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Cruising the Internet, you'll come across a lot of articles under the heading, "dogs who don't know their size," and invariably there'll be a photo of an Irish Wolfhound tossed in among the Great Danes and St. Bernards happily sitting in their humans' laps. Naturally, they just want to be a little closer to you. Your squeaking sounds are pretty funny, too.

But it's misleading, I think, because Irish Wolfhounds in my experience know very well that they're whopping big. Mine have always looked amused at my efforts to budge them when they have no plans to be budged. They like to put me in my place when I get another of my "ideas."

An Irish Wolfhound's size scares some people away from the breed. They think you need nothing less than a baronial manse to live with one. And while it's true that they look smashing lying in front of the fireplace underneath your coat of arms, this is not the situation of most wolfhound owners. In truth, an Irish Wolfhound will adjust to a home considerably smaller than the Palace of Versailles.

For a dog the size of a pony, wolfhounds are surprisingly nimble and self-aware. They do need a large fenced area outdoors where they can run every day. But indoors, they're happy with a stretch of carpet or a place on the couch. *Your* place on the couch, usually. You're the clever human. Get another couch if *you* just insist on using one.

But I think too many people look at a wolfhound and see mass

destruction inside their homes. This is simply not the case. We live in a small house. We have two wolfhounds and until recently, lived with three. One of our hounds, Oisin, is still in the grip of juvenile hormones. He's a little....*bouncy*? But he's broken nothing. Even when he tears through the house with crazed abandon, he's careful. The *other* hounds are careful when they dive out of his way.

The only real threat is something beyond their control, those tails. With those long, muscular whip-like appendages, an excited wolfhound is a wrecking-ball wolfhound. But only for any object waist-high. But a couple of happy sweeps and they'll take care of all that.

I've noticed (with much relief) that when they're on the leash, they're normally careful not to hurt me or my wife. Sure, we've practiced loose-leash walking since they were just weeks old, but once they topped 100 pounds, all they had to do was lean...and we leaned, too. They realize their power. They don't abuse it aside from an occasional side trip to a bush or tree, which in their defense, smelled irresistible. Mostly, they want to please you. They work with you. Except with squirrels. Then you're on your own. But hey, they're sighthounds. Restraint has natural limits.

Wolfhounds also self-handicap when playing with other dogs. They not bullies, even when the mere sight of a gigantic wolfhound sets off many smaller dogs. I've had dogs that were smaller than my hounds *heads* go berserk and cross a park to get in their faces. Finn thought one of these was so adorable that he became infatuated with the little guy, who later joined our playgroup and could not *shake* Finn.

When Oona was a wild-child teenager, Bentley, who's a fifth her size but believed that he was in charge of the household, repeatedly egged her on. Oona was amused. When Bentley got too excited, Oona rolled him up and sat on him. He quickly calmed down and they played again.

Over and over I've seen wolfhounds pull their punches out of respect for their smaller friends. To see how a wolfhound *likes* to play, pair them with another wolfhound. The ground shakes, fur flies, teeth flash and snap and you'd swear they're trying to kill each other. It's just their natural exuberance. See it once and you'll understand how much they're holding back.

So don't let the fact that they're the tallest dogs on the planet intimidate you. Don't be reluctant to have one because they were once used to kill wolves or snatch knights from their saddles. Wolfhounds are gracious, generous individuals. You'll understand this as they graciously curl up in your lap. You can squeak your appreciation...