



# Radiant Girl

*Andrea White*

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A girl's 11th birthday always brings big changes to her world, but for Katya Dubko, it is truly the end of the world as she knows it. In the northern Ukraine, an area of dense forests, abundant wild life, and sparkling rivers, Katya's little village of Yanov has been a fairytale home. Her family life is rich with ancient traditions and magical beliefs, and her father has a good job working for the government at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Station, a complex bigger than her whole village.

Steeped in the imagery of her people, Katya believes that the station is a magical factory, and she looks for men in white robes, the angels she has heard push buttons to create electricity. When she asks her father about the station, he reassures her that it is safe: "so safe I would let you and Mama sleep there. I'd let a baby sleep there." Yet when Katya is sent into the forest to play while her family prepares her birthday dinner, she meets Vasyi, a mysterious otherworldly boy who tells her the agonizing truth: her world will be destroyed in an explosion. What is she to believe?

On April 26, 1986, the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant exploded, and the Soviet government refused to acknowledge the extent of the disaster. As Katya struggles to survive in the aftermath, Vasyi reenters her life and helps her to realize that there can be no healing without truth, however difficult it may be to face. As she reconnects with her friends from before the explosion, she begins to learn more about the scientific concepts that have changed their world, and she discovers that blind patriotism like her father's can be the undoing of a country as well as a man. With the help of friends she could have never imagined in her old life, Katya begins to understand that the things that are most important about her homeland and herself have survived the disaster. Combining the mythological truths of her ancestors with an understanding of the science behind the Chernobyl explosion, Katya finds the strength to fulfill a promise she made to herself many years before. And from her new vantage point she realizes that she is no longer the little girl in the fairy tale, she has become the author of her own story.

Radiant Girl weaves history, fantasy, photographs and illustrations together to create a fictional coming of age tale that offers readers insight on surviving the powerful forces of change that rock their own lives, both from within and without.

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