

The Offering

by Dan Simmons

Introduction

Just recently, as I write this in the early autumn of 1989, I optioned my novel *Carrion Comfort* to a film and TV production group. As is the case with many would-be Ben Hechts, I wanted first crack at the screenplay.

All right, said the production group, but first let's see what you can do with a half-hour TV script.

I've never written a teleplay or screenplay before, but being a child of the second half of the Twentieth Century, I feel like I've *lived* in the movies for most of my life. As a writer, I've heard all of the horror stories about doing work-for-hire in this particular collaborative medium: the senseless rewrite demands, the producer's girlfriend sug-gesting a "great idea" that guts your script, the contempt so much of the industry has for writers ("Didja hear the one about the Polish starlet visiting Hollywood? To get ahead she slept with all the *writers!*"), the endless com-promises of quality in the face of budget or perceived mar-ket demands or whim or ... you name it. The list of aggravations seems infinite.

That's why it was interesting to me that my first attempt at script writing was a lot of fun. The rewrite suggestions not only were minimal but definitely improved the prod-uct. The people I dealt with were professionals, and I al-ways enjoy working with people who know their business—whether it's in carpentry or filmmaking. Of course, my agent says that it was a fluke ... *that* studio was OK but the next will drive me to drink and beyond. My agent is a gentleman and a friend ... he humors me ... but I know that in his heart he thinks that I should quit while I'm ahead.

Well, maybe. Maybe after one more TV show. Then perhaps a movie. Just a little movie ... and then, just maybe, a twenty-hour mini-series. And then...

Meanwhile, I thought you might be interested in how I decided to adapt "Metastasis" to teleplay form. Reading scripts is not the easiest or most enjoyable literary pursuit, so if you skip over this entry it's understandable.

But if you *do* bear on, it might interest you to know some of the demands and restrictions a low-budget syndi-cated TV series makes on the writer who's adapting a story.

First, the thing has to run about 22 or 23 pages to fit its half-hour format, averaging about a minute per page, since the rest of the time is taken up by the fershtugginer commercials that keep so many of us from *watching* these syndicated shows.

Second, as I'm sure you know, the "exciting parts" come right before the commercial cluster breaks. (They don't really give a damn what happens the last few minutes of the show ... they don't need to get you back after *that* break.)

Third, budget restrictions on this show allowed only three or four characters, or at least only that many charac-ters who could *speak*. No exterior shots (but the director wanted the "windshield" shots in the opening). Only two interior sets and those easy to construct. Limited special effects—one or two optical processes, a few seconds of simple animation, and a guy in a monster suit and/or mask.

Fourth, they wanted a new title. "Metastasis" was out. They were afraid the audience would flip channels rather than watch something with such an ominous, disease-ridden sound to it.

Fifth, one of the top people thought I should also throw out the idea of "cancer vampires"—but, hey, I had to draw the line somewhere. I pointed out that this was the concept for which they had bought the story. I rea-soned with them. I used logic. Then I held my breath until I turned blue, pounded my heels on the linoleum, and threatened to fax them six bales of junk mail if they didn't let me keep my cancer vampire. They relented.

There's more, but I think you get the idea. The ques-tion I faced was—could I adapt "Metastasis" so that the essence of the short story survived even while I tossed out major plot elements, characters, settings, and structure for the reasons listed above?

I found the challenge rather enjoyable. As I write this, the studio is just finishing the filming (actually taping) of "The Offering" and I have no idea when I'll see it. I don't know which actors were chosen. I can only guess what changes were made in the script during the actual produc-tion. (For those of you interested, the program will be aired on a syndicated series called *monsters*, scheduled somewhere between 11:00 P.M. and 4:00 A.M. in most lo-cal markets. God knows where and when it will be by the time you read this.)

I'd be curious to know what you think of this adapta-tion.

* * *

ACT I

FADE IN:

1. EXT. A CAR. NIGHT.

We open with a montage of images: E.C.U. of rain on a windshield, the blur of a windshield wiper; we close on LOUIS—a handsome young man but agitated now, un-shaven, intense, blinking in the glare of oncoming lights and obviously upset about something—a sudden flash of light too bright to be a passing car, brakes squealing, metal tearing ... from Louis's P.O.V. we see everything spinning and the glare expanding, the sound of impact, filling the universe with rising noise and moving light...

DISSOLVE TO:

2. INT. HOSPITAL ROOM. DAY.

The moving light blurs, comes into focus, and we see that it is a penlight held by DR. HUBBARD, an avuncular, older man wearing a white hospital coat over his suit.

DR. HUBBARD

Louis? Louis, can you hear me? Louis?

Louis tries to lift his head but is restrained by the doctor.

DR. HUBBARD

Easy, Louis. Easy. Just lie still for a moment. Do you know where you are?

