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I really thought Bentley was the smart one of the bunch.

Sure, he's always been nervy for a wiry wisp of a hound, but he keeps his endgame firmly in sight — one day, Little Bentley will rule the world.

So I asked myself night after night, how is it that our little shaggy Machiavelli kept finding himself flat on his back in a cloud of dust? Well, doh, *how* is easy. Standing over Bentley, highly amused, was Oona, 160 pounds of smackdown. She hoped he'd creak to his feet again and dare another swipe so she could fold him up like a gum wrapper again and dribble him across the lawn.

And Peg and I were afraid we'd be bored when we cut our cable TV.

What *was* the poor little guy thinking? He had months to come up with a clever — or at least survivable — scheme to bend the puppy to his will. Maybe he didn't factor in her ridiculous growth rate. We sure didn't.

Oona, an Irish wolfhound, was a 40-pound toddler when we brought her home. She was triple that before she was nine months old. It was like watching a giant sack of popcorn pop.

Maybe her whoppingness just ... got away from Bentley? No, I don't think so. The day I brought her home after a 12-hour drive from Tampa, I worried she'd be overwhelmed by all the guys. As expected, Bentley decided to get the puppy off to the right start by barking in her face. In a flash she got nose to nose with him and roared back. Bentley and the two other boys rocked back on their heels. End of discussion. Oona ruled. They drooled.

Little Bentley has always been cooler than cool. It took me months to realize that once we brought him home. He was systematically assuming control of the house. Finn, a gentle giant, and Sully, who is basically a tank with fur, were disappearing. We'd find them trapped in back rooms. Little Bentley wouldn't let them out. He lolled casually across the threshold, flashing me a cheesy grin. Bentley weighs 25 pounds sopping wet. But they would not step over him. What, was he holding their *loved* ones hostage?

The real shocker was how he handled Memphis, my daughter's psychotic yet jolly dog who lived with us for a while. Memphis hoarded treasure in his kennel. Socks. Balls. Wads of paper towels. We shouldn't mock his values. After all, dogs don't need money. They have us. It was a little random but this stuff was to Memphis the gold bullion of dog currency. And if you came close, he'd growl and show you teeth that you had no idea he even had.

One day Bentley calmly edged past Memphis into that kennel, looked him square in the eye and... took a sock. No explosion of teeth and slobber. Bentley sauntered out and chewed on the sock right in front of Memphis, who just grinned and whistled. It had to be some kind of doggy mind control.

Sadly, Bentley never could find Oona's frequency. Every time he bunched his brow and fixed his hypnotic gaze on her, she stepped on him and walk on. He went from the Svengali to the Wile E. Coyote of the pack.

Her first year, Oona was kept apart from the boys by a baby gate. Her growth plates weren't closed. We didn't want her to get hurt trouncing them. It was an arrangement that suited them just fine. So Oona leapt the four-foot gate to say *howdy*. She cleared it easily and silently. We only knew when wailing came from the boys in the back.

So when her plates finally closed and it was time for them to all romp together in the backyard, it just did not look at all good for the boys.

But the stifling heat kept a lid on. The dogs just crept in slow motion around the yard in the thick, steamy August air. Until one night when an errant breeze broke through. The dogs all staggered to their feet and mingled. And a light came on it Bentley's eyes.

Sully saw it first. It's his job as chief toady to watch Bentley for signals. You could see the horror on Sully's face. Because Little Bentley was rearing up and cocking back a paw to peck Oona's snout.

Wolfhounds got their name by clearing all the wolves out of Ireland. Wolves. All of 'em. Next thing I saw, Bentley was shooting across the backyard like a bottle rocket. And Oona was loping along an inch behind, grinning hugely. She has long, graceful

wrists. Oona uses her paws like hands. When she got tired of jumping baby gates, she started just handily sliding them aside. She snatched Bentley, dropped him on his back and sat on him.

One tiny paw was all you could see of him, frantically flailing for his tag-team partner, Sully. Sully was in the far corner of the yard with his eyes rolled back in his head. Sully wasn't tagging *nobody*.

Oona let Bentley up and darned if he didn't rear back again. WHOMPFFH... back in the dust under 160 pounds of highly-entertained girl hound. What *will* this wacky little guy do next? She stood up and there he was, hanging from her beard by his teeth like a tick. Sully keened and rocked in the corner. His boss was going to die. But no, Oona idly shook Bentley off, grabbed him and pressed him flat until his whiskers stopped twitching. He got up all glass-eyed and was rearing back again when... I led the champ inside.

Night after night in the heat and the dust, Bentley kept swinging for the bleachers. Again and again he was plucked down and sat on like an egg under a nesting hen. Wearing her down he was not. She watched butterflies and buffed her nails while Little Bentley flailed and fumed.

Our four-footed Svengali was not impressing her with his mental prowess. To Oona, he was just as brainy as any other tennis ball. You wanted to admire his tenacity and pluck but... he looked just like a sad little honey bun all rolled up and smushed under her chest.

But there was a look in his eyes — once he wiped the dirt out and stopped coughing. Little Bentley was down but not out. He was playing the long game. Months later I finally caught onto what he was up to.

Shortly, I'll tell you about it...