

One Step at a Time

SAMPLE

ALSO BY ALICE KAVOUNAS

*The Invited*

*Ornament of Asia*

*Thin Ice*

*Abandoned Gardens: New & Selected Poems*

SAMPLER

Alice Kavounas

One Step at a Time

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SAMPLE

*Questions of Travel*

Elizabeth Bishop

*'Continent, city, country, society:  
the choice is never wide and never free.  
And here or there ... No. Should we have stayed home,  
wherever that may be.'*

*Final quatrain of the title poem of Elizabeth Bishop's collection,  
Questions of Travel, included in Complete Poems,  
(London: Chatto & Windus, 2004)*

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*For my brother*

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## I FOLLOW THE FOOTPATH

as narrow as my boot  
knee deep in brome's green waves.

Across five fields, snaking  
from home to Saint Keverne  
I follow the footpath

my eye on the steeple  
a daymark for sailors  
as they battle the waves.

Coming from Coverack  
turn left at Trevalsoe  
then follow the footpath

to Saint Keverne's graveyard.  
Retrieved from shipwrecks, souls  
rest here, plucked from the waves.

What these gravestones reveal  
you might like to discern.  
Learn who walked this footpath.  
Who was swallowed by waves.

## PRETEND IT'S YOUR LIFE

Pluck an apple  
pretend it's your life

quarter it cleanly  
here's a sharp knife.

Devour the first  
juicy and white.

Savour the second  
such flavour, such bite.

Admit you're older  
take time with the third

reserving the seeds  
observing its core.

Prepare yourself  
for life's latest wrinkle

and face up to the final  
over-ripe quarter

alone on your plate  
small boat rocking

responding at once  
to the merest touch.

Relish its tang  
no point pretending.

## ANOTHER MIDNIGHT

On my watch  
the sweeping second hand  
unstoppable no matter what  
circling the numbered face  
taking me closer  
to yet another midnight  
an end to today  
racing into tomorrow  
the sweep second hand  
oblivious to events  
which might momentarily  
derail or indeed permanently  
stop me in my tracks  
urge me to hesitate sufficiently  
to retreat rewind.  
This continuously sweeping second hand  
circling smoothly never pausing  
no end in sight  
its measured meticulous count down  
the future  
no more than a figment.

## WHETHER WAKING GENTLY

as if to the whisper  
of an artist's brush across my face  
the caress of a horse's muzzle

its velvety invitation to pay closer attention  
or, surfacing suddenly, a wide-eyed  
deep sea diver

whose ocean floor exploratory  
has yielded ancient wrecks, glittering treasures.  
Either way, as I slide between deep sleep

and consciousness, crossing that divide,  
I can't at first recall a single detail of where I've been,  
for a long moment not even sure

what to do with this day  
nor, frankly, rock solid on what day of the week this is  
and although I'm fully awake

right now, honing every line,  
I'd be so much more precise  
if I could write coherently while fast asleep

expressing just how lost to this world I am  
inhabiting a parallel universe, full of vivid  
utterly unforgettable people

who insist on vanishing before my waking eye  
leaving more than a mere trace each morning,  
a tantalising sideways glance

scraps of intriguing conversation  
the image of the door to a place  
I once knew well. Tell me

is all this a good thing?  
A bad thing?  
Or just a thing.

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## BRONZE MANNIKIN

*(African Finch, *Lonchura cucullata*)*

Observe the precise pattern of scalloping  
edging the roof tiles of an undistinguished shed.  
Consider the timeless welcome of a wingback chair,  
raucous yet homely in its orange and grey hairy-legged design.  
Note the sign signalling dangerous road ahead  
punctuating that gloomy landscape.

Humphrey Ocean's benign scrutiny seeing the world  
as if from a great height, in penetrating detail,  
beguiled by the ordinary,  
sensing a significance in traffic signs, a chair, a yellow car.

He captures an image, is captured by it,  
re-creating reality, adding to his palette of the world  
as only he sees it, widening my field of vision  
with every flick of his brush, each stroke of colour  
illuminating a clump of trees, singling out a half timbered  
house revealing the mysterious poetry of rain.

And what has lately become my talisman is not a stone,  
nor a magic ring, but a singular bird,  
his majestic image of an African Finch, the Bronze Mannikin,  
tiny, gregarious, an eye keen as his own,  
watching me from the top of the stairs,  
reminding me, silently, how imperfectly I see.