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Child Learning to Write

Catherine Barnett

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CATHERINE BARNETT

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1. At church he practices writing no.
   Then I teach him love.

2. When I dress him in the morning
   I pull on his shirt, pointing out the hole for his head,
   for his hands, for his entire body.

   What does vanish mean? he asks.

3. He keeps the ink between the lines
   as he jags the pen up and down, sad
   because he doesn’t know what he is writing.

4. Out of grief—
   ire,
   fig,
   fire.

   Almost error if we could beg an o off someone.

5. Painted like a bird, labeled shrike across its wings,
   the shiny toy breaks.
   We tape it back up, matching the lines
   the torn letters make.

   Love is like this—

   Poor shrike, hurling its body against the ground.