

Part I

Once upon a lil' while ago, in a summer cabin at the base of the Smoky Mountains, the youth ministry team of New Life Baptist Church held its summer retreat. The event was led by Pastor Jeff Burrows. While in wait for the arrival of the youth ministers, he took a reconnaissance hike to scout the area. The young ministers arrived, 8 total, as Pastor Jeff was off on his hike. Martha & Mary began to prep for dinner, the sky showing it was about an hour until sunset. James & John dueled on Madden. James took the Saints. John took the Cowboys, the Lord's Team. Jacob & Rachel went searching for WiFi, or to make out, nobody cared. Steven took a nap & Seth caught up on 2nd Corinthians.

About 35-45 minutes passed into the evening when Jacob & Rachel came rushing back into the cabin short of breath. Jacob was first to catch it, "They got 'em, those diabolical disgusting demons!"

"Who got who?" James asked, not turning his head from the screen as Drew Brees drops another TD bomb over the Cowboys no Defense.

Rachel caught her breath and her senses, "The No-Eyed Zombies got Jeff!" John paused the game during the extra point.

Rachel continued, "We saw him on a ridge with the sun at his back just as it was setting. I took my phone out to take a picture of the majestic scene." Rachel stopped her story in shock of what she was planning to say next, but Jacob took her hand and finished it.

"Damn Devil Demons crowded behind him, casting a dark shadow on Jeff's benevolent soul. He must have felt their stankin' breath over his shoulder because he turned around and their hands went straight for his face as they dragged him away and he was screaming, he was screaming..."

Rachel whispers "...*my eyes, my eyes.*"

John unpaused the game. James misses wide left.

Martha steps out of the kitchen to set the table.

"Have y'all heard from Jeff? We thought he would be back by now."

"Tell 'em bout the zombies, Rachel!" John shouts sarcastically as he tries to mount a comeback.

"Wait," Martha freezes, "You mean the No-Eyed Zombies?"

"We heard him crying for his eyes as they dragged him away," Rachel tells her.

Martha calls her sister, "MARY!"

"It's almost done!" Mary shouts back.

Martha responds, “Zombies got Jeff!”

“NO-EYED ZOMBIES?”

“What do you think!”

Mary came out of the kitchen with the chili in the pot and set it on the table with a folded cloth beneath it. “This needs time to cool, Martha can you grab the fixins?” Mary asked calmly. Mary sat at the table, clasped her hands, and began to silently pray. She said “Amen” and looked up.

Jacob asked, “Shouldn’t we wait to say grace together?”

Mary told him “That wasn’t for the food, that was for Pastor Jeff, nobody’s ever survived the No-Eyed Zombies without becoming one.”

Martha came out with the rest of the fixins for the chili, put 'em on the table, and sat next to her sister. They hold hands. “James, turn that game off!” Martha yelled.

“Beat the CPU,” James got up and sat at the table.

“Your loss Sucka!” John boasts as he starts his game winning drive, “It’s time to feed Zeke. Fuck yo’ chili. I ordered pizza.”

Mary ignores John’s ignorance, “Martha, can you please get Steven and Seth? I’ma finna bless the food before it gets cold.”

Martha leaves to get them. She pounds on Steven’s door, but he’s a heavy sleeper. “Steven wake yo’ monkey ass up!” No answer. She moves to the next door. *Duh Duh Duh* ... “Seth bring yo lazy ass out here!” Steady stream of smoke seeps through the door crack as you hear *Kendrick’s Bitch Don’t Kill My Vibe* in the background. “Not hungry yet!” Seth shouts back.

“They ain’t coming,” Martha told them as she returned.

“We ain’t got all day,” Mary said as she grabbed Martha, while James adds “Foods getting cold, and zombies a comin’.”

The rest held hands and bowed their heads as Mary blessed the food.

“Good food. Good meat. Good God, let’s eat.”

They all said “Amen,” then filled their bowls as John waited for pizza.

BLOOD (in the water)

Mary begins the tale of the origin of the No-Eyed Zombies.

“Legend has it that once there was a fisherman, a one-eyed fisherman. Another legend has that he lost the eye when his daddy put out a cigarette on it. Anyways, this fisherman had an only son. Today was the day that his son would catch his first fish.”

