

CHERNOBYL

Episode 2 - "Please Remain Calm"

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201 OVER BLACK**201**

Stodgy classical music, played through a tinny radio speaker. Over it, a voice begins to recite poetry:

VOICE (ON RADIO)
*You know I believe that the Russia
 we fight for / is not the dull town
 where I lived at a loss /*

202 EXT. BYELORUSIAN INST. FOR NUCLEAR ENERGY - MORNING**202**

We PAN across an empty parking lot until we find a single car, a Lada Riva-- there all by itself in front of a drab, generic Soviet building on the outskirts of a city.

VOICE (ON RADIO)
*But those country tracks our ancestors
 followed / the graves where they lie
 with the old Russian cross /*

TITLE:

**8:30 A.M., APRIL 26
 7 HOURS AFTER THE EXPLOSION**

203 INT. LABORATORY - CONTINUOUS**203**

A large room with multiple lab desks, sinks, cabinets and racks of scientific equipment, periodic table charts on the walls, labels with the familiar RADIATION sign...

VOICE (ON RADIO)
*I feel that for me, it was countryside
 Russia / that first made me feel I
 must truly belong / to the tedious
 miles between village and village /
 the tears of the widow, the women's
 sad song /*

The room is empty but for: A WOMAN, 40's - FACE DOWN at a table, her salt-and-pepper hair splayed around her head. Next to her, a stack of technical documents. Coffee cup. Half-eaten sandwich. Soviet poetry droning from a RADIO.

We PUSH IN on her. She might be dead.

VOICE (ON RADIO)
*We see alongside us the deaths of
 our comrades / by old Russian
 practice, soldiers laid end to end /*

We stay on the woman. Hear the SOUND of the lab door opening.

VOICE (ON RADIO)
*And yet I still feel proud of the
 dearest of countries / The great
 bitter land I was born to defend.*

Someone enters. Drops a small paper bag next to her HEAD.

VOICE (ON RADIO)
 That was Konstantin Simonov's poem
 "to Alexei Surkov," written in--

CLICK. The unseen person turns the radio off, and ULANA KHOMYUK, the sleeping woman, raises her head.

KHOMYUK
 (disoriented)
 Whumm?

DMITRI, 30, puts a THERMOS in front of her.

DMITRI
 You work too hard.

Khomyuk rubs her face. Checks her watch. Then looks around.

KHOMYUK
 Where is everyone?

DMITRI
 They refused to come in.

KHOMYUK
 Why?

DMITRI
 It's Saturday.

Oh. Right. Then:

KHOMYUK
 Why did you come in?

DMITRI
 I work too hard.
 (wipes his brow)
 Uch, it's boiling in here.

He crosses to a WINDOW. He LIFTS the window OPEN, and almost instantly:

BEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE

Dmitri and Khomyuk turn in adrenaline shock to: a DOSIMETER mounted on the wall. A split second, then:

Dmitri SLAMS the window shut. Then rushes to the dosimeter. Presses a button to silence the alarm. Reads the meter.

DMITRI
Eight milliroentgen. What-- ?

Dmitri anxiously glances at a METAL CASE with radiation stickers. Inside, boxes and tubes.

DMITRI
A leak?

Khomyuk hasn't taken her eyes off the window. Wide awake now.

KHOMYUK
No. It would have gone off before.
It's coming from outside.

Dmitri sits down. Has the unthinkable finally happened?

DMITRI
The Americans?

IN CUTS - Khomyuk opens her drawer, pulls out a PILL CONTAINER. Takes one pill. Then tosses him the bottle.

Snaps on LATEX GLOVES. Tears open a PACKET. A sterile WET WIPE sample cloth is removed, folded...

Khomyuk WIPES along the SILL of the WINDOW in an "S" pattern, pressing firmly, picking up dust, and then we're:

204 INT. HALLWAY

204

Khomyuk strides with purpose down the empty hall, sample in hand. *There's iron in this woman.*

205 INT. SPECTOMETRY ROOM

205

THE SPECTROMETER - HUMS - Khomyuk stares at the screen. Eyes flickering over the spiking lines. One line spikes much higher than the other.

And just like that, she knows.

Khomyuk barrels back into the lab, startling the waiting Dmitri. She thrusts the SPECTROMETER PRINTOUT at him.

KHOMYUK

Iodine 131. It's not military. It's uranium decay. U-235.

DMITRI

Reactor fuel.

He looks at her. Then catches up. A sick realization.

DMITRI

Ignalina. Maybe 240 kilometers away.

She turns to a shelf of BINDERS... pulls one, flips pages. There. She picks up the lab phone. Dials a number.

IGNALINA OPERATOR (PHONE)

(rushed, loud)

Hello?

KHOMYUK

Yes, this is Ulana Khomyuk with the Institute of Nuclear--

IGNALINA OPERATOR (PHONE)

You don't think we already know?
We're looking for it!

KHOMYUK

Looking for--

IGNALINA OPERATOR (PHONE)

We've got 4 milliroentgen here, I've got men crawling over the whole plant... no steam leak, no water leak, nothing! We can't--

KHOMYUK

All right, stay calm.

IGNALINA OPERATOR (PHONE)

Don't tell me to stay calm, I want to evacuate, Moscow tells us we can't, and now you call? Who the hell are you anyway--

Khomyuk hangs up on him. No time for this.

KHOMYUK

They're at 4. It's not them. Who's the next closest?

DMITRI

(shakes his head)

Chernobyl. But that's not possible, it's 400 kilometers away.

KHOMYUK

No, too far for 8 milliroentgen. They'd have to be split open. But maybe they know something.

She finds the number in her directory, and dials. We hear the other end - *ring ring*. As they wait:

DMITRI

Could it be a waste dump?

KHOMYUK

We'd be seeing other isotopes.

ring ring... ring ring...

DMITRI

Nuclear test? New kind of bomb?

KHOMYUK

We would have heard. That's what half our people work on here.

ring ring... ring ring...

DMITRI

Something with the space program? Like a satellite or-- what are they saying down there?

KHOMYUK

I don't know. No one's answering the phone.

Khomyuk and Dmitri realize at the same time. She puts the receiver down on the table, and now he can hear it too.

ring ring... ring ring... ring ring... ring ring...

Oh god.

The ring of the the unanswered phone grows LOUDER and LOUDER, blending into the sound of A SIREN as we CUT TO:

207 EXT. PRIPYAT HOSPITAL - MORNING 207

An EMERGENCY VEHICLE screeches to a halt in front of the building. We follow-- handheld-- chaos-- as emergency workers WHEEL a patient rapidly into:

208 INT. PRIPYAT HOSPITAL - ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS 208

Madness. A war zone. The building is choked with people: firemen, plant workers, men, women, children, babies...

Some people are vomiting. Others are passed out. Children screaming. ZINCHENKO pushes through the crowd. Issuing instructions to a frantic PRIPYAT NURSE who follows her.

ZINCHENKO

Get everyone started on an IV.

PRIPYAT NURSE

We don't have enough.

ZINCHENKO

All the children then.

PRIPYAT NURSE

We don't have enough.

ZINCHENKO

(snaps)

As many as you can! Just--

(looks around)

Where's the old man?

PRIPYAT NURSE

He's set up a burn ward in 16.

Shit. Zinchenko leaves the panicking nurse...

209 INT. MAKESHIFT BURN WARD - MOMENTS LATER 209

Men on gurneys. Some are screaming in pain.

Zinchenko ENTERS... wobbles slightly in a puddle of vomit on the floor. Fuck. Regains her balance and sees:

THE OLD DOCTOR - dabbing at VASILY'S FACE with a wet sponge, which he's dipping in a basin of WHITE FLUID.

ZINCHENKO

What are you doing? What is that?

OLD DOCTOR
Milk. Much better than water.

My god. Zinchenko scans the men. We recognize Vasily. Akimov. Toptunov. Sees the patterns of the burns on their skin. Bodies swollen. Skin strangely tanned. Dark.

Zinchenko grabs the sponge out of the old doctor's hand. Flings it aside. Then starts PULLING Vasily's BOOTS off.

OLD DOCTOR
Have you lost your mind?

ZINCHENKO
These are radiation burns. Their clothes are contaminated.

Everyone stares in silence. Until:

ZINCHENKO
HELP ME.

The nurses are jarred into action. As they strip away pants, jackets, helmets, shirts, socks, underwear...

ZINCHENKO
Get it all off. We're taking it down to the basement.

The old doctor watches in utter confusion. *The basement?*

210 INT. THE BASEMENT - MOMENTS LATER

210

Feet STAMPEDE down the winding stairway.

EQUIPMENT and CLOTHING hits the concrete floor in a jumbled pile. The nurses run back up for more as other nurses come down and toss more clothing.

Zinchenko hurls her handful of clothing to the floor. Then winces. Checks her hand where she was holding Vasily's BOOT. Her palm is already BRIGHT RED.

She looks up to see a nurse staring. *Are you all right?*

ZINCHENKO
Let's get the rest.

Zinchenko heads back for more. The nurse follows, and:

211 OMITTED

211

212 EXT. HOSPITAL FRONT DOORS - CONTINUOUS**212**

A MOB of angry people are yelling and pleading with: A LINE OF MILITARY POLICE, some with guns, some holding clubs.

HOSPITAL SOLDIER

We are at capacity. Please disperse!

LYUDMILLA is JOSTLED by the crowd. Near the front, the soldiers physically PUSH people back. There's a SURGE of movement from behind her... the soldiers PUSH back... and in the chaos, she SLIPS past them... FALLS...

...then gets up and RUNS into the hospital. The soldiers can't stop her. Too busy with the rest of the crowd. The air fills with angry shouts and screams, and then:

213 INT. KREMLIN - DAY**213**

Silence.

A stately corridor. Chandeliers. Floors shined to a polish. And every few feet, the Soviet flag.

VALERY LEGASOV sits on a small chair against the wall near one of the flags. Hair carefully combed. His best suit.

A door opens, and a woman, 40's, emerges. Pleasant. Courteous.

