Sketch

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Stroke

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Abstract

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THE VASE receded into a chaos of blankets and roses and sunlight, and then focused with almost deliberate slowness as the fragments of the clot brushed across the nerves. He lay on the bed, buried in a heap of many-colored blankets, with only one large foot and his head exposed. His pale-blue eyes were wide open, and threw a weird illumination on his yellowish-white face. He couldn't take his eyes from the ugly blue vase squatting in brief shadows across the room. He lay, breathing very slowly and very deeply in long, hoarsely drawn gasps, hypnotically watching the vase.

He could almost feel the clot stumble on, racing down canals of blood, brushing fibers, feeling for the nerve cells. Somewhere in the back of his head a tiny bit of jelly-matter caught and held, and the bits of clot caught behind it. The heart thundered in the brain. The muscles tightened, and relaxed, and tightened. The breaths were drawn, and released, and drawn again in giant spasms — sucked deep within the chest and released with grimaces and terrible pain. The vomit came with a rush, spilling over the red blankets, and over the white sheets. The bowels shifted and relaxed and again tightened — and then it was over, but for the gasping breathing. The clot slid free, leaving a raw scar of nerves — a seared mass to govern at the base of the brain.

The eyes were still wide, still staring, but only seeing an infinite length of gray shadows reeling drunkenly into space.

And somewhere a gentle voice was saying, very quietly, "Our Father . . ."