## Thin Ice

# Also by Alice Kavounas from Shearsman Books 

Ornament of Asia

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## Thin Ice

## Alice Kavounas

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## Single Digit Days

January's sun punches through bare-limbed trees like a prize-fighter's fist-splintering my windscreen. I drive straight on, into the New Year.

What to make of the spittle-like verges glistening along these storm-rutted lanes? What to make of the scrappy, left-over ice mixed with mud-the unfresh look of these single digit days? Hard winter light
casts a tall, wobbling shadow on the brambly hedge:
horse and rider ahead. I slow
to a crawl. Young horse-CAUTION. Yes, the horse is visibly frisky, mane-tossing fresh.
Its seasoned rider waves in my rear-view mirror.
What to make of the year ahead? To learn, along with that young horse, not to fear where the road leads?

## Be Me <br> (After Tomas Alfredson's film 'Let the Right One In')

Why not be me, she said, just for a while.
To satisfy his new-found friend's desire
he set up a neighbour for the next kill who died by her knife, not his. But still. Still.

All appetite, she drank and drank.
Who are you? he ventured, though to be frank
by then he felt sure he knew.
$I$, she whispered, am you.
But I don't kill! $A h h h$, she smiled, if you could call it a smile,
if you could call her a 'she'.
Then tell me:
don't you carry a knife? And plot revenge?
That much was true. So he ran his finger
along the blade, cutting himself until he bled, until, wild-eyed, she backed out of the room, and fled.

When that same gang of boys came after him, when they decided to drown him,
when he could hold his breath no longer, she reappeared, avenging him, returning the favour
at a cost he knew. And with four fresh kills streaming in their wake, together they flew.

## The Mill Race

An eyebrow moon tonight, French. Pencil-thin. Norman chestnut trees stand in full leaf. Water sluicing over schist shushes me. I turn out the lamp. My hand. The desk. An unshuttered window. A vanishing act. No familiar beam of the Lizard Light blinking blinking blinking, scanning for boats or swimmers in distress in Coverack Bay.

I pretend to be a blank sheet in a darkroom preparing to dip myself in and out of solutions. I'll twist and weave like a stream. Encounter rocks. (Mistakes often produce the best results.) Try
everything! Morning. A trace of an image, silvery as the millrace, steals onto paper.

## Seal Harbor, Maine

You must have slowed your step for me and stooped slightly, to reach my hand.
I'm three, against your fit and weathered fifty-three-old, in that America, for a father.

On our walks, sea met primordial rockcrashing, ebbing, slithering through fissures into rock pools: my mirror-bright worlds. Later, freewheeling gulls would make off with the remains of lobster lunches.

Postcards kept arriving-close friends, cousins, colleagues, your brother, living through the death throes of civil war. Your already depleted country, still fighting with itself. Here, it was croquet and iced lemonade
on the sloping lawns of the silvered clapboard mansion whose owners had befriended you and mother. And I had the run of it! Seal Harbor, affording you a breakshelter from feverish heat, squalls, of that summer of '48.

## Thin Ice

The man who twirled me round each Saturday, older than my brother, younger than my father, was called Otto, a name like no other within my circle of school-friends; family.

Tall, thin, thin-haired, blond, his face a long pale oval tilted skyward, chin thrust forward, Otto carved elegant, contiguous figure-eights at a languid pace across this pristine, miniature landscape of man-made ice, in his weekly attempt to teach me
how to skate. As his pupil, I was, frankly, something of a disappointment to us both, not that Otto nor I ever let on to mother. I'd attempt, but never master, the art of skating backward, nor learn to glide as he did, hands clasped nonchalantly
at the small of his narrow back, dreaming perhaps, of more graceful dancing partners, of Austria, who knows? Otto's English remained as vestigial as my father's:

Left foot, lift now! Now! Turn, spin. No, no, no. At Christmas, in the shadow of a giant spruce, we'd celebrate with hot chocolate, topped mit swirls and twirls of Schlag, pale AustrianAmerican Otto, and Greek-American me.

On thin ice, glistening at Manhattan's heart, we skated round and round each other, ringed by Rockefeller's millions, Otto's flashing blades describing dazzling figure-eights; mine, increasingly imperfect zeroes.

## Villa Mokoras

for Jessica
In the demolishing heat, we read and mostly sleep away the afternoons, on one or another of the stone terraces where coils of fat yellow hose await the gardener's hand to unwind and flick, unwind and flick unleashing cool fresh water to quench the countless pithoi festooned with hibiscus, oleander, geraniumsscarlet blazing against blazing skies. Through half-lidded eyes, I glimpse how, at intervals, he slowly raises the silver arc of braided water, and by dipping his head toward the mouth of the un-coiled garden snake, slakes his own unending thirst.

