

# C'mon, Eileen

*When a Dog Calls You*

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*To Eileen*

*The purest, gentlest soul that I've had the honor of encountering in this life. My squirrel whisperer, you will always be the "sweetest Dove in the forest."*

## INTRODUCTION

Who doesn't think their dog is special? Or their cat, or their bird, or pig, horse, snake, goose, rat, alpaca, opossum, newt, or dung beetle. Just like people and their children. You see it on the news. A teenager robs 17 elderly ladies at gun-point and breaks their knee caps with a hammer, but after he's arrested, "momma" is interviewed, saying something like, "Oh but he's just the sweetest, kindest boy, he never did mean nobody no harm."

People are like that with their pets, too.

Something about being at the helm of another soul's existence—controlling whether they thrive or flounder, literally live or die—manifests as the ultimate devotion. Living with them, you discover their pleasures and pet peeves, their nuances and nasties, things that an outsider would never know. You celebrate their achievements—*Yaaa! Pickle went pee outside!* You comfort them when they're frightened—*Sit with momma while the scary sky is growling.* You nurse them back to health, wipe up their puke, and wash their poop-crusting rumps. All these experiences weave an invisible umbilical cord of love, trust, and intimacy that connects you for life--and forge a custom lens through which only you can see your pet.

But there are those rare pets that transcend an owner's perception. These creatures are more than just the sum of their furry parts and seem to exist on a slightly higher plane than the rest. They seem to know more and be more than your 'average bear.' Without intent or flagrancy, they lure the unsuspecting bystander into their aura and quietly say, "See me. I'm different." They turn haters into admirers, casual supporters into worshipers.

You *know* they have a soul.

You feel it.

Eileen was one of those transcendent creatures.

Eileen called to me. From hundreds of miles, across congested highways, over cloud-tipping mountains, riding the winds and dodging skyscrapers, her soul summoned mine. That's the only explanation that makes sense to me.

I almost didn't listen.

I have a fantastic Spidey-sense instinct that I still treat like some Psychic Hotline flunky, despite many lessons learned. And once again, I almost allowed my bully pragmatic brain to throat-punch that intuition into submissive silence.

Almost.

Thinking about what I would have forfeited if I hadn't shoved away all rationality and opinions to let more divine energy take charge shoots me with a little jolt of dread, like I've just realized I'm leaning too far back on a chair and am about to fall. Had I taken my practical road most trodden, I would not have learned that making room for what you don't yet understand makes room for rewards. I would not have realized that you don't always need to go know where you're going to get some place good. I would have missed out on the purest soul I'd yet to know.

I would have missed out on Eileen.

# CHAPTER 1

## WHO'S CALLING?

"Angie, seriously? You want another dog?" Even in the 10-table restaurant my neighbor Jana used her outdoor voice. It was the kind of noise that could crack crystal.

"I didn't say I *wanted* another dog."

Her dusty blue eyes, stared. Blinked. "Shit, Ang. You just said you had 'the urge' to look for a dog. How the hell is that—"

"Yeah, an urge to *look*. Doesn't mean I really want another dog.

I sat up straighter and put both elbows on the table. "I don't want another dog."

Jana gave me a look like I just offered to pay for dinner with the pot of leprechaun gold I had in my pocket.

In the moment of silence, the floral-aproned waitress shuffled over to our table and asked in Thai-accented English if we like our food. This was the only Thai restaurant in town, but its food was consistently delicious.

"Don't you think three cats, and a dog, are enough? Oh! And the fish. Your tank of fish," She punctuated the end of her comment with two tiny rice rockets launched through her carp-like lips.

Jana was never afraid to share her opinion about the animal count in my house. I'm not sure why she had one.

I had the money for fancy canned food and vet bills, the house held plenty of space for all mammals to roam and nest, and I kept it OCD-clean—even to the nose. My clothes weren't caked in fur, there wasn't any pee-stained bedding reeking up the house, no shit sculptures hardening in corners. More than a few people said they were surprised I had animals by the look and smell of my house.

