

This album was recorded in Fredensborg Palace Chapel, which was carefully chosen for this project due to its exceptional acoustics, ideally suited for guitar recordings. We would like to express our sincere thanks to His Majesty King Frederik X, who personally granted us permission to record in Fredensborg Palace Chapel.

The recording took place on February 4-6 and April 1-3, 2025.

Producers: Preben Iwan, Mette Due and Lars Hannibal

Edit: Mette Due

Mix and Master: Preben Iwan and Mette Due

Executive producer: Lars Hannibal

Cover notes: Joshua Cheek

English translations on lyrics: Eloïse Roach Copyright © 1957

Artist: Halfdan Pisket

Artwork and cover design: CEZBP/OUR Recordings

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AUGUSTINUS FONDEN



AAGE OG JOHANNE
LOUIS-HANSENS FOND



Recorded in the DXD audio format (Digital eXtreme Definition, 352.8 kHz/32bit). Pyramix DAW system with Horus preamps/converters. Monitored on B&W 802D Nautilus Diamond speakers and Genelec The Ones. Microphones: 3x DPA 4006-TL, 3x DPA 4015-TL. For Dolby Atmos: DPA 4011's. Available in the Dolby Atmos format on streaming services.



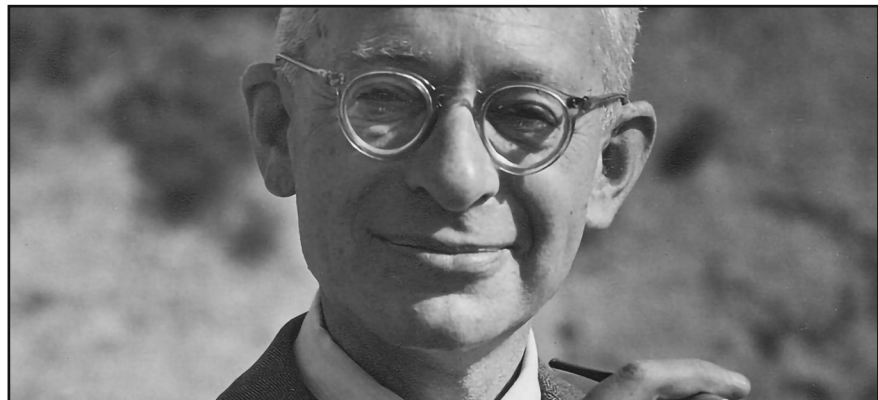
PERSONAL NOTES BY NIKLAS JOHANSEN

My journey through the vast collection “Platero y Yo” has been a fantastic privilege. The work possesses a truly rare poetic depth. After immersing myself in all 28 pieces, I’ve experienced every corner of the emotional spectrum, as well as the many timbres and expressions of the guitar, always colored by Tedesco’s distinctive character and tonal language. It has been unique to experience how my approach to the work has consistently been shaped by the music’s close relationship with Jiménez’s deep poetry, like when one can hear everything from the wind in the treetops in “La Arrulladora” to the shrill clatter of the birds in “La Primavera”. The poems have shaped my relationship with the music, and the music, in turn, has shaped my relationship with the poems.

Part of the preparation has taken place in Spain, not far from Jiménez’s hometown of Moguer, and my interest in the Spanish language has also led me to read the poems in Spanish. The close relationship with the language and culture has contributed to making this album something special for me. In working with the music, I have sought guidance from Paolo Pegoraro, Judicæel Perroy, and Jørgen Bjørnslev. I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all three for their contribution to my understanding of the music. I would also like to thank my two main teachers during my studies, Jesper Sivebæk and Ricardo Gallén. And last but not least, I want to thank Lars Hannibal for bringing this work’s beauty to my attention and for initiating the project.

NOTES BY JOSHUA CHEEK

Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco was born in Florence on April 3, 1895. Despite an early talent for music, his father, a successful financier, had hopes his son would pursue a medical career, but Castelnuovo continued his musical studies, obtaining first a diploma in piano with Edgardo Del Valle de Paz in 1914, then in composition with one of Italy’s leading modernists, Ildebrando Pizzetti (1880–1968), whose profound influence would shape his early development. The young man quickly established himself in Italian musical life and was active as a pianist, music critic and as a consultant to concert series of the Lyceum Club. Castelnuovo-Tedesco’s early music found enthusiastic audiences throughout Italy and was even selected to be part of the programs of the first International Festival of Contemporary Music, held in Salzburg in August 1922, where he joined fellow Italian composers Gian Francesco Malipiero (1882-1973), Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924), and his teacher, Ildebrando Pizzetti.





Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco and Jascha Heifetz in 1934.

Even during the rise of fascism in the 1930s, the composer found continued success in Italy at a time when anti-Semitism grew elsewhere in Europe. During this time, his international reputation spread, and he made many musical friends abroad. In 1931 he was approached by Jascha Heifetz (1901–1987) to compose a violin concerto that he premiered with the New York Philharmonic at Carnegie Hall, conducted by Arturo Toscanini. At the explicit request of Gregor Piatigorsky, Castelnuovo-Tedesco also composed the *Concerto per violoncello e orchestra* (1932–33), which also had its first performance in New York with the Philharmonic, again under the baton of Toscanini. Another significant commission came in 1935, when Mussolini requested a work for the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino festival. Alas, the Nazi contagion spread and not even a musician of Castelnuovo-Tedesco's stature was spared the coming persecution of Italian Jews: in January 1938 a planned performance of his violin concerto by the Turin Radio Orchestra (which had a distinctive “Hebraic flavor”), was cancelled on orders from Rome. By September, Mussolini adopted the racial laws promulgated by the fascist regime as a result of the alliance with Hitler and the



Paganini Quartet, Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco and Andrés Segovia in 1951.

government forbade Jews from teaching. Consequently, the composer and his family decided to leave Italy. The visa process was not without difficulties, but his musical friends Arturo Toscanini and Heifetz helped to ensure their colleague's safe passage. Finally, in 1939, the Castelnuovo-Tedesco family set sail for New York, and the composer became a US citizen in 1948. The composer knew it would be difficult to “conquer” New York, let alone in America! As a pianist, he would have to compete with performers far more experienced and technically accomplished, and as a composer, he understood that his art, quiet and understated, was far removed from the prevailing taste for novelty, and so, as with many expat composers of the time, Castelnuovo-Tedesco headed to Hollywood to work in the film industry. With all the expat musicians flooding the market, finding work was difficult. Eventually, Castelnuovo-Tedesco would land a contract at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), with a start date of November 1st, 1941. The next month, the United States entered World War II resulting in Italians living in America coming under scrutiny as “enemy aliens” and were subject to various restrictions, among them being prohibited from going out in the evening, meeting other

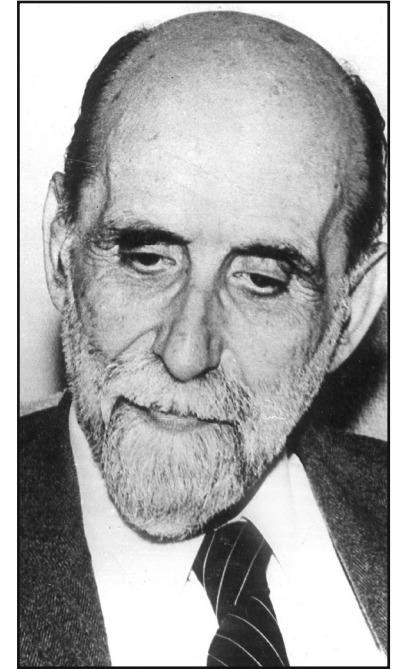
Italians, and traveling more than fifteen miles from their place of residence. During this time Castelnuovo-Tedesco also immersed himself in private teaching. Some of the dozens and dozens of students of every age who passed through his doors went on to become celebrated film composers: Elmer Bernstein, John Williams, Henry Mancini, Jerry Goldsmith, Nelson Riddle, and Jerry Fielding, as well as his personal favorite, André Previn.

