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HENRI ALLEG / INTRODUCTION BY JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

*Translated by  
John Calder*

# THE QUESTION

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FRANCE  
ALGERIA

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En attaquant les Français corrompus, c'est la  
France que je défends.

JEAN-CHRISTOPHE

## PREFACE TO THE AMERICAN EDITION

HENRI ALLEG was the editor of the *Alger Républicain* from 1950 to 1955. This paper, the only daily in Algeria which printed all aspects of Algerian democratic and national opinion, was banned in September, 1955. In November, 1956, Alleg was forced into hiding in order to escape internment. On June 12, 1957, he was arrested by paratroops of the 10th Division Parachutists who kept him at El-Biar, in the suburbs of Algiers, for a whole month.

This book is an account of his detention. It ends when Alleg is transferred to the internment camp at Lodi, one of a number of such camps. It was at Lodi that he drew up a plea protesting the tortures he had undergone. It was smuggled into France

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and received considerable publicity in the French and international press.

After months of disquieting reports concerning Alleg's fate, he was finally brought before a magistrate. Since then he has been imprisoned in the civil prison of Algiers where, as a member of the Algerian Communist Party, he has been charged with endangering the safety of the State. Of this moment, several months after the opening of an inquiry, his plea is still "under investigation."

THE QUESTION, in its French edition, has to date sold some 150,000 copies despite its suppression and confiscation after the first two weeks, the first such banning since the 18th century. Books are being smuggled into France from Switzerland and the work is being published in translation all over the world.

When THE QUESTION was presented to us for consideration and we read it in the light of Jean-Paul Sartre's remarkable introduction, we felt impelled to publish it here. In an age when indifference is the rule, the excitement induced by the implications of one man's account of his trials and his triumph over them, has given cause for hope.

PREFACE TO THE AMERICAN EDITION

Surely what we find in THE QUESTION, we believe others will find too.

Fully aware of our responsibility as the publisher, we have ascertained the facts to the best of our ability. They speak for themselves.

GEORGE BRAZILLER

## INTRODUCTION

### 'A VICTORY'

IN 1943, in the Rue Lauriston (the Gestapo headquarters in Paris). Frenchmen were screaming in agony and pain: all France could hear them. In those days the outcome of the war was uncertain and we did not want to think about the future. Only one thing seemed impossible in any circumstances: that one day men should be made to scream by those acting in our name.

There is no such word as impossible: in 1958, in Algiers, people are tortured regularly and systematically. Everyone from M. Lacoste (Minister Resident for Algeria) to the farmers in Aveyron, knows this is so, but almost no one talks of it. At most, a

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few thin voices trickle through the silence. France is almost as mute as during the Occupation, but then she had the excuse of being gagged.

Abroad, the conclusion has already been drawn: some people say our decline has gone on since 1939, others say since 1918. That is too simple. I find it hard to believe in the degradation of a people; I do believe in stagnation and stupor. During the war, when the English radio and the clandestine Press spoke of the massacre of Oradour, we watched the German soldiers walking inoffensively down the street, and would say to ourselves: 'They look like us. How can they act as they do?' And we were proud of ourselves for not understanding.

Today we know there was nothing to understand. The decline has been gradual and imperceptible. But now when we raise our heads and look into the mirror we see an unfamiliar and hideous reflection: ourselves.

Appalled, the French are discovering this terrible truth: that if nothing can protect a nation against itself, neither its traditions nor its loyalties nor its laws, and if fifteen years are enough to transform

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victims into executioners, then its behaviour is no more than a matter of opportunity and occasion. Anybody, at any time, may equally find himself victim or executioner.

Happy are those who died without ever having had to ask themselves: 'If they tear out my fingernails, will I talk?' But even happier are others, barely out of their childhood, who have not had to ask themselves that *other* question: 'If my friends, fellow soldiers, and leaders tear out an enemy's fingernails in my presence, what will I do?'

The young conscripts driven to the wall by circumstances: what do they know of themselves? They sense that the resolutions they make here in France will, when they are faced with an unpredictable crisis, seem like empty abstractions. Alone and over there, they will have to take decisions for France and for themselves. After that experience they come home transformed, aware of their helplessness, and generally taking refuge in a bitter silence. Fear is born. Fear of others and of themselves, and in France today fear permeates all sections of society. The victim and executioner merge into the same figure: a figure in our own likeness.

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In fact, in the final extremity, the only way to avoid one rôle is to accept the other.

