

Title (up to 20 words) - 1:23:58

Strapline (up to 40 words) - A Historical Fiction based based on the events at the Chernobyl Power Plant on April 26th 1986

Copy (between 900 and 1000 words) -

At least he got to say goodbye before the world ended. Most were swallowed by the fires before they got the chance or mutated until they couldn't even spit the word. Apparently, the Day of Reckoning looks the same as any other. In fact, when he left for work the sun was dipping on a normal day . His name was Yeva Melnyk. His daughter, Ganna, worked at the local school and her fiancé, Danilo Shvets, was a fireman.

Yeva had started working at the Chernobyl power plant when it first opened 9 years ago. That night the station was a busy hum due to the upcoming safety test.

April 26th 1:22:14.

"Right, where're we at?" Chief Barsky leaned over.

"The reactor's been unstable since we shut off the core cooling system. I've managed to get the readings to borderline but- "

"-Excellent let's run it while we can then."

"It's unsafe-."

"Melnyk, you press that button or don't bother coming into work tomorrow, alright?" Barsky addressed the room: "Testing commencing in 5."

Yeva's mind raced:

"4." People could get hurt, killed.

"3." Land, livestock, destroyed.

"2." Or the test could be successful. What was he giving up if he didn't press it?

"1." Ganna. The roof over their heads, the food on the table, the wedding gone, all because of a hunch?

"0." He pressed the button

1:23:58. The world ended.

Alarms screamed in the fire station ripping Danilo from his subconscious. "Danilo! Get up, there's been an accident at the power plant." Someone tore the duvet from his shoulders; he blinked rapidly. His body acted on auto pilot, swinging his legs off the bed, and projecting him out the door.

Screams seared into their minds as they ran down corridors and upstairs. On the roof of the power plant a seething wildfire consumed all in its wake; even the sky wasn't safe from it as flames licked the stars and it belched clouds of deadly black. Dread tugged at Danilo's gut when he heard a creaking above him. The blazing scaffolding was falling; he had about 2s before he was crushed and burnt alive. Too late. An unearthly shriek bellowed from his lungs. Someone dragged him somewhere but all he knew was agony, rolling over him like merciless waves. Yeva had to help, it was his fault. He saw two men carrying what he presumed to be a person, he really hoped it wasn't.

"Can I help?" he yelled

"Call an ambulance." The first man struggled as he lugged the person between them.

"Danilo! Stay with us," the second firefighter said. Yeva stopped short.

"Danilo? Danilo Shvets?" he asked, dreading the answer.

"Yes."

Ganna ran into the hospital too out of breath to register the faces of men she might've known.

"Ganna!" she pushed towards her father's voice.

"This way." Yeva snatched his daughter's hand and half dragged her numb frame.

"Put these on," he said, thrusting a pair of goggles, gloves, and a face mask at her. She looked up at him before pushing through the doors. Death followed her, scythe at the ready. Seeing her fiancé, she believed she'd walked into the wrong room, one of a dead men dug up from 6 feet under. The left side of his face sunk into the pillow; the bone structure crushed under a layer of oozing flesh. She only knew it was her Danilo when the light in his right eye lit up at her voice. She took his charred hand gently, when an agonising groan escaped the deformed hole, she had once kissed. Tubes spawned from his body shifting every time he drew a shallow, raspy breath.

"Hey baby." Ganna, finally managed to croak a whisper, deep canyons stabbing through her heart. Death raised his scythe.

"I love you, Danilo."

He swung it down with an endless tone on the heart monitor. Ganna broke into a fit of uncontrollable sobs hugging Danilo's lifeless hand. Yeva burst in, distraught guilt on his face when he saw Danilo. He yanked Ganna's arm, but she wouldn't let go. "Ganna, we have to go."

He said

"No."

Yeva pulled her up. Ganna's glove peeled away from the sticky pus seeping from open burns. Yeva eyed Danilo's hand for a second before setting his jaw in confirmation.

"Ganna don't go to the house, get to a bus." He said, pushing her out the door. "Don't wait for me, get as far away as you can." He looked into those precious eyes so full of hurt because of him. "Where will you go?" she asked,

"Never mind that, I'll meet you in Pripjat."

He gave her a reassuring smile; not wanting the last thing he said to her to be a lie, he told her something that will always be true. "I love you." He kissed her hand then turned away, afraid that if he saw her again, he wouldn't go. Ganna watched him leave too numb to run after him. Maybe someone else was pulsing the beat of her heart; all she could see was that right eye turning pale and distant.

Her heels clacked against the pavement outside. Left. Right. Left. Who was moving them? She waited 4 hours at the bus stop. Only the steady monotone of her breathing reminded her that she was alive. It was a while before she realised her father wasn't coming back. She cried for so long the time dragged like years.

"It's been 20 years since Chernobyl. The devastation has spread nearly as far as the radiation did. 3.5 million lives have been affected and lost. This is a wig," Ganna points to the locks on her head. "I was nowhere near the reactor, but doctors say I have 6 months. That's ok. Most didn't get as long as I have, I went back to school, specialised in radiation studied it, learned from it, So Chernobyl will never happen again."

Applause rang throughout the auditorium and Ganna stepped down from the podium.