

I Guess Everything Reminds You of Something, Ernest Hemingway

"I Guess Everything Reminds You of Something" is a completed short story set in Cuba, where Hemingway made his home at the Finca Vigía from 1939 to 1959.

"IT'S A VERY GOOD STORY," THE BOY'S father said. "Do you know how good it is?"

"I didn't want her to send it to you, Papa."

"What else have you written?"

"That's the only story. Truly I didn't want her to send it to you. But when it won the prize—"

"She wants me to help you. But if you can write that well you don't need anyone to help you. All you need is to write. How long did it take you to write that story?"

"Not very long."

"Where did you learn about that type of gull?"

"In the Bahamas I guess."

"You never went to the Dog Rocks nor to Elbow Key. There weren't any gulls nor terns nested at Cat Key nor Bimini. At Key West you would only have seen least terns nesting."

"Killem Peters. Sure. They nest on the coral rocks."

"Right on the flats," his father said. "Where would you have known gulls like the one in the story?"

"Maybe you told me about them, Papa."

"It's a very fine story. It reminds me of a story I read a long time ago."

"I guess everything reminds you of something," the boy said.

That summer the boy read books that his father found for him in the library and when he would come over to the main house for lunch, if he had not been playing baseball or had not been down at the club shooting, he would often say he had been writing.

"Show it to me when you want to or ask me about any trouble," his father said. "Write about something that you know."

"I am," the boy said.

"I don't want to look over your shoulder or breathe down your neck," his father said. "If you want, though, I can set you some simple problems about things we both know. It would be good training."

"I think I'm going all right."

"Don't show it to me until you want to then. How did you like 'Far Away and Long Ago'?"

"I liked it very much."

"The sort of problems I meant were: we could go into the market together or to the cockfight and then each of us write down what we saw. What it really was that you saw that stayed with you. Things like the handler opening the rooster's bill and blowing in his throat when the referee would let them pick up and handle them before pitting again. The small things. To see what we each saw."

The boy nodded and then looked down at his plate.

"Or we can go into the café and shake a few rounds of poker dice and you write what it was in the conversation that you heard. Not try to write everything. Only what you heard that meant anything."

"I'm afraid that I'm not ready for that yet, Papa. I think I'd better go on the way I did in the story."

"Do that then. I don't want to interfere or influence you. Those were just exercises. I'd have been glad to do them with you. They're like five-finger exercises. Those weren't especially good. We can make better ones."

"Probably it's better for me to go on the way it was in the story."

"Sure," his father said.

I could not write that well when I was his age, his father thought. I never knew anyone else that could either. But I never knew anyone else that could shoot better at ten than this boy could; not just show-off shooting, but shooting in competition with grown men and professionals. He shot the same way in the field when he was twelve. He shot as though he had built-in radar. He never took a shot out of range nor let a driven bird come too close and he shot with beautiful style and an absolute timing and precision on high pheasants and in pass shooting at ducks.

At live pigeons, in competition, when he walked out on the cement, spun the wheel and walked to the metal plaque that marked the black stripe of his yardage, the pros were silent and watching. He was the only shooter that the crowd became dead silent for. Some of the pros smiled as though at a secret when he put his gun to his shoulder and looked back to see where the heel of the stock rested against his shoulder.

Then his cheek went down against the comb, his left hand was far forward, his weight was forward on his left foot. The muzzle of the gun rose and lowered, then swept to left, to right, and back to center. The heel of his right foot lifted gently as all of him leaned behind the two loads in the chambers.

"Ready," he said in that low, hoarse voice that did not belong to a small boy.

"Ready," answered the trapper.

"Pull," said the hoarse voice and from whichever of the five traps the grey racing pigeon came out, and at whatever angle his wings drove him in full, low flight above the green grass toward the white, low fence, the load of the first barrel swung into him and the load from the second barrel drove through the first. As the bird collapsed in flight, his head falling forward, only the great shots saw the impact of the second load driving through onto the bird already dead in the air.

The boy would break his gun and walk back in off the cement toward the pavilion, no expression on his face, his eyes down, never giving any recognition to applause and saying, "Thanks," in the strange hoarse voice if some pro said, "Good bird, Stevie."

