

Things went on like this until, with the sun almost at its zenith, I knew: you weren't there.

Not just that you weren't there, in that pile; you were still alive. For some reason, though the identities of the other souls who were clustered near at hand remained unknown, if I used all my powers of concentration to picture a specific individual, someone I'd known, I was able to tell whether or not they had died. And yet, at that moment, my discovery brought me no comfort. Instead, it frightened me to think that here by this strange thicket, surrounded by bodies gradually breaking down into their constituent parts, I was alone among strangers.

There was worse to come.

In an attempt to batten down the rising tide of fear, I thought of my sister. Watching the blazing sun describing an arc farther and farther to the south, staring at my face as though trying to bore through those shuttered eyelids, I thought of my sister, only of her. And I felt an agony that almost broke me. She was dead; she had died even before I had. With neither tongue nor voice to carry it, my scream leaked out from me in a mess of blood and watery discharge. My soul-self had no eyes; where was the blood coming from, what nerve endings were sparking this pain? I stared at my unchanging face. My filthy hands were as still as ever. Over my fingernails, dyed a deep rust by watery blood, red ants were crawling, silent.