

# TV Time: The Americans 5.11

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**Title:** Dyatkovo

## Episode M.V.P.: Irina Dubova

What has always made *The Americans* resonate with me is the way it makes you care about basically every character—from Philip, Elizabeth, and Stan to the various men, women, and even children who find themselves caught up in the tangled web they're weaving. The casting department for this show consistently manages to find actors who are able to break my heart in even the smallest roles. That was certainly true in this episode, as Irina Dubova (who only has 11 acting credits to her name dating back to just 2013, according to IMDB) made me feel physically sick over a soon-to-be victim's fate in a way I haven't felt since Lois Smith's incredible work as Betty in Season Three's "Do Mail Robots Dream of Electric Sheep?"

What I found most impressive about Dubova's work in this episode was the way she embodied the very core of *The Americans*—the concepts of truth, identity, and reality versus artifice—in such a short amount of time onscreen. The fact that I spent most of her scene truly wondering whether or not "Natalie" was who the Center believed she was is a credit to Dubova. In order for the scene to work, we had to be unsure, we had to doubt the Center at first, and then we also had to ask the same question Philip asks: Does it even matter if she really is who she the Center claims she is? Does she deserve to die?

That question can be asked of every one of Philip and Elizabeth's victims over the years, but for some reason, it weighed heavier on me during this scene than perhaps any other. So much of the

horror of this episode's final minutes came from the absolutely heartbreaking performance Dubova gave as the truth came out. Dubova made every word, every pause, and every breath feel deeply personal. When she begged Philip and Elizabeth not to let her husband know because "He thinks I'm wonderful," I felt absolutely gutted. It was such a simple line, but Dubova's delivery of it was devastating. The fact that what mattered most to her was not her own life but her husband's belief that she was a good person made every second that came afterward even more painful.

When "Natalie" and her husband were killed, I found myself more horrified than I have ever been over one of Philip and Elizabeth's kills on this show. Part of that was because her husband was completely innocent, but the main reason I was so viscerally upset was because Dubova made me care about her character despite my own best instincts. Did she do terrible things to survive? Yes. Was she perhaps "more deserving" (if that can ever be said) of the violence that befell her than Betty or the lab worker from earlier this season or the man Philip killed on the bus in that infamous "Tainted Love" scene? Yes. But the whole point of this scene was to put us in Philip's shoes, asking if that matters at all. She might have done the Nazis' dirty work, but she is still a human being who feels, who loves, and who has a family she wants to protect. And Dubova made all of that so horribly clear in that scene, making me feel every bit as broken as Philip over the idea of this woman having to die. "Natalie" wasn't just a target; she was a person, and for the ending of this episode to hit as heavily as it did, she needed to feel like a fully realized, complex person, which Dubova did with heartbreaking honesty as her character's true story began to unfold.