

1. Platero

Platero is a small donkey, a soft, hairy Donkey: so soft to the touch that he might be said to be made of cotton, with no bones. Only the jet mirrors of his eyes are hard like two black crystal scarabs.

I turn him loose, and he goes to the meadow and, with his nose, he gently caresses the little owers of rose and blue and gold.... I call him softly, "Platero?" and he comes to me at a gay little trot that is like laughter of a vague, idyllic, tinkling sound...

He eats whatever I give him. He likes mandarin oranges, amber-hued muscatel grapes, purple gs tipped with crystalline drops of honey...

He is as loving and tender as a child, but strong and sturdy as a rock. When on Sundays I ride him through the lanes in the outskirts of the town, slow-moving country-men, dressed in their Sunday clean, watch him a while, speculatively:

"He is like steel."

Steel, yes. Steel and moon silver at the same time.

2. The Crazy-Man

Dressed in mourning, with my long brown beard and my small black hat, I must look odd riding on Platero's grey softness.

When, on my way to the vineyards, I cross the last streets, whitewashed and dazzlingly bright in the sunlight, shaggy-haired gypsy children, with sleek tanned bellies showing out of their green, red, and yellow rags, run after us shrilling a long-drawn-out call:

"Crazy-man! Crazy-man!"

Before us lies the open country. Face to face with the vast purple sky of ery blue, my eyes -so far from my ears- open contentedly, receiving in all its quietness that nameless calm,

that harmonious and divine serenity that lies in the innitude of the horizon.

And from the distance, of the elds, sharp cries nelymued, broken, breathless, faint:

“Crazy–man...! Crazy–man...!”

3. The Thorn

On entering the pasture lands Platero begins limping. I jump quickly to the ground.

“What is the matter, child?”

Platero lets his right forefoot limp without weight or strength, barely touching the burning sand of the road, showing the frog of the hoof.

With greater solicitude, no doubt, than that shown him by old Darbón, his doctor, I stoop to examine the bruised foot. A long green orange–tree thorn is stuck in it like a little round emerald dagger. All sympathy with Platero’s pain, I pull out the thorn and take the poor fellow to the brook of the yellow lilies so that the running water may lave the little wound with its long pure tongue.

Then we go on toward the white sea, I leading, he following, still limping, his head knocking softly against my body at each faltering step.

4. The Roof

You, Platero, have never climbed to the at roof of the house. You cannot know how one’s heart expands with the joy of breathing, when, attaining it from the dark and narrow wooden stairway, one feels the heat of the full daytime sun and knows himself ooded with blue, as though touching the sky itself, blinded by the whiteness of the lime with which, as you know, the brick oor

is covered, so that the water from the clouds may reach the cistern clear and clean.

What enchantment on the rook! The bells of the tower ring within you, on the level with your heart, which beats faster; you can see in the distant vineyards the hoes gleaming with a glint of silver and sunlight; you dominate everything: other roofs; yards where forgotten people work, each at his own task –the chair mender, the painter, the cooper– spots that are trees in barnyards, with the bull or the goat; the cemetery to which there comes from time to time, small and black and unnoticed, a humble third-class funeral; windows at which a girl in a white bodice carelessly combs her hair and sings; the river, and a boat that never quite reaches port; granaries where a lone musician practices on his horn –or where blind, violent love is having its way...

The house has disappeared like an underground cellar. How strange, through the crystal skylight, ordinary life bellow: words, sounds, even the garden, so beautiful in itself; you, Platero, drinking at the trough, not seeing me, or playing like a simpleton with the sparrow or with the turtle.

5. Liberty

My attention, lost in the owers that lined the path, was recalled by a little bird bathed in light, which unceasingly uttered his wings in the wet green mead. We approached slowly, I in front, Platero behind me. There was nearby a shadow-dark watering place, and some treacherous boys had set a snare for birds. The sad little captive would rise as far as he could, calling unconsciously to his sky brothers.

The morning was clear, pure, transpierced with blue. From the nearby pine grove there fell a light concert of excited trills that swelled and softened without fading in the gentle golden sea wind that rocked the treetops. Poor innocent concert, so close to the evil heart.

I got on Platero and, urging him with my legs, climbed up to the pine grove at the sharp trot. Arriving under the sombre leafy

canopy, I clapped my hands, sang, shouted. Platero, entering into the spirit of my eort, brayed harshly once and again. And the deep sonorous echoes responded as from the depths of a deep well. The birded singing to another grove.

Platero, in the midst of the distant maledictions of the angry urchins, rubbed his dairy head against my heart, thanking me to the point of hurting my chest.

6. The Three Old Women

Get up here, Platero. We must let those poor old women pass...

They must be coming from the beach, or from the hills. Look. One is blind, and the other two lead her. They are probably coming to see Dr. Luis, or to the hospital. See how very slowly they walk, with that care, with what seriousness the two who can see act. They look as if all three were afraid of meeting death itself on the road. Do you see how they extend their hands gropingly before them, as if to ward o the very air, thrusting aside imaginary dangers? Do you see how, with absurd tenderness, they push back even the lightest owering branches, Platero?

You will fall, little one, if you are not careful... There.