I carved a circle in my rice with a squiggly piece of garlic chicken.

"It's not that what I have isn't enough."

I took my elbows off the table and leaned back against the way-too-vertical booth back. "It's just ... I don't know. It's weird. This intense feeling. I really don't know how to explain it without sounding all woo-woo."

I looked up as a young 20-something couple walked in and sat two tables away to our right. A northwest December chill slipped in behind them. I pulled down my cardigan sleeves.

Jana jumped in, "Hell, Ang, you can't feed another animal with feelings." She gave the word 'feelings' a caustic clip.

Now, I was starting to feel like I showed up to dinner with a face-full of flea bites and cat shit-matted hair.

Was she worried she'd be interviewed in a few years for an episode of Hoarders when they come to my hazmat house to film the fallout of the 23 cats and 17 dogs she thinks I will collect? Did she fear that she'd eventually be living two doors down from The House that smelled like a dirty chicken farm in the moist days of summer?

She liked animals—including mine, I thought. She and her hubby Paul, both in their 50s, lived with some concoction of a chihuahua and Pomeranian named Ryder. And once upon a time, they said, they adopted an outdoor cat, Hobo, who lost a fight with a bad-ass raccoon.

I continued: “All I know is that I have this freaking ... I don’t know what to call it. Compulsion, I guess—it’s the craziest damn thing. It’s like someone told me, ‘Whatever you do, don’t think of Dobermans.’ So, of course, all I can think about are Dobermans.

“Wait. A Doberman? You want a *Doberman*? Hell, I thought you were talking about another little Chi, like Pete.

“Speaking of Pete, have you asked him how he feels about this?”

“Not yet.”

Pete was my 10-pound ‘deer head’ Chihuahua. He was the anti-thesis of the yappy, frenetic, make-you-want-taser-them stereotype. Pete practiced an impressive economy of barking, respected all house rules, humans, and cats, and I’m certain, he could’ve driven my ‘89 5-speed Volvo if he had longer legs and thumbs, he was that smart. He was the Anti-Chi.

“You better ask Pete.”

“Yeah.”

“So, what are you gonna do? Would you really get another dog?”

I didn’t know what was going on or what I was going to do. It wasn’t that getting another dog was enormously consequential, it was that I honestly didn’t want two dogs, and I couldn’t bloody well understand this sudden feeling. It was more than a feeling (cue Boston), really, it was a compulsion—and it was intensifying.



But I've never wanted more than one dog. Multiple cats, yes. Dogs? Nope. I barely wanted one.

A friend of mine asked me once, "Are you a dog person who happens to have cats or a cat person who happens to have a dog?" Without hesitation, I declared myself a cat person.

I feel about dogs the way I do about children. I don't like most of them—most are loud, stinky, and have the manners of a spider monkey on speed—said the cat-person.

I liked *my* dog. And I don't have a kid, but if I did, it'd be just like my dog: quiet, well-mannered, no taser required.

Pete was just the right amount of watchdog and snuggle buddy that I needed. He filled my heart to the top. In these past nine years my 'main man' was with me, I never thought about another dog.

Until October 2019.

Sometime in October, an unknown voice—or force or Providence—had been nagging me to look for another dog. And not just any dog, but Doberman, specifically. The breed made sense, at least.

Ten years earlier, I had been blessed by a black and tan Doberman who I brought home from a shelter when she was just six weeks old. "Brontë." When she passed away at 13, I couldn't bring myself to get another Dobe. I loved the breed, but I loved her more. The void she left was too raw to insert another dog that would potentially look so similar to my Brontë. So, I changed the color palette and downsized to a fawn-coated Chihuahua—Pete.

When I first felt this, whatever it was, that was now causing me to cruise PetFinder like a puppy junkie, I ignored it, and I didn't tell anyone—it was nothing worth sharing, right? I was like Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol* when he's in denial of seeing Marley's ghost for the first time: "You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of underdone potato."