Of all of Castelnuovo-Tedesco's illustrious musical friends, it would be the long association with the Spanish guitarist Andrés Segovia (1893-1987) that would permanently establish the composer's international reputation. The two men first met in 1932 at the International Festival of Contemporary Music in Venice, where Segovia asked Castelnuovo-Tedesco to write something for him. The result was the *Variations à travers les siècles – Variations Through the Centuries*, op. 71. The guitarist was so satisfied that the next year he asked the composer for a new and larger work. Thereafter, Castelnuovo-Tedesco wrote a new work every year in honor of his friend's birthday, resulting in an extraordinary corpus of about 50 works: from the early *Variations* to the unfinished *Appunti, Preludi e Studi* op. 210 [*Notes, Preludes and Studies*] (1967-68), and of course, the famous *Concerto* op. 99 which was premiered by Segovia on 28 October 1939 in Montevideo, Uruguay.

Following the war, Castelnuovo-Tedesco would return to his native Italy several times where he maintained a small apartment and was even offered the directorship of the Naples Conservatory but never felt truly Italian again. As he would describe in his autobiography, he felt "suspended like a cloud between two continents." His remaining years were spent peacefully in Beverly Hills with periodic stays in Europe. A particular highlight of his life in America occurred in 1958 when he was invited to Michigan State University in Lansing, Michigan as a Distinguished *Visiting Professor* to teach a course of his own choice. His activities during this stay were multi-faceted: concerts, speeches in a variety of settings, as well as time for composition; he described the period as one of the "most serene and pleasant" of his life. Castelnuovo-Tedesco passed away in Beverly Hills, California on March 17, 1968.

THE POET JUAN RAMÓN JIMÉNEZ

Platero y Yo (Platero and I) is the masterpiece of one of Spain's foremost 20th century poets, Juan Ramón Jiménez. Jiménez was born in 1881 in the Andalusian village of Moguer in the south of Spain, a region which he immortalized in *Platero and I*. A prolific author of more than twenty-five volumes of poetry, Jiménez drew inspiration from Andalusian culture, a heritage notable for its rich diversity of Arabic, Hebrew, Spanish and Gypsy influences. His talent was recognized as early as 1900, when he was called to Madrid to meet the Latin American poet, Ruben Dario. By 1920, he had replaced Dario as the leading poet of the Spanish-speaking countries. For many years, Jimenez lived in Madrid with his wife, Zenobia. But the Spanish Civil War forced him to flee his homeland, and he sought refuge in America, remaining there for the rest of his life. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1956. Tragically, the honor came just a few days before his wife's death. Unable to survive her loss, the poet died two years later, in 1958.



Platero y Yo is a collection of 138 prose poems, each sketch describing a scene in the shared life of the poet and his beloved donkey companion, Platero. The tale unfolds in Moguer, a small, once prosperous Andalusian town where Jiménez was born in this bucolic setting, fell victim around 1910 to a full scale ecological catastrophe that led not only to its

decline but ultimately to its complete devastation. Its vineyards were decimated by disease and the port itself gradually became silted up with debris from the nearby Rio Tinto mine. Despite this, Jiménez stayed in the ruined town of Moguer until 1912. Jiménez had great difficulty overcoming his grieving both for Moguer as well as several personal losses. For the poet, *Platero y Yo* became a vehicle to revisit the Moguer of his childhood and explore the cycle of life from birth through to death and followed by rebirth.

PLATERO AND CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO

In June 1960 Castelnuovo-Tedesco began work on *Platero y Yo*. The work was originally conceived as a recitation with guitar accompaniments to 28 of the poems from Jiménez's famous collection. Despite this limitation, or perhaps BECAUSE of it, especially owing to Jiménez's deeply humanistic prose, Castelnuovo-Tedesco's music rises above mere incidental accompaniment and while Castelnuovo-Tedesco had always composed at a precipitous speed each of the 28 settings (divided into four groups of seven) occupied him for no longer than a day or two. That said, the composer's final sequence of his *Platero* settings is rather haphazard in its ordering and most likely reflects the pieces in the sequence of their composition. The order certainly makes no narrative sense. For example, *Platero's* death three-quarters of the way through the set is followed by his lively re-appearance at a village carnival. While Castelnuovo-Tedesco must have hoped that Segovia would one day perform *Platero y Yo* in its original form with a narrator, there are no record of such a performance and the work most frequently is programmed as excerpts or in an abridged form. The English version that Castelnuovo-Tedesco used for his settings of *Platero y Yo* was drawn from the complete translation by the American academic Eloise Roach, first published in 1957. That is the version that we include in this recording. For all its eccentricities and slapdash narrative structure, *Platero y Yo* is an undoubted masterwork in all aspects in the repertoire of the guitar and a monument to Castelnuovo-Tedesco's love for the instrument.





Photo: Sebastian Bak

NIKLAS JOHANSEN GUITARIST

Niklas Johansen plays a double-top cedar guitar, built in 2013 by Arnoldo García (Granada), with Knobloch Double Silver nylon strings (400 ADQ).

Niklas Johansen is a Danish classical guitarist based in Copenhagen. He has won numerous first prizes at international guitar competitions in China, Greece, Bulgaria, Austria, Italy, Poland and Germany, and nationally he has received numerous awards and grants such as the P2 Talent Prize and the Sonning Talent Prize. As a concert guitarist, Niklas Johansen has played in more than 20 countries around the world, including Australia, Russia and large parts of China. He has often performed with renowned orchestras and ensembles such as the Danish National Symphony Orchestra, the Danish National Vocal Ensemble and ADDA Simfónica Alicante. He performs both as a solo guitarist and in various chamber music contexts. His passion for contemporary music has driven him to premiere numerous works, often collaborating with composers who had yet to write for the classical guitar. In addition to his extensive concert activity, Niklas Johansen is often played on the radio, and he has several releases behind him, which have been heard by more than half a million listeners worldwide.

Niklas Johansen studied classical guitar at the Royal Danish Academy of Music with Jesper Sivebæk, at the Hochschule für Musik Franz Liszt in Weimar with Ricardo Gallén, and at the Universidad de Alicante with David Russell and Manuel Barrueco, among others. At all places he received the highest grade, including the Latin honor “cum laude”. Besides his concert activities Niklas Johansen has a teaching position at the Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen as well as the two pre-academy institutions of Copenhagen, and he’s the co-founder of the annual international summer course Danish Guitar Camp.



