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Irish wolfhound owners know there's a big difference between quiet and ominously quiet. "Too quiet" is time to worry, check the refrigerator door, the pantry latch and maybe change the combination on your wall safe. Again.

Wolfhounds are not a noisy breed. They can stretch out regally on the couch for hours, dignified, maybe a little mysterious. Mysterious because you know they haven't missed a beat even when they appear to have fallen from sleep into a full-blown coma.

These are hounds bred for centuries with the speed, power to catch and take down the biggest prey. They are savvy and unafraid. And this wintry time of year, they're bored, soooooo bored.

Oona laid on the couch yesterday with her head on my lap, sighing heavily while Oisín ran through the house streaming a roll of toilet paper. She'd *told* him to get the bag of chips. But Oisín had improvised. He's a promising young wolfhound, but Oona had already sneaked and shredded her *own* roll of toilet paper. If she wanted crunchy corn goodness, she'd have to get it herself. Unless she could will *me* to get it for her. I avoided eye contact and tried to retrace how Oisín had crept past the baby gate to the bathroom.

While I was working out the logistics, Oona slipped away and was up to her eyeballs in a bag of chips. Quietly. How does a 160-pound dog levitate to another room without stirring so much as a dust mote? Luckily my eyes were following Oisín as he ran through the house fluttering a roll of paper towels and my eyes landed on Oona. This is where most dogs will flash you a guilty look and tuck their tails. Oona just snorted derisively and ate faster.

We've baby-proofed the house, of course. We just haven't rigged it for pirates. Eerily *quiet* pirates.

You have to wonder where Irish wolfhounds learned this wondrous and fearful talent. They weren't quiet when they killed wolves. They didn't silently snip off the heads of their chieftains' foes when they ran with the Celtic armies. Yanking knights off saddles is not generally a quiet affair. It's obviously self-taught and may be a recent development.

Most of us no longer live in castles. Gone is the day when a wolfhound could trot out, bag a deer, drag it back to the great hall and entertain himself. Now they depend on us now for entertainment. And tasty snacks. When we fail to deliver on schedule, well then, they're wolfhounds, they'll take the initiative. Quietly. So as not to disturb us, their presumed masters.

And they've caught on fast that we generally object to them riffling through the meat drawer of our refrigerators. Not a problem. They just won't let us catch them. Since most of us no longer keep water buffalo in our living rooms, wolfhounds are by far the largest animals in our homes. They're hard to miss. We fall over them or squeeze past them to get down the hall. They're not *teleporting* goodies to their maws. How are they getting away with this?

Misdirection. Look, there goes Oisín running through the house with someone's underwear....

Maybe it's just a male thing. All our boys have had one fatal flaw, even once they mastered the art of creeping like a giant, furry Ninja. We call it the Naughty Dance. Finn did it. Oisín does it a *lot*. Whenever they seize a forbidden object, they prance jauntily back to their X pen or off to a quiet corner. Yessir, they have pulled one over on you. They may have an entire ham in their mouth but you'll probably never spot it. But you *will* notice the dance.

Oisín is so used to me sticking my hand in his mouth — often up to the elbow — to retrieve socks or bath towels or pork roasts that he

just spits it out when he sees me coming. Busted. Now *I'm* pretty pleased with myself.

And then I remember Oona.

She knows her nephew. She knows it won't be long until he distracts me. She knows the URL of the pizza place. She knows where I keep my credit card. She'll still be sitting there serenely surveying the living room when the pizza guys shows up with five giant pepperoni pizzas. And *I* won't know what else she's ordered online until weeks later when my credit card statement shows up. And I didn't hear a thing. I was too busy chasing my giant boy and sticking my hand down his throat.

What do you do when your wolfhound is suspiciously quiet? The first thing I do is find Oona. She's usually grinning at me. Quietly...