

CHERNOBYL

Episode 3 - "Open Wide, O Earth"

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SOLDIER
Straight ahead.

The miners stumble forward. This is far from a mine. They're unsure what they're doing or where they're supposed to be.

327 INT. MOBILE OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

327

Legasov sits with Shcherbina. A map of the power plant on the small table in front of them.

Legasov smokes. Worried.

SHCHERBINA
What.

LEGASOV
I'm not good at this, Boris.
(beat)
The lying.

SHCHERBINA
Have you ever spent time with miners?

LEGASOV
No.

SHCHERBINA
My advice? Tell the truth. These men work in the dark. They see everything.

A KNOCK on the door, then it opens. A soldier, announcing--

SOLDIER
Andrei Glukhov. Crew chief.

Shcherbina nods. The soldier backs away, and GLUKHOV enters, gas mask in hand. He sits himself down unceremoniously, and drops the gas mask on the table. Gestures at it.

GLUKHOV
Do these work?

LEGASOV
To an extent.

Glukhov shrugs. Better than nothing. Then points at Legasov's pack of cigarettes.

LEGASOV
Of course.

He holds the cigarettes out to Glukhov, who casually takes the entire pack. Lights one up, pockets the rest for later.

GLUKHOV
Well? What's the job?

Legasov clears his throat. All right. He points to the map.

LEGASOV
We need to install a liquid nitrogen heat exchanger underneath this concrete pad. There's no way to approach it from the interior of the building. We have to come at it from underground.

GLUKHOV
And what's above the pad?

Again, right to the point. Legasov glances at Shcherbina, who gives a tiny nod. "Tell the truth."

LEGASOV
The core of the nuclear reactor, which is melting down.

GLUKHOV
(melting down?)
What. Like-- ?

He makes a dropping gesture.

LEGASOV
Essentially.

GLUKHOV
Is it going to fall on us?

LEGASOV
Not if you're done within six weeks.

Glukhov takes a long drag on his cigarette. Staring carefully at Legasov. Then:

GLUKHOV
Dimensions?

LEGASOV
(points at the map)
You'll break ground here, tunnel 150 metres to here, and then excavate a 30 metre by 30 metre space for the heat exchanger.

(MORE)

LEGASOV (cont'd)

(beat)

And because we need to keep disruption of the ground to a minimum, we cannot use heavy equipment. It must be done by hand.

Glukhov whistles. That's a big job.

GLUKHOV

We'll need more men. At least four hundred. And we'll have to work around the clock.

(beat)

How deep do you want this tunnel? Six metres?

LEGASOV

Twelve.

GLUKHOV

Twelve? Why?

LEGASOV

For your protection. At that depth, you will be shielded from much of the radiation.

GLUKHOV

The entrance to the tunnel won't be twelve metres down.

LEGASOV

No.

GLUKHOV

And we're not twelve metres down right now.

LEGASOV

No. We're not.

Ah. So this is the situation.

SHCHERBINA

We have some equipment here on site, but more will arrive by midnight. You can start in the morning.

Glukhov stubs out his cigarette. Rises. Grabs his gas mask off the table.

GLUKHOV
We'll start now. I don't want my men
here one second more than they have
to be.

He stares at his gas mask for a moment.

GLUKHOV
If these worked, you'd be wearing
them.

He tosses the gas mask back on the table, and exits.

CUT TO:

328 NEAR PITCH BLACK

328

The sound of muffled men shouting to each other. A heavy
RATTLE of metal...

TITLE:

MAY 6, 1986

And then a MINER shifts his head to UNBLOCK the lights
behind him, and now we see him and a coworker PUSHING a MINE
CART full of dirt around a CORNER and--

329 EXT. REACTOR SITE - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

329

They EMERGE from the MOUTH of the tunnel shaft, and quickly
TILT the minecart to empty the dirt.

They wear simple white uniforms, and simple white caps, much
in the style of the reactor control room workers. But these
men are covered in dirt. And dripping in sweat.

There is a SIGN nailed to the side of the shaft entrance...
yellow Cyrillic lettering on a piece of brown plywood.

SUBTITLE: Comrades: our goal, 24/7, is to advance the tunnel
by 13 metres each day

GLUKHOV emerges from the tunnel, right behind them. Jumps up
out of the entrance trench.

GLUKHOV
Quickly. Back in. You two! Behind
them.

(MORE)

GLUKHOV (cont'd)
(to another miner)
Iosif, get another spool of wire, and
tell group three to switch with two.

They move quickly, and without care. Jumping down into the dirt. Wiping the sweaty dust from their faces. No one is wearing a mask.

Glukhov looks up at the SUN. It's beating down, and it's not even noon yet.

He walks over to a crude, brown INTERCOM BOX set on top of some SANDBAGS. Pushes a button on it twice. It emits two signal tones. *Bweee bwee...* then we hear a VOICE, crackling through the tiny speaker.

