

S L I C E S - O F - D E A T H

written by

Adam Nadworniak

Address
Phone
E-mail

FADE IN:

BLACK

A faint CHOIR, far away. It detunes. The hum of cheap fluorescent ballasts creeps in like a migraine.

A SNAP.

INT. POLICE INTERROGATION ROOM — NIGHT

A sickly GREEN light buzzes on. Two-way mirror. Metal table. The smell of disinfectant and coffee-ghost.

JACOB (21), gaunt and scraped, sits cuffed. One hand rests on a soft-cover BIBLE. Dried blood freckles his hoodie.

Across from him: DETECTIVE HASTINGS (50s), a tired ox in a corduroy sport coat. Beside him, DETECTIVE TOMPKINS (40s), compact, keyed-up, eyes like a night animal.

HASTINGS
Start with the beginning, Jacob.
Day one at the lake.

Jacob stares at his own reflection in the glass. When he speaks, it's like the words are being pulled from his ribs.

JACOB
We were just... messing around.
Twelve days, no sleep. For money.
(MORE)

JACOB (CONT'D)
For content. I thought—
(beat, a wince)
I thought I could stay pure.

Tompkins clocks that word.

TOMPKINS
Pure?

Jacob's gaze slides to the Bible. He swallows. Somewhere
distant, a loon calls—

SMASH TO:

EXT. LAKE ROAD — LATE SUMMER — DAY (DAY 1)

Heat-shimmer. Pines. A glinting LAKE through trees.

An SUV rattles over potholes, music thumping, then dies as
the car sputters and coasts in on inertia. It rolls to a stop
by a LAKE HOUSE that looks like a Pinterest board married a
hunting cabin.

Doors pop. Five twenty-somethings spill out:

— MIA (21): influencer-pretty, practiced angles, fresh scar
peeking beneath concealer near her ear. Her smile hides
metrics.

— LIAM (22): ex-small town golden boy; grief sits on him like a weight vest. USMC DOG TAGS wrapped around his wrist, not his neck.

— CHLOE (20): theatre-kid weird, conspiracy-podcast brain; a chaos fairy with big headphones and a bigger heart.

— RYAN (21): unmedicated charisma grenade; prank-channel cofounder; appetite for dopamine like it's oxygen.

— JACOB (21): earnest, shy, Christian youth-group core memory survivor. The kind who apologizes for existing, then apologizes for apologizing.

Ryan climbs onto the hood, pulls out a wad of cash in a Ziploc — \$5,000. He kisses it like a trophy.

RYAN

Twelve days, zero sleep. Winner takes it. Losers buy brunch. I want croque madames like we're in Paris.

CHLOE

You've never been to Paris.

RYAN

I am Paris.

He hops down, slaps a glass COOKIE JAR on the porch table. Duct-tapes a label: SLICES.

MIA

(points her phone)

Rule explainers get views. Smile like we're soft-launching a cult.

They cluster. Mia's camera rolls.

RYAN (to camera)

What up, ghouls and goblins. Science says you can't go twelve days without sleep. We say: hold my liquid death.

CHLOE
Don't say brands unless they pay
us.

RYAN
(revamping)
Hold my unbranded artisanal water.

LIAM
What are the rules, again?

RYAN
Stims allowed, no closed eyes
longer than ten seconds, no "micro-
naps," and you gotta wear the dumb
smart rings. If you sleep, you're
out. Last one conscious wins.

Jacob hovers outside the frame.

MIA
Jake, get in. You're part of the
chaos.

JACOB
I... okay.

They put their hands over the jar.

ALL
(chanting)
Sleep when you're—

They can't sync it; it turns into a laughing mess. The sound blows into the trees, gets swallowed whole.

INT. LAKE HOUSE — MAIN ROOM — DAY

Air that smells faintly like old cedar and mouse pee. A DEER HEAD mounted over a stone fireplace; its eyes track nothing. Mismatched couch. Board games. Cracks like veins in the ceiling paint.