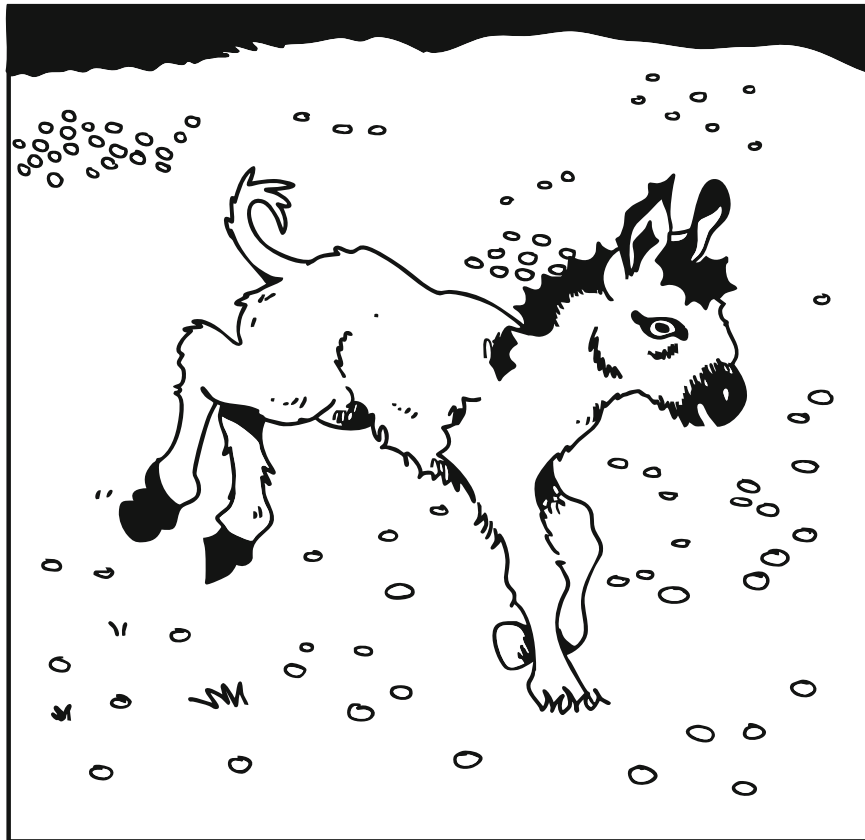
1

PLATERO (PLATERO)

Platero is small, downy, smooth, so soft to the touch that one would think he were all cotton, that he had no bones. Only the jet mirrors of his eyes are hard as two beetles of dark crystal. I let him run loose and he goes off to the meadow; softly, scarcely touching them, he brushes his nose against the tiny flowers of pink, sky-blue and golden yellow. I call him gently: "Platero?" and he comes to me at a gay little trot as though he were laughing, lost in a clatter of fancy. He eats everything I give him. He likes tangerines, muscatel grapes, all amber-colored, and purple figs with their crystal point of honey. He is tender and loving as a little boy, as a little girl; but strong and firm as a stone. When I ride him on Sunday through the lanes at the edge of the town, the men from the country, clean-dressed and slow moving, stand still to watch him.

"He is made of steel."

He is made of steel. Both steel and quicksilver.



2

ANGELUS (ANGELUS)

Angelus!

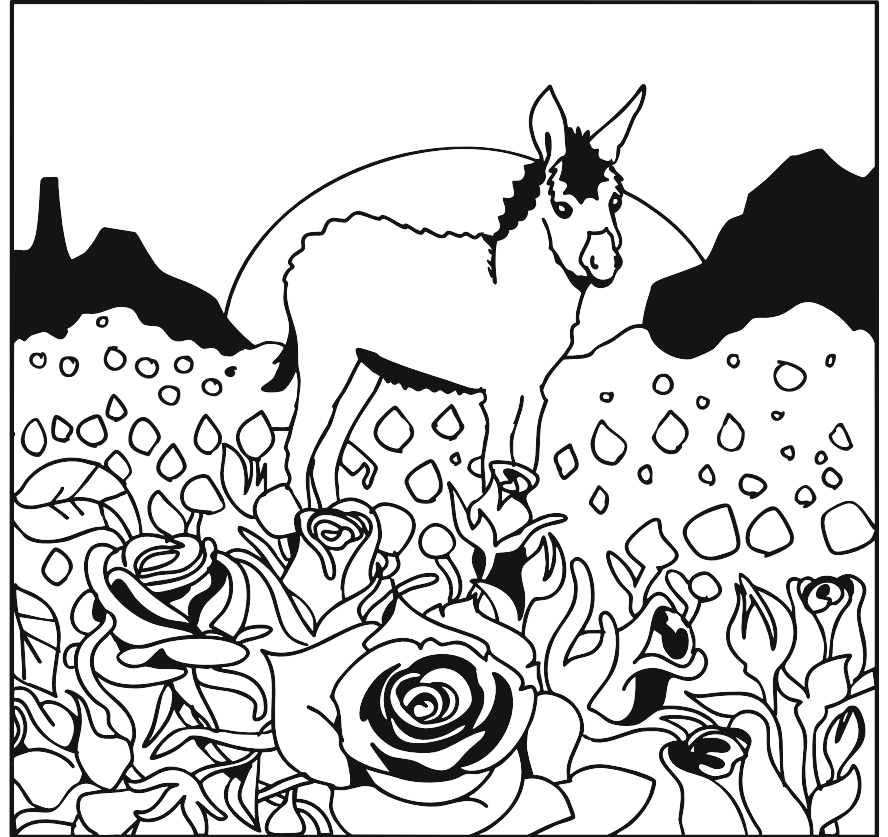
Look, Platero, how many roses are falling all around; blue roses, white roses, roses without color.

... One would think that the sky was dissolving into roses. Look how the roses are covering my forehead, my shoulders, my hands... What shall I do with so many roses?

Do you know, I wonder, for I do not, where this delicate flower comes from? Daily it casts a mantle of tenderness over the landscape, leaving it softly pink, white and blue ... more roses, more roses, ... like a painting by Fra Angelico who always knelt to paint the sky.

One would think that they were throwing roses to the earth from the seven galleries of Paradise. Like a warm and lightly colored snowfall the roses lie on the tower, on the roof, on the trees. Look: all strong lines, with their adornment, become delicate. More roses, more and more roses...

It seems, Platero, while the Angelus is ringing, that this life of ours loses its daily force and that another force from within, loftier, purer and more constant, causes everything to rise, like fountains of grace, to the stars which are beginning to sparkle now among the roses. More roses... Your eyes, which you cannot see, Platero, and which you raise meekly to the sky, are two beautiful roses.



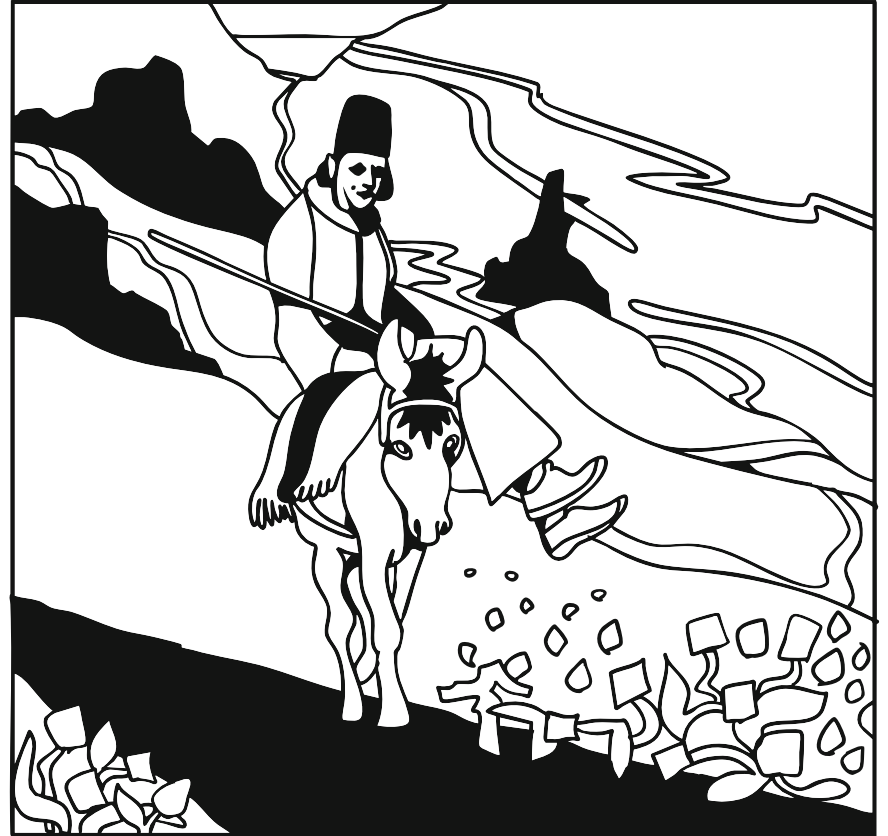
3

RETURN (RETORNO)