“Now today was his lucky day, his father told him before they left that day. See, the son hasn’t yet caught a fish. Now when they got to the pond, the pair lined their rods and the father busted out his magical bait box filled with grasshoppers.

‘With this you will catch your first fish. Just have faith, because your first bait will be your lucky bait that you will be sure to catch fish with for your whole life.’ The father hooked their lines with the ol’ 5 twist and baited their hooks with grasshoppers. He handed his son his rod and they cast deep into the murky waters. ‘Believe me, today will be the day you catch your first fish.’ They sat there for hours.

The boy was losing patience, then the daddy got a bite and pulled it in with a steady reel. So smooth. ‘Just you wait boy, you’re next. I got a feeling.’ The father reassures as he takes a decent sized bass off the hook. He turns to put the fish in the cooler by the tree behind them.

After watching his father catch yet another fish in front of him, the boy gains not encouragement, but doubt. He reels up his line to check his hook. The grasshopper is still there. ‘First bait, lucky bait? We’ll see about that.’ The boy said in disgust as he takes the bug off the hook and tosses it aside. ‘I don’t even need bait.’ The boy swings his rod back over his head to cast his line.

The father turns back from the cooler and sees the sun setting behind the hills overlooking the pond. ‘Lord, I hope the boy catches something soon, it’s bout time to go,’ he whispered. Suddenly, the boy’s errant hook catches the 1-eyed fisherman’s only eye. The boy casts it deep into the murky waters. The father screams in pain. The boy screams in glee, for as soon as it hits the water, he catches a bite.

The son reels in the bass as the father blindly stumbles to him. ‘Daddy, I caught my first fish. I didn’t even need no stinking bait,’ the boy boasts.

‘You definitely had bait. It was my eye son,’ the father said calmly as the boy looked down the empty socket in shock. ‘Member when I told you that your first bait will be your lucky bait?,’ the father asked as he reached into his back pocket. The boy nodded hesitantly.

The father grabbed his son by the back of the head and pulled his trusty leatherman. He flipped the blade, dug into his son’s skull and popped out one eyeball, then the other. He cut the optic nerves, dropping the eyes into his hand. The boy wailed and cried blood as the father prepared their lines with their new lucky bait.

‘Quit crying son,’ the father said as he handed him his rod. ‘From now on this is how we fish.’

Ever since, they've been popping out the eyes of lost victims to use as bait, converting them into an army of No-Eyed Zombies to collect even more eyes for them." Mary concluded.

"BOOOO!! That was the dumbest story I have ever heard in my life. Ain't no such thing as No-Eyed Zombies, y'all kin feed y'all selves, Mary's chili will give you the shits anyways," John announces from the couch to nobody's care.

"So why do they only hunt at night?" Rachel asks as she tops her bowl with cheese and onions.

Martha answered, "They can't see, but can sense the setting of the sun as the cold creeps over the land. They ain't got no eyes, so don't need no light to guide them. Some say they can smell flesh from up to a mile away. They're sneaky little bastards, too. They find ways to lure campers outside their tents at night, by mimicking wounded animals or crying children. And when people leave their tents to investigate in the darkness is when they attack. Most never even see 'em coming, or it's the last thing they see."

"We'll be safe here right, they don't break into cabins at night, do they?" Rachel nervously asks.

"They ain't known to, but I wouldn't put it past em," Martha responded hesitantly.

The group tried to take their minds off the No-Eyed Zombies and the fate of their Pastor as they dug into their bowls of Mary's chili that wasn't half bad, forget what John says.

After a while, a knock at the front door. Everybody at the table freezes. Rachel whispers "...zombies."

Another knock at the door, but this time it is followed with a raspy voice, "Domino's Pizza!"

"Pizza's here, bitches!" John skips to the door and opens it, only to look down the empty sockets of a No-Eyed Zombie holding a pizza.

John was frozen in terror. He couldn't believe his eyes (or lack thereof). The delivery-man turned No-Eyed Zombie snatched John by the shirt and tossed him toward a hidden horde that pounced from the bushes. Jacob was quick to dash to the door and kick the delivery zombie right in his chest before slamming the door shut and locking it.