Chloe clocks a dime-sized RED LED in the corner.

CHLOE

Uh... why does Grandpa Cabin have a nanny-cam.

RYAN

Security. Or a ghost influencer.

MIA

(to camera)

Haunted house check.

JACOB

(automatic)

Please don't invite—

He stops, embarrassed by his own religiosity. Mia softens.

MIA

Hey. We'll invite only good ghosts. Maybe your grandma. She can bully the algorithm.

LIAM heaves a duffel into a side room, all no-nonsense.

LIAM

Where's the shut-off for that light? It's flickering like a panic attack.

The overhead FLUORESCENT buzzes then steadies, sickly green.

HASTINGS (V.O.)
How long before it got... strange?

JACOB (V.O.)
It was already strange. That's why
we came.

MONTAGE — DAYS 1-3: "BRIGHT"

- CANS and BAGS of energy drinks stack into a pyramid.
- Mia shoots a house tour; every take is "okay but again."
- Ryan darts like a bee, already cutting mid-conversation to chase a joke.
- Liam grills on the deck; the LAKE glitters; we hear a SUBTLE MECHANICAL HUM, almost under perception.
- Chloe tapes GAFFER X's over the tiny red LEDs in the corners.
- Jacob inventories snacks; arranges Scripture memory cards like index tabs in his brain.

EXT. LAKE HOUSE — EVENING (DAY 3)

A LOCAL in a dented jon boat glides by. Sunburnt neck.
Shades. He doesn't wave.

CHLOE
(to the water)
Hi! We're very normal!

The Local keeps going. The HUM (is it in the air or their heads?) lingers.

RYAN
He's like, "TikTok killed my marriage."

MIA
TikTok killed my jawline. Shout-out to post-op swelling.

LIAM clocks that, glances at her. Noted.

INT. KITCHEN — LATER

Mia ices her cheek while Chloe builds a caffeine "flight" like a sommelier.

CHLOE
We start subtle: yerba mate. Then we escalate to corporate war crime.

RYAN bursts in with a thrift-store STOVEPipe HAT.

RYAN
Costume challenge. Winner gets to pick the next punishment.

He plops it on. It doesn't sit right; it's wrong in a way you can't name. Mia laughs, then stops, then laughs again.

JACOB
Maybe don't.

RYAN
Jake, I love you, but your whole
vibe is "church lock-in chaperone."

JACOB
That's—
(lets it go)
It's fine.

Ryan tips the hat. For a second, his shadow on the ceiling
elongates, TALLER than it should be.

EXT. GAS STATION — NIGHT (DAY 4)

They raid for snacks. The CLERK (60s) eyes their jittery
banter.

CLERK
You kids doing the "don't sleep"
thing?

RYAN
We're professionals.

CLERK
(taps a warning sign)
Brain's like a septic tank. You
shake it too long, it burps up
things you flushed.

CHLOE
(nods like that tracks)
Yeah, totally.

As they leave, the CLERK adds:

CLERK
Don't swim after dark. The lake
holds things.

The bell dings. Night swallows them.

INT. LAKE HOUSE — OVERNIGHT (DAY 5)

The house creaks like it's breathing.

— Liam sits alone, rolls his brother's DOG TAGS across his knuckles. His brother's name catches on an edge.

— Mia doom-scrolls surgery before/after, comments like cuts.

— Chloe edits a goofy "house spirits" segment and accidentally pauses on a single frame where something tall and thin stands at the end of the hall. She scrubs back. It isn't there.

— Ryan's eyes are wide as thumbnails; he can't stop talking.

— Jacob underlines: WATCH AND PRAY.

INT. BATHROOM — MORNING (DAY 6)

Mia peels off a hydrocolloid patch near her ear. The scar is healing. She tilts her head, tightening her jaw for symmetry. The mirror wobbles — barely.

MIA
(whisper)
We're okay.

