

“I was taking care of animals,” he explained.

“Oh,” I said, not quite understanding.

“Yes,” he said, “I stayed, you see, taking care of animals. I was the last one to leave the town of San Carlos.”

He did not look like a shepherd nor a herdsman and I looked at his black dusty clothes and his gray dusty face and his steel rimmed spectacles and said, “What animals were they?”

“Various animals,” he said, and shook his head. “I had to leave them.”

I was watching the bridge and the African looking country of the Ebro Delta and wondering how long now it would be before we would see the enemy, and listening all the while for the first noises that would signal that ever mysterious event called contact, and the old man still sat there.

“What animals were they?” I asked.

“There were three animals altogether,” he explained. “There were two goats and a cat and then there were four pairs of pigeons.”

“And you had to leave them?” I asked.

“Yes. Because of the artillery. The captain told me to go because of the artillery.”

“And you have no family?” I asked, watching the far end of the bridge where a few last carts were hurrying down the slope of the bank.

“No,” he said, “only the animals I stated. The cat, of course, will be all right. A cat can look out for itself, but I cannot think what will become of the others.”

“What politics have you?” I asked.

“I am without politics,” he said. “I am seventy-six years old. I have come twelve kilometers now and I think now I can go no further.”

“This is not a good place to stop,” I said. “If you can make it, there are trucks up the road where it forks for Tortosa.”

“I will wait a while,” he said, “and then I will go. Where do the trucks go?”

“Towards Barcelona,” I told him.

“I know no one in that direction,” he said, “but thank you very much. Thank you again very much.”



He looked at me very blankly and tiredly, and then said, having to share his worry with someone, “The cat will be all right, I am sure. There is no need to be unquiet about the cat. But the others. Now what do you think about the others?”

“Why they’ll probably come through it all right.”

“You think so?”

“Why not,” I said, watching the far bank where now there were no carts.

“But what will they do under the artillery when I was told to leave because of the artillery?”

“Did you leave the dove cage unlocked?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“Then they’ll fly.”

“Yes, certainly they’ll fly. But the others. It’s better not to think about the others,” he said.

“If you are rested I would go,” I urged. “Get up and try to walk now.”

“Thank you,” he said and got to his feet, swayed from side to side and then sat down backwards in the dust.

“I was taking care of animals,” he said dully, but no longer to me. “I was only taking care of animals.”

There was nothing to do about him. It was Easter Sunday and the Fascists were advancing toward the Ebro. It was a gray overcast day with a low ceiling so their planes were not up. That and the fact that cats know how to look after themselves was all the good luck that old man would ever have.

C. The table below has some words used in the story in Column A with their meaning in Column B. match the words with their contextual meaning.

Words	Meaning
a. pontoon	walk or move unsteadily
b. stagger (ed)	without any interest
c. plodded	a floating platform used as a landing bridge or dock
d. blankly	a person who has dictatorial power and forcibly suppresses any opposition
e. fascist	to walk heavily or move laboriously

D. Here are some multiple answer questions with one correct and three incorrect answers for each. Choose the correct answers based on your reading of the story.

1. What is San Carlos?
 - a. a road
 - b. a bridge
 - c. a town
 - d. a wheel
2. What is the old man's occupation?
 - a. soldier
 - b. shepherd
 - c. herdsman
 - d. traveller
3. What was the man worried about?
 - a. animal
 - b. destination
 - c. artillery
 - d. politics
4. How was the man's voice by the end of the story?
 - a. dull
 - b. tired
 - c. blank
 - d. worried
5. What is the story about?
 - a. love for war
 - b. love for nature
 - c. love for animal
 - d. love for a village

E. Critically examine the theme of the story and how it has been developed in the text.

F. Read the text below and fill in the gaps using the words in the box. Some words need to be given in their *past tense* forms.

screaming	blankly	shatter	flash	appear	impatiently
unquiet	smile	pause	sway	sadly	artillery

Suddenly the peaceful setting turned _____ . Birds started _____ . Trees started to _____ from one side to another. The roaring sound of the helicopters _____ the silence. A searchlight _____ suddenly. A soldier _____ from the nearby bushes and asked the old man 'Who are you?' The old man answered _____ – 'I'm not a soldier'. The soldier laughed. 'What do you do?' he asked _____. The old man _____ and said, 'I look after animals'. Then he _____ for a moment and said _____ 'I had to leave because of _____.'

G. Read below the text which is the beginning of a story. Complete the story in your own language.

It was 1971. The Pakistani army had begun a reign of terror against the Bengalees. Thousands of innocent people were killed each day. None was safe – students, politicians, businessmen, small traders, the rich, the poor – none. Everybody was worried about survival. People were fleeing for safe places. Doctor Saha had the same worry for his family. But he had one more anxiety – anxiety for his pet hen that had been a part of his family for nearly a year. In the meantime, the village had been looted and torched a couple of times. Some of his neighbours had been killed. People were leaving the village. Dr. Saha too decided to leave the next morning. But... how could he leave behind the youngest member of the family, the hen?