The ladies at the table listened as John screamed "*My Eyes, My Eyes!*" as if he was cast into the eternal furnace of fire, followed by the sound of zombies gnawing on flesh.

GOD

“So if they don’t convert them, they’re devoured. I knew they couldn’t feed an army with just two fish,” Mary plainly stated.

“We best hide while they’re eatin’, the back rooms don’t have windows.” Martha got up and led the group, with Jacob guarding the ladies from the rear, to the rooms at the back of the cabin. She furiously pounded on Steven’s door. “Steven, wake your monkey ass up!”

Mary shook her head and sighed. “Boy sleeps like the dead, the only one that can wake him is Lord Jesus.” Mary knocked on Seth’s door right next to Steven’s. “Seth, open up.”

“Still not hungry!”

“Just open the door, Seth!”

He closed his Bible, got up from his bed, put it next to his bong still smoking with warm ash, turned down the Kendrick, and answered the door.

The group rushed in. Rachel huddled in the corner. Jacob soon followed to comfort her after locking the door. Martha & Mary sat on Seth’s bed as he stood there bewildered before chiming in, “Care to explain?”

“Just sit down,” Mary told him.

Seth sat at his desk and began to pack a fresh bowl. His anger was calmed by either the Kush or Corinthians, or the fact that he wanted the sisters on his bed the entire time. Seth took a deep breath filled with bong smoke.

“The Zombies are after us Seth,” Mary told him.

“No-Eyed Zombies?” Seth asked.

“No-Eyed Zombies,” she confirmed

“I told y’all we shouldn’t come here. Was it the two or the horde?” Seth continued with his questioning.

“The Horde.” Martha said.

“Have they gotten any eyes yet?”

Rachel in the corner began to cry out. “They got Jeff’s eyes, we saw them!”

“John’s too, they’re still eating him,” Jacob told him.

Seth remained calm. “OK we can get through this. They won’t come in here when the lights are on, it blinds them.”

“That don’t make no sense, how can they get blinded with no eyes?” Martha asked.

“Go on ahead an’ ask them ‘bout it.” Seth started to get impatient. If they would have believed him in the first place, they wouldn’t be on this trip.

“Where’s Steven?” Seth asked.

“Sleeping like a stone,” Martha answered.

“What about James?”

Martha looked at Mary. Rachel at Jacob. “JAMES!”

Apparently, Mary’s chili always gives him the shits and he got up to relieve himself halfway through dinner. That’s when the lights shut off. The No-Eyed Zombies must’ve found the circuit breaker. The lights went out on James mid-wipe.

“Man, now how imma tell when I’m done?” James asked himself.

James was caught in the age old dilemma: How do blind people know when to quit wiping? “Guess I gotta have faith.” He flushed the job, felt his way to the sink to wash his hands. “Jeff must be spending the offerings on Jordans again, not paying the bills round here.”

James made his way back to the dining room table led by some sparse moonlight to finish his meal. He could see the outline of a silhouette sitting in his chair, finishing his chili.

“John, you couldn’t wait for your pizza, now you’re finishing my bowl?”

He grabbed the silhouette behind by the shoulder and looked into its eyes. But they weren’t there.

From darkness he was surrounded by the horde. He kicked the first zombie square in the scrotum. Dropped him. Then another, dropped him too. But there were just too many. James was overwhelmed, taken down, and soon consumed by the darkness.

Mortal Man (Part II)

“*My Eyes! My Eyes!*”, they heard James scream.

“And another one bites the dust,” Seth lamented.

“Seth, you should use your phone to call for help,” Rachel suggested.

“No service in this cabin, you know this.”

“So how’s the music playing?” Rachel nagged.

“I downloaded a few albums before the trip.” Seth used the light from his phone to help him pack another bowl.

“How can you even smoke at a time like this?” Rachel scolded.

“How can I not?” Seth offered the greens to the ladies on his bed. Martha shook it off. Mary was down. She took the bong, filled it up, and cleared it out.

“Pass the Duchee,” Jacob called from the corner next to Rachel, who disapproved. Jacob didn’t care. He took his hit, then passed it back to Seth. Seth finished off the bowl, lifted his head, and blew it out into a vent in the ceiling that led outside, as if he was making a burnt offering to the Lord.

Jacob was a little lightheaded. “What kinda bud was that?” he asked.

