

The First Lesson Was Learned

by John Cantey Knight

Upon a limber creek-cane pole,
he hung a quail
by fine-knotted string
and let loose the pointer
to run and bore
for a minute
through dew-wet meadow
until the young dog quieted
and smelled the small quail bird
for the first time—
more intense than
the smell of a bitch in estrus.

Shocked still, a paw raised,
the tail straightening
as vertebrae strained and pulled
muscles up sinewed legs.
He'd make a bird dog,
the trainer thought, tossing
out the bird as
the dog moved in closer,
ready to lunge
like a trout on a fly.

He jerked the bird,
dancing inches away
from the dog's twitching nose,
and left smell like taste
upon the sparkling grass.
Caught in a circle,
the dog ran, inches away,
like Sambo's proverbial tiger,
turning dew to buttermilk,
wearing the grass about
first in desire, then obsession.

On and on, the young dog ran
the dead quail before him,
then slowed and stopped,
the bird dangling,
and fitfully began the run again,
until at last
he fell in slaver and fatigue
and would not rise,
but lay in exhaustion and rested.