Behind her, for a heartbeat, a HOODED FIGURE stands in the shower. Empty face. Linen hood. When she whips around, the shower is empty. Just a drip.

She laughs at herself, but it lands wrong.

EXT. LAKE — DUSK (DAY 6)

They skip stones. The humming is louder near the water.

LIAM
Hear that?

CHLOE
It's the planet. Or a data center.
Or both.

Ryan points his phone across the lake: the silhouette of a long, low BUILDING half-hidden by trees.

RYAN
Secret submarine Starbucks.

JACOB
We shouldn't mock.

RYAN
Buddy, the Lord made memes.

Jacob almost smiles. The bond is real, even when it tangles.

INT. MAIN ROOM — NIGHT (DAY 7)

Storm threatens. They pile into a board game. The fluorescent breaks into a strobe.

CHLOE
We gotta kill that light. It's
giving "asylum chic."

RYAN
We're already in an asylum.
Population: us.

MIA
B-roll of us losing our minds:
great engagement.

LIAM
(soft, to himself)
We lost someone already.

Beat. The room shifts. Ryan clocks it, changes subject too
fast.

RYAN
Punishment round: loser has to do a
confessional to camera about their
worst secret.

All eyes avoid Jacob. He feels it anyway.

MONTAGE — DAYS 8-9: "FRAYED"

- Surfaces go sticky. Trash evolves.
- Everyone talks over everyone like it's oxygen.
- The COOKIE JAR fills with cash and small weird trinkets (a hotel key, a saint medal, a plastic ring).
- Chloe re-tapes the LEDs; new RED DOTS show up in new corners.

- Mia films a makeup routine that's more pep talk than tutorial.
- Liam stares at the water until his reflection blurs.
- Ryan sketches a doodle of a TALL THIN MAN with a stovepipe hat and too-long teeth.
- Jacob feels watched, flips the Bible open like a shield.

NIGHT SOUNDS — (DAY 9 INTO 10)

A screen door chitters against its frame. Something moves through the pine needles without footsteps. The house answers with its own groans.

CHLOE (O.S.)
(tiny, to mic)
If you're watching this later and
I've become cringe, I'm sorry. Cut
this part.
(beat)
Don't cut this part.

INT. MAIN ROOM — 4 A.M. (DAY 10)

Everyone glassy. Silence has a presence.

MIA
What if we're... meaner without
sleep?

RYAN
We're funnier.

LIAM
You're not.

RYAN
Okay dad.

LIAM
Don't.

It lands heavy. Ryan backs off, chastened.

JACOB
Maybe we could... pray?

They don't laugh. That somehow makes it worse.

CHLOE
Do your thing, Jake.

Jacob closes his eyes. The green flicker turns to STAINED GLASS in his mind. A JESUS figure blooms there, halo like a welding arc. When Jacob opens his eyes, a sheen of tears makes everybody swim.

JACOB
Amen.

The HUM under everything swells like a crowd at a church about to speak in tongues.

INT. HALLWAY — PRE-DAWN (DAY 10 TURNING 11)

Jacob pads alone. From a closet, a BUTCHER KNIFE gleams among winter coats. He stares at his reflection in the blade: alien, stretched.

He pulls on his white hoodie BACKWARDS, cuts two small EYE HOLES at the seam. He looks like an inside-out pilgrim.

JACOB
(whisper, to the vision)
I will make it clean.

He tucks the knife into his sleeve.

Outside, wind combs the lake into fur.

ACT TWO — THE FRACTURE

FORM NOTE

From here, intercut subjective POV with objective stabs. Time cracks. Events replay slightly off. The house becomes a different house depending on who's looking.

INT. VANITY BATH — NIGHT (POV: MIA)

Mia's face in the mirror is betraying her. Flesh bubbles, pores yawning like mouths. The scar ropes into a keloid that spells UGLY in gooseflesh. She slaps concealer, it slides off like oil.