“It’s that OG.”

“Original Gangsta?”

“Naw, it’s On God.”

“Y’all just gonna sit here and smoke while we are under attack by Zombies?” Rachel detested the use of marijuana. She and a lot of the Church considered it sin. Martha was also in that camp.

“It’s probably in our best interests if we were all clear headed to best deal with this situation,” Martha stated like she had some authority.

“Well, since I was smoking before either y’all or the zombies showed up. If y’all don’t like it y’all, can just git out and talk to them about it.” Seth offered.

The two dissenting females had no further objection and sat in darkness and silence as Seth pulled the bong out again and packed another bowl to offer it as a sacrament to those participating.

After Seth exhales his hit like the first, he reconsiders Martha’s statement. “You know, you’re right Martha,” Seth acknowledges, “our heads should be clear. This OG Kush clears the mind

AND opens the heart. I'm sorry about saying you can go talk to the zombies. That makes me more blind than they. Are you sure you wouldn't like a bowl?"

"This is my lot in life," Martha reflected. "I came to this camp to learn the Gospel with my sister to preach to children. I go my whole life avoiding the temptations of drugs, alcohol, sex, & rock n' roll. This is the day? This is the day that the Lord has made? Our Pastor and two brothers murdered by Ruthless Godless No-Eyed Zombies. We are trapped in darkness. The only light I see is off your phone Seth. Mary, I can't see us surviving this." Martha grabs her younger sister by the hand. Mary can't see the tears in Martha's eyes, but can hear it in her voice.

"Mary, I'm so sorry that I brought you out here. I can't believe this is how we gon' die."

Mary holds her sister's hand tighter and leans in closer to her. "Martha, don't blame yourself for any of this. Most people leave this world alone. It doesn't matter to me if we go to heaven or hell. I'm just glad we're together."

Mary holds Martha as she cries in the darkness on Seth's bed. Mary takes the bong from Seth and hands it to her sister and lights it for her. Martha wipes her eyes, takes the hit. The smoke filled her lungs and warmed her heart. She coughed it out violently.

"Damn Gina!" Seth exclaimed.

Jacob nudges Rachel, "You're up next, babe."

"Don't tempt me when we are on death's doorstep," Rachel protests.

"C'mon," Jacob begs, "It's OG Kush. It's literally On God."

"Don't use the Lord's name in vain, Jacob! Unless Jesus Christ Himself comes down to save us right now, we're all gonna die, and you're all probably going straight to hell! What's the point of going to heaven alone? Pack that bowl Brother Seth, and I'll see you in hell."

Seth already packed it while they were arguing. The bong was passed to Rachel in the corner. Jacob does the honor of sparking the flame. Her inhale draws the flame to the ganja and ignites it. For that moment the burning bowl was the only light in the room like a candle. She clears it, but her virgin lungs can't hold it in and she breaks into a fit of coughing and weezing. Jacob holds her and pats her back until the fit subsides. "How do you feel?" he asks.

"I feel... at peace."

Kendrick's FEAR played as they wait for the No-Eyed Zombies.

FEAR

The peace didn't last long. It was soon replaced with tension as the group could hear in the darkness the approaching footsteps of the Zombie horde. The rumble in the hallway stopped and they could feel the evil lurking just on the other side of the door. The handle of the door made a jiggling sound, but the door didn't open. They felt the evil pass, but the horde didn't stray too far before reaching Steven's unlocked room. This time, the zombies were met by no resistance and lurched in unnoticed.

A guilty relief fell over the group with a 'better him than us mentality' that nobody dared mention. They waited for the now familiar cry of the victim for his eyes. Martha confessed to Mary, "I thought his room was locked. I thought I checked."

"It's not your fault," her sister assured her.

The cry for eyes was not heard, but instead, a massive ruckus of bodies that could be felt through the wall that carried back into the hallway, with screams, shouts, wailing, and hissing. For the next three and a half minutes, right until the song ended, it sounded like a bloodbath. After the last body dropped, there was a knock, then a familiar voice.

"How y'all holdin' up in there?"

It was Pastor Jeff.

Jacob got up to answer the door.

"Jacob," Rachel called from her corner, "It could be a trap."

"They lure their victims to their doom," Martha added.

