

It's Me or the Dog

Can a pooch ruin your love life? One lesbian finds out.

By Jenny Jedeiken

"I'm looking for sanitary pads and strap-on harnesses with belts, if you have that for a dog," I ask the clerk at the pet store. I have come here on a mission. Our new dog Pookie, a miniature bull terrier, which we acquired during the lunacy of our home renovation, is in heat. With thoughts of protecting what little functionality there is left in my relationship, I have elected to find a solution for the 21 days of bleeding that I have been advised will follow.

My girlfriend Greta is so in love with the little creature that if it were up to her, she would mop up after her with hand-held Hermes tea towels spread open across her lap for three weeks, on the couch, without bothering to get up once for a shower. But I am of an entirely different disposition.

The clerk points me to a narrow aisle in the back of the store. Next to packages of doggie diapers for the "incontinent older pooch," I spy the one I need: "The preferred female product, for a bitch in heat," reads the box, and it comes with a tidy companion box of pads. I open the package and pull out a slinky black thong with criss-crossing belts; it looks as though it were designed for a mutt with a lack of self-correcting Christian values. The little snap-on straps seem more manageable than the bulky denim diaper-cover with red-and-white cowboy stitching up the side, which we'd purchased at the dog boutique George on Union Street in San Francisco five days before.

Besides, the \$50 blue-jean one disappeared beneath a small, isolated tornado of clothing in one of the kids' bedrooms. Maybe someone threw it out the window. Maybe. Everyone had deep feelings about the menstruating dog.

It all began several weeks before, with the ill-timed adoption of our new companion. Despite the fact that we were all seething with hatred for one another during our eight-month home remodel and renovation, my partner decided it was a fine time to acquire a new pet. It had been eight weeks since our family—three kids and the two of us—had had the luxury of using a kitchen with running water or a stove, 40 days since we had slept in our bedroom or had the privacy afforded to those whose home is not transformed into a testosterone-charged construction site at 7:30 every morning.

Soon we were busy schmoozing up a miniature bull terrier and Greta had fallen in love with the quirky breed. "You know the bull terrier—it's the 'Target dog' with the egg-shaped head," she told me. It was also the "Spuds Mackenzie" dog, and the famous dog pictured alongside General George Patton. "There are only something like 135 born a year in the U.S.," she said.

Days later she pulled up to our home with the new specimen. "Thanks for making this so easy for me," she said, as she showed off the pure-bred dog with royal markings, which she had acquired at the grave discount price of \$2,000. The breeder normally charges \$2,500 for a dog, but Pookie had an eye problem, rendering her useless to a breeder. "She didn't want to pass along this gene," explained my partner. "Besides, she's a year old, so we won't have to train her."

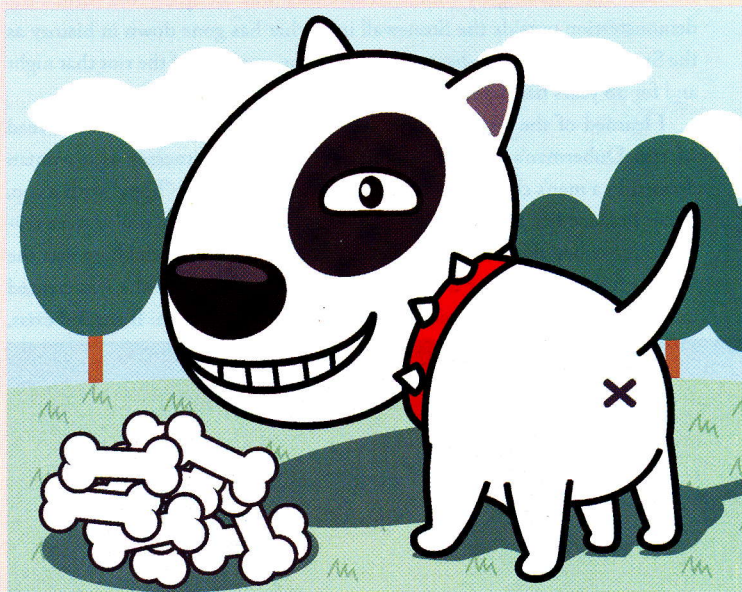
Housebroken, yes, but within weeks there were drops of blood dotting every surface in our home: beds, carpets, laundry in transition, everywhere that beloved pooch trotted. Pookie had gotten her period. "Let's fix her," I suggested, knowing that we were all living on top of each other.

"We can't fix her. She's going to be in a dog show," my partner announced.

"I've registered her in a show next month, so we can't touch her." Pookie used to be in dog shows. There are pictures of her in magazines, advertising her existence before it was determined that her genetic makeup was not desirable.

Two weeks later we drove to a hotel by the airport to watch Pookie prance in front of middle-aged bald men. I had been up all night the night before because Greta and I had gotten into a fight over something irrelevant. We had to make up in a hurry because the next day we were going to a miniature bull terrier specialty dog show. Even though I was reeling from anger at her, I knew I had to make up with her. My children would never forgive me if they missed seeing their beloved animal in the ring.

I could ask no intelligent question at the dog show. All the people that were there understood the basic ground rules of dog shows and and, despite the worshipful devotion of my entire family, Pookie did not place in the show. In the ring she was just a ho-hum mini-bull, smaller than average, with a somewhat uninterested show-dog disposition.



But it didn't matter that Pookie was not victorious in competition, because in our house she was the gal who won in the end. Without having to compromise too much of her core belief systems, Pookie got to live on our Tempur-Pedic bed pretty much like she owned it, even though I despised seeing her on it and she was incapable of hurting my partner's feelings.

When Greta asked the breeder, Isabel, about acquiring another puppy, she was told: "It will have to be a male, because two females can't live together. There will be constant animosity." Maybe she's right. One year, and one perfect puppy later, I'm the one who is moving out. Now Greta sleeps with two miniature bull terriers. The new puppy, Teddy, just won first place in a dog show in Los Angeles in a category called "Best of opposite sex." ■