Louis's head is heavily bandaged. He groans again, tries to lift both hands to his head, but stops—staring at his hospi-tal ID bracelet, the IV in his left arm, his hospital gown—looking around in surprise. He moves his head slowly, obviously in great pain, and squints up at the doctor.

LOUIS

Dr. Hubbard? Yeah, I know where I am ... the hospital ... but why? What happened?

The doctor smiles, plays with his unlit pipe.

DR. HUBBARD

We've been worried about you, Louis. You had quite a serious concussion. You've been uncon-scious for almost seventy-two hours. Do you re-member the accident?

LOUIS

Accident? Uh-uh, I don't remember any ... Wait, I remember *you* calling me ... telling me that Mom had been admitted to Mt. Sinai ... that you had to operate ... Oh, God, I remember ... can-cer! She has cancer! Like Dad.

Louis starts to sit up but the pain is so intense that he al most passes out. Dr. Hubbard takes him firmly by the shoulders, sets him gently back on the pillows.

DR. HUBBARD

(attempting to make his voice light)

Louis, I told you to *come* to the hospital, not put yourself *in* it. Do you remember anything about the accident?

Louis's eyes are still closed as he fights the pain, concen-trates. Finally he shakes his head ... he can't quite re-member.

DR. HUBBARD

After I told you about your mother's illness, you drove across town like a madman. Evidently your car hit some black ice on the Youngman Express-way ... rolled four or five times, the patrolman said ... Well, you've always been a bit reckless, Louis. Or at least since...

Dr. Hubbard removes the pipe, frowns at it as if just dis-covering it is unlit, and shakes his head.

LOUIS

(voice thick)

Was anyone else hurt?

DR. HUBBARD

No ... no one else. And you were lucky, my boy. The pressure on the left frontal lobe of your brain was ... well, it could have been very serious. As it is, you'll have quite a headache for a week or two ... possibly some double vision...

Louis opens his eyes and it is obvious by the intensity of his gaze that he is not worried about his own well-being.

LOUIS

Dr. Hubbard, how's Mom? You said on the phone that she had to go into surgery right away. Did you operate? Did you get all the cancer? Or is it ... like Dad's cancer when I was a kid. Is it too late?

Dr. Hubbard removes his pipe again, turns it over and over in his hands and stares at it.

DR. HUBBARD

This is a filthy habit, Louis. I gave it up a year ago, but still carry the pipe around ... can't get used to not having the thing with me...

Louis sits up in spite of the pain, grips the doctor's white coat and pulls him closer.

LOUIS

Tell me, damn it. How is she? How serious is the cancer? Is Mom going to be all right?

DR. HUBBARD

Louis, I've known your family for years ... I was your father's doctor when you were just a child, all during his long struggle...

Dr. Hubbard looks straight at Louis, all business now, his voice brisk.

DR. HUBBARD

When I spoke to you before your mother's oper-ation ... before your accident ... I had some hope that the surgery alone might eradicate her cancer. But the metastasis was more rapid than we thought and now ... well, we'll have to take it one day at a time now. There's always some-thing else to try...

Louis is stunned, speechless. Dr. Hubbard grips the younger man's shoulder.

DR. HUBBARD

We're going ahead with radiation treatment, Louis. We have new drugs now, medication to help diminish the pain of the ... of the coming weeks. We can hope for a remission. New proce-dures are being perfected all the time...

LOUIS

Where is she, Dr. Hubbard? Is Mom nearby?

DR. HUBBARD

She's right down the hall, Louis. Room 2119. You can visit her in a couple of days ... when we're sure you're better. The kind of head injury you sustained can have all sorts of nasty side ef-fects...

Louis struggles to get his legs off the bed, to stand up.

LOUIS

Mom!

Dr. Hubbard restrains him, forces him back onto the pil-lows.

DR. HUBBARD

(shouting over his shoulder)

Nurse!

A syringe is brought to the doctor. He checks the contents, administers it via Louis's IV.

DR. HUBBARD

You can see your mother tomorrow. Right now you have to rest. This will help you sleep.

Again in Louis's P.O.V., we see the doctor go out of focus and the overhead light glow brighter, brighter...

DR. HUBBARD

(as if from a great distance)

There's nothing you can do tonight, Louis. Just rest now. Rest. Rest...

CUT TO:

3. NIGHT. HOSPITAL ROOM.

Louis awakens to see the hospital room transformed by night. The curtain is drawn around the bed next to him. Rain taps against the windows and tall shadows are thrown on the opposite wall by the single nightlight in the monitor panel on the wall above his bed. Louis sits up, groans, re-moves his IV drip, and swings his legs over the edge of the bed. He is still groggy, half out of it.

LOUIS

I'm sorry I wasn't here, Mom ... They wouldn't let me in to see Dad ... I was too little...

Louis gets to his feet, sways, and staggers to the far wall, using it to brace himself as he moves toward the door.

LOUIS

I'm coming, Mom.