This choice has not been imposed—or at least not yet—on Frenchmen in France. But the indetermination weighs on us because it has brought us near to the point where we may have to decide whether to be the torturer or the tortured; the horror of the one and the fear of the other drive us from one decision to the other. Old memories awaken; fifteen years ago the best members of the Resistance feared the suffering less than the possibility of giving way under torture. Those who were silent saved the lives of all. Those who talked could not be blamed, even by those who did not give way. But the man who talks becomes one with his executioner. Coupled as man and wife, these two lovers made the abject night terrible. Now the terrible night has returned: at El Biar, it returns every night; in France, it is the ashes in our hearts. Whispered propaganda would have us believe that 'everybody talks', and this ignorance of human nature excuses torture. As every one of us is a potential traitor, the killer in each of us need feel no qualms. All the more so, as honeyed voices tell

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us every day that the glory of France demands it. The good patriot has a clear conscience, and only defeatists need be ashamed.

Suddenly, stupor turns to despair: if patriotism has to precipitate us into dishonour; if there is no precipice of inhumanity over which nations and men will not throw themselves, then, why, in fact, do we go to so much trouble to become, or to remain, men? Inhumanity is what we really want. But if this really is the truth, if we must either terrorise or die ourselves by terror, why do we go to such lengths to live and to be patriots?

These thoughts have given us strength; false and obscure, they all unravel from the same principle: that man is inhuman. Their purpose is to convince us of our impotence. They will descend on us if we do not face them squarely. We must let other nations abroad know that our silence is not an assent. It comes from nightmares which are forced on us, sustained and guided. I have known it for a long time and have been waiting for a decisive proof.

Here it is.

A few weeks ago a book was published by Editions de Minuit: *La Question*. The author, Henri



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Alleg, still in prison today in Algiers, tells without unnecessary padding and with admirable precision what he underwent when 'questioned'. The torturers, as they themselves promised, 'looked after him': torture by electricity; by drowning as in the time of Brinvilliers, but with all the perfected technique of our own time; torture by fire, by thirst, etc. It is a book one would not advise for weak stomachs. The first edition—twenty thousand copies—is sold out; in spite of a second printing produced in haste, the publishers cannot satisfy the demand: some booksellers are selling fifty to a hundred copies a day.

Up to now only those returning from military service, particularly priests, have been able to bear witness. They lived among the torturers, their brothers and ours. They know of the victims principally by their screams, their wounds, their sufferings. They point to the sadists, bending over the torn flesh of their victims. And what distinguishes us from these sadists? Nothing does, because we do not protest: our indignation seems to us to be sincere, but would we be indignant if we had lived over there? Would we not have resigned ourselves

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to it instead? As for myself, I have to read by profession, I have books published, and I have always detested those books that mercilessly involve us in a cause and yet offer no hope or solution.

With the publication of *La Question*, everything is changed: Alleg has saved us from despair and shame because he is the victim himself and because he has conquered torture. This reversal is not without a certain sinister humour; it is in our name that he was victimised and because of him we regain a little of our pride: we are proud that he is French. The reader identifies himself with him passionately, he accompanies him to the extremity of his suffering; with him, alone and naked, he does not give way. Could the reader, could we, *if it happened to us*, do the same? That is another matter. What is important, however, is that the victim saves us in making us discover, as he discovered himself, that we have the ability and the duty to undergo anything.

We fascinate ourselves with the whirlpool of inhumanity; but it only needs a man, hard and stubborn, obstinately doing his duty to his fellow man, to save us from vertigo. The 'Question' is not

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inhuman; it is simply an ignoble and vicious crime, committed by men against man and that another man can and must rebuke. Inhumanity does not exist, except in the nightmares which engender fear. And it is just the calm courage of the victim, his modesty and his lucidity which wake us and show us the truth. Alleg underwent torture in the darkness of night; let us get closer, to look at it by daylight.

First of all, let us look at the torturers: who are they? Sadists? Fallen archangels? War lords with terrible caprices? If we are to believe them, they are all these things mixed up. But, quite properly, Alleg does not believe them. What emerges from the events he describes, is that they want to convince themselves and their victims of their invincible power: sometimes they present themselves as supermen who have other men at their mercy, and sometimes as men, strong and severe, who have been entrusted with the most obscene, ferocious, and cowardly of animals, the human animal. We know that they do not look at themselves very closely. The main thing is to make the prisoner feel that he does not belong to the same species. There-

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fore, they are undressed; they are beaten; they are mocked; soldiers come and go, proffering insults and threats with a nonchalance which they want to make as terrible as possible.

But Alleg, naked, trembling with cold, tied to a plank still black and sticky from the vomit of earlier victims, reduces all these things to their pitiable true nature: they are comedies played by fools. Comedy in the violent fascism of their nature, in the boast that they will 'blow up the republic'. Comedy in the persuasions of the '*aide de camp* of General M—', which finishes with these words: 'The only thing left for you to do is to kill yourself.' They are vulgar comedies flouting all conventions, renewed every night (without conviction) for all prisoners, and each session has to be shortened for lack of time, because these horrible employments are overloaded with routine. Having been dragged in, prisoners have to wait in line to be attached to the torture plank; they are attached, detached, dragged from one torture chamber to another. In looking through Alleg's eyes at this unearthly hive, we see that the torturers are overloaded by their tasks.

