

*Chapter 1*

## No Way to Help



*Tripper*

He wasn't a big Doberman. He weighed only seventy-three pounds, sleek with smooth, compact muscles and elegant as a sculpture. Standing by the back door, I watched him run slow loops across the backyard, graceful loops that reminded me of a thoroughbred horse exercising in the cold dawn air. He ran one front and one back leg touching under his chest with the opposing legs stretched to the limit—a graceful dance of symmetry. Snow crunched as he broke through the crusty top of more snow than Colorado had seen in several years. It reached the bottoms of windows, and the snow blower piled it waist high on sidewalk edges. Snow-packed, icy streets reluctantly yielded to persistent blades of passing plows that shoveled snow hills across driveways, waiting for homeowners to move them day after day. The weatherman said no more snow, but to expect temperatures hovering around or below zero with no relief in the near future.



PAMELA LOVATO

Black with rust markings, the dog's coat shone as he ran from the shadows into patches of frosty sunlight. Each time the dog looped toward me, I marveled at the blackness of his eyes—so dark that, when he turned, his brow seemed a solid cast of ebony.

How would I manage?

How would he?

Today, for the first time, he willingly left the front door to go outside. Now he ran. *Did he run to escape his pain?*

I wondered where I could run to escape *my* pain—unrelenting agony gripping my chest with tenacious, inflexible fingers.

The dog had lain on the cold stone by the front door for the past two weeks, patiently waiting for his master's return. Sometimes he moved to the staircase, firmly planting his butt on the second step. His back legs stretched forward, front legs braced on the first step, eyes focused on the small prism of clear glass among the stained ones that gave him a tiny view of the front porch. He sat for hours until fatigue overcame him, and then he lay again in front of the door. I thought of Hachiko, the Akita Inu who mourned his master for nine long years—patiently waiting at the train station, in the heat, rain, or snow, for his owner who would never return.



**Hachiko is only one story. Scotland, Russia, Korea, and Argentina boast similar stories of a dog's loyalty. Here in the United States, Hawkeye, a Labrador Retriever, refused to move from the coffin of his owner, Jon Tumilson, a Navy Seal who was killed in Afghanistan on August 6, 2011.**



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*Although the dog had occasionally stayed with me for several days, he never relaxed. I was an annoyance to him, and to me he was definitely a burden. He paced or lay by the front door, as though the accommodations at this hotel were suboptimal when he'd requested five stars. On the off chance he could be persuaded to relax by the fire, play in the yard, or accept a few treats, he never wanted me to pet him—nor did he sit close to me.*

Now he could never again leave. This was his home even though he didn't yet know it. I admitted to no one that I was somewhat afraid of him. I doubted my ability to control him if he decided to ignore my commands. I needed to earn his respect, but how would I do that?

*Once, when he was visiting, I tried to push him aside when he stood in the middle of a doorway. It was as though he turned to stone. His gaze was flat and impassive when he turned his head to look at me. I walked around him.*

*During his visits, he spent most of his time listening for the rumble of his master's Wrangler and the jingle of keys in the door. At the first faint sound of the Jeep, which he heard several moments before I did, he started a steadily accelerating Dobe whirl until his nose appeared to be attached to his stub of a tail.*

*At the slam of the car door, he regained his composure, stood perfectly still, and considered the dilemma for which he never found a satisfactory answer. How could he escape me and still convey his displeasure at being left by his master, the only person he loved?*

*The dog used many tactics for instilling guilt, and all worked with equal success. He always received an apology, hugs, and more than one treat. Sometimes a haughty look with a sharp uplifting of his nose sufficed. Other times demanded more drastic measures.*

*A turned back expressed the extent of his displeasure when he was left for ten days because of a trip to San Diego. To end the long separation, he was taken to the airport to meet the return flight. The dog's sharp gaze*



PAMELA LOVATO

*spotted his master as the outer doors of the airport whooshed open. Still, he found the strength of will to turn his back. For several minutes, he refused to acknowledge his relief and joy—the master was home.*

Today, the dog seemed to know the time was too long. He was skittish and restless. The days stretched into more nights of separation than he had ever endured. I saw confusion when he looked at me, and his distress reflected mine.

Afraid he'd damage his paws in the freezing snow, I opened the back door and called, "Tripper!"

An icy blast of wind hit me as he barreled past and headed straight to the front of the house, skidding sideways as his snowy feet hit the glossy stone. He placed his nose against the panels of stained glass and listened; every muscle in his body tensed with anticipation, and his head cocked sideways with expectation.

He looked back at me; I faltered. Dobermans have extremely expressive eyes—eyes that sparkle with joy and mischief, penetrate to your core with purpose and determination, or dull with disappointment and sorrow. As his eyes lost hope, his body drooped. He collapsed as though his bones had turned to water.



**The greatest fear dogs know is the fear that you will not come back when you go out the door without them.**

**—Stanley Coren, *What do Dogs Know?***



I walked quietly past him and up the stairs.  
Unable to help him.  
Unable to help myself.  
Unable to stop the onslaught of memories.



