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They were a small group of dedicated professionals in the business of providing around-the-clock care for other people's dogs. They'd worked with beloved family dogs of all shapes and sizes. But Oona was their first Irish wolfhound. It was a Game of Thrones episode from the moment I left the staff in her care.

She'd boarded at the kennel just down the road from us for a week last summer when she was in heat and her nephew Oisín was just old enough to be a threat. Now she knew the lay of the land. They didn't know what was about to hit them, but I had a pretty good idea. Oona sashayed in, high-fived all the staff and led them to her "suite" in the back. Oona gave me one brief look to see if I was watching. I was. Very closely. She had *that* twinkle in her eye.

Oona the Pirate Queen had arrived for her week of luxury and pampering at the "spa." At least, that's where we *told* her she was going. We figured she'd balk if we just called it the slammer. She didn't care. She was away from Oisín, who was falling under the spell of her scent, scooting reaaaal close and making goo-goo eyes until she gave him a hellacious growl that sent him skittering at light speed to the other side of the room with every hair on his big body standing straight up and dancing. The shock kept him in his corner for five minutes. Then he was sidling up again wearing a silly grin. The boy was a blink away from being eaten alive. Time for Miss Oona to go on holiday.

Like you, I'm particular about who I let watch over my fur kids. I'd heard good things about this kennel from other particular

people and I was there every day last summer to spend time with my girl and watched closely for any red flags. Oona *liked* the owner and staff and I trust her judgment. This time around? I saw a few red flags. No, not signs of any kind that Oona was being mistreated. Signs that the queen's court might not actually suspect that they were becoming Oona's minions.

Like, the owner casually mentioned that she was going outside with Oona several times a day now to get "Oona hugs." They were great de-stressors. Yes they were. Oona is a world-class cuddler. I give her therapy hugs every day. I also check my pockets afterwards.

The next day, one of the assistants sheepishly showed me a selfie she'd made on her cell phone. It was of Oona stretched lazily out in the grass with the young woman lying across her. Giving her a massage. I give Oona massages at home, too. And then check my pockets.

When I came to check her out for her daily walk downtown, I noticed she was making side trips down the hall before coming to me in the foyer. Why not? She outweighed the staff. And she wasn't taking them far. Just to the other rooms where I could tell from the barking that she was making a victory lap and checking in on all her homies in the kennels before letting me drive her away somewhere glamorous and exciting. Or so she told them. She was going to the park. She was going to sniff lamp posts where other dogs had peed. But why spoil the other dogs' dreams. They were all expecting T-shirts from Monte Carlo when she checked back in.

One of the staff told me one day that after being with Oona,

she'd decided to get an Irish wolfhound if she could convince her husband. I told her I was happy for her....and she should check her pockets. When her husband came to meet Oona, he should, too.

They asked if I'd like them to give Oona a bath. I knew how smoothly it went when *I* did it. I said, sure, let's see how it goes with the professionals. The next day, Oona *was* bathed and shampooed. She was also grinning. The staff tried to be upbeat about it. There *had* been that hitch when they led her on the lift to raise her to tub level....and she stepped off it and ran down the hall to say hi to all her new friends. Three or four of them, including a 6'5" ex-Marine, managed to maneuver her to the shower and floor drain. One of them still had a fixed smile and a thousand-yard stare. I didn't have to remind any of them to check their pockets. I think by now they knew.

On checkout day I made sure to check the contents of Oona's travel bag like a prison guard searching for contraband. Slowly and meticulously. I looked for wallets, credit cards, treats from the other dogs' bags, safe combinations, computer passwords...nothing, which was worrisome. Was it going to come down to a body cavity search next? I decided against it. I just wanted to get my girl home again. My girl with the light touch and the Mona Lisa smile.....