Platero and I were returning from the mountains heavily loaded: he with sandalwood, I with yellow lilies. It was April dusk. Everything that in the west had been limpid gold was now limpid silver, a smooth luminosity of Cape jessamine petals. Then the vast sky became transparent sapphire; then emerald. Sadness held me like a shroud...

From the hilltop the one tower of the town, the church steeple, crowned with blue tiles, acquired in the clarity of the hour a monumental aspect. For the moment it was the Giralda from a distance... And my yearning for Seville, acute in springtime, found in the sight a melancholy comfort.

Return... Where? From what? To what? For what? But the lilies I carried were more odorous in the warm freshness of approaching night; their fragrance was more penetrating and at the same time more vague, coming from the unseen blossoms, as if they had become all odor, intoxicating the body and the soul in the solitary darkness.



4

SPRING (LA PRIMAVERA)

“O what sparkles and odors!
O how pasture grounds rejoice!
O what joy and mirth are heard!”

(Popular ballad)

My morning nap is disturbed by a devilish noise of children and I am in an ill-humor. No longer able to sleep, I leave my bed in despair. Then, looking out from my open window, I realize that it is the birds whose shrill clatter has disturbed my slumbers.

I go down to the garden and sing thanks to the God of the blue day. Free concert of singing bills, fresh and endless music. The swallow, fanciful one, utters her warbling from the well; the blackbird whistles on the fallen orange; the fiery golden oriole chatters from evergreen to evergreen; the blue titmouse laughs long and daintily on the top of the eucalyptus tree; and in the tallest pine the sparrows argue outrageously. What a morning! The sun spreads his gold and silver gladness on the earth; myriad-colored butterflies flit everywhere, among the flowers, through the house, now in, now out, above the spring. Everywhere the countryside burst open to a bubbling of new and wholesome life. It is as though we were inside a great honeycomb of light, which might be the heart of an immense, calid, scarlet rose.



5

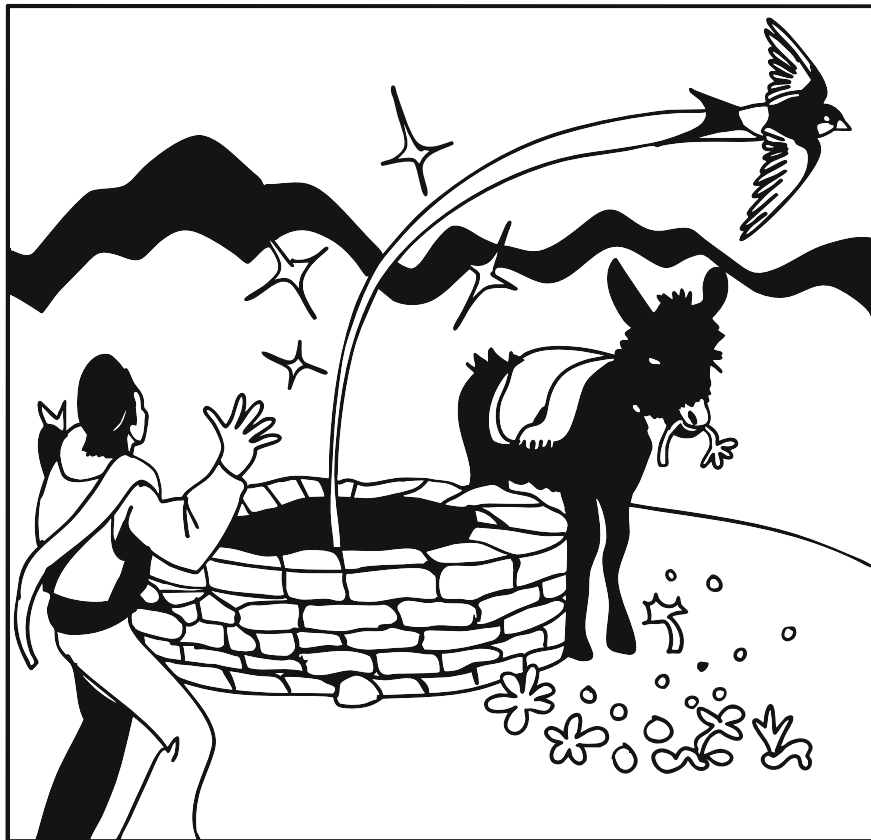
THE WELL (EL POZO)

Look at it: the last spring rains have filled it to the brim, Platero. It has no echo now, nor can one see, in its new depth, the reflection of the oriel window bathed in sunlight, prismatic jewel above the yellow and blue pattern of the glass patio roof.

You have never been down in the cistern, Platero. I have; I went down when it was emptied, many years ago. Listen; it has a long underground gallery, and then a very small room. When I entered it, the candle I carried was snuffed out by the fingers of the darkness, and a salamander crawled over my hand. Two icy sensations crossed each other in my breast like two swords, or like the crossbones under a skull. The whole town is honeycombed with cisterns and galleries, Platero. The largest cistern is the one in the courtyard of the ancient citadel of the castle. The best one is this one at my house, which, as you see, has the curbstone carved in one piece of alabastrine marble. The gallery of the church goes as far as the Puntales vineyard, and there it opens on the fields, near the river. The one that starts at the hospital no one has ever dared to follow to its end, because it never ends.

I remember how when I was a child the sobbing murmur of the rain that fell from the flat tiled roof into the cistern troubled my sleepless hours. Then, in the morning, mad with eagerness, we would go to the cistern to see how high the water had reached. When it was up to the rim, as now, what surprise, what excitement, what exclamations...

Well, Platero, now I am going to give you a bucketful of this pure fresh water, from the same bucket that old Villegas used to drink from, poor Villegas, whose body was already dried up with cognac and brandy.



