

DON'T EAT LASSIE

Written by

Sam Roen

EXT. DOWNTOWN WILMINGTON - DAY

It's sunny. Birds CHIRP. Boats rock against the Riverwalk. Shops, bars and restaurants are open. The streets are empty.

REPORTER (V.O.)

Russia claims the world's first vaccine as the United State's death toll quickly rises. Experts say we'll hit the one million milestone by week's end.

A MAN, 59, in Personal Protective Equipment, emerges from an alleyway. He stumbles up to an unlit, vacant bar.

REPORTER (V.O.)

This begs the question. Where are our leaders?

The Man KNOCKS. The tag on his PPE suit says, "Mayor Raffo."

INT. PETE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Stained sheets lay tattered on the bed. The light of the TV illuminates the otherwise empty, dark room.

PETE, 24, bedraggled, on the phone, downs a glass of vodka.

PETE

I'd make it stop if I could.

He rolls the glass under the bed. The empty receptacle finds a home with other dirty dishes.

PETE (CONT'D)

Don't say that. Nobody's out to kill you. I promise, Mama.

He pulls on a wrinkled t-shirt.

PETE (CONT'D)

We'll figure this out, okay? I'll make some calls. We'll find help.

The line goes dead.

His hands shake. He takes a deep breath.

JO (O.S.)

C'mon, boy!

Pete peers through the curtains. He squints out the window as a dog's tail vanishes into his neighbor's home.

JO, 25, in the front doorway, in her pajamas, bare legs, sips her coffee and goes back inside.

Pete waves at the already shut door.

REPORTER (V.O.)

Creep.

He startles and scans the room.

PETE

Who's there?

A shadow lurks in his peripheral vision.

He looks. It vanishes.

He leaves the window just as Jo's front door nudges open. A dog's nose appears. LASSIE, 5, a medium sized mutt, emerges and trots down the front steps.

INT. PETE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Black mold spots the ceiling. Light cuts through the drawn blinds, casting human sized shadows on the walls. Empty booze bottles litter the floor.

A calendar on the fridge reads, "Haven't left the house in." A black checkmark fills each day in August.

Pete fills a flask with mouthwash and takes a swig.

Something SCRATCHES at the front door. He ignores it.

He makes for the fridge, opens it and stares at emptiness. He scours the kitchen and opens every cupboard to find them filled to the brim with empties and trash.

Something SNIFFS under the crack of the front door.

He turns. The sniffs intensify.

He shuts his eyes, shakes his head and blinks.

Silence.

Pete grabs his keys off the counter and heads to the front door. He freezes and shoots a frown back at the calendar.

REPORTER (V.O.)

It's not safe. Even for food.

He takes a deep breath and pulls the door open.

Something bounds past. Nails click on the wooden floor.

Pete slams the door and spins around.

Lassie sits mere feet away.

Pete pins his eyes shut. Opens them. Lassie BARKS.

They stare at each other, eyes locked.

Pete gets on face level with Lassie. He puts a hand out, hesitates, and touches fur.

PETE

You're real?

He checks for gender.

PETE (CONT'D)

What's your name, boy?

Pete gives Lassie time to respond. The dog doesn't.

Pete grabs the dog's collar. Lassie GROWLS, but doesn't struggle. The tag's faded and impossible to read.

Pete smiles at Lassie and scratches him behind his ear.

Stoicism sweeps over Pete.

Pete hops up, locks the door and hurries to the kitchen.

Lassie follows.

Pete turns on the gas stovetop. He pulls a pot out of a cupboard, fills it with water and puts it on the open flame.

REPORTER (V.O.)

You wouldn't?

Pete shakes his head and finds a cutting board.

PETE

It is a pandemic.

He grabs a chef's knife and sharpening stone.

PETE (CONT'D)

And I am hungry.

He gets to work sharpening the blade.

PETE (CONT'D)

What do you think?

Lassie WHIMPERS.

REPORTER (V.O.)  
He is meaty.

Pete nods.

JO (O.S.)  
Lassie!

Lassie's ears perk up and he takes off up the stairs.

Pete turns off the gas and goes to the window. He peers through the curtain. Jo, still in pajamas, whips past.

He contemplates the knife, then makes for the stairs.

INT. PETE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Pete enters with the knife hidden. He shuts the door.

PETE  
I'm not going to hurt you.

REPORTER (V.O.)  
Liar.

Lassie stands on the bed, eyes peeled on the drawn curtains.

Pete goes to his bedside table and grabs a pill bottle. He takes off the cap and pours two pills into his hand.

REPORTER (V.O.)  
That enough?

Pete fishes out two more pills and offers them to Lassie.

Lassie sniffs Pete's hand, but doesn't take the bait.

PETE  
C'mon, buddy. They're good.

Pete pops a pill into his mouth and swallows.

PETE (CONT'D)  
See?