Behind her in the mirror — the HOODED THING. No face, just dark. Knife a little smile.

MIA
(hoarse)
Not real. Not real. Not—

She grabs a heavy brass CANDLESTICK and swings. The hood ducks; the knife kisses tile—SKRANG—sparks like fireflies.

INT. LOFT LANDING — SAME (POV: RYAN)

The railing undulates; the house is a funhouse. At the far end, the TALL THIN FIGURE in the hat does a little Charleston, then gestures c'mon. Its hands are too long, like Eel Bones wrapped in gloves.

TALL FIGURE
(silent, mouthing)
Do it. Do it. Do it.

RYAN
(too big, too bright)
Okay!

He shoulders a HUNTING RIFLE from a rack as if this is a skit. The world fisheyes, his friends below are papier-mâché monsters twitching on strings.

INT. FIREPLACE HEARTH — SAME (POV: LIAM)

The fire isn't lit but there's HEAT. On the hearth, dripping lakewater, sits LIAM'S BROTHER — helmet fused to a char-black skull, eyes too alive.

BROTHER
(low, wet)
They put me in the roots, Lee. Like trash. Like I'm poison. Are you going to sleep through this too?

LIAM
(voice shredded)
No.

His hand finds a FIRE AXE. His breath serrates.

INT. MAIN ROOM — SAME (POV: CHLOE)

Three corners blink RED — little LED eyes. She frames it with her hands, delighted.

CHLOE
Production value! We got a three-
cam!

She sees the hooded “stuntman” lunge at Mia. She claps like she’s at a Scream revival and the crowd’s in on it.

CHLOE (CONT'D)
Okay stunts! Okay union!

INT. HALL — SAME (POV: JACOB)

The hallway is a cathedral throat; the JESUS at the end blazes, hand out. Behind the holy glow, his friends are distorted BLASPHEMIES: Ryan a wolf in party store skin, Chloe a laugh-track doll with black-button eyes, Mia a hive of gnats wearing makeup, Liam a charcoal statue that leaks regret.

JESUS (VISION)
Save them.

Jacob steps toward Mia, knife trembling like a tuning fork—

BANG!

INTERCUT — THE LAST NIGHT (MULTI-POV)

— Ryan fires; the shot shreds a LAMP, vomiting moths of shadow.

— Mia smashes the candlestick into the mirror; the mirror SHATTERS, her face fracturing into a hundred wrong versions.

— Liam swings the AXE; it bites WOOD, screams; the hooded figure slips past like wind.

— Chloe yells "Cut!" and laughs too hard; the laugh curdles midair, keeps laughing after she stops.

— Jacob tackles Ryan; the rifle skitters. The JESUS flickers like an open sign going out.

Sound compresses into Tinnitus. Then comes back like their ears changed neighborhoods.

INT. KITCHEN — LATER (OBJECTIVE GLIMPSE)

Blood arcs on white tile. A smear like a comet tail.

The axe lifts. Falls. Wet thud. A whisper like a prayer. A tile pops under a heel.

A boot tumbles down steps without a leg in it. The COOKIE JAR tips, money snowing into PINK WATER.

This objective view is quick and cruel—never enough to anchor to.

INT. PANTRY — CONTINUOUS (POV: CHLOE)

Dark crowded with cereal boxes and the smell of onion skin. Chloe hides and can't stop grinning.

CHLOE
(whisper)
This is good TV. This is finally
good TV.

A shape passes the slats. The RED LED on a baby monitor blinks. From the monitor: WHITE NOISE; behind it, a woman's voice singing a lullaby backwards.

Chloe's grin wilts.

CHLOE (CONT'D)
Mom?

She doesn't have a mom who sings. That's not her memory. Why is she crying like it is?

INT. HALL — SAME (POV: MIA)

Mia crawls, hands sticky with her own reflection. Footsteps behind—

She swings the candlestick blind and catches FLESH. A GASP—male. She skitters into the bathroom, knocks the door shut with her heel.

