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I never thought it'd come to this: One night when Oona was 10 months old, I saw her and Bentley, nose to nose at the fence, snickering and whispering.

Just days before Bentley was trying desperately to be invisible crossing her turf in the living room. And she was distractedly batting him back and forth like a ping pong ball. She was distracted by me holding on saying, "No darling, mustn't trounce the little dogs."

They were *all* little dogs to Oona. Two months shy of a year old, she weighed 135 pounds. She had muscles on top of muscles. But Oona wasn't a bully. She was just an

enthusiastic party girl.

So far this had thwarted Little Bentley's plan to rule the house and one day the world. It's hard to break down The Plan to somebody who just wants to jitterbug. On your head.

There's an art to adding a new dog to an existing pack. There are common sense steps. You introduce them on neutral ground. Every dog has his own food bowl and water dish. You, oh wise and caring dog parent, control the bones, toys and treats so no one (I'm looking at YOU, Bentley) hoards them all.

When you can't be there to referee, you use baby gates and other barriers until the pack settles down and jells. In McMillan's House O'Fur, we've done this again and again.

Puppies are a special case. A well-adjusted adult will let puppies gnaw on their ankles and climb on their face because they're babies and babies don't realize their cute antics are shredding nerves like a wood chipper. At which point the big dog shows a tooth and growls. And the puppy tumbles off and runs away squealing. Lesson learned.

Except Oona was bigger than nearly all our dogs the day we brought her home. And she's an Irish wolfhound, a breed once used in Europe to snatch knights off horses. They cleaned all the wolves out of Ireland. Today we simply say they're "independent."

When Oona came to us at 13 weeks old, Bentley reckoned he'd strike the proper tone with Oona right away and show

her that he was firmly in charge. He barked at the puppy. Sully followed his lead because that's just what henchmen do. In an eyeblink, puppy Oona was in their faces roaring back. Once their ears stopped rippling back, they ran away squealing.

Finn our old and sensible wolfhound, shot Bentley a "told you so" look and shuffled off to the bedroom where he plonked down and hid his head under his paws. "Call me when the devil's spawn is gone."

Normally you'd hover while they work things out, but again, wolfhounds have special needs. Oona couldn't linger with the boys because then she'd play. And hurt herself making sharp turns harrowing them all through the house. She might have been built like Arnold Schwarzenegger, but her bones didn't meet yet. When you grow 100 pounds in 7 months, nature makes compromises.

So, she hadn't polished her manners with the boys because we kept them all separated by baby gates. Which are, as it turns out, worthless.

At my computer desk in the bedroom one day, I looked up and in sauntered Oona, tired of being locked out of the boys club. She'd vaulted the gate and dive-bombed the bed, scattering the Three Amigos like pebbles on a trampoline. So we turned a panel of her X-Pen on its side to keep her away. It was four feet tall.

The very next weekend, there she was again, grinning. I

didn't even hear a nail ping as she sailed over the steel barrier. "*Hello* boys! I'm baaaaack!" We thought we'd have to use a barricade of burning tires next.

None of this was lost on Little Bentley. Oona was clearly an unstoppable force headed right his way, yet, unlike the other two dogs, he wasn't pacing, bug-eyed and trembling. I study Bentley because I hate being outsmarted by a 30-pound hound. He pulls the other dogs' strings with subtle looks and just plain hoodoo. Sully's twice Bentley's size but he won't go near Bentley's things. He treats his food bowl like the Ark of the Covenant. If Bentley wanted out, he'd poke Finn and Finn howled. Out went Finn and Bentley with him, hidden under Finn, strutting like Napoleon.

So how *did* David woo Goliath? It beat me. Mostly all I'd seen were his spectacular failures.

He tried creeping past her verrrrrry slowly, looking dead ahead. Oona let him get halfway into the room with nowhere to run, then whirled around him like a tornado with fur. You could hear him gulp, but he just kept coolly creeping along while she gave him noogies from all directions at once.

The old boy's got grit. He kept finding ways to slip past the gate into her domain. Sure, he filched her toys and bones, but often he just lingered until she got tired of trouncing him. You can just have so much fun. Then they hung out while the other two dogs were in the hall, furiously stringing barbed wire.

Finally at Oona's ten-month mark I began to understand Bentley's method. One night I saw her get bored and start whirring around him again. Bentley stood on his hind legs, looked her square in the eyes and tapped Oona on the nose. She blinked. And then settled back on the couch with a harrumph. Lion tamers and hostage negotiators should take notes from Bentley.

He was taming her before my very eyes. He simply stayed the course. Little Bentley in the eye of the hurricane, sure his compass was true. And, shortly, they were whispering and snickering.

He outlasted her. He stuck to his guns. He showed her that grit and pluck comes in tiny packages, too.

I'm hoping he'll let me ghostwrite his autobiography, "Little Bentley Rules The World," since I can type and he can't.

At least, not that I know of...