Summer came.

For the book thief, everything was going nicely.

For me, the sky was the color of Jews.

When their bodies had finished scouring for gaps in the door, their souls rose up. When their fingernails had scratched at the wood and in some cases were nailed into it by the sheer force of desperation, their spirits came toward me, into my arms, and we climbed out of those shower facilities, onto the roof and up, into eternity’s certain breadth. They just kept feeding me. Minute after minute. Shower after shower.

I’ll never forget the first day in Auschwitz, the first time in Mauthausen. At that second place, as time wore on, I also picked them up from the bottom of the great cliff, when their escapes fell awfully awry. There were broken bodies and dead, sweet hearts. Still, it was better than the gas. Some of them I caught when they were only halfway down. Saved you, I’d think, holding their souls in midair as the rest of their being – their physical shells – plummeted to the earth. All of them were light, like the cases of empty walnuts. Smoky sky in those places. The smell like a stove, but still so cold.

I shiver when I remember – as I try to de-realize it.

I blow warm air into my hands, to heat them up.

But it’s hard to keep them warm when the souls still shiver.

God.

I always say that name when I think of it.

God.

Twice, I speak it.

I say His name in a futile attempt to understand. “But it’s not your job, to understand.” That’s me who answers. God never says anything. You think you’re the only one he never answers? “Your job is to…” And I stop listening to me, because to put it bluntly, I tire me. When I start thinking like that, I become so exhausted, and I don’t have the luxury of indulging fatigue. I’m compelled to continue on, because although it’s not true for every person on earth, it’s true for the vast majority – that death waits for no man – and if he does, he doesn’t usually wait very long.

On June 23, 1942, there was a group of French Jews in a German prison, on Polish soil. The first person I took was close to the door, his mind racing, then reduced to pacing, then slowing down, slowing down…

Please believe me when I tell you that I picked up each soul that day as if it were newly born. I even kissed a few weary, poisoned cheeks. I listened to their last, gasping cries. Their vanishing words. I watched their love visions and freed them from their fear.

I took them all away, and if ever there was a time I needed distraction, this was it. In complete desolation, I looked at the world above. I watched the sky as it turned from silver to gray to the color of rain. Even the clouds were trying to get away.

Sometimes I imagined how everything looked above those clouds, knowing without question that the sun was blond, and the endless atmosphere was a giant blue eye.

They were French, they were Jews, and they were you.