast and loud and fiercely all the time in some Spanish-sounding language. She pushed him backwards on to one of the beds. He sat on the edge of it blinking his eyes and testing his head to see if it would still turn on his neck.

'I am sorry,' the woman said. 'I am so terribly sorry that this should happen.' She spoke almost perfect English. She looked sorry and deeply concerned.

The boy was untying his hand from the table. The English girl and I stood there and said nothing.

'He is a menace,' the woman said. 'Down where we live at home he has taken altogether forty-seven fingers from different people, and has lost eleven cars. In the end they threatened to have him put away somewhere. That's why I brought him up here.'

'We were only having a little bet,' mumbled the little man from the bed.

'I suppose he bet you a car,' the woman said.

'Yes,' the boy answered. 'A Cadillac.'

'He has no car. It's mine. And that makes it worse,' she said, 'that he should bet you when he has nothing to bet with. I am ashamed and very sorry about it all.' She seemed an awfully nice woman.

'Well,' I said, 'then here's the key of your car.' I put it on the table.

'We were only having a little bet,' mumbled the little man.

'He hasn't anything left to bet with,' the woman said. 'He hasn't a thing in the world. Not a thing. As a matter of fact I myself won it all from him a long while ago. It took time, a lot of time, and it was hard work, but I won it all in the end.' She looked up at the boy and she smiled, a slow sad smile, and she came over and put out a hand to take the key from the table.

I can see it now, that hand of hers; it had only one finger on it, and a thumb.

Man from the South – *Roald Dahl* (CUT version)

It was getting on towards six o'clock so I thought I'd buy myself a beer and go out and sit by the swimming pool.

I got the beer and carried it down the garden to the pool.

In the pool there were about a dozen American boys all splashing about and making a lot of noise.

It was very pleasant sitting there in the sunshine with a beer and a cigarette.

Just then I noticed a small, oldish man walking briefly around the edge of the pool. He was immaculately dressed in a white suit and he walked very quickly with little bouncing strides, pushing himself high up on his toes with each step. He stopped beside me and smiled, showing two rows of very small, uneven teeth, slightly tarnished, I smiled back.

'Excuse please, but may I sit here?'

'Certainly,' I said. 'Go ahead.'

He sat down and crossed his legs.

'A fine evening,' he said. 'They are all evenings fine here in Jamaica.'

I couldn't tell if the accent were Italian or Spanish, but I felt fairly sure he was some sort of a South American. And old too, when you saw him close. Probably around sixty-eight or seventy.

'Yes,' I said. 'It is wonderful here, isn't it?'

Suddenly one of the American boys was standing in front of us. He was dripping wet from the pool.

'Are these chairs taken?' he said.

'No,' I answered.

'Mind if I sit down?'

'Go ahead.'

'Thanks,' he said. He had a towel in his hand and when he sat down he unrolled it and produced a packet of cigarettes and a lighter. He offered the cigarettes to me and I took one. The little man said, 'Tank you, no, but I think I have a cigar.' He pulled out a crocodile case and got himself a cigar.

'Here, let me give you a light.' The American boy held up his lighter.

'Dat will not work in dis wind.'

'Sure it'll work. It always works.'

The little man removed his unlighted cigar from his mouth, cocked his head on one side and looked at the boy.

'*All-ways?*' he said slowly.

'Sure, it never fails. Not with me anyway.'

The little man's head was still cocked over on one side and he was watching the boy.

'Shall we perhaps make a little bet on dat?' he smiled at the boy. 'Shall we make a little bet on whether your lighter lights?'

'Sure, I'll bet,' the boy said. 'Why not?'

'You like to bet?'

'Sure, I'll always bet.'

The man paused. 'I like to bet too. Why we don't have a good big bet on dis ting?'

Den we go up to my room here in de hotel where iss no wind and I bet you, you cannot light dis famous lighter of yours ten times running without missing once.'

'I'll bet I can,' the boy said.

'All right. Good. I make you a very good bet. I am rich man and I am sporting man also. Listen to me. Outside de hotel iss my car. Iss very fine car. American car from your country. Cadillac. You strike lighter successfully ten times running and Cadillac is yours. You like to

have dis Cadillac, yes?’

‘Sure, I’d like to have a Cadillac,’ the boy said grinning.

‘All right. Fine. We make a bet and I put up my Cadillac.’

‘And what do I put up?’

The little man carefully removed the red band from his still unlighted cigar.

‘Some small ting you can afford to give away, and if you did happen to lose it you would not feel too bad. Right?’

‘Such as what?’

‘Such as, perhaps, da little finger on your left hand?’

‘My *what?*’ The boy stopped grinning.

‘Yes. Why not? You win, you take de car. You looss, I take de finger.’

‘I don’t get it. How d’you mean, you take the finger?’

‘I chop it off.’

‘Jumping jeepers! That’s a crazy bet? I think I’ll just make it a dollar.’

The little man leaned back, spread out his hands palms upwards and gave a tiny contemptuous shrug of the shoulders, ‘Well, well, well,’ he said. ‘I do not understand. You say it lights but you will not bet. Den we forget it, yes?’

The boy sat quite still, staring at the bathers in the pool.

‘Now, just let me check up on this bet of yours. You say we go up to your room and if I make this lighter light ten times running I win a Cadillac. If it misses just once then I forfeit the little finger of my left hand. Is that right?’