6

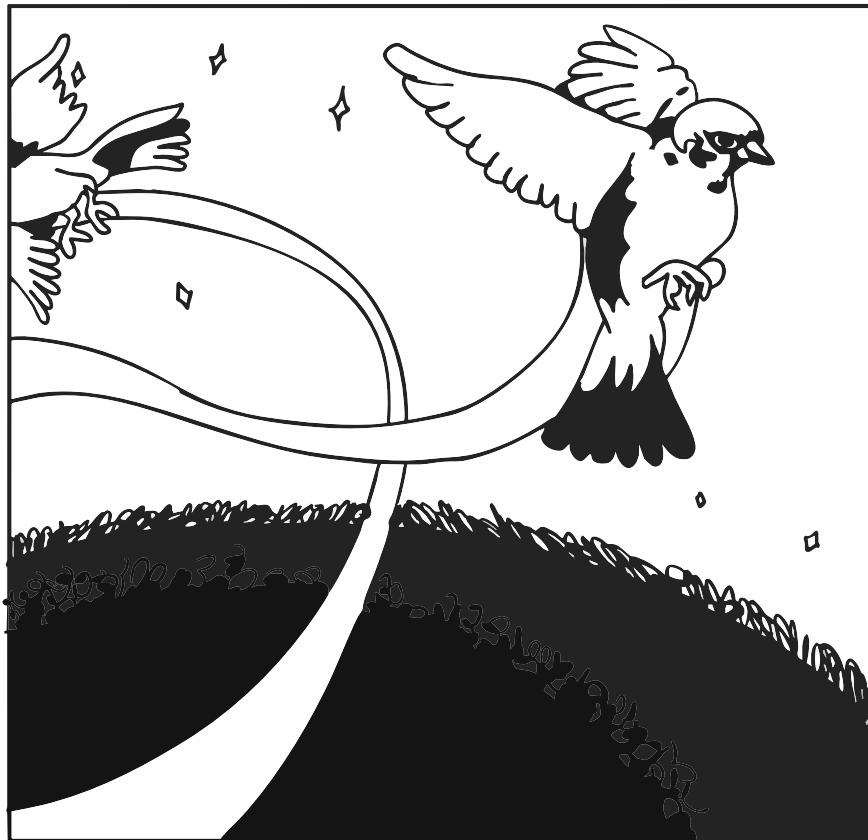
SPARROWS (GORRIONES)

The morning of Santiago Day is clouded with gray and white, as if set in cotton. Everyone has gone to church. The sparrows and Platero and I have remained in the garden.

Sparrows! Under the round clouds which at times rain a few drops, how they come and go in the climbing vines, how they shrill, how they peck at each other's bills! One lights on a bough, takes flight, and leaves it quivering; another drinks a bit of sky from the little pool on the well curb; another has leapt up to the roof from the olive tree, whose almost-dry flowers the gray day brightens in contrast.

Blessed birds, with no fixed holy days! Free in the monotony of the innate, the real, bells mean nothing to them, unless it be a vague joyousness. Well content, with no fatal obligations, with no Olympus to enrapture nor Avernus to terrify them, with no morality but their own nor any God but the blue, they are my brothers, my sweet brothers. They travel without money and without luggage; they leave a house when the fancy strikes them; they know where to find a brook; they divine a fern; and they need but open their wings to gain happiness. They know nothing of Mondays or Saturdays; they bathe anywhere, any time; they love nameless love, the universal loved one.

And when people—poor wretched people—go to church on Sundays, locking their doors behind them, they, in a glad example of riteless love, suddenly come, with their fresh and jovial shrilling, to the gardens of the closed houses in which some poet whom they know well, and a tender small donkey—will you let me join our names, Platero?—watch them with fraternal love.



7

MELANCHOLY (MELANCOLÍA)

This afternoon I went with the children to Platero's grave, a low mound that lays in the orchard, at the foot of a round, fatherly pine tree. April had adorned the damp earth with large yellow lilies.

Titmice were singing above in the green canopy mottled with the blue zenith, and their light trilling, joyous and fairy-like, drifted away on the golden air of the balmy evening like a limpid dream of new love.

As soon as we arrived, the children stopped shouting. Quiet and sober, their bright eyes following mine, they plied me with anxious questions. "Friend Platero," I said to the earth, "if, as I believe, you are now in a heavenly meadow and carry angel children on your hairy back, have you forgotten me, perhaps? Tell me, Platero, do you still remember me?"

And, as if answering my question, a white butterfly, soft and smooth as waxen petals, fluttered gently, like a soul, from lily to lily.



8

FRIENDSHIP (AMISTAD)

We understand each other.

I let him go at his fancy, and he always takes me where I want to go.

Platero knows that on reaching the Corona pine I like to get close to its trunk and touch it, and to look up at the sky through its enormous, light filtered top; he knows that the narrow path that leads between grassplots to the Old Fountain delights me; that it is high festival for me to watch the river from the pine hill, which, like a sorceress, brings classic scenes before me. If I go to sleep, unafraid, on his back, my awakening always finds me at one of these friendly spots.

I treat Platero as if he were a child. If the road is rough or a little too hard for him, I get down to make it easy for him. I kiss him; I tease him mercilessly. He knows that I love him and bears me no grudge. He is so like me, so different from the rest, that I have come to believe that he dreams my own dreams.

Platero has given himself to me like a passionate adolescent.

He protests at nothing. I know that I am his happiness. He even avoids donkeys and men ...



THE MOON (LA LUNA)

Platero had just drunk two bucketful's of water with stars by the barn well and was returning to the stable, slow and absent-minded among the sunflowers. Wrapped in the warm fragrance of the heliotropes and lying on the whitewashed doorsill, I was waiting for him.

Beyond the roof, the distant field, damp with September dew, slept, sending forth the pungent breath of pines. A huge black cloud, like a gigantic hen laying an egg of gold, laid the moon upon the hill. I said to the moon:

"... Ma sola

ha questa luna in ciel, che da nessuno
cader fu vista mai se non in sogno."

Platero stared at the moon, and, with a harsh soft sound, he shook one ear. He turned to gaze at me, and shook the other ...



10

TWILIGHT GAMES (JUEGOS DEL ANOCHECER)

When in the village twilight Platero and I come, stiff with cold, through the purple shadows of the wretched alley which leads to the dry riverbed, poor children are playing at frightening one another, pretending to be beggars. One throws a sack over his head, another says he cannot see, another plays lame.

Then comes one of those sudden changes that happen with children; since they are wearing shoes and clothes, and their mothers, in some way known only to them, have given them food to eat, they think themselves princes.

"My father has a silver watch."

"And mine has a horse"

"And mine, a shotgun."

A watch that will rise at dawn, a gun that will not kill hunger, a horse that will lead to poverty.

Then they form a circle. Amid so much blackness, a little girl with a thin voice, a thread of liquid crystal in the dark, sings melodiously as a princess:

"I'm the young widow of the Count of Ore..."

Yes, yes! Sing, dream, children of the poor! Soon, at the first blush of youth. Spring will frighten you like a beggar in winter's guise.

"Let's go, Platero."



11

RONSARD (RONSARD)

Having freed Platero from his halter and left him grazing among the chaste daisies of the little meadow, I have thrown myself under the pine tree, have taken a small volume from my Moorish saddlebags, and, opening it at a marked place, I have begun to read aloud:

“Comme on voit sur la branche au mois de mai la rose

En sa belle jeunesse, en sa première fleur,

Rendre le ciel jaloux de...”

Above, on the topmost boughs, a brief bird leaps and chirps, while the sun turns him and the whole soughing treetop into gold. Joined by its fluttering and by its twittering comes the sound of the breaking of seeds which the bird is eating.

“...jaloux de sa vive couleur...”

A huge warm thing advances suddenly, like a living prow, on my shoulder. It is Platero, who, no doubt attracted by the lyre of Orpheus, comes to read with me. We read:

“...vive couleur, Quand l'aube de ses pleurs au point du jour l'a...”



12

THE CRAZY MAN (EL LOCO)

Dressed in mourning, with my beard cut like a Nazarene's and my narrow-brimmed hat, I must present a strange figure riding on Platero's soft gray back. When on the way to the vineyards I cross the last streets, bright with whitewash and sun, the gypsy children come running after us, shaggy and oily-smooth, showing tense brown bellies through their red, green and yellow rags. They give long shrill cries of:

"The crazy man! The crazy man! The crazy man!"