Another knock, "Don't act like I don't know y'all hiding in there, It reeks of Kush out here."

"Man, that's Jeff, ain't no Zombies know 'bout this dank-a-lank," Seth wholeheartedly believed.

"I'm opening it," Jacob decided.

"Are you sure?" Rachel pleaded.

"No, but I have faith."

Jacob unlocked the door and opened it.

Dying of Thirst

Standing right there in front of Jacob was none other than their beloved Pastor, Jeff Burrows. He was covered in dirt, mud, and blood, and when Jacob squinted to make out his face, there was just enough ambient moonlight to see that he had no eyes.

Jacob slammed the door right back in his face, then locked it.

“Jeff’s a No-Eyed Zombie!” he announced.

Another knock, “Not Cool, Jacob!” No-Eyed Jeff shouted.

Seth asked Jacob, “Was it Jeff or not?”

“Definitely, but he had no eyes,” Jacob confirmed.

“Just cuz he ain’t got no eyes don’t make him a zombie,” Mary sided with Seth.

“Open the door, Jacob. If it’s Jeff, I’m sure he is thirsty by now,” she commanded.

“Seth, do you have any water in here?” she asked.

“A few bottles.”

“Gimme one.”

Mary took a bottle from Seth and opened the door herself and handed Jeff the bottle.

“Drink this Pastor, I’m sure you’re thirsty.”

“Thank you, Mary.”

Just before he drank, he handed Jacob a trusty leatherman with an exposed bloody blade.

“Do us a favor and go round the side of the cabin and flip the breaker. You can stab any zombies I mighta missed with this in the neck. I found that to be their weakness.”

Jacob, with his head hung low, didn’t speak and obeyed, ashamed for first turning him away.

Pastor Jeff chugged the bottle.

Martha asked the nagging question, “What happened to Steven?”

“He was slain in the melee,” he sighed, “young man fought to the death, God bless his soul.” He then asked, “Did y’all lose any others?”

“Zombies got John and James,” Rachel told him, still not sure if she could trust whom she could still not see. That’s when the lights came on and they could clearly see their filthy Church leader, and Rachel couldn’t help gasping.

Pastor Jeff withdrew from the light. Seth had a pair of sunglasses that he handed to Martha. She got up to put them on his face. The sisters led him in and when Jacob returned from his mission, Pastor Jeff led them in prayer.

“Heavenly Father, be with the souls of our departed brethren, James, John, and Steven. We fear not those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. But rather Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. I pray that you bless and protect the souls of our brothers, and cast the souls of that pile of No-Eyed Zombies in the hallway straight to the fiery hell which they deserve. Yes, they deserve to die, Father, and I hope they burn in hell! All this, we pray in Jesus’ holy name, Amen.”

They all said “Amen,” and Pastor Jeff took a seat on the bed between Mary and Martha.

“Seth, would you be so kind to pack me a bowl?” Pastor Jeff asked, “It’s for the cataracts.”

Seth laughed, “Sure, but please explain how you found your way back.”

“Don’t it say in Corinthians to walk by faith, not by sight?”

“Somewhere in there it do,” Seth packed it & passed it.

“Well that, and I could smell that OG Kush from a mile away.” Pastor Jeff ripped it.

“Now that’s On God.”

LOVE

“Pastor, do you know where Steven’s body ended up?” Rachel asked.

“He fell in the hallway after wrestling two of those savages off me when they pinned me to the wall. I heard his neck snap and he dropped.”

“I’ll wrap his body in a spare blanket and carry him outside, let’s go Jacob.” Rachel and Jacob got up to leave the room. Before they exited, Rachel turned back, “Do we have any shovels?”

“They’re in the shed,” Jeff said.

“Good, we’ll dig the graves tonight.”

“But babe,” Jacob interjected, “there could be more.”

“Then we’ll beat their blind asses to death and dig more graves.”

They left to tend to Steven’s body.

“Rachel’s not gonna be the same after this,” Martha told Mary.

“None of us will be,” Mary responded.

They left next to gather the bodies of James and John.

Only Seth and the Pastor remained in the room.

“Have you eaten yet?” Jeff asked.

“Not yet, I still can’t work up an appetite,”

“You need to eat to keep up your recovery,” Jeff reminded him.