KREMLIN AIDE

Professor Legasov?

LEGASOV

(rises)

Yes?

KREMLIN AIDE

Oh no, not yet. They're finishing up some other business. It'll be a few more minutes. Can I get you some tea?

LEGASOV

No, I'm fine. Thank you.

She extends a document to him.

KREMLIN AIDE

I thought you might care to read Deputy Secretary Shcherbina's report while you wait.

LEGASOV
Oh. Certainly. Thank you.

He takes the typewritten report, and she exits.

Legasov sits back down. Scans the first page. Hmm.

Flip. Second page. Scanning. Mmhmm.

Flip. Third page. Scanning.

Wait.

Oh my god.

He sits there, staring agape at the page. Then looks around... is anyone else here? Has anyone else seen-- ??

The aide returns. Still pleasant and calm.

KREMLIN AIDE
All right, Professor. They're ready.

She sees the panic in his eyes.

KREMLIN AIDE
Is something wrong?

214 INT. KREMLIN HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

214

WE LEAD: Legasov, on his face, watching as he forces himself to walk... forces himself to stay calm, the report clutched in his hand, still open to the third page.

Surely they know. They have to know...

He wipes his brow. Sweat. Mouth dry.

He passes SOLDIERS who push open doors, and he enters:

215 INT. KREMLIN CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

215

The inner sanctum. The center of Soviet power.

A long room lined with Soviet flags.

In the center of the room, a conference table. Men in their seats. Some in Soviet military uniforms. Others in suits.

And at the head of the table, MIKHAIL GORBACHEV.

Legasov's eyes dart nervously. Who among these men knows?

Who else is frightened? Who else feels sick to their stomach?

Not one of them appears concerned at all.

Someone clears their throat, catching his attention.

This is BORIS SHCHERBINA, 67, barrel-chested, intimidating brow. A bull of a man.

And Shcherbina nods toward a seat. As in: we are all sitting. You are not. Sit.

Legasov rushes himself into his chair. Trying to keep his hands from shaking.

Please. Let someone else say it. Not me. Anyone but me.

GORBACHEV

Thank you all for your duty to this Commission. We'll begin with Deputy Chairman Shcherbina's briefing, and then we'll discuss next steps if necessary.

If necessary?

SHCHERBINA

Thank you, General Secretary. I am pleased to report the situation in Chernobyl is stable.

What?

SHCHERBINA

We're coordinating with local Party officials and plant management to address the incident. Military and civilian patrols have secured the region, and Colonel-General Pikalov, who commands troops specializing in chemical hazards, has been dispatched to the plant.

Legasov looks down at page three. Flips to the next page, hoping that there's something that makes page three not real. But page three is real.

SHCHERBINA

In terms of radiation, Plant Director Bryukhanov reports no more than 3.6 roentgen. I'm told that's the equivalent of a chest x-ray.

(to the room)

So if you're overdue for a check-up...

The men chuckle. Legasov looks up again, eyes passing over all of them, desperately searching for someone to meet eyes with him, to say, "Yes, I know, I'll say it..."

SHCHERBINA

As for the fire, it's largely contained. Pikalov and his men should have it out soon enough.

GORBACHEV

Foreign press?

SHCHERBINA

(proudly)

Totally unaware.

Shcherbina nods across the table to CHARKOV, 63.

Of all the Soviet men... the balding, white-haired men with round faces and black-rimmed glasses... Charkov is perhaps the most exemplary of the type.

As if he were made in a factory.

SHCHERBINA

KGB First Deputy Chairman Charkov assures me we've successfully protected our security interests.

GORBACHEV

Good. Very good. Well, it seems like it's well in hand--

Someone say something. Now. Say it.

GORBACHEV

--so if there's nothing else?

Legasov's mouth won't open. Tongue won't work.

GORBACHEV

Meeting adjourned.

Gorbachev rises. Everyone else gets up, and--

LEGASOV

No!

Everyone turns to him. Shocked.

GORBACHEV

Pardon me?

Legasov realizes he said it. He said no. To Mikhail Gorbachev. And he's terrified. But--

LEGASOV

We can't adjourn.

Shcherbina fixes a dark gaze on Legasov. There's a disquieting rage in this man.

SHCHERBINA

This is Professor Legasov of the Kurchatov Institute. Professor, if you have a concern, feel free to address it with me. Later.

Legasov gives a small nod. Cowed. Dying inside. But:

LEGASOV

I can't.

All eyes on him again. Everyone standing. And now he rises. Sweaty, flustered, bad suit, crooked glasses.

LEGASOV

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry but--
(the report)

Page three-- the section on
casualties--

(reading)

"A fireman was severely burned on his hand by a chunk of smooth, black mineral on the ground outside the reactor building." Smooth black mineral!

(does no one--?)

Graphite. There's graphite on the ground. Outside.

SHCHERBINA

There was a tank explosion. There's debris. Of what importance is-- ?

LEGASOV

There's only one place in the entire facility where you'll find graphite.

(MORE)

LEGASOV (cont'd)

Inside the core. If there's graphite on the ground, it means it wasn't a control system tank that exploded.

(beat)

It was the reactor core.

(the unthinkable)

It's open.

No one is sure how to react. And so they do what they have always done.

They slowly turn toward Gorbachev to see how they should feel about this.

For a moment, he is inscrutable. Then:

GORBACHEV

Comrade Shcherbina?

SHCHERBINA

General-Secretary, I assure you Professor Legasov is mistaken. Bryukhanov reports the reactor core is intact. And the radiation--

Legasov's panic ferments to frustration. Impatience. The words come flying out of him.

LEGASOV

Yes, "3.6 roentgen", which by the way is *not* the equivalent of one chest x-ray, but rather four *hundred* chest x-rays. That number's been bothering me for a different reason, though. It's also the maximum reading on low-limit dosimeters. They gave us the number they *had*, but I think the true number is much, much higher. If I'm right, this fireman was holding the equivalent of four million x-rays. In his hand.

SHCHERBINA

(icy)

Professor Legasov. There is no place for alarmist hysteria in this room.

LEGASOV

It's not alarmist if it's a fact!

GORBACHEV

I don't hear any facts at all.

The room falls silent. A palpable sense of fear.

GORBACHEV

All I hear is a man I don't know engaging in conjecture-- in direct contradiction of what has been reported by Party officials.

Shcherbina can barely repress a smile. And Legasov remembers where he is. Who he's yelling in front of.

Oh god.

LEGASOV

I apologize. I didn't mean-- may I express my concern as calmly and respectfully as I can?

Shcherbina is about to cut him off, but Gorbachev raises a hand to silence him. Then gestures to Legasov to continue, and sits.

The rest of the room sits back down with him.

LEGASOV

An RBMK reactor uses uranium-235 as fuel. Every atom of U-235 is like a bullet traveling nearly the speed of light, penetrating everything in its path. Wood, metal, concrete, flesh. In every gram of U-235, there are over a billion *trillion* of these bullets.

(beat)

That's in one gram. Chernobyl holds over three million grams of U-235. And right now, it is on fire. And-- I believe-- exposed. Wind will carry radioactive particles across the entire continent, and rain will bring them down on us. Three million billion trillion bullets in the water we drink, the food we eat, in the air we breathe. Each bullet-- capable of damaging the genetic code in our bodies. Each bullet capable of bringing sickness, cancer, death. Most of them will not stop firing for a hundred years. Some of them will not stop for fifty thousand years.

The air has gone out of the room. No one says a word. Then:

GORBACHEV

And this-- concern-- stems entirely
from the description of a rock?

Everyone turns to stare at Legasov. Dead eyes, all of them.

LEGASOV

Yes.

A moment. Then Gorbachev turns to Shcherbina:

GORBACHEV

I want you to go to Chernobyl. Look at
the reactor. You personally. Report
directly back to me.

SHCHERBINA

A wise decision. I'll depart at once.

GORBACHEV

And take Legasov with you.

Legasov and Shcherbina both register surprise.

SHCHERBINA

Forgive me, Comrade General-
Secretary, but--

GORBACHEV

Do you know how a nuclear reactor
works, Boris Evdokimovich?

SHCHERBINA

No.

GORBACHEV

Then how will you know what you're
looking at?

Gorbachev strides out, followed by everyone else, until
there's no one left in the room but Legasov and Shcherbina.

Staring at each other.

216 EXT. MOSCOW - AIR FORCE BASE - AFTERNOON

216

The NOISE of HELICOPTER ROTORS.

Two SOLDIERS hold on to their hats as they lead the way
toward the helicopters. Legasov walks beside Shcherbina,
trying to keep up with the older man's athletic pace.

217 I./E. HELICOPTER MID-FLIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

217

IN THE BACK - Legasov is sandwiched between the two soldiers. White knuckles. Across from him, a very calm Shcherbina. Legasov is the only one wearing his seat belt.

SHCHERBINA

Did you enjoy the meeting?

Legasov isn't quite sure what to say.

SHCHERBINA

You should know, it's not the first time someone's tried to embarrass me like that. I've been part of the apparatus for over forty years now. Men like you come along all the time. So smart. So confident.

(beat)

Funny. I can't remember any of their names.

(beat)

How does a nuclear reactor work?

LEGASOV

What?

SHCHERBINA

It's a simple question.

LEGASOV

It's hardly a simple answer.

SHCHERBINA

Of course-- you presume I'm too stupid to understand. So I'll restate. Tell me how a nuclear reactor works, or I'll have one of these soldiers throw you out of this helicopter.

Legasov slowly looks at the soldiers. Neither one of them seems fazed by that suggestion in the slightest. Okay...

LEGASOV

So-- a nuclear reactor generates electricity with steam.

Shcherbina nods. Good. Continue.

LEGASOV

The steam turns a turbine, which generates electricity.

(MORE)

LEGASOV (cont'd)
But where a typical power plant
makes steam by burning coal, a
nuclear plant--

Legasov pats his jacket pockets. Looking for--

Shcherbina calmly hands Legasov a pen and a copy of the
report he just presented.