He would put his gun in the rack and wait to watch his father shoot and then the two of them would walk off together to the outdoor bar.

"Can I drink a Coca-Cola, Papa?"

"Better not drink more than half a one."

"All right. I'm sorry I was so slow. I shouldn't have let the bird get hard."

"He was a strong, low driver, Stevie."

"Nobody'd ever have known it if I hadn't been slow."
"You're doing all right."

"I'll get my speed back. Don't worry, Papa. Just this little bit of Coke won't slow me."

His next bird died in the air as the spring arm of the sunken trap swung him up from the opening in the hidden trench into driving flight. Everyone could see the second barrel hit him in the air before he hit the ground. He had not gone a yard from the trap. As the boy came in one of the local shooters said. "Well, you got an easy one, Stevie."

The boy nodded and put up his gun. He looked at the scoreboard. There were four other shooters before his father. He went to find him.

"You've got your speed back," his father said.
"I heard the trap," the boy said. "I don't want to throw you off, Papa. You can hear all of them I know. But now the number two trap is about twice as loud as any of the others. They ought to grease it. Nobody's noticed it I don't think."
"I always swing on the noise of the trap."

"Sure. But if it's extra loud it's to your left. Left is loud."

His father did not draw a bird from the number two trap for the next three rounds. When he did he did not hear the trap and killed the bird with his second barrel far out so that it just hit the fence to fall inside.

"Geez, Papa, I'm sorry," the boy said. "They greased it. I should have kept my damned mouth shut."

It was the night after the last big international shoot that they had ever shot in together that they had been talking and the boy had said, "I don't understand how anyone ever misses a pigeon."

"Don't ever say that to anybody else," his father said.

"No. I mean it really. There's no reason ever to miss one. The one I lost on I hit twice but it fell dead outside."

"That's how you lose."

"I understand that. That's how I lost. But I don't see how any real shooter can miss one."

"Maybe you will in twenty years," his father said.

"I didn't mean to be rude, Papa."

"That's all right," his father said. "Only don't say it to other people."

He was thinking of that when he wondered about the story and about the boy's writing. With all his unbelievable talent the boy had not become the shooter he was on live birds by himself nor without being taught and disciplined. He had forgotten now all about the training. He had forgotten how when he started to miss live birds his father would take his shirt off him and show him the bruise on his arm where he had placed the gun incorrectly. He had cured him of that by having him always look back at his shoulder to be sure he had mounted the gun before he called for a bird.

He had forgotten the discipline of weight on your forward foot, keep your head down and swing. How do you know your weight is on your forward foot? By raising your right heel. Head down, swing and speed. Now it doesn't matter what your score is. I want you to take them as soon as they leave the trap. Never look at any part of the bird but the bill. Swing with their bills. If you can't see the bill swing where it would be. What I want from you now is speed.

The boy was a wonderful natural shot but he had worked with him to make him a perfect shot and each year when he would take him and start on his speed he would start killing a six or eight out of ten. Then move to nine out of ten; hang there, and then move up to a twenty out of twenty only to be beaten by the luck that separated perfect shooters in the end.

He never showed his father the second story. It was not finished to his satisfaction at the end of vacation. He said he wanted to get it absolutely right before he showed it. As soon as he got it right he was going to send it to his father. He had had a very good vacation, he said, one of the best and he was glad he had such good reading too and he thanked his father for not pushing him too hard on the writing because after all a vacation is a vacation and this had been a fine one, maybe one of the very best, and they certainly had had some wonderful times they certainly had.

It was seven years later that his father read the prize-winning story again. It was in a book that he found in checking through some books in the boy's old room. As soon as he saw it he knew where the story had come from. He remembered the long-ago feeling of familiarity. He turned through the pages and there it was, unchanged and with the same title, in a book of very good short stories by an Irish writer. The boy had copied it exactly from the book and used the original title.

In the last five of the seven years between the summer of the prize-winning story and the day his father ran onto the book the boy had done everything hateful and stupid that he could, his father thought. But it was because he was sick his father had told himself. His vileness came on from a sickness. He was all right until then. But that had all started a year or more after that last summer.

Now he knew that boy had never been any good. He had thought so often looking back on things. And it was sad to know that shooting did not mean a thing.

The End