Hunting Pheasants in Lehigh County

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I am here as last year and the year before, climbing the dirt road past wild grapes toward the high fields, with the spaniel moving back and forth in front of me and cold wind down my collar. The afternoon is gray and blue, the stream silver as it enters the ravine.

I enter grass higher than my head and stop to listen to it, to the far-off cries of crows. All afternoon it is woods and hedgerows, red berries, thorns catching sleeve and hat. The birds run ahead of us and it is not frailty that stops me from circling down to the overgrown orchard where they roost, then hunting back into their confusion. It is something else settling beneath brushpile or furrow in this long afternoon as I move among the names of autumn, seedbox, pinweed, enchanter's nightshade, all the intricate accidents of time drying.