CUT TO:

4. INT. ANOTHER HOSPITAL ROOM. NIGHT.

The door to a hospital room slowly opens and we see Louis in his hospital gown. He is hanging on to the door-frame and obviously exhausted and in much pain. He moves into the room, weaves, and leans against the wall to keep from falling. There is a single bed in this room. It is dark and a curtain is drawn most of the way around the bed, but Louis can see his mother's head and shoulders through the opening. She is asleep, obviously sedated, and Louis is shocked at her appearance.

LOUIS

Mom! Mom it's me!

Louis steps forward and throws back the curtain.

LOUIS

Oh, my God...

There is a figure leaning over his mother. It is the size of a child, but this is no child. The body is thin and white ... fish-belly white ... and the arms are skin and tendon wrapped around long bone. The hands are pale and enor-mous, fingers three times the length of those on a human hand. The head is huge and misshapen, brachycephalic, reminiscent of photographs of fetuses. The eyes are bruised holes from which two yellowed marbles, striated with mucus and yellow cataracts, stare out blindly ... but even though the thing must be blind, the yellow eyes dart back and forth purposely. The thing has no mouth, but the bones of its cheek and jaw seem to flow forward under white flesh to form a funnel, a long tapered snout of muscle and cartilage which ends in a perfectly round opening. This opening pulses as Louis watches, pale-pink sphincter muscles around the inner rim expanding and contracting as the thing breathes. It is a **CANCER VAMPIRE**.

LOUIS

Oh, dear God...

Louis staggers toward the thing, grasps the back of a chair to keep from falling. His expression changes from revul-sion to total horror as he watches the cancer vampire slowly, almost lovingly, pull back the thin blanket and topsheet above Louis's mother. The cancer vampire lowers its head until the opening of its obscene proboscis is inches above Louis's mother's chest. A SLIDING, RASP-ING is audible. Something appears in the flesh-rimmed opening of its snout ... something gray-green, segmented, and moist. Cartilage and muscle contract and a five-inch TUMOR SLUG is slowly extruded from the cancer vam-pire's proboscis and hangs wiggling above his sleeping mother.

FADE OUT
END ACT I

FADE IN on: ACT II

5. INT. HOSPITAL ROOM. NIGHT.

The moist slug falls softly onto his mother's bare skin. It coils, writhes, slides across his mother's chest, and bur-rows quickly away from the light. Into flesh. Into his mother.

LOUIS

Stop! ... Aw, no ... no

Louis staggers to the tray table, throws a glass at the can-cer vampire. The creature lifts its head as if sensing Lou-is's presence, stands, extends its impossibly long fingers, and drops out of sight behind the bed ... it remains stiffly upright as it disappears, as if a hydraulic lift were lowering it through the floor.

LOUIS
(sobbing)

No ... no ... no ... no...

Louis lunges toward his mother's bed, falls against the side of it, wraps his fingers in the bedclothes, and slides to the floor, still sobbing, slipping into unconsciousness.

DISSOLVE TO:

6. NIGHT. HOSPITAL ROOM.

Louis awakens in his own room. He looks around, disori-ented. It is still dark, rain still sends streaks down the win-dow and shadows onto the wall, but he is lying in his own bed, his IV attached. He moans and touches his head.

LOUIS

God, did I dream that ... that *thing*?

Louis suddenly becomes aware of a wet, swallowing, SLURPING sound. This is what awakened him and has been in the background all the while. Now the slurping rises in volume. Louis realizes that it is coming from be-hind the drawn curtain pulled around the bed next to his. The bed that had been empty when the doctor had been there.

LOUIS

(whispering)

Hello?

The SLURPING continues.

LOUIS
(louder)

Hello? Is someone there?

The noise continues, growing even louder. Louis leans out of bed, reaches the end of his IV tether, raises his free hand to the curtain, and flings it back.

LOUIS

Ah.

An old man, JACK WINTERS, looks up from SLURPING whiskey in a glass through a bent hospital straw. A bottle of cheap booze, almost empty, is on his tray table. In the glow of the nightlight and the occasional lightning flashes, the old man is a sight—pale and obviously ravaged by ill-ness, hairless except for the gray stubble on his wrinkled cheeks. He is toothless but grins up at Louis even as he continues slurping.

LOUIS

Jeez ... I'm sorry ... I didn't know anyone else was in here.

JACK

That's all right, young fella. My name's Jack Winters. Been your roommate all along but you slept for three straight days after they brought you in an' I guess I was downstairs for my radiation treatment when you woke up yesterday.

Louis collapses back in his pillows, holding his head.

LOUIS

God, I had the worst dream.

Jack gives another toothless grin and pours out more of his whiskey.

JACK

That's what Ol' Nurse Haversmith ... she's the night nurse and mean as a junkyard dog ... that's what she said when they brought you back in a couple of hours ago after you'd gone sleepwalkin'. She said you was screaming and carrying on somethin' fierce while you was in your mommy's room. I had me a cousin once who was a sleepwalker ... they useta have to tie him to his bed with a clothesline...

