

## The Apocalypse Family

By Peter Burke

### -Prologue-

*“I remember before when the world was bright. My memories faint, like a fantasy. Yet I know it was real..all of it. No one could dream of a world so beautiful, at least not now. Not since the world was swallowed by fire, not since **that** day.”*

“Sweetie, I need you to wake up, ” my mother's voice soothingly called out to me. Her hand gently moved the tangle of bedding from my face. I let out a yawn in response, slowly starting to move.

“What Mom? Is it time for school?”

“No honey, you're not going to school today. You and I are gonna go on a little trip to see your dad.” Her voice was soft as always, but the words came out with a pain to them. “Come on Kathy get changed, we **have** to hurry.” she spurred me, not allowing me time to question what was happening. She already had clothing prepared for me sitting on the edge of my bed, there were jeans, a t-shirt, a light jacket, and hiking boots all a flurry of blacks, grays, and greens. *These clothes looked awful!*

“Mom I can't wear this, I'd look terrible,” I said. I began making my way to my closet when my mother's hand tightly grabbed my forearm pulling me towards her.

“We don't have time for this Kathy!” she said piercingly “Get changed now.” Her eyes locked with me in an icy stare.

I opened my mouth to protest more but my mother was already gone. Sighing in defeat I changed into the dreary ensemble. Making my way to the door I stopped and quickly crossed back to my bedside table. *Can't believe I almost forgot this!*

The silver charms jingle as I slide the bracelet on my wrist; I never left home without it. It was a treasured gift from my oldest and dearest friend Jenny.

“A charm for every year of a friendship, that way we never forget a single memory.” She had told me. 10 glittering charms now hang heavy from the chain. Exiting my room I made my way down the hallway to our living room. Thoughts of Jenny had made me forget the horrid tension I currently found myself in. Rounding the corner of the hallway I came into the living room. I found my mother stoned-faced waiting by the door.

“Are you ready to go?” She asked.

Meekly I replied, “Yeah, I'm ready.”

“Then let's go,” she said, holding out her hand. *I'm 14. Since when did I need hand-holding?*

Yet something stopped me from refusing perhaps the terror my mother held behind her eye, or maybe it was the fear of god she had boomed down upon me. Whatever the reason I grasped her hand, and she was half holding my hand and half dragging me towards the door.

Swinging it open soft rays of sun blurred my vision and we moved towards the car. Its glossy black paint shimmered in the morning sun. Quickly my mother sat me in the back seat and placed a large luggage bag next to me. *A bag that big just for a trip to Dad?*

Looking out the window, there was light coming from every house. Illuminating the street still dark from the fading night sky. *Why was everyone up so early?* Some of them were packing their cars frantically, while other doors were closed shut. No one else was on the road yet, somehow my parents had got a head start.

“What's happening Mom?”

“We are going on a trip to Dad's work Kathy,” she said coldly, not turning to face me.

“But where is everyone else going?” I was confused. *Maybe there was a disaster coming, do we need to get to high ground?* “Are they going to the mountains too?”

My mother's voice faltered as she spoke “No honey, I don't think they are.” *Why won't she tell me what was going on?*

“Where are they going then, Mom?” I pushed hungry for answers.

“I don't know.”

Unsatisfied, I continued “Then why is everyone leaving?”

“**Enough** questions Kathy, we will explain when we get there,” she shouted, her voice rising hot with anger, it ended the conversation. A few moments passed before she spoke again calmly, this time “I promise you everything will be alright.” *Would you even tell me if it wasn't?*

After that, we drove in silence until we reached our destination. As we drove through the town, I saw many cars packed with bags; people frantically throwing anything they could inside. As we reached the highway we passed the welcome sign that stood on the edge of town.

### ***Colorado Springs the Olympic City***

As my home disappears from view the road becomes quiet. It seemed we were one of the first houses awake, and the first to leave. *Yet why, why were we leaving?* None of this had made any sense. So I resign myself to sitting, impatiently waiting for us to arrive. I looked out and saw the light alive in the window of every house far and near. They looked like shooting stars as we drove past them. Appearing and disappearing within an instant each a little flash of light streaming past the window.

Slowly the lights begin to fade, becoming fewer and farther between. The landscape changed and the roads sloped and twisted, the beautiful landscape swirled all around me. The

great rocky mountains towered above us, yet all I could think about was what my mother was hiding.

As the road began to level out, the path became straight. The trees were fading around us and we came to a halt in a line of cars all waiting to enter a dark tunnel heading into the mountain. Above the tunnel, in dark letter,s it said "Cheyenne Mountain Complex " I had of course heard of this place. Schools took tours up to this place, it was an old military base or something.

We continued forward slowly as the tunnel curved around the road, one lane each way. As we enter the morning light feels distant from the dark tunnel we faced. Continuing forward slowly we come to a gate. Three men stood inside a dinky box beside it black point only accentuating the old, aging wood. As we approach the men look up. Two of them are dressed in army fatigues each brandishing a rifle, the third man is dressed in a suit. *He looks oddly familiar.* The man in the suit pushes past the others and out of the box. *Dad!* Somehow everything feels a little better, a little safer.

"Susan! Kathy! Thank god you're alright," he cries his voice moments away from breaking. My mother without thinking burst out of the car throwing herself into my fathers arms. Her muffled words inaudible with her head buried in his chest.