Already the green fields lie before us. Facing the vast pure sky of burning indigo, my eyes, how far removed from what I hear! open nobly, receiving into their calm that nameless quietude, that divine, harmonious serenity which lives in the endlessness of the horizon.

There in the distance, among the high garden patches, a few sharp-pitched cries persist, finely veiled, intermittent, panting, tedious:

"The cra-azy man! The cra-azy man!"



13

THE CONSUMPTIVE GIRL (LA TÍSICA)

She was sitting up straight in a poor, mean chair, her face a dead white, like a bruised lily, in the center of the cold, whitewashed room. The doctor had prescribed walking in the country, to take the sun of that chilly May; but the poor child could not go.

“When I get to the bridge,” she told me, “you see, sir, just close by, I can’t breathe.”

The childish voice, thin and broken, would fail her, as a summer breeze sometimes fails.

I offered her Platero for a little ride. Mounted on him, what laughter from her sharp, dead child’s face, all black eyes and white teeth.



14

NOSTALGIA (NOSTALGIA)

Platero, you see us, do you not?

Is it not true that you see how the water in the garden well laughs peacefully, clear and cold; how in the late afternoon the industrious bees fly around the green rosemary that has turned mauve, rose, and gold in the last streaks of sunlight that sets fire to the distant hill?

Platero, you do see us, do you not?

Is it not true that you can see, climbing up the red slope to the old spring, the little donkeys of the washerwomen, tired, lame, sad in the immense purity that unites the earth and sky in a single crystal splendor?

Platero, you see us, do you not?

Is it not true that you see the children running playfully among the rockroses, whose flowers cluster in their branches like a light swarm of white butterflies spotted with carmine?

Platero, you do see us.

Platero, is it not true that you do see us? Yes, you see me. And I think I hear, yes, yes, I hear, in the cloudless sunset hour, mellowing the whole valley of the vineyards, your tender, plaintive bray.



15

WHITE BUTTERFLIES (MARIPOSAS BLANCAS)

Night is coming on, misty and purple. Vague green and mauve lights persist beyond the church tower. The road rises enveloped in shadow, in bellflowers, the scent of grass, songs, weariness, and longing. Suddenly a dark man, with a cap and swordstick, his ugly face showing red for a moment in the glow of his cigar, comes down toward us from a wretched hut, buried among coal sacks. Platero shies in alarm.

“Any merchandise?”

“Look ... white butterflies.

The man wants to thrust his iron stick in the little basket, and I do not prevent it. I open the saddlebag and he can see nothing. And so the stuff for dreams passes free and guileless, paying no tribute to the tax collectors.



16

APRIL IDYLL (IDILIO DE ABRIL)

The children took Platero with them to the brook of the poplars, and now they are bringing him back trotting, in the midst of pointless playing and senseless laughter, loaded with yellow flowers. It rained on them down there—that fleeting cloud which veiled the green meadow with its threads of gold and silver on which there trembled, like a lyre of tears, the rainbow.

And in the drenched hair of the little donkey the wet bellflowers are still dripping.

Fresh, gay, sentimental idyll! Even Platero's braying sounds tender under the sweet, rain-drenched load. From time to time, he turns his head and bites off the flowers his big mouth can reach. The white and yellow blooms hang for a moment from his mouth, streaked with his greenish slaver, then disappear into his round, cinched belly. If one could only eat flowers like you, Platero, and not suffer.

Ambiguous April evening! The brilliant eyes of Platero reflect the hour of sun, against whose setting above the field of San Juan is seen another rosy raveled cloud raining.



17

THE CANARY'S FLIGHT (EL CANARIO VUELA)

One day the green canary, I do not know how or why, flew out of his cage. He was an old bird, a sad legacy from a dead woman, which I had not set at liberty for fear that he might starve or freeze to death, or that he might be eaten by the cats.

All morning long he flew about the pomegranate blossoms in the garden, through the pine tree by the gate, among the lilacs. And all morning long the children sat on the porch, absorbed in the brief flights of the yellowish bird. Platero rested close to the rosebushes, playing with a butterfly.

In the late afternoon the canary came to the roof of the large house, and there he remained a long time, fluttering in the soft light of the setting sun.

Of a sudden, without anyone's knowing how or why, he appeared in his cage, gay once more.

What a stir in the garden! The children leaped about, clapping their hands, rosy and laughing as the dawn; Diana, mad with joy, followed them, barking at her own tinkling bell; having caught their mirth, Platero capered around like a wild young goat, stood on his hind legs dancing a rude waltz, and then, standing on his forefeet, kicked his hind feet in the clear warm air. . . .



18

LULLABY (LA ARRULLADORA)

We understand each other. I let him go at his fancy, and he always takes me where I want to go. Platero knows that on reaching the Corona pine I like to get close to its trunk and touch it, and to look up at the sky through its enormous, light filtered top; he knows that the narrow path that leads between grassplots to the Old Fountain delights me; that it is high festival for me to watch the river from the pine hill, which, like a sorceress, brings classic scenes before me. If I go to sleep, unafraid, on his back, my awakening always finds me at one of these friendly spots.

I treat Platero as if he were a child. If the road is rough or a little too hard for him, I get down to make it easy for him. I kiss him; I tease him mercilessly. He knows that I love him and bears me no grudge. He is so like me, so different from the rest, that I have come to believe that he dreams my own dreams.

Platero has given himself to me like a passionate adolescent. He protests at nothing. I know that I am happy. He even avoids donkeys and men ...



19

THE CANARY DIES (EL CANARIO SE MUERE)

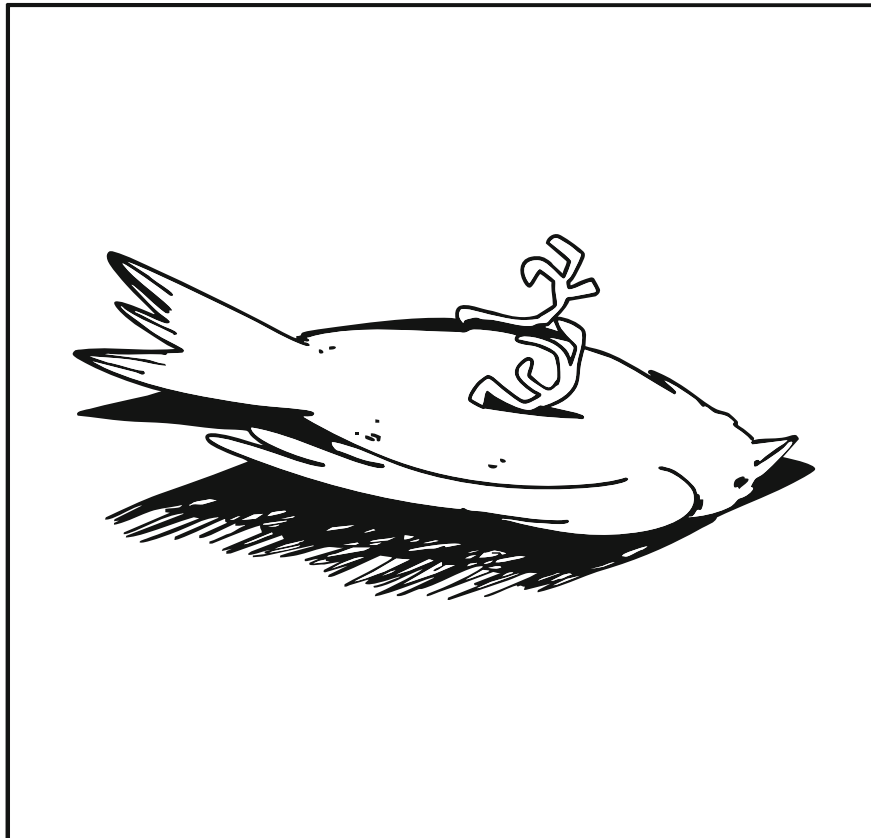
Look, Platero, the children's canary was dead in his silver cage this morning. It is true that he was very old. In winter, you remember, he was always silent, with his head hidden under his wing. Then, at the beginning of spring, when the sunshine turned the open living room into a garden and the best of the roses of the courtyard bloomed, he too tried to do honor to the new life, and he sang; but his voice was weak and asthmatic, like the voice of a cracked flute.