But two months of this Dobe junkie condition increasingly sabotaging my thoughts, begging for another "fix" worn me down. So there in the restaurant, chatty dinner conversation and perhaps the Christmas spirit moved me to reveal this little bit of weirdness to Jana.

Actually, I was probably hoping that she would talk me out of it. I'd tell her, she'd tell me I didn't need another pet—like she did—and I'd see she was right ...The End.

Instead, I defended my position.

"Would two dogs be that bad? I already have to walk and shit patrol for one. And unless I lose a fight with a wood chipper, I've got two arms—one for each leash."

Jana's laughter ricocheted off the walls like a racquetball. She only had one volume level—loud.

"Seriously, though, this pull ... it's so strong. It's like ... this is going to sound hokey, but it's like someone, *something* is ... calling to me."

Jana said, "Maybe it's the sales team at Chewy to get you to buy more dog food. Maybe they're testing new telepathic sales tactics on unsuspecting customers."

"At least that would make sense. This really isn't just me making up some bullshit about wanting another dog. It's something more than me. I really wish I could explain it better."

I had no idea that very shortly, I'd get help with that. She'd soon see this wasn't all in my head.

The waitress appeared and asked if we were ready for our check.

Jana and I stepped out into the wintry evening. Though there was a mild breeze nipped with chill, I felt warmed slightly by the town's Christmas cheer. Along the two-block Historic District, old-fashioned lamp posts stood sentry in uniforms of twisting garland that twinkled with tiny white lights. The storefronts of the independent shops offered a kaleidoscope of Christmas scenes—a nuclear family of snowpeople welcoming shoppers, an impressive collection of Rudolph figures in a multiplicity of sizes, expressions, and materials, and a miniature train circling a miniature snow-covered valley—all hoping to win the annual window decorating contest.

We turned left to continue our shopping quest for Christmas gift treasures.

The second store we entered packed a mix of random antiques and new nick-knacks tightly around the walls, leaving just enough room for a narrow walkway that circled a center display of handmade soaps, amusing tea towels, and candles that were not good gift options for olfactory-sensitive folks.

I was eyeing a silver bracelet with abalone inset for my aunt, Jana was sniffing soap when the old-fashioned doorbell—a literal bell above the door—tinkled, announcing another shopper. I looked up instinctively. In walked a lanky man of about 40, wearing a charcoal North Face jacket and ... in his left hand was a leash. The other end of that leash held a shiny-coated black and tan

Doberman. He probably weighed in around 95 pounds and walked with the dignity and serenity of a nobleman roaming his estate on warm Sunday morning.

I bounded over to Jana, smacked her arm and pointed.

Her perfectly plucked eyebrows shot up, forming a wavy wrinkle across her forehead.

Once we left the store, I said to Jana, "Ok, now that was a little freaky, right? We see a guy with a gorgeous Doberman. In a shop. In town. Right after I tell you all about my urge to get one."

She almost rolled her eyes. "Ok, maybe a little."

"Oh come on. Have you ever seen anyone walking a *Doberman* in town? In a shop? I haven't."

"No, you're right, I haven't."

"See, some funky has come to town."

"Yeah ... you."

I really have never seen someone walking a Doberman in town. Labs, pits, and many mutts, yes. No Dobes. Seeing a Doberman anywhere in public was rare, really. Taking them shopping in antique stores, rarer still. The intelligent breed got some bad publicity that hit its pinnacle in the 70s and 80s when they were forced to play many a villain's vicious, wanna-rip-your-lips-off guard dogs. No one has bothered to repair their reputation since.

Two stores later, we came up to a shop with two large windows that flank the entrance alcove and wrap around to the front of the building about four feet. Before we even get the door open, I see in the left window, among random antiques, a life-size Doberman statue.

I cannot say that I have ever seen a full-size statue of a Doberman. Particularly in a store window.

I looked at Jana, "OK, now? Now will you admit this is too much of a coincidence?"

"Ok, yeah, this is a little kooky."

Apparently the lonely, in-my-head, ethereal taunting was diverging into physical directionals with witnesses.

Somebody wants me to listen.