Louis had been on the verge of drifting off again despite the old man's monologue, but suddenly he realizes what is being said and snaps awake, sitting up and leaning over to grasp Jack's arm.

LOUIS

What's that? What did you say about me being in my mother's room?

Jack shields his whiskey bottle as if Louis is trying to steal it.

JACK

I just said what Nurse Haversmith said when she an' the others brung you back, Boy. Said you got to your mommy's room and passed out or somethin'...

Louis releases Jack's arm and collapses back into the pil-lows.

LOUIS
(to himself)

It wasn't a dream. I saw it...

Jack resumes slurping up the whiskey, edging to the far side of his own bed to stay away from Louis. The drink re-vives his spirits.

JACK

Hellfire, Boy, consider yourself lucky if you just got a bump on the head that makes you a mite crazy. Most of us on this floor are in for the Big C...

LOUIS

The Big C? You mean cancer?

JACK

Damn right I mean cancer. Look at me, Boy, three months here and they took out 'bout everythin' I had two of ... and some things I only had one of ... cut so many things off me and outta me that there ain't nothin' left to remove that I can get along without. So now they just zap me with ra-diation and fill me up with drugs that make me puke.

(grins toothlessly)

So now I prescribe me my own medicine. My daughter Esther Mae sneaks it in...
(Jack hesitates and then offers Louis the bottle)

Care for a little late night pick-me-up?

LOUIS
(shakes his head and grimaces from the motion)

No ... thanks, Mr. ... uh ... Winters.

JACK

Jack.

LOUIS

Jack. You say this is a cancer ward?

Jack chuckles but the laughter soon turns to thick cough-ing. He sets aside the straw and gulps the last of the whis-key. The coughs subside.

JACK

Ain't *supposed* to be a cancer ward ... but that's what it amounts to. It upsets the regular patients to bunk with us terminal cases ... that's what Nurse Haversmith calls us when she don't think we're listenin' ... so Doc Hubbard and the other cancer docs just sorta dump us in this ward.

(then, mumbling to himself)

Makes it easier for the damn night critters to find us, too...

Jack fumbles behind his pillow and finds another bottle. He busies himself with filling his glass and replacing the straw.

LOUIS

What? What did you say about night critters?

Jack freezes in mid-slurp. He glares suspiciously at Louis.

JACK

I didn't say nothin'.

LOUIS

Yes you did. About night critters.

JACK

Just things I seen while in my DT's, Boy. Nothin' real.

LOUIS

Yes it is. You've *seen* something ... got a glimpse of something that shouldn't be here. Something that shouldn't *exist*...

Jack looks as if he is about to speak, to talk about some-thing that he *has* seen late at night there in the cancer ward, but instead he glares at Louis, makes a motion with his hand as if warding off evil spirits, leans forward, and draws the curtain back between them. The room seems to darken further. From behind the curtain we hear resumed SLURPING.

CUT TO:

7. INTERIOR. DAY. HOSPITAL ROOM.

Sunlight fills the room. Fresh flowers overflow from a vase on a tray table pushed against the wall. Jack Winters is out of the room for one of his tests and his bed is neatly made. Dr. Hubbard sits on a chair by Louis's bed, fiddling with his pipe and listening intently as Louis paces back and forth. Louis has been removed from the IV and is wearing a robe over pajamas rather than his hospital gown, but his head is still bandaged and his eyes look feverish. He gestures as he talks and his voice is rapid, almost manic.

LOUIS

Let's just say that I *did* see something last night. Is that all right? Can we just suppose ... for argument's sake ... that I *saw* something rather than *hallucinated* that I saw something? Can we just work under that assumption for a moment?

DR. HUBBARD

All right, let's work with that assumption, Louis. What did you see?

Louis stops pacing for a moment and holds his arms as if chilled by the memory of what he saw.

LOUIS

Well, it wasn't human, but...

DR. HUBBARD

Yes, yes, ... you've told me several times *what* this thing looked like. But what *is* it? Assuming you saw it, what *was* it? A ghost?

(he allows himself a single, reassuring smile)

Perhaps it was an extraterrestrial ... an alien M.D. interested in our medical facilities?

Louis pays no attention to the sarcasm. Lost in thought, he walks over to the window and stares out ... seeing noth-ing ... letting the light warm his face. After a moment he speaks.

LOUIS

I'm not sure what it is. Some ... some *thing* that brings those slugs I told you about. Maybe it's from another dimension or something. Maybe these things are around us all the time ... coex-isting ... but we can't *see* them...

(he touches his bandages ruefully)

...unless we have a certain type of concussion with certain types of pressure on certain parts of the left frontal lobe...

Dr. Hubbard continues smiling but he is sufficiently shaken by the absurdity of Louis's explanation that he tries to inhale smoke from his pipe ... forgetting that it is empty.