The eldest of the children used to take care of him, and when he found him lifeless on the floor of his cage, he cried out, sobbing: "Why did he die? He had everything. He never lacked food nor water nor anything."

No. He did not lack anything, Platero. He died because he died, as Campoamor, that other old songster, would say. Platero, do you suppose there is a paradise for birds? Do you suppose there is a green garden above the azure sky full of golden rosebushes in bloom with the souls of white, crimson, blue, and yellow birds?

Listen: tonight the children and you and I will take the dead bird down to the garden. The moon is at its full now, and in its pale silver light the poor songster, in Blanca's white hand, will look like the withered petal of a yellow lily. And we will bury him under the big rosebush.

In the spring, Platero, we shall see the bird come out of the heart of a white rose. The fragrant air will turn sweeter with music, and we shall hear in the April sunshine a magic fluttering of invisible wings and a sweet symphony of clear golden trills.



20

NOVEMBER IDYLL (IDILIO DE NOVIEMBRE)

When at dusk Platero returns from the country with his light load of pine branches for the fire, he almost disappears under the spread-out submissive green. His step is short, neat, like that of a wire-walking circus girl, delicate, playful ... He seems not to walk. His ears upright, he might be a snail beneath its house.

The green branches that once when erect on their tree had in them sunlight, titmice, wind, moonlight, ravens, what a horror, Platero, that these have sat there! drag, poor things, to touch the white dust of the dry twilight paths.

A cool mauve softness is a nimbus over all things. And in the country road which presages December, the tender humility of the loaded donkey begins to seem, like the year that is past, almost divine.



21

DEATH (LA MUERTE)

I found Platero lying on his bed of straw, eyes soft and sad. I went to him, stroked him, talking to him and trying to help him to stand.

The poor fellow quivered, started to rise, one forefoot bent under ... He could not get up. Then I straightened his foot on the ground, patted him again tenderly, and called the doctor.

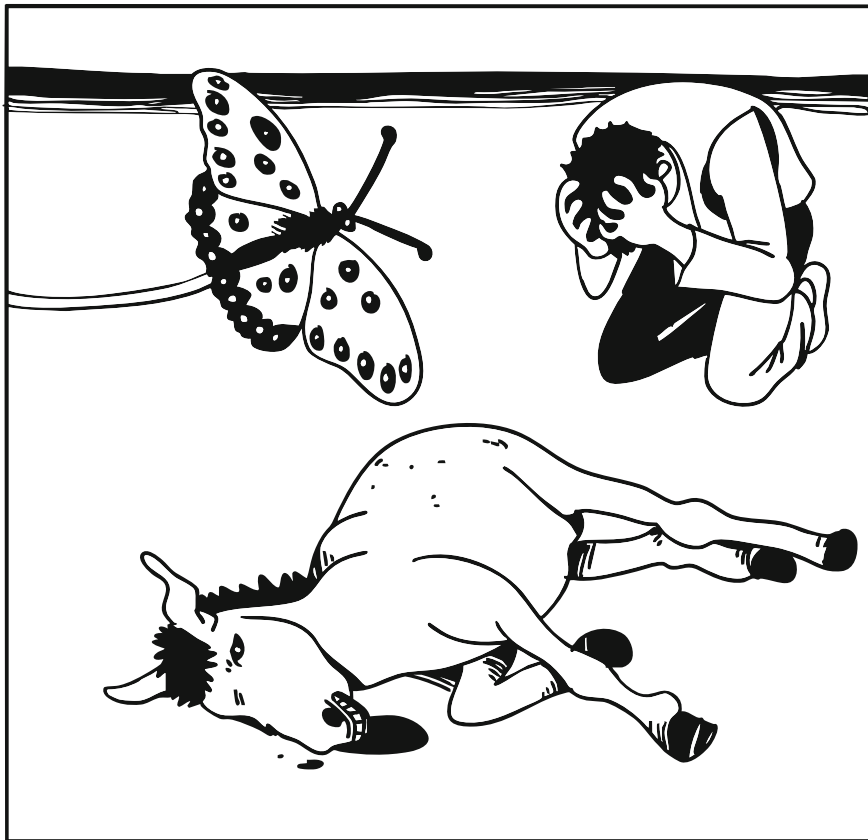
Old Darbón, as soon as he saw him, puckered his toothless mouth and shook his bulbous head like a pendulum.

“No hope?”

I do not know what he answered ... That the poor fellow was dying ... nothing ... a pain ... Some root he had eaten, with the grass ...

At noon, Platero was dead. His little cotton-like stomach had swollen like a globe, and his rigid discolored legs were raised to heaven. His curly hair looked now like the moth-eaten tow hair of old dolls that falls off when you touch it.

Through the silent stable, its translucent wings seeming to catch fire every time it passed the ray of light that came in through the little window, fluttered a beautiful three-colored butterfly.



CONVALESCENCE (CONVALENCIA)

Lying in the dim yellow light of my convalescent's room, comfortable with rugs and tapestries, I hear from the night street, as in a dream bedewed with stars, light-stepping donkeys returning from the country, children playing and shouting.

I can imagine the large dark heads of asses and the fine small heads of children who, amid brayings, sing Christmas carols in crystal and silver voices. I feel the town wrapped in the smoke of roasted chestnuts, in the effluvium from stables, in the emanation of homes at peace. ... And my soul overflows, purifying me, as if a torrent of celestial waters supplied it from the hidden rock of my heart. Redeeming nightfall! Intimate hour, cold and warm at the same time, full of infinite revelations!

Up above, the bells peal gaily among the stars. Platero, caught in the prevailing spirit, brays in his stall, which, in this instant of heaven-at-hand, seems far away In my weakness I weep, moved to tenderness, and alone, just like Faust



23

SWALLOWS (GOLONDRINAS)

There she is now, Platero, a dark and lively little figure, in her gray nest beside the painting of the Virgin of Montemayor, a nest which is always respected. The unhappy bird seems terrified. I believe that this time the poor swallows have made a mistake as the hens did last week, when they took shelter in the chicken coop in mid-afternoon during the eclipse of the sun.

Spring had the coquetry to arrive earlier than usual this year, but, shivering with the cold, she has had to hide her tender nudity again in the cloud bed of March. How sad to see the virgin blossoms in the orange grove wither in the bud!

The swallows are here already, Platero, yet one can scarcely hear them as in other years, when on the very day of their arrival they greeted and investigated everything, chattering without pause in their fluted trills. They would tell the flowers what they had seen in Africa, of their two journeys over the sea, landing on the water with a wing for a sail, or in the rigging of ships; of other sunsets, other dawns, other nights with stars.

