



Feb. 24, 2018

Curiously, after all the mud and the rain and the ice, spring was suddenly in the air these recent nights. Frogs were singing in the mud under a gauzy, buttermilk moon. It set my mind to wandering because spring is when I most think of Ireland and old magic. These last two years, it's also when I watch Oisín closer, too. My moon-born boy haunts me sometimes.

When you live with Irish Wolfhounds, even the most pragmatic of us feel the hairs on the back of our neck stand up and flutter at some of the things these hounds do. They invite magical thinking. They're not the sort of dog we're used to dealing with. They think for themselves. They have rich inner lives. Sometimes you see something in their eyes that just makes you wonder... on what secret fields are they roaming? What are they seeing now?

The other day the weather map showed a wall of thunderstorms practically upon us and I told Oona and Oisin, no, we can't go for a walk today. It's going to rain. They knew the words "walk" and "rain" very well. And they looked at me like I was daft. All I was seeing was a computer radar map. They were tapping into other sources. And that wall of storms just kept sailing north. It didn't rain until well over 24 hours later. Oona was miffed at missing her walk. I'm sure Oisin was, too, but he's a sweet, sweet boy. *He* didn't slap me with a paw like Oona did. He just smiled, even though I could see he couldn't wait to ask Oona why Dad's brain had gone mushy.

Anthropomorphism. Animal behaviorists warn us about it. Don't ascribe human feelings and motives to animals because you'll misread them. Except wolfhound companions know that Irish Wolfhounds *are* practically human, only so much more....In the case of the no-show rainstorm, Oona and Oisin were reading the air pressure, sniffing for the scent of rain on the breeze, using natural senses we humans have but have so little of. But there are other times....

Oisin was born on a stormy April night. Somewhere above the thunderheads, a full moon rode, pale and buttermilk yellow. The timing was just right for these puppies to be born and we were pretty sure the pull of the moon would seal the deal. We were beside ourselves because this was a special litter, the first for an uncommon female aptly named Luna. Luna is an old soul who marches to nobody's drum but her own. She's strikingly elegant and beautiful, sensitive, and more than a touch fey, the Diana of wolfhounds, mistress of the hunt and, yes, the moon in the sky. She'd have her puppies when *she* was ready.

But in the photo I have of Luna from the day before Oisin was born, she was ready. Her eyes were full of fate. I think she knew...

Because she and her puppies nearly died that night. The first was a breech. Our breeder and a friend somehow delivered the first girl safely, but Luna was through. She stopped her contractions. She *willed* the birthing process to come to a complete halt. They had to administer a drug to re-induce labor because....Oisin and his sister were still inside. Hours later, they were safely born, miracle puppies, and I have another photo of Luna, looking shocked by pride and joy, completely luminous. That love turned a wild child into a very good mother. These were the only babies Luna would ever have and you could see in her eyes and her tender touch how precious they were to her.

There's one more photo. The puppies were three months old, weaned and ready to go. And Luna, loomed above Oisin. Her massive head is down eyeball to eyeball with Oisin. It was hours before I came and took him away. He's frozen in the headlights of her gaze. Again, somehow she knew. Her only son was going. What did she tell him with those urgent eyes?

I was already head over heels for Irish wolfhounds. I was madly in love with our girl, Oona, Luna's younger sister. But this was something else. The day I took Oisin, I sat with Luna for a very long time. She knew why I was there. She lingered with me. I made her a solemn promise, the promise countless other Irish Wolfhound owners have made to countless other puppies and their mothers. I told her I'd give him the very best life I possibly could. I felt the gravity of the ages on me all the long drive home.

Part of it was this: A dear friend of mine who was there for the birth, who's sensitive to this sort of thing, had an odd, powerful impression when Luna's three babies arrived. She told me felt that these puppies *really* wanted to be here, that they fought to be born. "In many ways, none of them should have survived, but they're all alive. Your boy has a certain spirit to him...he has a purpose. He came for you."

Whether or not you believe in prophecy, being told a thing like affects your outlook. So I've raised him and loved him and watched him. Oisín has been incredibly tender and affectionate since day one. His smile is so sweet it makes your teeth ache, and he's nearly always smiling. He has his quirks. He watches the world sideways, shyly and slyly. He's taken some time to find his confidence.

Oona helped immensely. She's fearless. She adopted him. She created a space for him to grow fearless as she is. He turned into a wild juvenile, deviling her and full of hormone-fueled rowdiness. But he's never stopped pressing to get closer to me. Given that he's the biggest one in the house, it's hard not to notice.

And then out of the blue, a second friend volunteered this after seeing Oisín on Facebook: "I can see small things in the pictures. Like where your hands are when you touch him, how he touches you, his eyes, how you respond to each other. He seems to be conveying so much to you. He has so much to teach you and was sent to you because you would listen and learn."

I never used to have conversations like this until I got Irish Wolfhounds....

And that's my point, really. Irish Wolfhounds are magical creatures. They'll reel you into their world.

Meanwhile I watch Oisín and I wait. Everywhere I take him, I'm told how beautiful he is and he is all that — lean, athletic, elegant with a patrician head and soulful eyes. But it's the fire inside him that draws me like a moth to a candle. I'm haunted by my moon-born boy...