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CATHERINE BARNETT

Child Learning to Write

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.