They do not know what to do. They fly about silently, perplexed, like ants when a child tramples on their path. They do not dare to fly up and down the Calle Nueva in a steady straight line, with that flourish at the end, nor enter their nests in the wells, nor perch on the telegraph wires which the north wind keeps humming, in their classic pose as mail carriers, beside the white insulators. They will die of the cold, Platero!



24

WAYSIDE FLOWER (LA FLOR DEL CAMINO)

How pure, Platero, and how lovely, this wayside blossom. All the bustle and confusion pass beside it: the bulls, the goats, the stallions, men – and it, so delicate and so weak, remains erect, mauve and fine in its place, uncontaminated by any impurity.

Each day when starting up the slope we take the crosspath, you have seen it on its green stand. Now there is a bird by its side that flies away, why? – when we approach; now it is full, like a tiny chalice, of the clear water of a summer cloud; now it consents to the foray of a bee or the voluble adornment of a butterfly.

This flower will live brief days, Platero, although its memory may be eternal. Its life will be like a day of your spring, or like a spring in my life What would I not give autumn, Platero, in exchange for this divine flower, that it might be, day by day, the simple and endless example of our life?



The clamorous voice of the bell, now near, now far, resounds in the sky as if the blue were a crystal goblet. And the open country, already a little sickly, seems to gild itself with open notes falling from the joyous chiming. Everyone, even the watchman, has gone to town to see the procession. Platero and I are alone. What peace! What freedom! What well-being! I turn Platero loose in the meadow, and, under a pine which the birds have not deserted, I fling myself on the ground to read Omar Khayyám.

The silence between two peals, the inner tumult of the September morning, acquire shape and sound. The gold and black wasps flutter round the bunches of muscatel grapes which load the vine; the butterflies, indistinguishable from the flowers, seem to renew themselves in a metamorphosis of color as they fly. The solitude is like a great thought of light.

Now and then Platero stops eating and looks at me. I, now and then, stop reading and look at Platero.



THE GYPSIES (LOS GITANOS)

Look at her, Platero. There she comes down the street in the coppery sunshine, straight, erect, shawless, looking at no one How well she carries the memory of her beauty, gallant still, like an oak, her red kerchief round her body, over her blue white-dotted skirt with many ruffles. She is on her way to the town hall to ask permission to encamp, as usual, behind the cemetery. You remember the sordid tents of the gypsies, their fires, their gaudy women, their starving donkeys all around.

The donkeys, Platero! The donkeys of the town must be trembling, hearing the gypsies from their stable yards. I am not uneasy about Platero because to get to his stable the gypsies would have to leap over half the town, and, besides, Rengel, the watchman, likes him and me. But in jest, to frighten him, I say with a voice charged with implications: "In, Platero, in! Let me close the grating. Someone will get you!"

Platero, sure that the gypsies will not get him, passes at a trot through the iron door, which closes after him with a harsh sound of iron and glass. He leaps from the marble court into the flower garden; like an arrow he speeds into the stable yard, breaking, in his short flight, the blue morning-glory vine.



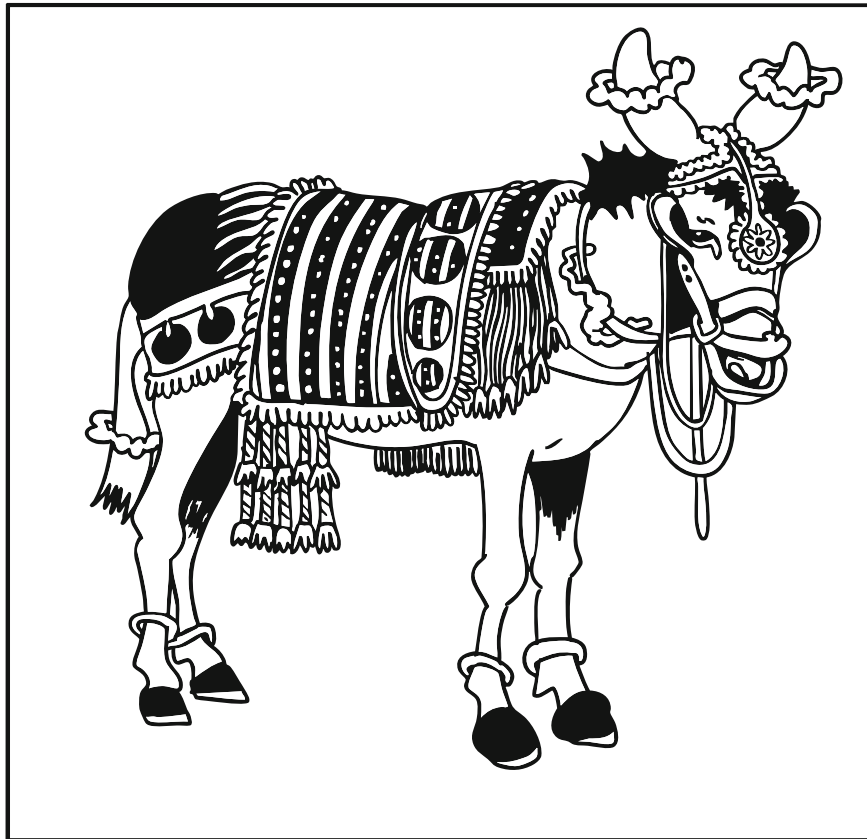
27

CARNIVAL (CARNAVAL)

How handsome Platero is today! It is Carnival Monday and the children are wearing masks and gay costumes. They have arrayed Platero in a Moorish harness, heavily embroidered in red, blue, white, and yellow arabesques.

Rain, sun, and cold. Colored serpentine streams from the balconies and bits of confetti are tossed about in the sharp afternoon wind. The revelers, stiff with cold, try to warm blue hands in the folds of their flowing costumes.

When we arrive at the Square, some women, disguised as inmates of an insane asylum in long white robes, their loose black hair wreathed with green leaves, take Platero in the center of their boisterous circle and, joining hands, dance gaily around him.



TO PLATERO IN THE HEAVEN OF MOGUER
(A PLATERO EN EL CIELO DE MOGUER)

Dear, trotting Platero, my beloved little donkey, who carried my soul so many times – only my soul!, along the deep roadways of cacti and mallows and honeysuckle; for you this book that is of you, now that you can understand it.

It goes to your soul that grazes now in paradise, through the soul of our Moguer landscape, which must also have gone to heaven with yours; it carries on its paper back my soul which, traveling among the flowering briars, on its ascension becomes better, more peaceful, purer each day.

Yes. I know that when at the close of day I come slowly and thoughtfully through the oropéndolas and the orange blossoms across the lonely orange grove to the pine tree that watches over your last sleep, you, Platero, happy in your meadow of eternal roses, will see me stop before the yellow lilies that have sprung from your buried heart.





HALFDAN PISKET ARTIST

Halfdan Pisket was born 1985, the son of a Turkish-Armenian father. At the age of 17 Halfdan was admitted to the *The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts*, where he graduated in 2009. Pisket broke through internationally with *Desertør* [Deserter] (2014), first part of a trilogy (the *Dansker* trilogy (2014–2016)) about the life of his Turkish-Armenian father. Pisket became the first graphic novel author to receive a three-year grant from the *Danish Arts Foundation* in 2015, and in January 2019, he won the award for best comic at the prestigious *Festival International de la Bande Dessinée*. He also received the *Ping Award for Best Danish Comic* (twice), *The Karen Blixen Award*, *Politikens Frit Flet Award*, *Art Poster of the Year for Copenhagen Jazz Festival* and other honors.