DR. HUBBARD

All right, Louis ... assuming this thing you saw was ... was not human. Assuming that only *you* could see it because of your injury. Was it at-tacking your mother?

LOUIS

Yes ... no ... Look, somehow it was *using* Mom.

DR. HUBBARD

But you said it was *leaving* this ... this slug thing. It put something *into* your mother's body you said. Now why would it...

LOUIS

(interrupting, agitated, pacing again,
voice high and rapid)

Look, I don't *know*! Maybe it has to do with Mom's cancer. Maybe they lay these slugs in peo-ple and they grow or change inside our bodies. Maybe what we call tumors are really the eggs of these ... these things ... and we're only incuba-tors to them. Or maybe ... maybe they sow those slugs, let them multiply in us ... isn't that what cancer does, Doctor? ... and then these creatures come back and harvest the slugs for food. Like vampires...

(Louis stops, struck by a revelation)

My God, that's what they are ... *cancer vam-pires*!

Dr. Hubbard nods, appearing to listen, anything to calm Louis down. Louis stops suddenly, makes a motion with both hands as if starting a final appeal to a jury.

LOUIS

(excitedly)

Look, Dr. Hubbard, that makes sense! I mean, tell me the name of a famous person who died of can-cer a hundred years ago. Go ahead...

DR. HUBBARD

I don't understand...

LOUIS

I mean, this cancer scourge is like an *invasion*. An invasion of cancer vampires. And a recent one. Tell me someone who died of cancer a cen-tury ago.

DR. HUBBARD

I can't think of a name right now, Louis. But there must have been many...

LOUIS

Exactly! I mean, today we *expect* people to get cancer. One in six. Or maybe it's one in four. These things must be everywhere, using us ... Planting their slugs in us. I mean, *everybody* knows somebody who's died of cancer. Look at my family ... first my dad years ago, now Mom. Those creatures must be all around us ... feeding on us ... we just can't *see* them!

DR. HUBBARD

All right... all right. But we don't need your ... ah ... cancer vampires ... to explain this recent so-called scourge of cancer. In the modern world we're exposed to more carcinogens...

LOUIS

(laughing almost hysterically)

Oh, yeah ... *carcinogens!* That's what I used to believe in. And we read the official list of carcin-ogens and they're in everything we eat, breathe, wear ... I mean, *come on!* You medical experts want us to believe in "carcinogens" ... and you don't even know where tumors come from.

DR. HUBBARD

(angry but trying to hide the fact)

But you do?

LOUIS

Yes. Cancer vampires!

Triumphant but exhausted, Louis sits on the edge of his bed. Dr. Hubbard removes his pipe and leans forward to grab the young man by his upper arms.

DR. HUBBARD

All right, Louis, I've listened to your fantasies and allowed your assumptions. Now will you lis-ten to my theory?

Louis nods, totally drained of energy.

DR. HUBBARD

My theory is that you're *very* concerned about your mother and very upset that she has cancer. In addition, you have a serious subdural hematoma that is creating low grade hallucinations. Your concern about your mother is dictating the form of these hallucinations.

(pauses, decides to be blunt)

Louis, be honest ... your father's death from can-cer when you were a boy *changed* you ... I re-member a happy boy ... outgoing ... generous ... in recent years you've been withdrawn, moody, your behavior

alternating between danger-ously reckless and near-paranoid.

(beat)

I know you'd love to see ... a *thing* ... some-thing solid ... something you could fight rather than the intangible assassin of cells running amok. But it's an hallucination, Louis ... a visual malfunction ... and the sooner you admit it, the sooner you can get well so you can help your *mother* get well.

Louis is staring at the doctor. He manages to nod.

DR. HUBBARD

(flushed, chewing on his pipe to calm down)

Good. Now Mr. Winters is having his radiation treatment about now. The same sort of treatment your mother will be receiving in a few days. Would you care to see it?

Still staring, Louis nods again.

DR. HUBBARD

Fine. Now you have to try to be sensible. No more nonsense about cancer vampires.

(he smiles)

It could upset Mr. Winters and the other patients on the floor.

Louis nods again.

DR. HUBBARD

Excellent. Then I'll go see if we're ready to start his treatment. We'll send an orderly up for you.

(he realizes that the pipe is in his mouth,
removes it, and smiles)

Now, don't you feel better, Louis?

Louis nods a final time. Then, in a very tight shot, from Louis's P.O.V., we are in E.C.U. of Dr. Hubbard's face: his mouth is slightly open, showing white teeth, healthy gums, and a hint of tongue. From beneath that tongue comes first the fleshy antennae and then the green-gray body of a tu-mor slug. It moves farther out and then withdraws, as if burrowing from the light.