"It's alright honey we're almost through the worst, stay strong for just a little longer." Turning to face the other men he speaks again "This is my wife and daughter may we be allowed to continue on our way"

"ID **now** please," he asked briskly.

"You may pass, good luck Howard and godspeed to you all," he said grimly, raising the gate barring our way. I slide into the back seat as my father takes over the driver's seat.

Past the gate we began to descend, the mountain slowly consuming us. LED lights along the floors flickering as the car passes. With every second we go deeper, I search for the words but come up empty. Then the tunnel begins to shake; vibrations coursing through the floor. Booming echoes course through the hall drown out everything else.

“What's happening?” I scream my voice barely audible over the thunder noise that has flooded the tunnel. I feel the car accelerate under me throwing me against my seat My mother turns around to face me, eyes watery, and she grabs my hand trembling.

“Everything is going to be alright I **promise.**” Staring into my eyes I feel her fear and love; it overwhelms me. *Does she even believe what she's saying?*

“What's happening,” I cry. No longer able to hold myself together, tears streaming down my face. “I’m scared Mom, are we gonna be OK?”

She looks at me solemnly; tears dripping like syrup. Her voice is soft when she speaks but it rings clear above the thundering vibrations. She grabs my hand and squeezes it tight

“Just remember how much we love you. We would never let anything hurt you.” *Then why don't I believe you?* Suddenly the car comes screeching to a halt. My father throws his arm around my mother as gravity throws her forward like a ragdoll. I feel my seatbelt dig into my chest, sending every ounce of air fly out of my lungs.

I start to recover gasping for air. We are now in line 3 cars in front of us, and nothing but an empty road behind us. The thunderous noise still hums around us but the vibrations seem to have ceased. *How deep underground are we?* At the front sits another pillbox with a little gate. Confused and in shock, I sit quietly waiting to see what comes next. My parents don't speak much, simply preparing some papers as we inch forward. Every second burns in my brain, desperate for an answer, desperate to feel safe. There is one car in front of us now it pulls up

slowly as another military man approaches. There are 3 men in total they do not carry rifles like before instead they each carry a pistol holstered on their hips.

A balding man with two young boys steps out of the car. They hand their keys and papers to one of the men in front of them. He looks over a clipboard he makes a few marks before nodding the man through. He hands the keys to one of the men behind him. Who fumbles with the car, before driving it past the gate turning left beyond sight. The man and his children were then guided to the right and away from my prying eyes. *What was this place?* The man with the clipboard waves us forward.

Slinking slowly we stop the car, and all slowly begin to exit the car. My father hands his keys to the clipboard man along with some papers.

“Thank god we made it, is everything in order?” my father began seriously. “Please let's not make this take any longer then it needs to.”

“Yes sir, everything's in order. Please we will be closing up the main entrance now so hurry in **quickly**.” He responded gruffly, perhaps a little anxious to get inside himself.

My parents seemed not to notice, they were otherwise preoccupied. Grabbing my mother's hand we rushed forward following the path laid out for us. I'm not sure how long we walked but next, I remember we were at the back of a horde of people.

It stretched as far as I could see, the people waited anxiously, nerves on edge. Most people my age looked terrified, the younger kids looked confused, like me. I'm not sure which was worse. It annoyed me to feel associated with children. 8 flat notes played out of speakers in the ceiling, then came a robotic voice, an optimistic monotone.

**“Welcome to the Cheyenne Mountain Nuclear Shelter. We are currently preparing your temporary living arrangements while we assess the likelihood of a nuclear attack and**

**potential damage to the surrounding area from the fallout. Please be patient and we will help you all get comfortable shortly. Staff is currently handing out food and water to those in need. Do not be afraid to ask. We are here to help.”** A slight click followed as the recording ended, and the same flat notes played again. **“DO DO... DO DO... DO DO... DO DO”**

The announcement ended and suddenly I realized my parents were staring at me. For how long who knows?

I opened my mouth and tried to speak but all that came out was a strained stutter. My mother finally burst into tears wrapping her arms around me as she did.

“I’m so sorry honey, everything's gonna be alright. We’ll be safe here, there's nothing to worry about. She spoke through the tears, her arms squeezing me tight. *Where her lie for me or herself?* I looked over at my father, his face solemn as ever but even he looked afraid. Our eyes met and I could feel the fear behind his eyes. Then he smiled, bent down on his knees, eyes still locked with mine.

“Just remember we still have each other, we still have our family.” He wrapped his arms around us and leaned his head against mine. “I don’t know what the future holds but we’ll survive to see it I promise.” My family and all I had left in the world stood huddled for a while. We do not pray, and we hold no faith, but at that moment we prayed, and the whole world prayed.

*It's kinda funny, isn't it? The only time the world is united is seconds before they kill each other. IAll praying the bombs didn't go off, that it was all just some kinda joke.*

A screeching alarm plays out of the speaker, and I hear the clattering of doors far ahead. Then those same annoying 8 notes.

**“Your temporary live arrangements have been prepared, please proceed to your designated place.”** And again they played.

My parents rose from our little huddle and proceeded to follow the swarm of people that moved beyond the reach of my eyes. My parents looked a little calmer, a little safer. Maybe we would live though I can't say that seemed to matter to me much.

My world was gone... everything was gone. I couldn't even think about what that meant. I was safe at least for whatever that was worth. For how long? Who knows? At the time all I remember thinking was...

*I wonder if I'll know anyone who survives.*