Legasov nods in nervous thanks. Turns the document over,
and begins sketching as he talks.

LEGASOV
--a nuclear plant uses something
called fission. We take an unstable
element like uranium-235, which has
too many neutrons. A neutron is--

SHCHERBINA
The bullet.

LEGASOV
Yes. The bullet. So, bullets are
flying off of the uranium.

He shows Shcherbina the page as he sketches.

LEGASOV
Now, if you put enough of these
uranium atoms close together, the
bullets from one atom will eventually
hit another atom. The force of this
impact splits that atom apart,
releasing a tremendous amount of
energy. Fission. But-- that
fissioning atom releases even more
bullets, which slam into even more
atoms. More fission leads to more
fission-- and the result is a chain
reaction.

(beat)
You see the problem with that, right?

SHCHERBINA
I'm not in your classroom. Just tell
me the answer.

Oh.

LEGASOV
The chain reaction will grow and
grow, never stopping until all the
uranium fissions.

(MORE)

LEGASOV (cont'd)

The fuel quickly burns out, releasing a massive amount of energy in an instant. This is the principle behind a nuclear bomb. So:

(the sketch)

Control rods. See... these rods are the fuel rods. They contain the uranium. *These* rods are control rods. They're made of boron. Now-- why do you think they're--

Oh. Right. Not in a classroom.

LEGASOV

They're made of boron because it's excellent at capturing neutrons. It absorbs them. If you lower a control rod between two fuel rods, it acts like a bullet proof vest, keeping *these* neutrons from smashing into *these* atoms, and the reaction slows. If you raise it, the fuel rods can fire neutrons at each other, and the reaction increases. Water is pumped through the core, the heat of fission turns it to steam, and the result: electricity.

Shcherbina reaches out and takes the sketch. Studies it.

SHCHERBINA

And the graphite?

LEGASOV

Ah-- the neutrons are moving so fast-- we call this "flux"-- it's relatively unlikely that they'll hit other uranium atoms. To make the chain reaction possible, you have to slow them down. In the RBMK reactors, we surround the fuel rods with graphite to moderate-- slow down-- the neutron flux.

Shcherbina stares at the sketch. Then:

SHCHERBINA

Good. I know how a nuclear reactor works. Now I don't need you.

Shcherbina leans back in his seat and closes his eyes to sleep. A happy little smile on his face.

218 EXT. BYELORUSIAN COMMUNIST PARTY HQ - MINSK - AFTERNOON 218

An impossibly gray, Soviet building.

219 INT. OFFICE RECEPTION ROOM - CONTINUOUS 219

A portrait of LENIN.

Khomyuk sits across from it on a squat couch. Tense. From behind a closed door, we hear MEN LAUGHING.

A sheepish female AIDE, 60's, sits at a desk near the door.

AIDE

Perhaps if you came back another-- ?

KHOMYUK

I've waited three hours. I can wait longer.

The DOOR OPENS, and two men emerge in good spirits. One is CHULKOV, 50's. The other is GARANIN, 57, overfed.

GARANIN

Wonderful... just wonderful...

KHOMYUK

(rises)

Deputy Secretary Garanin.

Garanin doesn't drop his smile, but he glances over to his aide, who looks like a dog about to get beaten. *Who's this?*

AIDE

Ulana Khomyuk of the Byelorussian Institute for Nuclear Energy.

The slightest hitch in his smile. Then right back to:

GARANIN

Oh? What a pleasure. May I introduce Ilya Ivanovich Chulkov, the eminent poet? We were just discussing--

KHOMYUK

I'm here about Chernobyl.

Garanin's smile freezes on his face. Then to Chulkov. Guides him warmly to the door.

GARANIN

Such a lovely time. Please, visit again soon.

Chulkov heads out, confused. Garanin closes the door behind him, then turns back to Khomyuk. No longer smiling.

220 INT. GARANIN'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

220

He pours himself a glass of vodka.

GARANIN

I must tell you-- this is why no one likes scientists. When we have a disease to cure, where are they? In a lab. Noses in their books. And so, grandma dies.

He crosses to his desk.

GARANIN

But when there *isn't* a problem? They're everywhere. Spreading fear.

KHOMYUK

I know about Chernobyl.

GARANIN

Oh?

KHOMYUK

I know the core is either partially or completely exposed.

GARANIN

(shrugs)

Whatever that means.

KHOMYUK

And I know that if you don't immediately issue iodine tablets and then evacuate this city, hundreds of thousands will get cancer, and god only knows how many will die.

For a moment, her fear rattles him. But only for a moment.

GARANIN

Yes, very good, there *has* been an accident at Chernobyl, but I have been assured there is no problem.

KHOMYUK

I'm telling you there is.

GARANIN
I prefer my opinion to yours.

KHOMYUK
I'm a nuclear physicist. Before you were Deputy Secretary, you worked in a shoe factory.

GARANIN
(stiffens)
Yes. I worked in a shoe factory. And now I'm in charge.
(raises his glass)
"To the workers of the world."

He downs his drink. Meeting over.

221 INT. OFFICE RECEPTION ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

221

Khomyuk walks out of Garanin's office. Closes the door behind her. His AIDE looks nervous.

Khomyuk fishes the PILL BOTTLE out of her purse.

KHOMYUK
Stable iodine will keep your thyroid from absorbing radioactive iodine. Take one pill each day for as long as they last. And go east-- as far away from Minsk as you can.

Khomyuk hands her the pills, and exits.

The aide stares at the pills, then quickly takes one and shoves the bottle into her own purse.

222 OMITTED

222

223 INT. PRIPYAT HOSPITAL - LATE AFTERNOON

223

Lyudmilla pushes her way through the throngs of miserable people. The hallways are choked with sick people.

Some are being treated while they lie on the floor. We hear the sound of a SCREAMING BABY from off-screen.

Lyudmilla sees a nurse coming toward her.

LYUDMILLA
Can you help me, I'm looking for--

The nurse doesn't acknowledge her. Just rushes by.

Lyudmilla turns a corner and stops when she sees: Oksana's husband MIKHAIL, standing in the corridor.

He's holding his baby, who is screaming-- not a wail of hunger or fatigue, but the sharp, staccato cry of PAIN.

MIKHAIL

Lyudmilla.

She stares in shock at him. His eyes are bloodshot. Face puffy. Both his and his baby's skin are reddish/tan.

She approaches and sees that he's standing in front of a window looking into a TREATMENT ROOM.

THROUGH THE WINDOW - she sees OKSANA and her FOUR-YEAR OLD SON in the room - both sharing a single gurney. Oksana's dress is covered in vomit.

ZINCHENKO, her hand BANDAGED, is hooking the four-year old up to an IV. The little boy's head lolls... he doesn't even react when Zinchenko pushes the needle in.

They're both TANNED... just like Mikhail and the baby.

MIKHAIL

Take her.

LYUDMILLA

What?

He extends his baby out to her.

MIKHAIL

Take her. Take her away from here.

He retches, then holds the baby out again. Raising his volume to be heard over his daughter's SCREAMING.

MIKHAIL

Please. Take her. Take her.

Lyudmilla, scared, reaches out for the baby when:

PRIPYAT NURSE

Get away from them!

The Pripyat Nurse rushes over to Lyudmilla. Starts pushing her back from Mikhail.

PRIPYAT NURSE
You want to get sick? Go!

Lyudmilla backs away, then turns and rushes away. Mikhail is still holding his baby out.

MIKHAIL
TAKE HER! PLEASE TAKE HER!

224 INT. HOSPITAL - CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

224

Lyudmilla rounds the corner, then finally stops. Covers her mouth with a shaky hand. Overwhelmed.

Then sees: a MILITARY OFFICER, MAJOR BUROV, 45, passing by. She runs to catch up to him.

LYUDMILLA
Excuse me... I am Vasily Ignatenko's wife...

MAJOR BUROV
(no time for her)
I don't know him.

LYUDMILLA
No, he's a fireman. Ignatenko.
Ignatenko. 6th Paramilitary Fire and
Rescue Unit... I have to find him...
(stops him)
Please.

Burov relents. He pulls a folded paper from his pocket. A list of names. Scans it. Then:

MAJOR BUROV
Ignatenko. He's being transported by
helicopter to Moscow. Hospital #6.

LYUDMILLA
Why? Is he all right? Can I see him?

MAJOR BUROV
(enough already)
You want to see him? Go to Moscow.

LYUDMILLA
But-- we're not allowed out of--

They arrive at a hallway guarded by soldiers. Lyudmilla can no longer follow him.

MAJOR BUROV
 You have permission. Tell them Major
 Burov sent you.

He walks down the hall. She calls out after him.

LYUDMILLA
 When are they taking him?

MAJOR BUROV
 Now.

225 EXT. FIELD OUTSIDE PRIPYAT - DUSK 225

VASILY - on a gurney - is loaded into a HELICOPTER along
 with some other firefighters and plant workers...

226 EXT. SKIES OVER CHERNOBYL - MOMENTS LATER 226

The helicopters sweep by in formation. A moment, then...

The COMMISSION HELICOPTERS blow into frame, heading in the
 opposite direction... moving toward Chernobyl...

227 INT. COMMISSION HELICOPTER - CONTINUOUS 227

The pilot calls back to the men in the back.

PILOT
 We're approaching the power plant.

Shcherbina looks out the small side window. From his
 vantage, nothing but green forest and blue skies.

SHCHERBINA
 Beautiful. You should enjoy this
 view, Legasov. While you have one.

Legasov ignores that. He's craning his neck. Left...
 right... which way? The helicopter BANKS, and he sees:

SMOKE... which is blown away to reveal:

CHERNOBYL - tilted toward him through the helicopter
 window... *the reactor building blown open... the fire
 pouring out of the center... and a faint BLUE GLOW
 flickering around the air over the reactor...*

And scattered on the roof, *CHUNKS of BLACK GRAPHITE.*

LEGASOV
 (to himself)
 What have they done?