## Accepting the Inevitable

My daughter's irritation was obvious, even over the phone. Her youngest brother, Jared, wanted her to go see some dogs. His ten-year-old German Shepherd Dog, Kaedo, was failing. He'd been to the Doberman Rescue of Colorado, and he wanted to adopt a Doberman, a young one to run with him.

"I don't *want* to go. I'm afraid of Dobermans and Chuck, the guy who owns the rescue, is blind." Almost never annoyed with her brothers, Demaris sounded genuinely distressed. "How can he control a bunch of big dogs he can't even see? I don't want Jared getting a dog that can't visit me. I won't go to his place if he gets a Doberman."

"Hmmm ..." I remembered trying to reason with her when she was agonizing over an American Bulldog puppy being held without bail at a north Denver doggie jail. The American Bulldog is a breed not recognized by the American Kennel Club and often mistaken for the pit bull—another breed people fear and distrust.

Since the birth of her younger siblings, Demaris has been a pawn in the game of brothers and sisters. If they want something, she wants them to have it.

"Can't you go just one time? You don't have to interact with the dogs. Would it be such a big deal?"

"Mom, do you remember those friends who lived down the block on Louise Lane? After they moved, we'd visit them in Kentucky on the way to Virginia?"



PAMELA LOVATO

“Yes. What about them?”

“They had two Dobermans.”

“I’d forgotten that. They were beautiful, weren’t they?”

“That’s *not* what I remember! The male chased me all over that wooded area behind the house. He even nipped at me.”

“Why didn’t you tell me? He was probably—”

“I don’t know why I didn’t tell you,” she interrupted, “but that’s not the point. Those dogs were *never* friendly. Even in the house, they would stand and stare at me.”

I didn’t want to take sides, but I agreed with her. Dobermans intimidated me, too. I knew they were strong-willed dogs, needing equally- or stronger-willed owners. So *many* rescue dogs, so *many* needing homes. A Doberman wouldn’t be my choice either, and that was the crux of the matter. It wasn’t her choice, and it wasn’t mine; it was her brother’s.



**Better to do something imperfectly than to do nothing flawlessly.**

—Robert Schuller



“Just tell him you won’t go. He’ll figure it out.”

I knew she would go.

She knew she would go.

It was just a matter of accepting the inevitable.



*Chapter 3*

## The Doberman

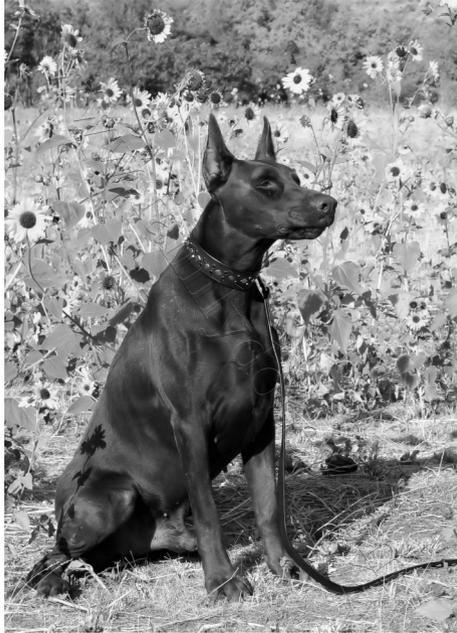


photo courtesy Family Dobes

The American Kennel Club registered the first purebred Doberman in 1908. One hundred dogs were registered in 1922. At that time, Dobermans were the only breed that had been bred to be “police-soldier” dogs.

The Doberman was the official war dog of the U.S. Marine Corps in WWII. In 1944, twenty-five Dobermans died liberating Guam. They served as messengers, sentries, and scouts and were known as “devil dogs”—not even afraid of the devil himself. A



1945 historic newsreel details America's invasion of the island of Okinawa, one of the bloodiest engagements of WWII. Archival footage from The Military Network shows a valiant Doberman standing strong after facing devastating battle conditions with his Marine.

Dobermans were the first service dogs for people with disabilities. Natural guard dogs, they will always place their bodies between danger and their owners.

The Doberman is a sharp, intelligent, active breed that needs both physical and mental stimulation. A Dobe left alone too much of the time will tend to find "something" to do, such as barking, digging, chewing—they can be a furry version of a one-man demolition team.

Some Dobermans train easily while others are hardheaded individuals. All should be trained with consistent, firm leadership and a gentle hand. They will shut down and refuse to cooperate if treated unfairly or ruthlessly.



photo courtesy  
Family Dobes

This breed needs quality human contact in order to be well socialized and happy. A poorly socialized or untrained Doberman can be a danger to both humans and other animals and is a legal liability to its owner. A significant number are surrendered to shelters and rescue organizations each year because their owners are unable or, more often, unwilling to take the time and effort to properly train and socialize these intelligent dogs.