Listen to their plaintive words. They are gypsies. Look, at the picturesque dresses, will polka dots and rues. See? They wear no shawl; their erect carriage has not suered with age. Blackened, perspiring, dirty as they are, blurred in the lustre of the hold midday dust, there is yet apparent in them a lean, rude beauty, a dry and harsh reminder. Look at the three of them, Platero. With what condence they bring age to life, permeated by this spring that causes the thistle to bloom in yellow under the vibrant sweetness of its ery sun.

7. The Well

The well!... Platero, what a deep word, how green and black, how cool, how sonorous! It is as if the word itself, turning, boring, had drilled into the earth to reach the cold water.

Look: the g tree adorns and destroys the curb. Within, at hand's reach, a blue, sharp-smelling ower has found its way between the mossy bricks. Farther down, a swallow has her nest. Then, below, in motionless shadow, is an emerald palace, and a lake, which, when one ings a rock at its stillness, is angered, and groans. Finally, the sky.

(Night enters in; the silver moon is in the depth, adorned with stars. Silence. Along the road life has ed. The soul escapes to the depths through the well. One can see beyond it the other side of the twilight. And it seems as though the giant of night, master of all the secrets of the world, were about to spring from the mouth of the well. Oh, quiet and magic labyrinth, sombre, fragrant spot, irresistible, enchanted scene.)

“Platero, if some day I throw myself into the well, it will not be for death's sake, believe me, but only the more quickly to attain the stars.”

Platero brays, thirsty and eager. From the well a frightened, dishevelled swallow wings silently.

8. The Orchard

Since we have come to the Capital (*), I have wanted Platero to see the Orchard. We walk very slowly along the iron grille in the grateful shade of the locust and banana trees, which are still loaded with fruit. Platero's footsteps resound on the pavement which is mostly bright from its watering, blue with the reected sky in places, and in places white with wet fallen owers exhaling a sweet evanescent delicate aroma.

Through the open spaces of the dripping ivy on the iron grille, what coolness and what an odour rise from the drenched garden! Within, children play. And through that wave of whiteness the little carriage with its little purple ags and green awning goes by shrilly thinking; the hazelnut-vendor's boat passes, all adorned in garnet and gold with its long strings of peanuts and its smoking chimney stack; the balloon girl with her gigantic oating bouquet of blue and green and red; the tay-seller, exhausted under his red box... In the sky, through the mass of verdure already tinged by the sickness of autumn, against which the

cypress and the palm stand out, the yellowish moon begins to glow between rosy clouds.

At the gateway, when I am about to enter, the blue man who guards it with his yellow stick and his great silver watch, says to me:

“The donkey may not enter, sir.”

9. Dawn

In the slow dawns of winter, when the watchful roosters discover the first roses of daybreak and gallantly greet them, Platero, surfeited with sleeping, brays a long, long bray. How pleasing his distant awakening in the blue light that lters through my shutters. I, also eager for the day, think of the sun from my soft bed.

And I think of what might have been the fate of Platero if, instead of falling into my hands, hands of a poet, he had fallen into those of one of the charcoal-burners who go before day on hard, frost-covered, solitary roads to rob the forest of its pines; or into those of one of the unkempt gypsies who dye their donkeys and give them arsenic and stick pins in their ears to keep them from dropping.

Platero brays again. Does he know I am thinking of him? What does it matter? In the tenderness of the dawn the thought of him is a pleasant to me as daybreak. And God be thanked he has a stable as warm and snug as a cradle, as kind as my thoughts.

10. The Wreath of Parsley

“Let us see who gets there first!”

The prize was a picture book which I had received from Vienna the day before.

“Let us see who gets to the violet bed first!
One...two...three...go!”

The little girls were o in a gay whirl of white and rose in the sunlight. In the silence that their mute forward rush cleft in the morning, the slow striking of the town's tower clock, the soft singing of a small bird in the pine hill that blue lilies covered, and the murmur of running water in the ditch were heard for an instant... The children had reached the first orange tree when Platero, who had been idling somewhere around, caught the spirit of the game and joined the lively race. The girls, eager to win, could not stop to protest, not even to laugh. I called out to them:

“Platero is going to win! Platero is going to win!”

Yes, Platero reached the violet bed before anyone else and remained by it, wallowing in the sand.

The girls came back protesting heatedly, rolling up their stockings, gathering up their hair:

“That wasn't fair! That wasn't fair! No, no, no!”

I told them that Platero had won the race and that it was fair to reward him. That the book, since Platero could not read, should be used as a prize for some other race of their own, but that we must give Platero a prize.

They, sure now of the book, leaped and laughed with joy, faces flushed:

“Yes! Yes! Yes!”

Realizing that Platero had had his reward in his effort, as I have in my verses, I picked up a few sprigs of parsley from the housekeeper's parsley bed, made them into a wreath and placed it on Platero's head, as on a Spartan's.

11. Death

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 raise, 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 discoloured legs were raised to heaven. His curly hair looked now like the moth-eaten tow hair of old dolls that falls o when you touch it.

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

12. To Platero, in the Heaven of 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, travelling among the oowering 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 golden oriole 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 my stop before the yellow lilies that have sprung from your buried heart.