Shcherbina is just as shocked. Never expected this.

SHCHERBINA
 Can you see the core from here?

LEGASOV
 I don't need to. Look at the
 graphite on the roof. The entire
 building's blown open. It's exposed.

SHCHERBINA	LEGASOV
I don't see how you can tell that from here--	For god's sake, look at the glow-- the radiation is ionizing the air!

SHCHERBINA
 If we can't see it, we don't know.
 (to the pilot)
 Get us directly over the building.

LEGASOV	SHCHERBINA
Boris Evdokimovich--	Don't use my name.

LEGASOV	SHCHERBINA
--if we fly directly over an open reactor core--	I didn't ask your advice.

LEGASOV
 --we'll be dead within a week. Dead.

The soldiers look at each other. And in the front, the
 pilot registers what was just said.

PILOT
 Sir?

Shcherbina's face is set in grim determination.

SHCHERBINA
 I have my orders from General-
 Secretary Gorbachev. You have your
 orders from me. Get us over the
 reactor core, or I'll have you shot.

Legasov UNBUCKLES himself. Turns toward the cockpit.

LEGASOV

If you fly over the core, I promise you-- by tomorrow morning, you'll be begging for that bullet.

ON THE PILOT - sweating... three seconds from the reactor... two seconds... one second...

The pilot YANKS on the stick. LEGASOV tumbles from his seat, SLAMMING into the side of the helicopter as--

228 EXT. OVER CHERNOBYL - CONTINUOUS

228

--the helicopter PEELS OFF at the last moment and heads AWAY from the reactor. And one by one, the trailing helicopters peel off and FOLLOW...

229 EXT. CHERNOBYL BASE CAMP - 3 KM FROM REACTOR - SUNSET

229

SLOW MOTION - SMOKE swirls - men in PROTECTIVE GEAR emerge silently from the cloud. White jumpsuits. Black gloves. The fashion of the apocalypse.

WIDE TO REVEAL - THE SITE - workers, some in protective gear, others wearing only military uniforms, are building a makeshift camp. Trucks, crates... and LIGHTS. Generators crank to life and light FLOODS the site, catching waves of soot passing through their beams. In the distance-- Chernobyl, and the plume of black smoke...

FOMIN follows BRYUKHANOV through the gauntlet of soldiers. He glances at the men in PROTECTIVE SUITS...

FOMIN

Overkill. Pikalov's showing off. To make us look bad.

BRYUKHANOV

It doesn't matter how it looks.

Bryukhanov stops. A stiff BREEZE has picked up. Fomin joins him. They're looking at: the COMMISSION HELICOPTERS landing on the ground nearby. Rotors kicking up a dusty wind.

BRYUKHANOV

Shcherbina's a pure bureaucrat, as stupid as he is pigheaded. We'll tell him the truth in the simplest terms possible, and we'll be fine.

(yells to)

Pikalov!

GENERAL VLADIMIR PIKALOV - 62, lifelong veteran, is signing orders for his men. He looks over at Bryukhanov with all the resentment of decades of taking orders from bureaucrats.

As he heads toward them:

THEIR POV OF - THE HELICOPTER - the SOLDIERS have exited, along with the PILOT.

Now SHCHERBINA gets out, followed by LEGASOV. Shcherbina speaks briefly to the soldiers, then begins crossing to Bryukhanov, Fomin and Pikalov.

The soldiers stay behind with Legasov and the pilot. Not with them. Guarding them.

As Shcherbina nears Bryukhanov:

BRYUKHANOV

Comrade Shcherbina-- Chief Engineer Fomin, Colonel-General Pikalov and I are honored by your arrival.

FOMIN

Deeply, deeply honored.

BRYUKHANOV

(shut up, Fomin)

Naturally, we regret the circumstances of the visit, but as you can see, we're making excellent progress containing the damage. We've also begun an inquiry into the cause of the accident, and I have a list of individuals we believe are accountable.

Bryukhanov hands Shcherbina a paper with a list of NAMES. Shcherbina takes it with an approving GRUNT, and removes some reading glasses from his jacket pocket.

BY THE HELICOPTER - Legasov looks out toward the reactor. Acid fear in his stomach. THEN: one of the SOLDIERS from the helicopter approaches. Nods at Legasov to follow.

SHCHERBINA - stands with Bryukhanov and Fomin-- a united front-- silently confronting the approaching Legasov. Then:

BRYUKHANOV

Professor Legasov. I understand you've been saying dangerous things.

FOMIN
 Very dangerous things.
 (his preening speech)
 Apparently our reactor core
 "exploded." Please tell me how an
 RBMK reactor core "explodes". I'd
 love to know.

Legasov glares at Fomin with pure hatred.

LEGASOV
 I'm not prepared to explain it at
 this time.

FOMIN
 (pleased)
 As I presumed. He has no answer.

BRYUKHANOV
 Disgraceful, really. To spread
 disinformation at a time like this.

Shcherbina stares at Legasov. Weighing his fate? Legasov
 meets his eyes. If this is his end, so be it. Then:

SHCHERBINA
 (to Bryukhanov)
 Why did I see graphite on the roof?

Bryukhanov is startled by the question. So is Legasov.

SHCHERBINA
 Graphite is only found in the core,
 where it's used as a neutron flux
 moderator-- correct?

Holy shit. Bryukhanov passes the buck immediately to:

BRYUKHANOV
 Fomin, why did the Deputy Chairman
 see graphite on the roof?

FOMIN
 There can't be, I-- Comrade
 Shcherbina, my apologies, but
 graphite? That's... that's not
 possible.
 (scrambling)
 Perhaps you saw burnt concrete?

SHCHERBINA

Ah, now *there* you made a mistake, because while I don't know much about nuclear reactors, I know a lot about concrete.

FOMIN

(panicking)

Comrade, I assure you--

SHCHERBINA

I understand. You think Legasov is wrong. So-- how shall we prove it?

No answer. Shcherbina turns to Pikalov. Well?

PIKALOV

Our high-range dosimeter just arrived. We could cover one of our trucks with lead shielding, mount the dosimeter on the front...

Shcherbina turns to Legasov. Satisfied? Legasov nods.

LEGASOV

(to Pikalov)

Have one of your men drive as close to the fire as he can, and give him every bit of protection you have. But understand-- even with the lead shielding-- it may not be enough.

Pikalov understands. And doesn't hesitate.

PIKALOV

Then I'll do it myself.

230 EXT. CHERNOBYL - SOUTH OF THE POWER PLANT - NIGHT

230

Smoky haze from the fire, visible in the nearly-full moon, blankets the ground.

The air occasionally flickers with an eerie fluorescent glow. No one here. No movement, no life.

Until.

HEADLIGHTS appear - an ARMORED TRUCK approaches from the east...

INTERCUT WITH - PIKALOV, driving the truck, in full gear. Gas mask concealing his face.

ON THE FRONT OF THE TRUCK - a large DOSIMETER, blinking lights, secured to the grill with MASKING TAPE.

PIKALOV'S POV - through the window screen - the POWER PLANT CHAIN LINK FENCE - and beyond it, the back side of Reactor Building #4 - and the fire raging from within...

He slows as he approaches the gate. Stop. Hesitates. Then: TURNS AROUND. Starts to drive away.

Then STOPS again.

ON PIKALOV - SHIFTING the truck into REVERSE, and:

STOMPS on the ACCELERATOR, and:

THE TRUCK - gears whining as it picks up speed, heading backwards, and:

SMASHES through the GATE, sending chain link and steel poles scattering aside...

The truck stops again, then turns slowly to face its destination.

PIKALOV'S POV - through the window screen - as he drives SLOWLY NOW, his headlights illuminate the desolate landscape of the broken power plant.

We stay in his POV as he weaves through: chunks of burning graphite. The wreckage of pumps and machinery thrown from somewhere deep in the building...

And as he turns around to the west side of the building: ABANDONED FIRE TRUCKS... OPEN HOSES still connected to the plant hydrants, SPEWING WATER into drainage grates...

ON PIKALOV - he turns the wheel, searching for the closest spot, and as he comes around a turn, we can see his eyes widen, even through the goggles of his face mask...

Because he sees it now.

And reflected against his windshield--

--a terrible, UNNATURAL light.

231 INT. TEMP. MILITARY SHELTER - BASE CAMP - NIGHT

231

A temporary command tent. Bryukhanov and Fomin sit in silence. Across the room, Legasov sits alone.

And in the middle of the room, between them... Shcherbina. Waiting with no expression whatsoever.

No one looks at anyone. No one says a word. Then-- a SOLDIER enters.

SOLDIER

He's back.

232 EXT. BASE CAMP - MOMENTS LATER

232

Shcherbina strides out, followed by Legasov, Bryukhanov and Fomin. The armored truck is 100 meters away, and men in protective gear are HOSING IT DOWN with a WHITE FOAM.

Twenty meters away, men hose down PIKALOV - still in his gear - and then help him remove his hood... gas mask... unzip the overalls... he unbuckles the boots...

Finally, Pikalov walks over to them.

PIKALOV

It's not three roentgen.

They hang in anticipation. Everyone's fate in the balance.

PIKALOV

It's fifteen thousand.

Legasov closes his eyes. That was the number he expected. Fomin is speechless. Bryukhanov scoffs.

BRYUKHANOV

Comrade Shcherbina--

Shcherbina fixes his deadly glare on Bryukhanov, who instantly shuts up. Then Shcherbina turns to Legasov.

SHCHERBINA

What does that number mean?

LEGASOV

It means the core is open and the fuel is melting down. It means the fire we're watching with our own eyes is giving off nearly twice the radiation released by the bomb in Hiroshima. And that's every single hour. Hour after hour.

(checks his watch)

Twenty hours since the explosion. Forty bombs' worth by now.

(MORE)

LEGASOV (cont'd)

Forty-eight more tomorrow. And it will not stop. Not in a week. Not in a month. It will burn and spread its poison until the entire continent is dead.

No one says a word. Then Shcherbina turns to a soldier.