FADE OUT

FADE IN on: **ACT III**

8. INTERIOR. RADIOLOGY TREATMENT AND CONTROL ROOM. DAY.

Louis has been wheeled into the Radiology Control Room in a wheelchair but now he stands to peer through a thick window into the Treatment Room where Jack Winters lies on the treatment couch under the overhanging eye of a massive supervoltage cobalt 60 machine. Jack Winters looks small and frail and terribly vulnerable as he lies on the treatment couch—parts of his body shielded by lead "molds", his upper torso bare with a target outline drawn on his upper chest in bright dye, an unsubtle + centered where the powerful X-rays will penetrate. We can see Jack breathing rapidly, shallowly, his emaciated chest rising and falling, his skin offering almost the only color in a vast Treatment Room which is mostly white machinery and black and white tile fading into black shadows. Dr. Hubbard is in the Control Room with Louis and a RADIA-TION THERAPIST who stands next to the complicated controls.

DR. HUBBARD

This will be Mr. Winters' next-to-last session. We believe that the tumors are responding very nicely to treatment.

(glances at Louis)

Radiation treatment and chemotherapy have come a long way since the days of your father's illness.

The therapist taps controls while watching his monitors and the massive machine above Jack Winters hums, moves, and lowers its ominous "eye" to a firing position just above the + on the old man's upper chest. A light from the machine snaps on and illuminates the target area.

LOUIS

(clearing his throat, obviously impressed
and a bit frightened)

How much radiation does Jack have to receive to beat the cancer?

DR. HUBBARD

We estimate that seven thousand rads should be sufficient to sterilize this tumor.

LOUIS

(turning away from the window)

Seven thousand rads? That sounds like a lot. How much is a rad?

DR. HUBBARD

Well, to give you an idea ... a regular chest X-ray ... such as you received when you were brought in after your accident the other day ... would expose you to about five millirem . . . that's a total of about five *thousandths* of a single rad.

LOUIS

My God ... and Jack has to receive *seven thousand rads* ... a million times as much.

(he looks back through the window
at the waiting man)

How can he take it?

DR. HUBBARD

In small doses. A single dose of seven *hundred* rads would be fatal to about half the people who received it. So we parcel it out... a bit at a time ... and still there are side effects.

(quickly, to avoid Louis dwelling
on the negative)

But the principle of radiation treatment is well-proven, Louis. The benefits are well-documented.

LOUIS

(lost in thought as he stares at Jack
alone in the other room)

And my mother will be receiving these treat-ments?

DR. HUBBARD

Depending upon post-surgical recovery and re-sults of other biopsies ... yes.

(he nods to the radiation therapist)

We're ready...

The radiation therapist throws the switch. Louis is startled as violet radiation fills the window, bathes his face in light.

LOUIS

I *see* it!

DR. HUBBARD

The actual radiation is invisible, of course.

The radiation *is* visible. Visible to Louis, at least. We share his altered vision as the Treatment Room is filled with a brilliant violet radiation, centering on the cobalt 60 machine's lens but arcing and pulsing in wild geometries as the radiation leaps from the machine to Jack. The others see none of this but we CLOSE ON Louis's startled face, painted violet in reflected light, and see the sudden shock and revulsion as the TUMOR SLUGS begin to slide out of Jack's chest.

LOUIS

Look! The...

(he bites off his exclamation before tipping off Dr. Hubbard)

DR. HUBBARD

(checks a dial)

Twenty-eight point six seconds. Precisely enough for this treatment.

Louis begins to explain but sees Dr. Hubbard watching him carefully. Louis shuts up. He is thinking quickly.

LOUIS

What ... what is the source of the radiation?

RADIATION THERAPIST

In this case, radioisotopes of Cobalt 60.

LOUIS

Can I see them?

DR. HUBBARD

What, Louis?

LOUIS

(attempting a smile)

Nothing. Nothing at all.

The tumor slugs emerge, attracted by the bright light from the cobalt 60 machine. First one, then a second, then a third ... They emerge from Jack's chest—some completely, some only partially—as if they are drawn irresistibly to the glow. The radiation therapist throws a switch. The hum disappears and the explosion of violet light fades and dies. The tumor slugs that emerged completely have shriveled and died ... the survivors burrow back into flesh once again.

LOUIS
(unable to contain himself)

There wasn't enough time ... not enough radiation!

The radiation therapist glances at Dr. Hubbard and the oncologist nods, still humoring his young patient. The therapist goes to a wall safe, casually runs through a brief combination—we see Louis watching carefully and we also catch the numbers, 17-right, 43-left, 11-right—and then the therapist dons ridiculously thick gloves, opens the thick vault door, and removes one of several heavy lead storage cylinders emblazoned with the international warn-ing symbol for radiation hazard.

LOUIS

Are those the isotopes?

DR. HUBBARD

These are their shielded lead storage units. The actual isotopes are tiny ... but dangerous. One isotope would power the cobalt 60 machine for many hours. Each ... unshielded ... would de-liver several thousand rads *at once*.