‘Certainly. Dat is de bet. But I tink you are afraid.’

‘What do we do if I lose? Do I have to hold my finger out while you chop it off?’

‘On, no! Dat would be no good. And you might be tempted to refuse to hold it out. What I should do I should tie one of your hands to de table before we started and I should stand dere with a knife ready to go chop de momint your lighter missed.’

‘What year is the Cadillac?’ the boy asked.

‘Excuse. I not understand.’

‘What year – how old is the Cadillac?’

‘Ah! How old? Yes. It is last year. Quite new car. But I’s see you are not betting man. Americans never are.’

The boy paused for a moment and he glanced at me. ‘Yes,’ he said sharply. ‘I’ll bet you.’

‘Good!’ The little man clapped his hands together quietly, once. ‘Fine,’ he said. ‘We do it now. And you, sir,’ he turned to me, ‘you would perhaps be good enough to, what you call it – to referee.’

‘Well alright’ I said. ‘But I think it’s a crazy bet. Are you serious about cutting off this boy’s finger if he loses?’

‘Certainly I am. Also about giving him Cadillac if he win. Come now. We go to my room.’

The little man led the way back through the garden to the hotel. We followed him to his room. He unlocked his door and we all trooped into what was a large pleasant double bedroom. There was a woman’s dressing gown lying across the bottom of one of the beds.

‘First,’ he said, ‘we ave a litle Martini.’

He began to make the Martini, but meanwhile he’d rung the bell and now there was a knock on the door and a maid came in.

‘Ah!’ he said, putting down the bottle of gin, taking a wallet from his pocket and pulling out a pound note. ‘You will do something for me now, plees.’ He gave the maid a pound. ‘I want you to go off and fine me tree tings. I want some nails, I want a hammer, and I want a chopping knife, a butcher’s chopping knife which you can borrow from the kitchen. You can get, yes?’

‘A *chopping* knife!’ The maid opened her eyes wide and clasped her hands in front of her.

‘You mean a *real* chopping knife?’

‘Yes, yes, of course. Come on now, plees. You can find dose tings surely for me?’

‘Yes, sir, I’ll try, sir. Surely, I’ll try to get them.’ And she went.

The little man handed round the Martinis. We stood there and sipped them. ‘Don’t you think this is a rather silly bet?’ I said.

‘I think it’s a fine bet,’ the boy answered. He had already dropped one large Martini., I can’t remember ever in my life having had any use for the little finger on my left hand.

The little man smiled. ‘Before we begin,’ he said, ‘I will present to de – to de referee de key of de car.’ He produced a car key from his pocket and gave it to me.

The maid came in again. In one hand she carried a small chopper, the kind used by butchers for chopping meat bones, and in the other a hammer and a bag of nails.

‘Good! You get dem all. Tank you, tank you. Now you can go.’ Then to the boy, ‘Help me, plees, with dis table. We carry it out a little.’

They carried it out into the room away from the wall.

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The boy put his glass away and sat down.

‘Now place de left hand between dese two nails. All right, good. Now I tie your hand secure to the table – so.’

He wound the string around the boy’s wrist, then several times around the wide part of the hand, then he fastened it tight to the nails. He made a good job of it and when he’d finished there wasn’t any question about the boy being able to draw his hand away.

‘Ex-cellent! Ex-cellent! Now we are ready. Wid your right hand you manipulate de lighter. But one moment, pleess.’

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‘We are all ready? Mister referee, you must say to begin.’ He lifted the chopper up in the air and held it there about two feet above the boy’s finger, ready to chop.

‘All right,’ I said. ‘Go ahead.’

The boy said, ‘Will you please count aloud the number of times I light it.’

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He flicked the wheel very strongly and once more there was a small flame burning on the wick.

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No one else said anything. The boy kept his eyes on the lighter. The little man held the chopper up in the air and he too was watching the lighter.

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‘Eight!’ is said, and as it is said the door opened. We all turned and we saw a woman standing in the doorway, a small, black-haired woman, rather old, who stood there for about two seconds then rushed forward, shouting, ‘Carlos! Carlos!’ She grabbed his wrist, took the chopper from him, threw it on the bed, took hold of the little man by the lapels of his white suit and began shaking him very vigorously, talking to him fast and loud and fiercely all the time in some Spanish-sounding language. She pushed him backwards on to one of the beds. He sat on the edge of it blinking his eyes and testing his head to see if it would still turn on his neck.

‘I am sorry,’ the woman said. ‘I am so terribly sorry that this should happen.’ She spoke almost perfect English. She looked sorry and deeply concerned.

The boy was untying his hand from the table. ‘He is a menace,’ the woman said. ‘Down where we live at home he has taken altogether forty-seven fingers from different people, and has lost eleven cars. In the end they threatened to have him put away somewhere. That’s why I brought him up here.’

‘We were only having a little bet,’ mumbled the little man from the bed.

‘I suppose he bet you a car,’ the woman said.

‘Yes,’ the boy answered. ‘A Cadillac.’

‘He has no car. It’s mine. And that makes it worse,’ she said, ‘I am ashamed and very sorry about it all.’ She seemed an awfully nice woman.

‘Well,’ I said, ‘then here’s the key of your car.’ I put it on the table.

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