SHCHERBINA

Please escort Comrades Bryukhanov and Fomin to the local Party headquarters.

Just as Bryukhanov foresaw. They're being arrested.

SHCHERBINA

Thank you for your service, gentlemen.

Bryukhanov attempts a protest, even as he knows it's pointless.

BRYUKHANOV

Comrade...

SHCHERBINA

You're excused.

Discussion over. Two more soldiers move in and guide Bryukhanov and Fomin away.

FOMIN

Dyatlov was in charge! It was Dyatlov!

And they're gone. Shcherbina takes a moment. Doesn't notice Legasov's disquiet about what just happened. Just:

SHCHERBINA

Tell me how to put it out.

PIKALOV

We'll use helicopters. Drop water on it, like a forest fire.

LEGASOV

No-- no-- you don't understand. You're dealing with something that has never occurred on this planet before. This isn't a "fire". It's a fissioning reactor core burning at over 2,000 degrees. The heat will instantly vaporize the water-- or worse, ionize it, and then you're--

SHCHERBINA

(no time)

How do we--

LEGASOV

Sand. Sand and boron. Thousands of drops because the helicopters can't go directly over the core, so much of it is going to miss, and there are other-- risks-- but I don't see any other way.

SHCHERBINA

How much sand and boron?

LEGASOV

Well I can't be as accurate as I'd--

SHCHERBINA

For god's sake-- roughly.

LEGASOV

Five thousand tons?

Shcherbina and Pikalov look at each other. *Five thousand tons?*

LEGASOV

And obviously we need to immediately evacuate an enormous area of--

SHCHERBINA

(bristles)

Never mind that. Focus on the fire.

LEGASOV

I am focusing on the fire. The wind is carrying the smoke, all that radiation-- at least evacuate Pripyat! It's three kilometers away!

SHCHERBINA

That's my decision to make.

LEGASOV

Then make it.

SHCHERBINA

I've been told not to.

LEGASOV

Is it or is it not your decision?!

SHCHERBINA

I am in charge here! This will go much easier if you talk to me about things you DO understand, and do NOT talk to me about things you do NOT understand.

With that Shcherbina turns and walks off in a huff.

LEGASOV

(shouts after him)
Where are you going?

SHCHERBINA

(shouts back)
I'm GOING to get you five thousand tons of sand and boron!

And just like that, he's gone. Legasov stands there, unsure of what to do. Or where to go.

PIKALOV

There's a hotel.

Legasov looks at him. A *hotel*? It's all so surreal... but...

233 EXT. POLISSYA HOTEL - PRIPYAT - NIGHT

233

A six storey, white building. Typical Soviet brutalist design. Could just as easily be a prison.

Legasov is dropped off by a Red Army UAZ-469, which drives away, leaving him alone. He looks around, still in shock.

A FEW CITIZENS - take their nightly strolls. Walk their pets. No one knows. And he can't tell them.

234 INT. POLISSYA HOTEL - LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

234

Legasov slowly walks through the lobby, like he's in a waking nightmare. The hotel is quiet, but there are the bellhops... the front desk attendants... the maids...

He turns and sees: a BAR off to the side. He crosses over to it and takes a seat. Everything feels upside-down.

Around the bend of the bar, a couple. HUSBAND and WIFE from the looks of it. 30's, probably locals. Sharing a quiet but merry conversation. Perhaps a birthday night out.

The BARTENDER, 20-ish woman, unscrews the cap on a bottle of vodka and takes a upturned glass from the bar. Legasov points to one of the glasses that are FACE DOWN on the bar.

LEGASOV

I'd prefer one of those.

She looks at him oddly. Uhh, okay. She takes one of the glasses he wants, and pours him his drink.

The HUSBAND AND WIFE have stopped chatting. They've noticed this. Legasov doesn't realize they're looking at him until:

LOCAL WIFE

Moscow?

He looks over at her. What? Oh. His clothes... or his face? He nods. Lost.

LOCAL WIFE

Superstitious?

Your strange request about the glass?

Oh. Yeah. Superstitious. He turns back to his drink, but:

LOCAL WIFE

Are you here because of the fire?

Please stop asking questions. Legasov nods. Yes. The wife and husband share a look. Then:

LOCAL WIFE

Anything we should be worried about?

Legasov turns to them. They're trying to disguise their concern... their fear... but doing a poor job of it.

A long pause. *Tell them. Tell them. Tell them.*

LEGASOV

No.

The couple do another poor job of disguising their relief. They each raise a glass to him. He raises his to them, and then he drinks. Fast.

CLOSE ON LEGASOV: the bottle enters frame. Pours another.

We stay CLOSE ON LEGASOV, soaking in his fear and guilt and frustration, and all sound FADES TO SILENCE.

DISSOLVE TO:

235 EXT. ABOVE THE PRIPYAT FOREST - MORNING 235

WE MOVE SILENTLY IN THE AIR - over the pine forest. What started as a narrow band of reddish/brown trees has widened. Death is spreading.

236 INT. FOREST - CONTINUOUS 236

A thick mist hangs over the ground. The only sound is the occasional creak of wood.

The mist shifts, and now we see the forest floor. Blanketed in dead pine needles.

The corpse of a deer.

Now we hear: a faint *whup-whup-whup-whup*

In the distance, PINE NEEDLES are blown off of dead trees... the sound grows to a DEAFENING ROAR... the wave of air and pine needles rushes closer, and:

LOOK UP THROUGH THE TREES TO SEE: a squadron of SOVIET AIR FORCE HELICOPTERS flying by in formation.

237 EXT. ABOVE THE FOREST - CONTINUOUS 237

The helicopters bank around toward Chernobyl.

TITLE:

**MORNING, APRIL 27
30 HOURS AFTER THE EXPLOSION**

238 OMITTED 238**239 EXT. ROOF OF ADMIN BUILDING - CHERNOBYL - CONTINUOUS 239**

LEGASOV stands on the roof, watching the helicopters through binoculars.

Shcherbina stands next to him. Behind them, set up on a small portable table, is a STASIUK, a RADIO OFFICER with a radio and microphone.

We hear the squawk of voices over the radio.

BASE COMMAND (RADIO)
 Boris squadron, maintain altitude,
 hold at 5 kilometers. Anna squadron
 proceed to pattern. Lead One begin
 approach. Keep clear of the
 construction cranes on the south
 edge of the zone, and move in from
 the east.

As Legasov watches, four helicopters come closer. Three remain in a holding pattern while the LEAD COPTER begins to move slowly toward the reactor site.

PILOT (RADIO)
 Anna squadron to pattern, Lead One
 on approach from east.

The lead helicopter BANKS as it begins to move toward the PLUME OF SMOKE. Legasov watches. Nervous.

LEGASOV
 Remind them about the perimeter.

Stasiuk looks to Shcherbina for the okay on that. Shcherbina scowls. Doesn't like taking orders from Legasov. But nods. Fine.

STASIUK
 (into mic)
 They cannot fly directly over the
 fire. A minimum of a ten meter
 perimeter.

BASE COMMAND (RADIO)
 Ten meter perimeter, copy.

A bit of static, then:

BASE COMMAND (RADIO)
 Lead One, per preflight-- maintain
 minimum ten meter perimeter.

PILOT (RADIO)
 Cop[distortion].

Legasov continues to peer through the binoculars. Shcherbina just watches with his eyes. Unblinking.

The helicopter moves slowly toward the plume of smoke.

PILOT (RADIO)
 Forty meters. [distortion]-five
 Thirty.

The smoke suddenly SHIFTS, and washing over the helicopter, partially obscuring it.

Legasov lowers the binoculars. He's lost sight of the copter.

ON THE RADIO - the signal is starting to distort. Then:

PILOT (RADIO)
 (breaking up)
 --visibility, I [can't]--
 (breaking up)
 --twent[y]--

BASE COMMAND (RADIO)
 Lead One, repeat.

PILOT (RADIO)
 [distortion] are we [distortion]

BASE COMMAND (RADIO)
 Repeat. Repeat.

The wind shifts, and the smoke moves away, briefly REVEALING THE COPTER. It's drifting RIGHT OVER THE FIRE.

LEGASOV
 No no no-- they're too close.

The smoke returns, OBSCURING THE HELICOPTER again.

Stasiuk looks to Shcherbina.

LEGASOV
 (no time for this)
 They cannot go over the core-- tell them!

Shcherbina gives Stasiuk another nod. Do it.

STASIUK
 Lead One is too close, I repeat they are too close!

BASE COMMAND (RADIO)
 Copy.
 (beat)
 Lead One, you are inside the perimeter. Abort. Abort.

PILOT (RADIO)
 [distortion] can't [distortion]

As the wind buffets the smoke, we catch GLIMPSES of the helicopter. It's hovering RIGHT OVER THE FIRE, now facing the wrong way.

STASIUK
Abort. Abort. Abort.

BASE COMMAND
Abort abort. Lead One--

PILOT
[distorted] I can't [distorted]
oh... oh... [distorted]

ON THE RADIO - LOUD STATIC... worse than silence. Then: Legasov, Shcherbina and Stasiuk watch in horror as the wind shifts the smoke away, revealing:

The helicopter is still just hovering there. Right over the mouth of the open reactor.

BASE COMMAND (RADIO)
Lead One. Lead One.

Nothing. Radio silence.

And then the helicopter slowly DRIFTS toward a CONSTRUCTION CRANE... off kilter, tilting ODDLY as if drunk...

...and its rotor blades STRIKE the steel cable hanging from the crane... the BLADES DISINTEGRATE, and--

--the helicopter ROLLS OVER and PLUMMETS from the sky.

Legasov turns away. Doesn't want to look. But he hears the distant THUD of the impact. His stomach turns.

Shcherbina hangs his head. The worst possible beginning.

The radio's distorted signal drops to a muted HISS. Then:

BASE COMMAND (RADIO)
(solemn)
Please advise.

STASIUK
(shaken)
Sir? What do I tell the others?

