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We say our Irish wolfhounds are practically human. The Irish have been saying this for a while, too. A *very* long while. In fact, Finn MacCool's two favorite wolfhounds were his cousins... It's a long story.

Before we had all the answers, we listened to our world more expectantly. We expected the world and all that was in it to speak to us and inform us. We were in the flow of it. Then science told us that anything that couldn't be replicated in the lab was rubbish and we went deaf.

Irish wolfhounds reawaken our wonder of the natural world. They're too big to ignore and too insistent that we listen to them. And speak to us they most definitely do. People have marveled at their intellect and human-like sensibilities throughout their long history.

So, it's no surprise that the Irish Celts wove these giants into their myths. How did they explain the wolfhounds' keen desire to be with us step for step, to bond with us unlike any other creature? Some wolfhounds, they said, *were* people magically transformed into hounds. The most famous of these stories involves [Finn MacCool](#), the legendary leader of the [Fianna](#), a wandering band of heroes who served the high king.

Finn's aunt, Tuiren, was married and pregnant when she ran afoul of the [Tuatha de Danann](#), the magical people who ruled Ireland before the coming of the Celts. With their defeat, they retreated grudgingly into the holy wells and rivers and under the hills of Ireland, removed, but a heartbeat away through the Veil in the Otherworld. They eventually became Ireland's terrible and proud version of the fairies, the [Sidhe](#), beautiful as the stars and cold as ice.

Tuiren's husband, Iollan, had in his youth been the lover of [Uchtdealb](#), a Sidhe. When she learned that he'd married, in her jealousy Uchtdealb turned Tuiren into a wolfhound. Tuiren gave

birth while under the spell. [Bran and Sceolan](#) were her children, forever trapped in the form of wolfhounds even after the spell on their mother was broken. They went to live with their cousin, Finn, who had more than 300 wolfhounds, but Bran and Sceolan were his favorites and the most remarkable. Through his many adventures they remained at his side, lightning fast and ferocious hunters. And one day they helped him find a wife. Literally.

Deer hunting with Finn and several of his hounds, Bran and Sceolan suddenly raced ahead of the pack when a red deer bounded into sight. They ran it to ground, but instead of attacking it, they wove 'round it and protected it from the other hounds. Finn arrived on the strange scene just as the deer transformed into a woman. Because of their own magical nature, they discerned the sorcery surrounding the deer. Being recognized as a human broke the enchantment.

The woman's name was [Sadbh](#) and she'd been turned into a deer by a dark druid after she spurned his advances. She was quite beautiful and Finn was taken with her. They wed, she became pregnant, and then Finn went hunting one day. In his absence, the evil druid snuck near Sadbh and recast his spell. A deer again, she fled into the woods, taking their unborn baby with her.

Finn looked for her fruitlessly for seven years, hunting with Bran and Sceolan, the only ones about to tell her apart from other red deer of the forest. Finally one day the hounds chased down a red deer but did not harm it. They'd sensed a human dwelling inside. The deer transformed, only it wasn't Sadbh. It was a seven-year-old boy. Finn knew it was his son and took him home where he told of being raised tenderly by a female deer. Finn named his son [Oisin](#) (Little Fawn) and the boy went on to become one of the most famous of the Fianna, a powerful warrior and poet.

Bran and Sceolan lived out their dog days with Finn and Oisin,

never knowing human form, but loved and admired by the heroes and the people of the age.

The Bronze Age Irish knew their wolf dogs were different. Today, we do, too. After reading tales like these, I peer deep into Oona and my own Oisín's eyes and [wonder](#). How is it you're able to speak to me? But I know there's no person in there. There's a personality that's truer, unshaded, more at home in its own skin than any person. And I can hear them speak to me because I listen.

They've taught me how again.