**Epitome of Heart**

My husband brings home a six-week-old AKC German Shorthair for

the hunt. He names her Tasha. I cuddle her. She is liver and ticked, smooth

to the touch. On the Fourth of July, she weighs seventy pounds and

scrambles into the dark bathtub to escape the loud booms. Hunting is out.

Tasha and I enroll in pet obedience school to learn how to relate

on leash and by voice commands and hand signals. She repeatedly

steps on my flip-flopped toes. “Don’t complain,” the instructor tells me,

“Some dogs won’t heel at all.”

I call her name across the park; she lifts her snout and tents her ears.

I yell, “Come!” and wave her to me. She flies like a jet, her legs outstretched,

racing as if for a ball. Reaching me, panting, she rounds my side, sits, and

asks for an ear-ruffling appraisal.

She retrieves the newspaper from the front drive.

Delivering it intact, she turns and closes the door.

With my leg in a cast, she picks up fallen things I cannot reach.

She brings my dropped pencil gently between her teeth.

She guards our home with a vicious growl and menacing eyes.

She snatches the cat by its neck and traps its body between her paws.

With her dripping tongue, she licks until he is thoroughly soaked,

giving her eighth “puppy” a loving bath.

She is not a true-blooded hunter. She is a fusion of

gentle nature and profound wisdom—a bonafide mother.

When the norm for Shorthairs is seven, she lives to thirteen.

Tasha’s caring demeanor surpasses my eighty-four years.