SHCHERBINA
Legasov.
(nothing)
Legasov, is there another way to do this?

Legasov shakes his head "no". Shcherbina turns back to Stasiuk.

SHCHERBINA

Send the next one in. And tell them to approach from the west.

Legasov walks away. Overwhelmed. Shcherbina lets him go.

240 OMITTED 240

241 OMITTED 241

242 OMITTED 242

243 OMITTED 243

244 OMITTED 244

245 OMITTED 245

246 EXT. KURCHATOV INSTITUTE - MOSCOW - DAY 246

The most Soviet building imaginable. A four story, brown box with a band of ugly orange tiling just under the roof.

We hear a PHONE RINGING.

247 INT. MARINA'S OFFICE / KHOMYUK'S LAB - CONTINUOUS 247

MARINA, 40's, scientist in a lab, answers the phone.

MARINA

Kurchatov Institute Laboratory 4.

INTERCUT WITH: KHOMYUK, in *her* lab, on the phone. Dmitri sits with her, listening to Khomyuk's end of the conversation.

KHOMYUK

Marina Gruzinskaya, it's Ulana Khomyuk from Minsk.

Marina tenses. Already knows what this is about. Glances at her phone, with its lit up buttons. This is a nuclear lab in the Soviet Union. No such thing as a private call.

MARINA

(stiffly pleasant)

Oh, yes, how nice of you to phone.
It's been too long.

Khomyuk registers the woman's tone. Good.

KHOMYUK

It has. I was actually calling about our friend-- you know, the one in the country?

MARINA

Yes, of course.

KHOMYUK

I wanted to see how he was doing.
It's so hot there right now.

MARINA

Yes, it's extremely hot. But--
(thinks)
His nephews are flying in, and they always bring cool weather with them.

KHOMYUK

Oh? Which nephews?

MARINA

Simka, who's 14, and little Boris, who just turned 5.

Khomyuk looks at the small reference PERIODIC TABLE taped on the wall under some cabinets. Sees the symbols for Si (14) and B (5).

KHOMYUK

Well that's wonderful. Of course, children can make you even hotter when they're crawling all over you.

MARINA

That's true. But what can you do?

KHOMYUK

Maybe I'll go visit them.

MARINA

No, they don't want visitors. I'm sorry, I have to get back to work. It's very busy right now. Goodbye.

Khomyuk hears the CLICK as Marina hangs up. She puts the phone down.

KHOMYUK

They're dropping sand and boron on the fire.

DMITRI

It's what I would do.

KHOMYUK

Yes, I'm sure it is.

She moves across the lab to a low storage unit with wide drawers. Begins pulling open the drawers, looking for--

--there. A set of BLUEPRINTS. She puts them on her desk.

Dmitri joins her, curious, as she hunts through the blueprints for something. Flip, flip, flip, flip -- there.

An elevation of an industrial building. HER FINGER traces down... to a cross-section of two EMPTY SPACES.

She thinks for a second, then FOLDS UP the blueprints and moves to the exit.

DMITRI

Where are you going?

KHOMYUK

(not looking back)
Chernobyl.

248 INT. POLISSYA HOTEL - SHCHERBINA'S SUITE - DAY

248

A minimalist suite. Bedroom with an attached area for a sofa, chair, coffee table. On it, plates of untouched food. Ashtrays full of cigarettes.

They've been holed up in here for a bit.

LEGASOV stands by the window. Staring out and down at something-- perhaps on the street below. We don't see what. From outside, the steady drone of distant HELICOPTERS.

SHCHERBINA enters. Legasov turns to him. News?

SHCHERBINA
It's been smooth. Twenty drops.

No change in Legasov's somber expression. Shcherbina's short fuse is immediately lit.

SHCHERBINA
What.

LEGASOV
There are fifty thousand people in this city.

So. This argument again.

SHCHERBINA
Professor Ilyin-- who is also on the commission-- says the radiation isn't high enough to evacuate--

LEGASOV
Ilyin isn't a physicist--

SHCHERBINA
He's a medical doctor. If he says it's safe, it's safe.

LEGASOV
Not if they stay here.

SHCHERBINA
We're staying here...

LEGASOV
Yes we are. And we'll be dead in five years.

The second the words leave his mouth, Legasov regrets them.

Shcherbina stands in total shock. Guttled.

LEGASOV
I'm-- I'm sorry, I didn't--

Shcherbina limply waves him off. Stop talking.

He sits down. Trying to swallow what he's just been told.

THE PHONE RINGS. Jars us. Shcherbina picks it up, in a daze.

SHCHERBINA
Shcherbina.

Legasov watches Shcherbina's face as he listens to the person on the other end. After a few long seconds...

SHCHERBINA

Thank you.

He hangs up. All of the fight gone out of him.

SHCHERBINA

A nuclear plant in Sweden detected radiation. And identified it as a byproduct of our fuel. The Americans took satellite photos-- the reactor building. The smoke. The fire. The whole world knows.

Shcherbina joins Legasov at the window. Stares out. Pale.

SHCHERBINA

The wind's been blowing toward Germany. They're not letting children play outside in Frankfurt.

THEIR POV: CHILDREN at a playground just across the street.

MUSIC: the familiar ABC NIGHTLY NEWS fanfare.

249 EXT. PLAYGROUND - CONTINUOUS

249

As children laugh and play, we hear the voice of:

PETER JENNINGS (V.O.)

There has been a nuclear accident in the Soviet Union, and the Soviets have admitted that it happened.

In the near distance, the PLUME OF BLACK SMOKE continues to rise from Chernobyl...

250 INT. KREMLIN CONFERENCE ROOM

250

Gorbachev sits alone, watching a VHS PLAYBACK of a Western news report on television. Grim.

PETER JENNINGS (ON TV)

The Soviet version is this: one of the atomic reactors at the Chernobyl Atomic Power Plant near the city of Kiev was damaged, and there is speculation in Moscow that people were injured and may have died.

(MORE)

PETER JENNINGS (ON TV) (cont'd)
 The Soviets may have been fairly quick to acknowledge the accident because evidence-- in the form of mild nuclear radiation--

251 EXT. HIGHWAY - UKRAINIAN COUNTRYSIDE

251

A motorcycle parked on the left shoulder of a WINDING HIGHWAY in the middle of nowhere. A young man is attempting to fix a thrown chain.

His girlfriend stands waiting. Smoking.

PETER JENNINGS (V.O.)
 --had already reached beyond the Soviet borders to Scandinavia.

An EMPTY KIEV CITY BUS rounds the bend and ROARS past them, heading north down the highway.

Then another. And another. And another.

The girl nudges her boyfriend to get his attention. He rises, and they both watch in confusion as:

Kiev city buses keep coming, one after the other...

252 EXT. PRIPYAT STREET - DAY

252

People walk outside. Push prams. Carry groceries.

A MILITARY truck rumbles into view. There are LOUDSPEAKERS mounted to the truck. A PIERCING electronic SQUEAL.

A female voice echoes out from the loudspeakers. A recording. Slow, deliberate, oddly calm.

LOUDSPEAKER
 ATTENTION.

And despite the eerie sedation of her voice, the people on the street immediately begin BACKING AWAY from the truck. Frightened. Whatever this is, it won't be good.

LOUDSPEAKER
 ATTENTION.

253 EXT. PRIPYAT - VARIOUS - MONTAGE**253**

The LOUDSPEAKER TRUCKS are everywhere, crawling at a snail's pace through the city.

LOUDSPEAKER
ATTENTION.

SOLDIERS begin moving in formation toward groups of people, who put their arms up, submissively moving backwards.

LOUDSPEAKER
ATTENTION.

TITLE:

**2 P.M., APRIL 27
36 HOURS AFTER THE EXPLOSION**

Soldiers are stopping cars. Gesturing for people to get out. Leave the cars... leave everything in the cars...

LOUDSPEAKER
FOR THE ATTENTION OF THE RESIDENTS
OF PRIPYAT.

Soldiers head into buildings. Fists POUND on doors.

LOUDSPEAKER
THE CITY COUNCIL INFORMS YOU THAT DUE
TO THE ACCIDENT AT CHERNOBYL POWER
STATION IN THE CITY OF PRIPYAT--

The KIEV BUSES begin arriving. Soldiers clear people out of stores. Panicky parents grab their children from playgrounds.

Teachers leads students out of school in single file lines.

LOUDSPEAKER
--THE RADIOACTIVE CONDITIONS IN THE
VICINITY ARE DETERIORATING.

In the HOSPITAL - soldiers move through the hallways. Usher patients out of bed. People are removing their own IV's...

Soldiers push the incapacitated out in gurneys. Even they cannot stay.

ZINCHENKO is treating MIKHAIL and OKSANA'S BABY, who is still shrieking in Mikhail's arms.

LOUDSPEAKER
 THE COMMUNIST PARTY, ITS OFFICIALS,
 AND THE ARMED FORCES ARE TAKING
 NECESSARY STEPS TO COMBAT THIS.

A soldier gestures for her to leave. She refuses. He grabs her. Another soldier takes the baby from Mikhail, who tries to stop them, but he has no strength. All he can do is cry.

Zinchenko fights to get to the baby, but they DRAG her away.

LOUDSPEAKER
 NEVERTHELESS, WITH THE VIEW TO KEEP
 PEOPLE AS SAFE AND HEALTHY AS
 POSSIBLE--

ON THE STREETS - people are being lined up to board buses. Scared, but compliant. Like livestock.

Nearby, a CRYING LITTLE GIRL. Alone. A soldier enters and casually LIFTS HER and takes her away. No one says a word.

LOUDSPEAKER
 --THE CHILDREN BEING THE TOP
 PRIORITY, WE NEED TO TEMPORARILY
 EVACUATE THE CITIZENS IN THE NEAREST
 TOWNS OF KIEV OBLAST.

People file into the streets, all under the watchful eye of soldiers. Some of them are barely dressed.

