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Wild Thyme

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Wild Thyme

Abstract
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fell backwards into wild thyme, too worried
about appearing the tourist or ruining my clothes...

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Wild Thyme

I took the photographs as the other poets fell backwards into wild thyme, too worried about appearing the tourist or ruining my clothes in the phryngana, the zone between mountain and sea, wood and water. On the rented boat to Antiparos, as the others slipped into wet suits, pulled on squeaky flippers, rolled into azure depths with Panayotis, the marine biologist, I stayed on the moored boat with whiskery Captain Giorgos nursing my salty old grudges against water. On the south shore of the island, when invited to sing into the mouth of the sea caves that echo the ancient world back, I had only this pop tune to offer (I can’t bear to name it). Between Lefkes and Marpissa, where the Byzantine trail empties down to the sea, when the old man with hair like a wild bird’s nest and a toothless collapsing chin saw me, an American, enter the chapel he guarded, he shouted, Ah, George Bush! and my only response was, I didn’t do it! (meaning, vote for him) which made all the other Americans laugh. At Marathí, where the mountain opens to marble quarries so translucent that the Venus de Milo, the temples on Delos, and Napoleon’s tomb are carved from it, as the guide distributed the headlamps for our underground excursion,
he had to ask, *Now, is anyone here claustrophobic?* 
And I had to answer, *Well, yes, because* 
I would never depend upon tourists 
to pull my limp and breathless body 
from any dark crevasse. So I guarded 
the entrance as the others descended, 
sat back to study the guidebooks. 
Did you know that 150,000 slaves mined 
these quarries. They say a bas relief 
above one opening depicts Pan cavorting 
with Nymphs. Did you know the thyme 
that grows on this mountainside feeds 
bees that make rare, wild honey, the color 
of amber. Aromatic and savory, they say, 
with the taste of white pepper, dates, and fruit. 

-- Debra Marquart