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They have their calmer moments, when they drink beer, relaxed, at the side of a tortured body, and then suddenly they jump to their feet, run around, curse and shout with rage; they are great neurotics who would make excellent victims; at the first electric shock they would tell everything.

Evil and savage they certainly are; sadistic they are not; they are in too much of a hurry. This is the one factor that saves them: they only keep themselves going by speed; if they lose impetus, they collapse.

Nevertheless, they like work well done; if they think it necessary, they can push their professional conscience to murder. This is what strikes one most in Alleg's account: behind the haggard masks, we feel an inflexibility which races ahead of them and which also races ahead of their masters.

We would almost be too lucky if these crimes were the work of savages: the truth is that torture makes torturers. These soldiers were not, after all, conscripted into an élite corps to martyr a defeated enemy.

Alleg in a few lines has described what he him-

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self observed, and it is enough to mark the stages of a metamorphosis.

There are a few young ones, impotent, shocked, who murmur: 'It's horrible,' when the electric torches light up a victim. And then there are the assistant torturers who do not as yet touch the victim with their hands, who carry and move the prisoners around, some of them hardened, others not, all caught up in the machinery, all of them already beyond forgiveness.

Then there is the young blond from the north: 'I looked at this youth with his sympathetic face, who could talk of the sessions of tortures I (Alleg) had undergone, as if they were a football match he remembered, and could congratulate me without spite as he would a champion athlete . . . .' A few days later, Alleg sees him again 'shrivelled up and disfigured by hatred, hitting an Arab on the staircase . . .' And there are the specialists, the hard ones who commit the atrocities, who take pleasure in the frenzied spasms of an electrocuted man, but who do not like to hear them scream. And then there are the lunatics who spin around like a dead leaf with the impetus of their own violence.

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None of these men exists by himself, not one of them will remain as he is; they all undergo a gradual transformation. Between the best and the worst, there is only one difference: the former are novices and the latter have been at it some time. They will all leave in time, and if the war continues, others will replace them: northern blonds and short, dark southerners, who have the same apprenticeship and find at the same time this taste for violence and its accompanying nervousness.

It is not the individuals, in this case, who matter. Executioners and victims alike are in the grip of a violent and anonymous hatred. It is a hatred that debases them both. Torture is a systematised form of hatred that creates its own instruments.

Yet when this is said in the Assembly, pretty timidly, the pack is let loose: 'You are insulting the Army!' These curs must be asked once and for all what this has got to do with the Army. Yes, torture *is used in the Army*, but what does this prove? The Commission de Sauvegarde, in a report which was in other respects benign enough, did not consider it necessary to hide the fact. After all, it is not the *Army* as such which does the torturing.

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What folly! Do they think civilians do not know these excellent methods? If it were only a question of protecting the Army, why not co-operate with the Algiers Police? And then, if a chief executioner is all that is needed, the entire assembly will appoint one: it is not General S— less than General E—, or even General M— who is named by Alleg: it is M. Lacoste, the man with absolute power. All this happens next door to him, by his hand at Bône as at Oran: all these men who die of suffering and horror in the building at El-Biar, in the Villa S—, die by his will. It is not I who say it is that way; it is the Deputies of the National Assembly, it is the Government. And the gangrene is spreading; it has crossed the sea. It has even got about that the 'Question' is applied in certain civil prisons in the Metropolis. I do not know if it has any foundation, but the persistence of the rumour must have troubled the authorities, because the prosecutor, in the trial of Ben Saddock, solemnly asked the accused if he had been submitted to torture; it goes without saying that the answer was known in advance.

Torture is neither civilian nor military, nor is it

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specifically French; it is a plague infecting our whole era. There are brutes East as well as West. One could cite Farkas, who not so long ago tortured the Hungarians, and the Poles who admitted that before the Poznan riots the police often used torture. The Khrushchev report shows conclusively what was happening in the Soviet Union when Stalin was alive. Men who only yesterday were being 'interrogated' in Nasser's prisons have subsequently been raised, still in a rather battered state, to high places. Today there are Cyprus and Algeria. In other words, Hitler was only a forerunner.

Disavowed—sometimes very quietly—but systematically practised behind a façade of democratic legality, torture has now acquired the status of a semi-clandestine institution. Does it always have the same causes? Certainly not: but everywhere it betrays the same sickness. But this is not our business. It is up to us to clean out our own backyard, and try to understand what has happened *to us*, the French.

How are the torturers justified? It is sometimes said that it is right to torture a man if his confession can save a hundred lives. This is nice hypocrisy.

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Alleg was no more a terrorist than Audin. The proof is that he was charged with 'endangering the safety of the State and reconstructing banned organisations'.