LOUDSPEAKER
 FOR THESE REASONS, STARTING FROM
 APRIL 27, 1986, 2 P.M., EACH
 APARTMENT BLOCK WILL BE ABLE TO HAVE
 A BUS AT ITS DISPOSAL, SUPERVISED BY
 THE POLICE AND THE CITY OFFICIALS.

Outside, ZHARKOV, the elderly Pripjat minister who gave the rousing speech in the Chernobyl command bunker, is helped toward a bus by a soldier.

The old Soviet believer seems utterly confused. He doesn't understand... they were told it was safe...

LOUDSPEAKER
 THE SENIOR EXECUTIVES OF PUBLIC AND
 INDUSTRIAL FACILITIES OF THE CITY
 HAVE DECIDED ON THE LIST OF
 EMPLOYEES NEEDED TO STAY IN PRIPYAT
 TO MAINTAIN THESE FACILITIES IN GOOD
 WORKING ORDER.

At the buses, the soldiers start taking PETS away... adults and children CRYING as dogs, cats, rabbits, hamsters... all pulled from their arms.

The people are going. The animals are staying.

LOUDSPEAKER
COMRADES LEAVING YOUR RESIDENCES
TEMPORARILY, PLEASE MAKE SURE YOU
HAVE TURNED OFF THE LIGHTS,
ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT AND WATER, AND
SHUT THE WINDOWS.

NEAR THE HOSPITAL - Hundreds of patients on gurneys. Even more stumbling around in hospital gowns. Soldiers trying to get them into ambulances. Onto buses.

ZINCHENKO leans over a RUBBISH BIN. Vomiting. She finishes, and stands back up weakly.

Looks at her hand. It's oozing fluid through the bandage. Her other hand is bright red now. Blistering.

The Pripyat Nurse rushes over and leads Zinchenko to an ambulance. She stumbles toward it. It doesn't matter now. She's dying.

LOUDSPEAKER
PLEASE REMAIN CALM AND ORDERLY IN
THE PROCESS OF THIS SHORT TERM
EVACUATION.

The BUSES full of people begin to pull away... one after another in a line... abandoned PET DOGS run after the buses, trying to stay with their owners...

ON THE ROOF OF THE POLISSYA HOTEL - Legasov and Shcherbina watch the evacuation in somber silence.

From here, we can see the scope of it.

The soldiers. The military vehicles. The abandoned cars. The dogs and cats. The circling helicopters.

The Soviet flags. The propaganda billboards.

And the endless convoy of buses as they drive away with the former citizens of Pripyat.

This time, it's Shcherbina who can't look. This time, it's Shcherbina who turns and walks away.

And the loudspeaker recording begins again.

LOUDSPEAKER
ATTENTION. ATTENTION. ATTENTION.

254 EXT. EDGE OF PRIPYAT - NIGHT

254

As the last of the buses rumbles past the military checkpoint, a small CAR comes driving up toward the town.

Soldiers step out, hands raised. A few more ready their rifles. The car slows to a stop. ZUKAUSKAS, a soldier, moves toward the car.

ZUKAUSKAS
NO ENTRY. TURN AROUND.

But instead, KHOMYUK rolls down her window. There are a dozen men with guns. She's terrified. But defiant.

ZUKAUSKAS
I said turn around. This is a restricted zone.

KHOMYUK
I'm from the Byelorussian Institute of Nuclear--

SOUND: a HELICOPTER ZOOMS BY overhead. LOW. She flinches from the noise. The wind. This isn't where she belongs.

ZUKAUSKAS
Do you have permission?

KHOMYUK
Listen to me. I need to--

ZUKAUSKAS
Turn around right now, or I will arrest you.

Only one option left. She gathers her courage.

KHOMYUK
If you arrest me, you should take me to the highest possible authority.

Another HELICOPTER rockets by. The guards look at each other. What is this woman on about?

255 EXT. POLISSYA HOTEL - NIGHT**255**

A Red Army UAZ-469 drives up to the hotel. There are lights on in the lower windows. All of the windows above the first storey are dark...

256 INT. POLISSYA HOTEL - BANQUET ROOM - NIGHT**256**

The type of place where you might have a wedding. The fancy lights and carpet are a strange contrast to Legasov and Shcherbina, who sit at a banquet table, looking at a large MAP of the region.

Legasov smokes as he talks. Shcherbina barely looks at the map. Seems lost in his thoughts.

LEGASOV

We have to start a radiological survey. Sector by sector. On foot-- dosimeters in hand--

Legasov realizes Shcherbina isn't listening.

LEGASOV

Are you all right?

Shcherbina lifts his head. Forces a reassuring smile. Then:

PIKALOV enters with KHOMYUK.

PIKALOV

I'm sorry to interrupt. The guards arrested this woman at the south checkpoint. I would have put her in a cell, but--

KHOMYUK

--but he thought you should know that I know.

Before Legasov can even ask--

KHOMYUK

I know your reactor core is exposed. I know the graphite is on fire, the fuel is melting, and you're dropping sand and boron on it. Which you probably thought was smart. But you've made a mistake.

(MORE)

KHOMYUK (cont'd)

(beat)

Ulana Yuriyvna Khomyuk, chief physicist, Byelorussian Institute for Nuclear Energy. You're Valery Alexeyevich Legasov?

He nods. A bit bewildered.

KHOMYUK

Smothering the core will put the fire out, but the temperature will eventually increase. It will melt down--

He raises a hand to stop her.

LEGASOV

Believe me, I'm perfectly aware. But I estimate at least a month before it melts through the lower concrete pad, which gives us time to--

KHOMYUK

You don't have a month. You have approximately two days.

Before Legasov can respond, she puts the BLUEPRINTS down on top of their map. Points to the bottom of the reactor.

KHOMYUK

Yes, the fuel *would* take a month to reach the concrete pad here, but first it's going to burn through the biological shield here by Tuesday. And when it does, it's going to hit these tanks. Bubbler pools. Reser--

LEGASOV

Reservoirs for the ECS. I understand your concern, but I confirmed it with plant personnel-- the tanks are nearly empty.

KHOMYUK

No. They *were* nearly empty.

That gets Legasov's attention. He leans in, concerned, as she points to the blueprints again.

KHOMYUK

Each of these points, here, here, here in the reactor hall... all drain to the bubbler pools.

Legasov leans back. Beginning to understand.

KHOMYUK

I'm guessing every pipe in the building ruptured. And then there are those fire engines I saw on the way in.

Pikalov turns to Legasov.

PIKALOV

The fire hoses are still connected. They've been gushing water into the structure this whole time.

LEGASOV

(horrified)

The tanks are full...

Shcherbina is utterly confused, but he can see from Legasov's face-- something has gone terribly wrong.

257 INT./EXT. NEWS REPORTS - VARIOUS

257

The ugly globe-and-red-star logo of the Soviet nightly news program VREMYA ("time") gives way to an oddly-framed newsdesk in front of a large blue screen.

A female newsreader calmly reads a 14-second report. This is footage of the actual newscast made on April 28th, 1986.

Translation only is SUBTITLED over the footage.

VREMYA NEWS ANCHOR

An official announcement from the Council of Ministers. There has been an accident at the Chernobyl atomic power station. One of the atomic reactors was damaged. Steps are being taken to deal with the situation, and aid is being given to those affected. The government has formed a commission of inquiry.

258 INT. KREMLIN CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

258

The commission is assembled, waiting, including Legasov, Shcherbina and Khomyuk, who sits with them.

Gorbachev enters. Weary. Visibly stressed. Everyone rises and sits back down quickly as he takes his seat.

GORBACHEV

I have ten minutes. Then I'm back on the phone. Apologizing to our friends. Apologizing to our enemies.

He glares at Legasov and Shcherbina.

GORBACHEV

Our power comes from the *perception* of our power. Do you understand the damage this has done? Do you understand what's at stake?

(beat)

Boris.

SHCHERBINA

Professor Legasov will deliver our briefing.

Gorbachev leans back. This isn't the stubborn, bull-headed Shcherbina he knows. This man seems sullen, defeated...

Legasov stands up, eager to draw attention from Shcherbina.

LEGASOV

We do have-- some-- good news. The air drops are working to douse the fire. There has been a reduction in radionuclide emissions, but the fire will not be extinguished for at least another two weeks.

Gorbachev hangs his head. Two weeks.

LEGASOV

There is also-- an additional problem.

Gorbachev slowly raises his eyes. There's *more*?

Legasov opens a document binder in front of him. Everyone in the room has the same one in front of them. As Legasov turns pages, so do they, en masse.

The first page is a CROSS SECTION of the REACTOR.

LEGASOV

Nuclear fuel doesn't turn cold simply because it's not on fire. In fact, the temperature will likely rise as a result of the blanket of sand we've dropped.

(MORE)

LEGASOV (cont'd)

The uranium will begin to melt the sand around it, creating a kind of-- lava-- which will begin to melt down through the shield below.

GORBACHEV

You've made... lava.

LEGASOV

(clears his throat)

I had anticipated this. I believed we had time to reinforce this lower concrete pad before the lava reached the earth and contaminated the groundwater. But as it turns out, I was worried about the wrong thing.

Legasov turns the page. We now see a closer section of the blueprint, focusing on the core and the pools underneath.

LEGASOV

It was my understanding the large water tanks under the reactor were essentially empty.

(gestures to)

This is Ulana Khomyuk of the Byelorussian Institute. Thanks to her insight, we are now aware that the tanks are, in fact, full.

GORBACHEV

(impatient)

Of water. What exactly is the problem here, Legasov?

Legasov nods to Khomyuk who rises. He sits down.

KHOMYUK

(the blueprint page)

When the lava enters these tanks, it will instantly superheat and vaporize approximately 7000 cubic meters of water, causing a significant thermal explosion.

The word "explosion" sits there for a moment. Then:

GORBACHEV

How significant?

A beat. Then:

KHOMYUK

We estimate between two and four megatons.

The men in the room react. My god.

Khomyuk flips to the next page. The room flips along with her. The *snap* of papers moving.

This is a map of the Pripyat/Chernobyl region. She makes a CIRCLING gesture on the page with her finger.