LOUIS

How are the isotopes loaded into the machine?

DR. HUBBARD

Very, very carefully. Remote mechanical handlers. Lead aprons. Lead shielding ... it's quite compli-cated. Have you seen enough?

(he nods for the therapist to return the isotope to safe keeping)

Louis looks through the window at Jack. The old man is shivering slightly from the cold. He turns his head toward the window and smiles. The dead and blackened tumor slugs are still visible on his bare chest.

LOUIS
(to himself)

Yes ... I've seen enough.

CUT TO:

9. INT. NIGHT. LOUIS'S HOSPITAL ROOM

Louis comes awake with a start. It is dark. From some-where down the hall comes a soft chime and the squeak of rubber-soled shoes on tile. But it is a closer sound which has awakened Louis. The SLURPING is coming from be-hind Jack's curtain ... an even louder, ruder noise than that of the night before.

LOUIS
(groggily, still half asleep)

Jack?

Louis slides back the curtains. Jack is dead, mouth agape, fingers curled into rigid claws, eyes wide and

staring. The SLURPING, SLIDING noise comes from tumor slugs sliding on and around his body ... his pajamas writh and ripple from their movement and some are spilling from the gaps in his pajama tops. A cancer vampire squats over the corpse, head lowered, proboscis deep *inside* Jack's chest like some nightmarish mosquito drinking its fill. The SLURPING is very loud.

LOUIS

Ahhh...

The cancer vampire lifts its face. Tumor slugs drip from its long snout ... one slides up the opening with a RASP-ING sound. The cancer vampire *looks* directly at Louis, its caked, yellow eyes peering myopically.

LOUIS

Uh-uh ... *uh-uh*...

Louis fumbles on his littered dinner tray, finds a knife, and throws it with all of his strength. It strikes the chest of the cancer vampire with a soft, rotten sound, but instead of sticking it sinks into the pulpy flesh like a dropped utensil floating in a pool of mucus. The cancer vampire idly ex-tracts the knife with long fingers and casts it aside. It has not been hurt. It raises a hand toward Louis.

LOUIS

No ... uh-uh...

Louis stumbles out of the bed backward, knocking over the IV stand, crashing into the tray table and sending the vase of flowers flying as he edges along the wall, staying as far away from the cancer vampire as possible while heading for the door. We MOVE IN on the cancer vam-pire's yellow, blind eyes, its head turning, as we hear Lou-is's footfalls receding down the empty corridor.

CUT TO:

10. INT. NIGHT. RADIOLOGY CONTROL ROOM.

Louis staggers into the dark room, remains panting at the doorway for a moment. There is no pursuit. Looking around, he snaps on a single low-wattage lamp above the control board. The adjoining Treatment Room is in total darkness. He looks around wildly, sees the safe with the radiation symbol, and takes deep breaths to calm down. He knows what he has to do. He fiddles with the dial. In E.C.U. we see 17-right, 43-left, 11-right. The safe door swings open and Louis steps back, shocked at how easy it was. Inside the safe, the lead storage cylinders sit like small bombs. Louis glances over his shoulder, then looks around until he finds the heavy gloves. Donning them, he removes the cylinders and sets them carefully on a table.

DISSOLVE TO:

11. INT. NIGHT. RADIOLOGY CONTROL ROOM.

Louis is crouching by the table so that only his head and shoulders are visible. The storage cylinders rise in front of him. The rest is darkness. Still wearing the heavy gloves, he fumbles with the complicated latch and lid on the first cylinder.

LOUIS

Damn.

He tugs off his gloves, easily breaks the seal, flips the latch, and removes the lid. A fierce violet light illuminates his face. The glow becomes even brighter as he shakes the radioisotope into his bare hand. The pellet is small but in-credibly brilliant—a point source of blazing light. He lifts it with both hands.

LOUIS
(whispering)

There's got to be another way.

(beat)

But I don't know what it is...

Louis takes a breath and lifts the isotope higher with shak-ing hands. There is an element of the sacramental to his motions—a radioactive Communion service. He swallows the cobalt 60 pellet, struggles to keep from gagging, and keeps it down.

LOUIS

Ah, God...

He opens another storage cylinder, lifts the isotope. The light in the room begins to fade...

DISSOLVE TO:

12. INT. NIGHT. LOUIS'S MOTHER'S ROOM.

We see a close shot of Louis's mother—her head on the pillow—as she moans in her sleep, turning fitfully, perhaps on the verge of coming out of the sedative-induced sleep. We move down her shoulder to her arm, her hand. Sud-denly a huge, misshapen form comes into the frame and clumsily enfolds her hand. It is Louis's hand, again in the heavy radiation glove. We PULL BACK and see Louis as he sits by her bedside, holding her hand in the dark room. Lightning ripples soundlessly outside the window.

