

Catherine of the Wheel

CAROLINE KING

They sang for Catalina who was first
his daughter.

*For Catalina, begins the week's litany, the mountain's unlikely womb
from which all this was born and to where
all returns.*

It's what he talks about
in other words, off knees. Like most girls
she was a chameleon,
cutting palms on rocks for learning
how to fly, shoving
Girl Scout cookie crumbs
into couch seams.

Surprising, for whom
by bus by foot by car by train
he crossed sweaty parsecs
every day, corporate-scented suit
askew, to be her fastest

hobbyhorse or read
the one about a sheep named Sherman, who
became both savior and sidekick and all
before evening invaded. It's a lot
to take in, watching
 clumsy heaven
come together as her eyes
closed tight
and fell back with a sigh, towards where he couldn't
follow. Catalina, named after what – an island?
 unrealized love?

The life comes first, I can't say myself
what the mountain looked like, or if it's far away
but I've heard that when he carried her up
on all fours, bad back burning,
it took a long time. Truer exhaustion prunes everything
but the present, childhood a whirl
of gerunds climbing screaming
skipping grooving tripping rocking breathtaking
burning past billy goats and cycles
of bruised moons, dad pointing out the stars
so she might name them. She climbed higher and higher
on his back until everything
but God sank into the heights, bye and bye
that's greater in the books.

 And they would
have lived, leaping back and forth
over ichthyoses
but like daughters, Catalina had
the power to invert
heredity, a hope that,
as he left her on a mountaintop
in a rocking chair too big,

he let run *I am a horse, I am*
a father, I go on

clumsily nevertheless

*I live, Catalina laughing as she tried to jolt
the heavy wood*

*asway, Daddy look love that's most
nearly itself*

*when futures dissolve. It must have been a while
before she realized*

he was gone, had left her

nailed high

to let her hair grow long as the way things should be

*cracked. I wonder what she sounded like –
a scream,*

a broken circle

in the sky that would one day be the name

for fireworks and the best hymns

in America – and did this

comfort him, people coming up the hallowed mountainside

with prayers, with

bread as he walked back

down.