

Butcherbird

Courtney Huse Wika

The fledgling shrike on the fence
touches the grass blade
to the barb once, twice, three times,

studying the best angle for slaughter.

He practices on the hapless grass spider next,
skewering the soft body on a series of thorns,
wedging the mangled legs into the crevice
of a forked branch,

a marriage of instinct and execution.

Rotund, heathered belly
and brown-barred breast,
he is a downier version of his parents'
stark lines and savage appetites.

He has butcherbird dreams
of well-stocked pantries,
and even this young, he understands
that violence can come

from the tenderest of bodies.