REPORTER (V.O.)  
Moron.

Pete sets up near Lassie on the bed and pulls out his phone. He pets Lassie as he types in, "How to kill a dog."

JO (O.S.)

Lassie!

Pete shakes his head and replaces "dog" with "chicken."

Somebody KNOCKS on the front door just as he taps search.

Pete sighs. He clicks on the top result, props his phone up in a way so Lassie can see, and leaves the pills on the bed.

PETE

Let me know if this is helpful.

VOICE FROM PHONE (V.O.)

You're face to face with a chicken that needs killing. Now you're wondering how to execute the deed.

Pete gives a thumbs up and goes to the door.

EXT. PETE'S HOUSE - DAY

Pete pokes his head out the door. He scans the front porch.

JO (O.S.)

Lassie!

Leaves RUSTLE around the side of the house.

Pete polishes off the flask, leaves the house and makes for the backyard, his lips now stained blue.

He rounds the corner and wipes his mouth.

Jo, tears streaming down her face, has one leg over the fence. She spots Pete and hops down.

Pete takes a step back for every one she takes forward.

PETE

Everything okay?

JO

No.

She gives Pete a hopeful look.

JO (CONT'D)

You haven't seen my dog, have you?

Pete shakes his head. He gestures with the flask.

PETE  
I'd offer you a drink, but that probably wouldn't be such a great idea with everything going on.

She gives him a funny look.

JO  
What?

He pockets the flask.

PETE  
Nothing. It's empty anyway.

JO  
How could I be so stupid?

PETE  
What do you mean?

JO  
I left the door open.

PETE  
That'll happen.

JO  
Can you help me look? Please?

Pete shuffles his weight.

REPORTER (V.O.)  
Don't do it.

He shoots a glance backward. His eyes go wide.

Lassie pulls back a curtain on the second floor, his nose bobbing in and out of sight.

Pete nods at Jo and takes off back to the front door.

PETE  
You start without me.

INT. PETE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Pete rushes in and slams the door.

Lassie watches the phone intently.

VOICE FROM PHONE (V.O.)  
That's how you kill a chicken in a  
humane fashion. If you enjoyed--

Pete turns off the video, pockets his phone and paces.

REPORTER (V.O.)  
What if she saw?

PETE  
She didn't.

REPORTER (V.O.)  
But what if she did?

He squeezes his eyes shut, hands to head.

REPORTER (V.O.)  
You could kill her.

PETE  
No. What's wrong with you?

REPORTER (V.O.)  
You might want to check the mirror.

Lassie slumps over and can barely keep his eyes open.

Pete looks him over and glances at the pill bottle, the loose  
pills nowhere in sight. He frowns and grabs his knife.

REPORTER (V.O.)  
Do it.

Pete white-knuckles the handle of the knife with both hands.  
He raises the blade over his head, sacrificial-like.

JO (O.S.)  
Lassie!

A car WHOOSHES past on the street below.

REPORTER (V.O.)  
One fell swoop and you can feast.

Pete's entire body vibrates. Sweat beads his brow.

Lassie glances up at him, droopy eyed.

Pete averts his eyes.

PETE  
I'm sorry, buddy.



Pete screams and plunges the knife downward.

JO (O.S.)  
Lassie! Please!

Pete, eyes pinned shut, hyperventilates.

PETE  
No. No. No.

LICKING. Pete opens one eye, peers down.

Lassie licks the knife handle sticking out of the mattress.

PETE (CONT'D)  
Oh thank, God.

REPORTER (V.O.)  
How the hell did you miss?

PETE  
Go away. Please. Just stop.

REPORTER (V.O.)  
Useless, piece of--

Pete snaps his fingers, looks shocked when the voice stops.

He hoists Lassie up and leaves the room.

EXT. PETE'S HOUSE - DAY

Pete carries the dog outside.

Jo, teary, sits on her porch and fiddles with a leash.

PETE  
Is this your dog?

She jumps up, wipes her eyes and sprints over.

JO  
You scared the hell out of me.

She grabs Lassie from Pete's arms.

Pete stumbles back and covers his face with his arm.

JO (CONT'D)  
Poor thing, you must be exhausted.

PETE  
I'm fine. Just a little sleepy.

She ignores this, but notices Pete's arm still over his face.

JO  
Are you okay?

PETE  
It's just, you touched me.

JO  
And?

PETE  
What if I get it?

JO  
It?

PETE  
You know, the pandemic. Millions  
dead. Etcetera.

JO  
Did you maybe hit your head?

Pete doesn't answer. Just looks at her, confused.

JO (CONT'D)  
Why don't you come inside with me.  
I'll get you a beer and you can sit  
down. You seem a little concussed.

Jo walks toward her house.

PETE  
Do you have any food?

REPORTER (V.O.)  
I'd ask her if she knows anybody in  
the psychiatric business.

Pete nods and follows after her.