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Winter song

Branches bow, hung low with snow.
I step off the track and snap a twig,
shatter the crystal, clarity of the still.

I start and hop, brush the bulk of a bush,
a thump, a thud of snow.
Leap aside, slide into a branch,

and nudge it to slip its load.
The branch rears up, with a gasp,
lisps its gratitude for the release to rise.

The fluster flutters a crow,
takes off with a screech, in a flap and
whoosh, and wings the echo far.

Wakes a sparrow in its winter hide
in a huddle of shrub, a knit of twine.
Shivers, rustles and puffs the snow.

Spain

Was it nonchalance, or was it passion,
was there a goal, or was it just that he could,
when God carved the canyons, coloured them ochre,
smote the mountains in broken stacks,
strew around the stony soil,
and splashed on the red.

Taken aback, perhaps, by this spree,
for consolation he gave the olive tree,
with its sturdy trunk, ruffled bush, blue-grey
green, speckled across vermilion slopes.
The sprightly almond, black in spindly limb, its tender
flower, and the knuckled stem of an earthy wine.

How many people have clawed to the bone,
this land, the crinkles and folds of stone.
Castles hustled up on mountain tops.
In dogged embrace a finca¹ clings to a slope

¹ Finca: Spanish farm house

of tumbled terraces, lined with rocks,
once bearers of withered crops.

Godforsaken and far from all, along a random,
desolate road, an edge of endlessness, in solitude
hobbles a woman and trots a dog, shuffling the dust.
Down to earth, quotidian, pedestrian life.
Gone for some goal, tongue lolling out. In this nowhere,
where does she come from, where does she go?

Sunday in Gouda

The advent of the day is tolled by the bells, chases
the steeples, cows the birds to swallow their call.

Behind skips the trill of the carillon. Dies out, and nature
resumes its course, the birds their tremulous song.

Time to get up, not the usual tug to light up
the room, but a revelatory draw to receive the day.

The sunlight splashes the tiles, glitters the stiles,
strokes a cat in reflection, silvers its whiskers.

The faithful walk in droves to the church, in a huddle,
skulked in hats and bonnets they tip to each other.

Turtled in collars, they peer out and wreath their faces,
in sight of a youthful mob, unruly, bundled for the beach.

Spanish siesta

From a roaring pick-up truck that shut the crickets up,
they and the fumes settle among rocks that bulge
with eternity, in a timid shade that hardly trembles,
in a waft that in the river crackles the reeds.
The crickets resume the rasp of their mantra, smother
the silence, a hum of heat hangs over sleep.

After the roast, smoke off smelly fats,
the children scream, women shrill.
Under the eucalyptus the castanets
begin to clack, hands to clap, guitar to trill.
Broad-hipped women sway and play the vamp,
stringy men, cocky, well-heeled, rattle their stamp.

Scorpions sidle around each other, raise
their arms and aim their sting,

and then they sing.