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You've dreamed of living with a hulking medieval dog like an Irish wolfhound for some time now. They're such gentle giants, and majestic. You've done your research. You know they're pricey, have special health issues and need plenty of space to stretch those long legs. You're ready to make the plunge, right? Really? See if you can give a rousing "heck, yes!" to these statements first...

You've always wanted to re-landscape your yard with random, gaping holes.

Good. The Irish wolfhound is the dog for you! Because

wolfhounds are diggers. We're not talking half-hearted, teaspoon indentions, either. Wolfhounds don't stop until they hit bedrock or China. Why? God only knows. But once they find just the right spot, they go at it with steam shovel gusto. Until they get bored and decide five feet over is more promising.

You're eager to show off your keen rodeo skills.

Here's your chance, buckeroo. Wolfhounds have more in common with ponies than their impressive height. Sure, they're gentle. Yes, they're aware of their size. But young wolfhounds could care less. Hormones are crooning. They can make "frisky" look placid. And at six months, most wolfhounds top 100 pounds. They're just getting started. And males like our Oisin don't cross paths with the Brain Fairy for at least a couple of years, during which time they just keep on getting bigger and more powerful and, from time to time, crazier than a bedbug. How are your reflexes?

I ask because, while your wolfhound will never deliberately hurt you, stuff happens. Wolfhounds like to lean affectionately, and 160 pounds is a lot of leaning. If they turn suddenly — say a squirrel darts away — that wayward back end can send you flying like a ping-pong ball or cut your legs completely out from under you. True, they're generally gentle on leashes. But all they have to do is gently lean and... you're leaning, too. Feel the power. Notice how fast you've learned to watch for squirrels? But you forgot about that tail...

There's nothing waist high in the house you really want to keep.

Even a wolfhound's tail is brawny. And long. Long like a whip.

So, a happy wolfhound is a wrecking ball with fur. A wagging tail can take out lamps, glasses, vases and that urn with granny's ashes. And guys? You learn to stand sideways and hope for the best after seeing stars and doubling over a few dozen times.

You've always admired Russian weightlifters.

I may have mentioned wolfhound puppies are hefty. But you'll need to take your 100-pound, six-month-old places regularly to get them used to our human world. You *really* don't want a shy or reactive giant on a crowded sidewalk. Unless you live downtown and walk everywhere, this means you'll need to somehow get your puppy into a vehicle. Until you train them to use a ramp or portable steps, this means lifting. And this means listening to parts of your body you'd forgotten you have crack and snap ominously. Bend your knees. Take your vitamins. Think how fragile your puppy is while all the veins in your face are popping.

Remember, their growth plates don't completely close until at least their 13th month. So they need to avoid flights of stairs, jarring jumps or playing with other dogs who might injure them with a bump. Sounds like a good time to get on with that ramp training, doesn't it. And maybe get a personal trainer....

You have a Bohemian attitude about furniture.

They're sometimes called the kings and queens of dogs. It's not because they carry scepters or do the royal wave. They're keen on comfort. Theirs, not yours. It's hard being a wolfhound and sleeping 14 hours a day. Unless you invest in an expensive dog bed (which they'll deconstruct five minutes after you set it down), they'll take the couch, thank you. Seven feet of it. More

if you try to sit on the couch with them. If you were there first, they'll lie atop you until your legs go numb. If you have more than one wolfhound (and you probably will) they'll take two couches. Or squeeze into your favorite chair. They're adaptable. You'll find you are, too. You can see the TV just fine sitting on the floor, squeezed into the corner, curled into a fetal ball.

Still want a wolfhound? Good for you. Find a reputable breeder, buy the biggest van or SUV you can, batten down the hatches and bring that puppy home. Get ready to love as you never have before. Oh, and there'll be a few more lifestyle changes. You can read about them later. Maybe you'll have time...