KHOMYUK

Everything within a 30 kilometer radius will be completely destroyed, including the other three nuclear reactors at Chernobyl. The entirety of radioactive material in all of the cores will be ejected at force, and dispersed by a massive shockwave--

She flips to the next page, and the room follows in turn. A larger map. Byelorussia and Ukraine.

KHOMYUK

--which will extend approximately 200 kilometers and likely be fatal to the entire population of Kiev as well as a portion of Minsk.

Gorbachev lowers his head to his hand. Can't look. Doesn't want to hear any more.

Khomyuk flips to the next page. The room follows. A map of Europe and Asia.

KHOMYUK

The release of radiation will be severe, and will impact all of Soviet Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania and Byelorussia, as well as Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary, and most of East Germany.

She sits down. Report concluded. Gorbachev takes a moment to absorb this, then:

GORBACHEV

What do you mean "impact"?

LEGASOV

For much of the area, a nearly permanent disruption of water and food supplies, and a steep increase in the rates of cancer and birth defects. I don't know how many will die, but-- many.

He hesitates, then:

LEGASOV

For Byelorussia and Ukraine, "impact" means completely uninhabitable. For a minimum of one hundred years.

The men in the room are staggered.

GORBACHEV

There are fifty million people in Byelorussia and Ukraine alone.

LEGASOV

Sixty. Yes.

GORBACHEV

How long before this happens?

LEGASOV

Approximately 48 to 72 hours.

Khomyuk watches their panic rise. Good. Panic is appropriate.

LEGASOV

But-- we believe we have a solution.

Legasov flips to the next page. A larger schematic of the power plant. The room flips along.

LEGASOV

We can pump the water from the tanks. Unfortunately, they're sealed off by a sluice gate, and the gate can only be opened manually from within the duct system itself. We need to find three plant workers who know the facility well enough to enter the basement here, find their way through all these ductways, get to the sluice gate valve here, and give us the access we need to pump out the tanks.

(beat)

Of course we'll need your permission.

GORBACHEV
Permission for what?

LEGASOV
The water in these ducts-- the level
of radioactive contamination--

KHOMYUK
(just say it)
They'll likely be dead in a week.

LEGASOV
We're asking your permission to kill
three men.

Gorbachev considers that. Turns to a GENERAL. Some kind of
silent communication between the two of them. Then:

GORBACHEV
Comrade Legasov. All victories
inevitably come at a cost. Sometimes
we count this cost in rubles.
(beat)
Sometimes we count it in lives.

259 EXT. PRIPYAT - VARIOUS - MORNING

259

We SILENTLY DRIFT through the empty city...

INSIDE CLASSROOMS - the desks are in an orderly grid.
Soviet propaganda on the wall. Lessons on the chalkboard.

OUTSIDE - tired, faded clothes hang from a drying line.

IN THE HOSPITAL - the wide, empty corridor. And now
different views. Equipment, beds, files... all scattered
about. A steady DRIP from a cracked IV bottle.

A BENCH ON THE STREET - a simple carving in the soft wood.
A worn pencil.

IN AN APARTMENT - a pair of old shoes next to an unmade bed.

A RESTAURANT - food still on tables, right where it was left.

THE FERRIS WHEEL - creaks gently in the breeze.

We PAN SLOWLY across the desolate ghost city until we land
on: the POLISSYA HOTEL.

260 INT. HOTEL BANQUET ROOM - MORNING

260

Shcherbina sits behind a table. Legasov stands next to him, pointing at the same facility schematic we just saw.

LEGASOV

--and open the sluice gate valve here.

Legasov turns away from the schematic to face: THE MEN - about thirty of them in civilian clothes, sitting on fancy banquet chairs, and staring back at him. Grim.

LEGASOV

There are multiple valves, so we'll need two to three men who know the basement layout-- and of course any volunteers will be rewarded. A yearly stipend of 400 rubles...

The men stare back at him. Unmoved. Legasov tries again.

LEGASOV

And for those of you working in reactors 1 and 2, promotions--

PLANT EMPLOYEE

Why are reactors 1 and 2 still operating at all?

Murmurs of agreement.

PLANT EMPLOYEE

My friend was a security guard that night. Her father tells me she's dying. And we've all heard about the firemen. Now you want us to swim underneath a burning reactor? Do you even know how contaminated it is?

LEGASOV

I don't have an exact number...

PLANT EMPLOYEE

You don't need an exact number to know if it will kill us. But you won't even tell us that. So why should we do this? For what? 400 rubles?

SHCHERBINA

You'll do it because it must be done.

Shcherbina slowly rises. Fixes his gaze on the men. His old gaze. His old anger and determination. The Ukrainian bull.

SHCHERBINA

You'll do it because no one else can,
and if you don't, millions will die.
And if you tell me that's not enough,
I won't believe you.

The Plant Employee sits down. The others listen carefully now, like they're finally hearing their native tongue.

SHCHERBINA

This is what has always set our people
apart. A thousand years of sacrifice
in our veins. And every generation
must know its own suffering. I spit on
the men who did this. And I curse the
price I have to pay. But I am making
my peace with it. You make yours. And
go into the water.

(beat)

Because it must be done.

Silence. Then... a MAN in the back rises. 30-years old.

ANANENKO

Ananenko.

A moment, then ANOTHER MAN rises. 40.

BEZPALOV

Bezpalov.

Then a THIRD MAN rises. 50.

BARANOV

Baranov.

Three men. Ready to die for what must be done.

Everyone looks at them like they're heroes. Because they
already are.

261 EXT. CHERNOBYL - NEAR ADMINISTRATION BUILDING - DAY

261

Pikalov's troops, in full hazard gear, stand by a
MAINTENANCE DOOR.

They silently turn, faceless behind their masks, to:

THE THREE MEN: Ananenko, Bezplov and Baranov-- each dressed in HEAVY DIVING WET SUITS. Soldiers strap DOSIMETERS to the men... one on the chest, one on an ankle.

Pikalov's men prepare the divers, like priests anointing sacrifices. Tightening gloves. Fastening boots.

Then they cover the three men's heads with RESPIRATOR MASKS. Ananenko, Bezplov and Baranov are now FACELESS.

Ananenko and Bezplov are given TORCHES and WRENCHES to hold. Baranov is given a DOSIMETER on the end of a TELESCOPING ROD.

It's time. A soldier TAPS on the maintenance door. Ready? The three divers look at each other. Then nod. Ready.

A RISE - ONE HUNDRED METERS AWAY - where Pikalov, Shcherbina and Legasov are watching.

Pikalov's men OPEN THE DOOR. The three divers ENTER.

262 INT. DUCTWAY ENTRANCE - SAME

262

The silhouettes of the three men are stark against the WHITE RECTANGLE OF LIGHT in the opening.

They step into the darkness... and the DOOR SEALS BEHIND THEM with a low, echoey BOOM.

They're sealed in now.

Pitch black. Then: a FLICKER of SPARKS floats down from above, giving us a GLIMPSE of:

A METAL STAIRWAY DOWN INTO THE DEPTHS. Another flicker. It's steep. Narrow. The layers of rustproofing are the color of dried blood.

Then: LIGHT. Two torch beams cut through the air, reflecting in the swirling particles of smoke and dust.

THE THREE - stand at the top of the steps. The light catches enough of the bottom for them to see:

REFLECTIVE WATER AT THE BOTTOM - dark and deathly still.

Baranov holds out the dosimeter. Points it down the stairs. The needle WOBBLER to the right.

No choice. It's the only way.

They head down the stairs.

263 INT. THE DUCTS - MOMENTS LATER

263

LIGHT - ripples on the surface of WATER.

THE THREE - move through the duct. The water comes up to their ANKLES here.

THE PASSAGEWAY - tight. Low. A claustrophobic maze of PIPES and ELECTRICAL CABLING. They duck their heads to go by.

No sound but their BREATH... and the occasional GROANING of the building above them...

Ananenko and Bezpалov shine their torches on the seemingly hundreds of interweaving pipes running along the sides of the wall and the ceiling.

There's tiny writing on some of them. Ananenko points to a pipe. "This one." Bezpалov nods. Yes. Follow it.

264 INT. DEEPER DOWN - MOMENTS LATER

264

Light bobs in the darkness as they round a bend, coming toward us. The water is deeper now. Up to their SHINS.

As they pass an opening to a SIDE-TUNNEL, Baranov points his dosimeter at it. The needle ROCKS HARD to the right.

Silently, he pushes the other two from behind. Move faster. Keep going.

They follow the duct... torch lights shining on the PIPES lining the sides... another turn... they're going DOWN now... the water seems darker here... and it's RISING.

Ananenko shines his torch toward the sound, and they see:

WATER - SEEPING IN from cracks in the tunnel wall. It's rising all around them now. Coming up to their KNEES.

Move faster. Keep going.

Their breathing gets heavier as they slosh through the rising water. Ahead, an intersection. Three tunnels.

The pipes are bending and crossing over each other. The men stop. Can't find the one they need.

Which way?

Baranov moves the dosimeter toward the WATER spilling in.
The needle rises. *The more water... the higher it goes...*

He turns back to Ananenko and Bezpalo-- and sees them both
MOVING THEIR LIGHTS over the three possible paths to take,
trying to make sense of the maze of pipes...

THE WATER RISES

THE DOSIMETER RISES

And then...

ANANENKO'S TORCH GOES DEAD.

They stop. Turn to him. He HITS IT. But it's dead. Fried.

Then:

BEZPALOV'S TORCH FLICKERS.

The three men stare at it. We can only see their eyes
through the goggles of their masks. That's enough.

Terror.

Please. No.

Their only remaining torch FLICKERS again.

Bezpalo-- hits it. The light comes back on.

And then it goes OUT.

And we see nothing now.

No walls. No floor.

No direction.

Just the sound of three men lost in the rising water--

--and their BREATHING... growing FASTER and LOUDER until
it's too much to bear, and:

BLACK

END OF EPISODE TWO