“This whole ordeal is just exhausting,” Seth sighed. “I thought recovering from cancer would be the hardest thing I’d have to do. Instead it was to sit back here and listen to friends die while too weak to do anything to stop it.”

“Now is not the time to lose faith.”

“I’m not losing faith in God. I know God exists. I’m just not convinced that He still loves us.”

“He loves us so much that He gave us His only begotten Son.”

“I really don’t want to hear that Bible Bumpersticker 3:16 Bullshit right now.”

“So would you like me to speak plainly then?”

“Be real with me,” Seth answered.

The Pastor took off his shades, leaned forward and ‘looked’ deep into Seth’s soul and told him, “The last thing I saw before those godless zombies gouged my eyes out was the sun go down behind the Smoky Mountains one last time.”

Jeff began to reminisce, “I felt their stankin’ breath over my shoulder. I knew they was out there. I was lookin’ for ‘em. They just found me first.”

“Sneaky lil’ bastards, ain’t they?”

“Damn skippy,” Jeff confirmed as he continued recollecting. “I didn’t even care to face them until they grabbed me. The Lord was too busy showing me the magnificence of His creation in just a glimpse of His Glory. All these years of being a Pastor and preaching the Word of God, I myself failed to see the Love of God in this majestic world He has bestowed upon us. I felt that evil lurking behind me. It was too familiar. It’s the same evil that lurks in the corners of my heart that I try to hide in the darkness. The darkness overcame and consumed me, blinded me so I will never see the beautiful light of day again. They threw me off that ridge and I fell hitting every ugly stick on the way down to the dark empty pit that I deserved to die in. Every branch I hit flashed across my mind each and every lie I ever told to every woman that convinced them I loved them and every dime I took from the tithes to spend on Jordans. When I crashed to the bottom all I could remember seeing was that shining light of the Lord that I couldn’t see til I was blinded. And you’re sitting back here wondering if God really loves us when we are surrounded by it. We are the ones who fail to see it.”

Seth listened, considered it, but shook it off. “I know you deserve what you got. We know you’ve done plenty evil. You got blinded, but our brothers got murdered. Where is the justice in that? They might have been sinners, but they were teenagers. The only thing that they might have been guilty of is pitching woo on the Sabbath. Death by zombie is a cruel, heartless demise and if that is all part of the Ultimate Plan, I don’t want to be a part of it. Does the evil ever end? Steven had the biggest heart out of anybody I ever knew. He always had my back. He had your back Pastor. Now he’s gone, but I guess that’s the Lord’s plan, in all His Infinite Wisdom.”

“It seems you’re not taking a liking to what the Lord has planned,” Jeff noticed.

“Damn straight,” Seth confirmed.

“How often you read Bible?”

“Daily.”

“So where does it say you gotta like it?”

Seth didn’t want to answer so Jeff rambled on.

“When I fell to the base of the ridge I was disoriented, but could tell I was near a pond. I walked along the rim of it and could hear two men fishing. I asked them if they could help guide me back to the cabin. They asked me if I was blind. I said ‘Can’t you see I ain’t got no eyes!’ They

said they didn't neither, so they couldn't guide me back, but they could teach me to fish. I knew who they were. The older one said 'First I'll need to help collect bait and the best bait around these parts are the eyes of the lost.' He told his son to hand me the blade. The son walked up and pressed this here trusty Leatherman into my chest and I took it. The father told me I'll be a valuable addition to the army of the blind. So I asked 'Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light?'"

"What does that even mean, Pastor?"

"Just some gangsta ass shit outta *Book of Amos* to say before slitting some blind niggas' throats."

"That's all of them, you killed them all. Would you like another bowl to take the edge off?" Seth offered.

"Does the Pope shit in the woods?"

They both knew the answer was 'Yes,' so Seth packed it & Jeff smoked it.

Seth started to exhale, "Ya know, I think I'm 'bout done guessing what the Lord has planned for us. The evil that's been lurking these mountains for the past decade got done smote and this sticky-icky right here led your way back."

"Do you feel God's Love yet?" Jeff asked.

"Not sure 'bout that, but I am starting to get hungry."

"Good, I'll have Mary warm you up a bowl of that chili I smelt on my way in here..."

... MARY!"

THE END