MINER (INTERCOM)
Yes?

GLUKHOV
What is it up to?

MINER (INTERCOM)
Fifty.

Glukhov hangs his head in frustration. Then sees:

GLUKHOV
Hey. HEY, you!

PIKALOV, issuing commands to his radiometrists, looks over to see: this short, angry miner MARCHING toward him.

GLUKHOV
We need fans. Thirty or forty.

PIKALOV
For what purpose?

GLUKHOV
What do you mean? What purpose? To
dig your fucking tunnel, what else?

One of Pikalov's men reacts, angrily, but Glukhov jabs his finger in the air at the soldier.

GLUKHOV
Who's talking to you? Who?

Pikalov raises a hand. Gets in between them.

PIKALOV
Comrades--

GLUKHOV

(back to Pikalov)

It's 50 degrees down there. We can't breathe with the masks, we can't breathe without the masks. It's an oven. We need ventilation.

PIKALOV

Fans will put dust in the air. The dust will go in your lungs.

GLUKHOV

I've been filling my lungs with dust for twenty years.

PIKALOV

Not this dust. I'm sorry. But for your own good-- no fans.

Pikalov and his men walk away, leaving a frustrated Glukhov.

We LOWER DOWN - INTO THE EARTH itself... until we come to:

330 INT. THE TUNNEL - NOW

330

A cramped shaft, dimly lit by bulb strung along swales of electrical cord.

Five miners are jammed against each other like rats in a nest, stooped over in the low tunnel, PICKING and SHOVELING into the earth as fast as they can manage.

The heat is intense. Rippling the air in spots. They drip sweat, but they keep working.

Gritting teeth. Muscles burning. And even without fans, the DUST swirls around them... it SHIMMERS in front of the lights... and we can literally see them inhaling it...

A miner swings his PICK right at us, and we cut to:

331 INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

331

LEONID TOPTUNOV, the young control room engineer, lies in a bed. Most of his hair is gone. Bits of his mustache remain in small patches. His body looks just as bad as Ignatenko's. Discolored. Swollen. Thousand yard stare.

He barely glances as KHOMYUK enters the room. Then back to the thousand yard stare.

She moves the chair back a few feet from his bed to maintain a safer distance, and sits. Still in full protection, mask covering her mouth. Notebook open in her lap. Pen poised.

She hesitates. Difficult to interrogate someone who is dying in front of your eyes. But no choice.

KHOMYUK

My name is Ulana Khomyuk. I am a nuclear physicist working with the Chernobyl Commission. I want you to tell me everything that happened the night of the accident. Is that all right?

TOPTUNOV

(hurts to speak)

Yes. I want to tell.

KHOMYUK

(reluctantly)

Alright. Your official title was--

TOPTUNOV

(a strange pride)

My name is Leonid Fedorovich Toptunov. I am the Senior Reactor Control Chief Engineer at Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant.

She stops writing. Surprised.

KHOMYUK

Senior engineer? How old are you?

He slowly turns his head to face her.

TOPTUNOV

I'm 25.

And now BLOOD begins leaking from his nostrils. Steady rivulets... coming out too easily. Coming out too thin.

Khomyuk crosses to the bedside table, picks up some cotton gauze, leans over Toptunov, and presses it gently to his nose.

They're looking straight at each other.

Her face covered by a mask. His face covered by the gauze. Nothing revealed but eyes gazing into eyes.

332 EXT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

332

The long hallway - then a BLOND MAN steps into view. 30's, mustache. Rolling a sucking candy around in his mouth. He looks around. Oddly out of place, and yet zero emotion.

Just a dead look. It should be quite clear what he is.

He steps out of the way as ORDERLIES come by, wheeling a GURNEY - with VASILY, the dark lenses shielding his eyes from the light. Lyudmilla follows right behind.

We move WITH THEM, leaving the Blond Man behind.

VASILY
(scared)
Lyusya...?

LYUDMILLA
I'm here.

They round a corner, and move toward a single room at the end of the hallway. Double doors.

VETROVA emerges from the room. Visible behind her, in the center of the room, we see heavy, CLEAR PLASTIC SHEETING dangling in overlapping strips from the ceiling.

As the orderlies bring Vasily into the room, Vetrova STOPS Lyudmilla from following. Shocked to even see her.

VETROVA
Have you been here this whole time?

LYUDMILLA
No one said I should leave.

VETROVA
I did. Thirty minutes, I said!

LYUDMILLA
(anger)
Well where have you been? When he's in pain? When his sores stick to his gown? When he soils himself five times a night-- I've been taking care of him. Where have you been?

Vetrova draws on every ounce of calm she has.

VETROVA

I have been in the north and west wing where there are dozens of patients from Chernobyl, exactly like him. It isn't safe for you here.