In the mirror, the HOODED FACE is inches away. It moves with her. That shouldn't be—

She reaches up, trembling, and LIFTS the hood.

It's Jacob. Eyes huge, wet. Mouth praying on fast-forward.

She screams a scream with no words in it.

INT. STAIRCASE — SAME (POV: RYAN)

Ryan laughs until he cries until he hiccups until something in his throat pops. He points the rifle at the TALL FIGURE. It raises its hands, "Don't shoot."

RYAN
Say "subscribe."

The Tall Figure opens its mouth. Inside is just GRINDERS. Metal teeth. It spins, slowly, like a meat slicer.

Ryan fires. The DEER HEAD explodes into hair and dust. He laughs wrong then slips on money and goes down the stairs in a pinball clatter.

INT. FIREPLACE — SAME (POV: LIAM)

Liam drags something heavy. We don't see it; we hear it: knuckles on stone. The BROTHER in his periphery nods approval.

BROTHER
There you go. Bring me home.

LIAM
(pleading)
Where do I dig?

BROTHER
You already did.

Liam looks down. His hands are already DIRT-BLACK to the wrists.

INT. MAIN ROOM — LATE (JACOB POV BLEEDS TO OBJECTIVE)

Silence like a judgement. The house is... still.

Jacob stands in the wreckage, hood soaked. The knife dangles. The JESUS neon is gone. The only glow is the fridge left ajar.

Bodies. Not monsters. Kids.

He kneels. Takes Mia's hand—nails chipped into little northern lights—and presses it to his forehead.

JACOB
(so small)
I saved you.

His breath arrives like he's learning how.

EXT. PORCH — DAWN

Jacob steps into a gray wash of morning. The lake is a steel plate. A LOON calls, then cuts off.

He walks, stumbling, toward the road.

ACT THREE — AFTERMATH

INT. POLICE INTERROGATION ROOM — NIGHT

Back to the green buzz. The room feels somehow wetter.

Tompkins sets a RECORDER on the table. Click.

TOMPKINS

Let's rewind, Jacob. Day ten. Who was still awake?

JACOB

Everyone. No one. I don't know.
It's like—

(he gropes)

Like we all fell through the same dream.

HASTINGS flips a crime scene photo toward Jacob. We don't see it. We see Jacob fold around it.

HASTINGS

Tell me what you see.

JACOB

A test.

TOMPKINS

From who?

Jacob looks at the two-way glass again. In the reflection, the stovepipe hat rides a silhouette behind him for a blink, then it's just the camera boom.

JACOB
God. Or something that wanted me to
think so.

Hastings softens. He's seen too many versions of this. He slides over a coffee.

HASTINGS
Drink. Helps you stay with us.

Jacob takes it; his hand trembles. The cup rattles a beat like a slow SOS.

TOMPKINS
(a different tack)
Tell me about the jar. Why label it
"Slices"?

JACOB
Ryan's idea. Each day you're awake,
you "slice" off another piece of
yourself. Joke's on us: we were
deli meat by day eight.

He almost smiles. It breaks.

TOMPKINS clocks the humor reflex, gently pushes.

TOMPKINS
Mia. What did she say before—

JACOB
She said we're meaner without
sleep. She said symmetry is
survival. She didn't want to be...
wrong.

He can't finish.

HASTINGS
You and Mia. Anything there?

JACOB
No. I wanted—
(beat)
I wanted them all to be okay.

Tompkins leans in, quieter.

TOMPKINS
Why the hood, Jacob?

JACOB
(to the table)
If I can't see my face, maybe I'm
not the one doing it.

Silence hums. Hastings slides the key toward the cuff, thinks
better of it, keeps it.

HASTINGS
We found something buried by a
pine. Shallow. Like a dog trying to
hide a bone. We're sending divers
in. We'd like to find what you
wanted to "bring home."

Jacob's gaze lifts. A tiny smile that is not joy.

