

## Affections

by Sarah Ellifritz

There she sat. Her ears tweaked in a way that suggested that she could in fact hear the high pitch squeal of something outside the apartment window. Both eyes peered at John from a head that contained only enough brain to comprehend three commands: do what is required to survive, love his girlfriend unconditionally, and ruin anything he valued. Clenched between her sharp puppy teeth was the thin black casing of his iPod. Enraged he clenched his own teeth and slammed his keys down on the hall table. The jarring sound sent the three-month-old scampering for some piece of furniture beneath which she could hide. His girlfriend, Penny, had left town for the week; she'd gone to South Carolina to stay with her parents in their beachfront rental property. Due to her father's allergies and a desire to be reimbursed the \$500 deposit, her puppy had been left behind. John and Penny would be unable to acquire their deposit because on more than one occasion he had seen the fluff spread its tiny legs to squirt yellow water or arch its back to excrete a deposit of used food onto the ivory carpet.

Penny had wanted a shih-tsu since he'd met her three years ago in college. So finally when she moved in with him, John bought her the expensive two pound bundle of joy. Prior to the puppy, life had been easy and lazy: leaving shoes where they were removed and dirty clothes where they fell (at least until laundry day or until his girlfriend's bitching prompted a little clean up.) However, now with the fluffy canine roaming the apartment, seeking something on which to teethe, all objects of value must be elevated to two feet or more.

John exhaled the anger and sought to survey the damage to the mp3 player, but the dog scampered beneath an end table. He thought over the other lost items he'd carelessly left on the floor, the low coffee table, or dangling precariously from varying other heights. There were the expected losses: toes of socks, laces of shoes, and crotches of underwear. But then there were the expensive tragedies: the leather golf shoes, the wood trim of his bathroom (another factor in the loss of his deposit), and now the newest item on the list was the iPod Penny had given to him. How ironic that her present had destroyed his; next year he was considering a bear trap.

Very few of his girlfriend's belongings had been crushed in the jaws of the furry fury. Only a few pairs of panties and one cheap belt had to be discarded due to the bite marks. She loved the tiny dog. The love was more than mutual. At any point in time when she was lying down, the dog made a point to loyally lie against her and gently moisten a spot on her pants with its minuscule tongue.

From under a kitchen chair he caught a glare of plastic. John lunged forward, seizing the dog under one arm like a grotesquely deformed furry football. The iPod fell from its teeth making a final and fatal crash against the tiles of the floor. He dared not look down at what remained. Taking the dog in both hands, he held it at arms length. It contorted and placed one tiny wet kiss on the knuckle of his thumb. Within the surface of fluff and skin was a \$450 investment as well as the source of his girlfriend happiness. John stared at the wiggling creature a minute longer before pulling it to his chest to stop the convulsive escape attempts. He looked down and saw \$250 worth of plastic and electronics lying dead on the white tile. He let out a frustrated sigh and stooped to gather the mess. The dog leapt to the floor and rolled over exposing its pink belly and odd number of nipples (which the breeder said was normal, making him feel like a creep for counting them in the first place). A hiss escaped his lips with the intent of frightening the fluff. He succeeded and the dog quickly jerked to its feet to yip at him. With

each shrill yap, her teeth showed more. The ferocity with which the dog was trying to bark was humorous to him.

After discarding the remains of his iPod and a tinkle break outside for fluffy, he sat on the couch to indulge in the distraction of the television. The dog sprang from the floor to his lap. After circling his thighs seven times in one direction and four in the other, she finally laid down to sleep but not without licking a spot on his pants twice, ironically creating a small abstract wet heart shape which he never noticed.