LOUIS
(very softly)

I remember once when I was a kid ... it must have been just after Dad died ... I woke up on a stormy night like this and found you sitting on the edge of my bed ... like you were protecting me from the storm.

The lightning illuminates the room again. Louis quickly looks around. There is no sign of the cancer vampire.

LOUIS

I pretended I was asleep, but I wanted to tell you that *nobody* could protect *anybody*. Not from the storm ... not from what killed Dad...

(beat)

I wanted to tell you then that all a person could do was *run* ... run from the people you loved the most ... run so that it didn't hurt so much when you couldn't protect them.

Louis squeezes her hand.

LOUIS

Well, Mom, maybe I'm through running for a while.

He looks around again.

LOUIS

I could see those ... *things* ... the cancer vam-pires ... in almost every room I passed on this floor.
(shivers)

White blurs in the dark rooms. Waiting. Waiting to feed on the people there...

He takes a deep breath.

LOUIS

It's time, Mom. Time to see if it'll do any good.

Louis removes one of the heavy gloves. His hand blazes with violet light. He removes the other glove and the glare from his two hands throws wild shadows around the room. He raises his hands, staring at them.

LOUIS

This won't hurt, Mom.

He lays the palm of one glowing hand an inch from flesh just below her throat. We wait a second and then see the ripple as a tumor slug slides up toward the light. Louis gri-maces but does not remove his hand as the slug emerges from her skin, tests the air with its moist antennae, and then slides *into* Louis's palm. A second one follows, enters Louis's hand. A third. Louis holds his hand there a mo-ment longer but no more emerge.

LOUIS

(gasping, close to fainting)

I think that's all.

He lifts his hand and we can see the turmoil under the violet-hued flesh of his bare forearm as the slugs curl and writhe in their new home. Louis shifts sideways in the chair and lowers his head almost to his knees, hugging his arm to his chest.

LOUIS

OK, Mom ... now ... now we ... wait.

The lightning flashes soundlessly. Behind and above Louis, high on the wall, the head and shoulders of a cancer vampire emerge from the solid wall like a predator press-ing its way through its own amniotic sac. Louis can not see it behind him. The thing makes no noise as it pulls its arms through, finds purchase on the wall with its impossi-bly long fingers, and pulls itself out like a swimmer emerging from a pool. The cancer vampire slides down the wall, as silent as a lizard, and disappears behind the hunched-over Louis. Louis's mother moans in her sleep and Louis stands, whirls, and knocks the chair aside.

LOUIS

(to the thing, his voice tremulous)

Hey! Here ... here I am ... damn you.

The cancer vampire was crouching over Louis's mother but now it rises, lifts long fingers and its funneled

face to-ward the glow that is Louis.

LOUIS

Here ... that's right ... food.

Louis extends his hands in the motion that is, once again, vaguely sacramental. The cancer vampire flows toward him, lowers its terrible face toward the outstretched, glow-ing hands.

LOUIS

That's right ... take ... *eat*.

The thing's proboscis seems to extend right into the flesh of Louis's open palms. Louis's forearms writhe with the motion of tumor slugs. We hear the SLURPING, SLID-ING. Finished, the thing suddenly pulls its head back and begins jerking, spasming.

LOUIS

(triumphantly but in a whisper)

Tonight, Death, ... *you die*.

The cancer vampire spasms and convulses. The violet glow increases as the radiation spreads. There is a HISS-ING, BURNING sound as of acid burning through thick paper. The cancer vampire collapses, curls into itself, and seems to shrivel while the HISSING continues. Its long fingers close slowly ... like the legs of a dying spider. Louis staggers to his mother's bed, collapses on the edge of it, and pulls on the heavy gloves.

LOUIS

I'd like to stay, Mom. See if Dr. Hubbard can help me ... be around when he tells you that your tumors are gone...

We see a close-up of his mother's face—she is resting more comfortably. He again takes her hand, pats it clumsily through his heavy gloves.

LOUIS

I'd like to stay ... but I can't ... I can feel the burning inside me. *So hot...*

(he clutches his stomach, bends over, then straightens)

There are all those other people in the ward, Mom ... all those other *things* ... waiting.

(glancing toward the door)

I'm scared. But at least now I know what I should do...

In E.C.U. we see her hand twitch, possibly a random movement, possibly squeezing his in affirmation. Louis stands, looks toward the dark hall.

LOUIS

(whispering)

I only hope that I can feed them all.

Louis touches his mother's hand a final time and walks to the door, pausing before stepping into the darkness there.

LOUIS

I love you, Mom.

Louis steps out and is gone. We watch and listen from a low angle near his mother's sleeping form as his footsteps recede ... for a moment there is silence ... and then the SLURPING, SLIDING, RASPING begins, grows in volume, builds to a chorus. But with the noises comes a promising violet glow, growing brighter down the corridor, filling the doorway, filling the entire room with its warmth, as we...

FADE OUT

-=*@*=-