JACOB
It'll sing to them. The lake holds
things.

Tompkins and Hastings share a look: the gas station clerk's
line has made a circle without knowing it.

EXT. LAKE SHORE — DAWN

A search line in waders. FLAGGED STAKES mark disturbed earth near roots like knuckles. A DIVE TEAM breaches, hauling a bag between them. The shore is very quiet in that way sound gets before a scream.

Hastings watches, lighter unlit in his palm.

Tompkins approaches, vibrating at a frequency higher than humans should.

TOMPKINS
He's not sleeping tonight.

HASTINGS
Neither are you.

TOMPKINS
No.

Hastings means it kindly. It isn't kind.

INT. INTERROGATION — LATER THAT NIGHT

Jacob sags. The coffee sits untouched. A fly tests the fluorescent, fries itself on a pop. Jacob flinches like it's a gunshot.

HASTINGS
You holding up?

JACOB
I can't tell if my eyes are open.

Tompkins reaches for the cuff key. Hastings gives the smallest nod — go on.

As the key touches metal— Jacob's FREE HAND moves on instinct. It slips under Hastings' jacket, finds the HOLSTER like it's been there before.

TOMPKINS
Jacob, don't—

JACOB
(soft, like church)
Sleep when you're dead.

BLAM.

The shot slams the room flat. Paper jumps. The fly drops. Jacob folds, taking the gun with him as if he can bury it in the floor. Blood yawns slowly across tile.

For a breath, everyone forgets to breathe.

Hastings' face is stone. Tompkins' hands hover in the air, unsure what shape to take.

Outside the glass, the HAT reflection rides someone's head. Or it's a camera hood. Or it's just an angle that will never repeat.

EXT. LAKE HOUSE — SUNSET

Crime scene tape whispers. Numbered YELLOW TENTS bloom like a tulip field from hell. Technicians move with the choreography of quiet people who do loud jobs.

Inside, the DEER HEAD lies in a paper bag with eyes like pennies.

INT. LAKE HOUSE — CONTINUOUS

Tompkins moves through the wreckage, camera at her hip. The COOKIE JAR sits on the mantle, cracked. Inside: cash damp with lake air, a SAINT MEDAL, two SMART RINGS, a PLASTIC DOMINO.

On the coffee table, Jacob's BIBLE, spined open. Underlined: Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Tompkins photographs the verse. The GREEN LIGHT overhead flickers, steadies. She flinches anyway.

EXT. LAKE — BLUE HOUR

Water like slate. A LOON calls. Then, faint under it — the CHOIR from the opening, detuned. Maybe it's wind ate by the treeline. Maybe it's the HUM.

INT. TOMPKINS' CAR — NIGHT

Tompkins sits in the dark, engine off. She sets a timer on her phone: 10:00. It begins to count down.

We stay in her face for too long, the way grief makes time weird. Her eyes close—

—ALARM SHRIEKS.

She gasps herself awake, kills it. Her chest hurts. She stares at the lake house.

In an upstairs window, for a heartbeat, a TALL THIN FIGURE in a stovepipe hat leans forward like it wants to be seen. It recedes. Or a curtain moved. Or her eyes are making cartoons out of shapes.

TOMPKINS
(whisper)
Stay awake.

She starts the car.

EXT. LAKE ROAD — CONTINUOUS

The car's taillights slide away. The HUM stays. It might be crickets. It might be a data center a mile through the trees. It might be the leftover sound of something sacred leaving the room.

INT. LAKE HOUSE — SAME

The camera we didn't know was on — the dime-sized RED LED
Chloe taped over — glows THROUGH the tape. Just a pinprick.

In the corner of the frame, barely there, a HOODED FIGURE
(white hoodie backwards, little eye holes) stands like an
idea somebody had and then forgot to let go of.

The image DRIFTS out of focus as if something breathed on the
lens.

CUT TO BLACK.

TITLE: SLICES OF DEATH