LYUDMILLA

He's my husband.

VETROVA

Not anymore. He's something else now. Do you understand? He's dangerous to you.

Lyudmilla doesn't understand. Or pretends not to?

LYUDMILLA

He's burned.

Vetrova can only shake her head. Tired. No, exhausted.

VETROVA

Go home.

All the fight leaves Lyudmilla, and she regresses to an almost child-like desperation and fear.

LYUDMILLA

Please. It won't be much longer.
(can barely say it)
I don't want him to die alone.

Vetrova closes her eyes. Angry at herself for this. Angry that this is happening at all. Then:

VETROVA

Stay on the other side of the plastic. Or I will have you removed by security.

Before Lyudmilla can respond, Vetrova WALKS AWAY. Then the orderlies exit the room and move past her as well.

Her husband is now in there alone.

333 INT. ISOLATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

333

We're on Vasily's side of the TRANSPARENT CURTAIN. Through the plastic, we see the DOOR open.

Lyudmilla approaches. Then stops just on the other side of the plastic.

VASILY

Lyusya?

A pause, then LYUDMILLA pushes through PLASTIC. On our side now. On Vasily's side. Stands right next to him.

LYUDMILLA

Yes, my love.

VASILY

Is it day?

LYUDMILLA

No, it's nighttime now.

VASILY

(confused)

I think I had a dream. But it's gone.

LYUDMILLA

Vasya.

(beat)

We're going to have a baby.

He doesn't respond. Perhaps too delirious to understand. But then... his HAND lifts slightly off the bed. Trembling. The SKIN sloughing off. He's reaching for her.

He heard. He knows.

And she gently reaches back to take his hand in hers.

334 INT. MOBILE OFFICE - CHERNOBYL COMMAND - NIGHT

334

A plate with boiled chicken and beets. Untouched. A bottle of iodine pills. A full glass of water. A stack of maps. Books. Notepads. Blueprints.

Legasov writes a LIST. Four pages in already. Hand cramping. He puts his pen down, takes his glasses off. Rubs his eyes.

Picks up the glass of water. Then puts it down. His hand is TREMBLING. He stares at it, then:

THE DOOR OPENS - and Shcherbina enters. Ebullient. A bottle of VODKA in his hand. He smiles at Legasov.

SHCHERBINA

The fire is out.

He plunks the bottle down. Unscrews the cap, and tosses it. It lands in the corner with a plink.

SHCHERBINA

It's out, Valera! And the miners are making incredible progress. They say the whole job will be finished in four weeks. Four, can you believe it?

He takes Legasov's WATER GLASS, empties it into the waste basket, and starts pouring vodka.

But Legasov just stares blankly at his list.

Shcherbina puts the vodka bottle down. Sighs. Just wants to find some small joy, even now. Even knowing what he knows.

SHCHERBINA

I know the job isn't over. But it's the beginning of the end.

The beginning of the end? Legasov looks up. A strange look of pity on his face. And then... he slowly shakes his head.

No.

The smile fades from Shcherbina's face, and: KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK on the door. Shcherbina crosses over and opens it. A soldier is standing there.

SOLDIER

I'm sorry to bother you, Deputy Minister, but-- it's the miners.

Shcherbina looks back at Legasov. *What now?*

335 EXT. REACTOR SITE - MOMENTS LATER

335

Legasov and Shcherbina follow the soldier through the work site, under the glare of FLOODLIGHTS. They walk around a truck and stop dead, as they see:

THE MINERS - working. Digging, emptying the carts, doing their job.

In the nude.

Well, they have their shoes on. And their paper hats. But otherwise? Completely naked.

Legasov and Shcherbina just stare dumbstruck. And then they sees GLUKHOV, as naked as the others.

Legasov raises a hand to him. "May we have a word?"

Glukhov walks over to them. Zero self-consciousness.

GLUKHOV

What?

Legasov isn't quite sure what to say.

GLUKHOV

They won't give us fans, and it's too hot for clothes. So we're digging the old way. This is how our fathers mined.

Oh.

GLUKHOV

We're still wearing the fucking hats. What do you need?

LEGASOV

You aren't as protected without--

GLUKHOV

Are you telling me it will make a difference?

Legasov hesitates. Then remembers who he's dealing with. Shakes his head. No. It won't.

Which is what Glukhov expected. He looks back at his men, then turns to Shcherbina.

GLUKHOV

When this is over-- will we be taken care of?

Legasov and Shcherbina say nothing. There's no point in lying to this man.

Glukhov stares back at them in disgusted disappointment.

Then without another word, he heads back to the tunnel. Naked. And resigned.

336 INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

336

A pen writes in Cyrillic in a notebook. Half a page of notes. The other page full. Six or seven pages behind that one. The pen underlines something. Then:

KHOMYUK stops writing. Looks at Toptunov.