

An old man with steel rimmed spectacles and very dusty clothes sat by the side of the road. There was a pontoon bridge across the river and carts, trucks, and men, women and children were crossing it. The mule-drawn carts staggered up the steep bank from the bridge with soldiers helping push against the spokes of the wheels. 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?" The trucks ground up and away heading out of it all and the peasants plodded along in the ankle deep dust. 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. It was Easter Sunday and the Fascists were advancing toward the Ebro. It was my business to cross the bridge, explore the bridgehead beyond and find out to what point the enemy had advanced. "There were two goats and a cat and then there were four pairs of pigeons." "If you can make it, there are trucks up the road where it forks for Tortosa." 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. "From San Carlos," he said, and smiled. That was his native town and so it gave him pleasure to mention it and he smiled. "Various animals," he said, and shook his head. I asked, watching the far end of the bridge where a few last carts were hurrying down the slope of the bank. "Thank you again very much." He looked at me very blankly and tiredly, then said, having to share his worry with some one, "The cat will be all right, I am sure." "Did you leave the dove cage unlocked?" "If you are rested I would go," I urged. He was too tired to go any farther. There were not so many carts now and very few people on foot, but the old man was still there. "There were three animals altogether," he explained. "Yes. Because of the artillery. The captain told me to go because of the artillery." "No," he said, "only the animals I stated." "I am seventy-six years old. I have come twelve kilometers now and I think now I can go no further." "I will wait a while," he said, "and then I will go. Where do the trucks go?" "Towards Barcelona," I told him. There is no need to be unquiet about the cat. "Why they'll probably come through it all right." "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?" "Then they'll fly." "Yes, certainly they'll fly. But the others. It's better not to think about the others," he said. "Thank you," he said and got to his feet, swayed from side to side and then sat down backwards in the dust. But the old man sat there without moving. "Where do you come from?" "Yes."