

# Matala

Ellen Austin-Li

We blew in on the morning ferry,  
slipped into the northern port of Heraklion  
in Crete, grabbed a taxicab  
and motored two hours south  
to Matala—*Arigato*—I thanked  
the cabbie in perfect Japanese,  
handing him too many drachmas.  
My Canadian girlfriends giggled  
at my international faux-pas.  
Joni sang *the wind was in from Africa,*  
*last night, I didn't sleep;* so, we went  
looking for the Mermaid Cafe  
in that crazy tourist town.

Matala—twenty years after  
Joni and Carey, but I thought  
I could hear a sweet dulcimer's  
zithered strings ringing the cove, singing  
the caves of honeycombed sandstone.  
We climbed the cliff face, wove in and out,  
cell to cell, searching cool walls  
for Joni's name carved in a heart  
alongside her *mean old daddy*.  
We looked out stone eyes  
onto the azure sea, kicked charred wood  
leftovers from hippie fires.  
*Our fingernails were filthy,*  
*we got beach tar on our feet.*

We descended with the dusk  
into town to drink bottles of wine,  
got smashed on shots of ouzo—  
Yasou—a round for each one  
free on this Greek isle.  
I thanked the bartender—*efkharistó*—  
in Greek this time, bowed out  
alone to the rocks, monoliths  
at the Mediterranean's edge.  
Supine, the night's starry dome  
spun a kaleidoscope overhead;  
I didn't want to leave there,  
where the stars shone so bright,  
as if light had punched giant holes  
in the fabric of night. But, like Joni,  
it was really not my home.

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*Author's note: Woven with a few lines from Joni Mitchell's "Carey."*



Joni Mitchell

"Carey"

Blue

06/1971

Reprise