Was it to save lives that they scorched his nipples and pubic hair? No, they wanted to extract from him the address of the person who had hidden him. If he had talked, one more Communist would have been locked up, no more than that.

Arrests are made at random. Every Arab can be 'questioned' at will. The majority of the tortured say nothing because they have nothing to say unless, to avoid torture, they agree to bear false witness or confess to a crime they have not committed. As for those who do have something to say, we know very well that they do not talk. All of them, or nearly all of them. Neither Audin, nor Alleg, nor Guerraudj unclenched his teeth. On this point the torturers of El-Biar are better informed than we. One of them said after Alleg's first session of questioning: 'All the same, he has gained a night to give his friends time to get away.' And one of the officers commented, a few days later: 'For ten years, fifteen years, they all have had the same idea:

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if taken they must not talk. There is nothing we can do about it.'

Perhaps he was only talking about the Communists, but do we believe that the partisans of the A.L.N. are of a different metal? These tortures bring a poor return: the Germans themselves ended by realising this in 1944; torture costs human lives but does not save them.

In spite of that, the point is not altogether badly taken; it at any rate throws light on the function of torture: *the question*, that secret or semi-secret institution, is indissolubly allied to the secrecy of the resistance and the opposition.

Our Army is scattered all over Algeria. We have the men, the money and the arms. The rebels have nothing but the confidence and support of a large part of the population. It is we, in spite of ourselves, who have imposed this type of war—terrorism in the towns and ambushes in the country. With the disequilibrium in the forces, the F.L.N. has no other means of action. The ratio between our forces and theirs gives them no option but to attack us by surprise. Invisible, ungraspable, unexpected, they must strike and disappear, or be exterminated.

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The elusiveness of the enemy is the reason for our disquiet. A bomb is thrown in the street, a soldier wounded by a random shot. People rush up and then disperse. Later, Moslems nearby claim they saw nothing. All this fits into the pattern of a popular war of the poor against the rich, with the rebel units depending on local support. That is why the regular Army and civilian powers have come to regard the destitute swarm of people as a constant and numberless enemy. The occupying troops are baffled by the silence they themselves have created; the rich feel hunted down by the uncommunicative poor. The 'forces of order', hindered by their own might, have no defence against guerillas except punitive expeditions and reprisals, no defence against terrorism but terror. Everybody, everywhere, is hiding something. They must be *made to talk*.

Torture is senseless violence, born in fear. The purpose of it is to force from one tongue, amid its screams and its vomiting up of blood, the secret of *everything*. Senseless violence: whether the victim talks or whether he dies under his agony, the secret that he cannot tell is always somewhere else and

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out of reach. It is the executioner who becomes Sisyphus. If he puts *the question* at all, he will have to continue for ever.

But this silence, this fear, these always invisible and always present dangers, cannot fully explain the obsession of the torturers, their desire to reduce their victims to abjection and in its final stages the hatred of mankind which takes possession of them without their knowing it, and which fashions them into what they are.

It is normal for us to kill each other. Man has always struggled for his collective or individual interests. But in the case of torture, this strange contest of will, the ends seem to me to be radically different: the torturer pits himself against the tortured for his 'manhood' and the duel is fought as if it were not possible for both sides to belong to the human race.

The purpose of torture is not only to make a person talk, but to make him betray others. The victim must turn himself by his screams and by his submission into a lower animal, in the eyes of all and in his own eyes. His betrayal must destroy him and take away his human dignity. He who gives

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way under questioning is not only constrained from talking again, but is given a new status, that of a sub-man.

In Algeria the contradictions are irreconcilable. Each side demands the complete exclusion of the other. We have taken everything from the Arabs and now we have forbidden them everything even to the use of their own language. Memmi has already shown us how colonisation ends by the annihilation of the colonised. They own nothing, they are nothing. We have wiped out their civilisation while refusing them our own. They asked for integration and assimilation into our society and we refused. By what miracle could we continue to overexploit the colonies if the colonised enjoyed the same rights as the colonisers? Undernourished, uneducated, unhappy, the system has mercilessly thrown them back to the confines of the Sahara, to the basic minimum of human subsistence. Under the constant pressure of their masters, their standard of living has been reduced year by year. When despair drove them to rebellion, these sub-men had the choice of starvation or of re-affirming their manhood against ours. They will reject all our

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values, our culture, which we believed to be so much superior, and it has become as one and the same goal for them to revindicate their claim to be men and to refuse our French nationality.

This rebellion is not merely challenging the power of the settlers, but their very being. For most Europeans in Algeria, there are two complementary and inseparable truths: the colonists are backed by divine right, the natives are sub-human. This is a mythical interpretation of a reality, since the riches of the one are built on the poverty of the other.

In this way exploitation puts the exploiter at the mercy of his victim, and the dependence itself begets racialism. It is a bitter and tragic fact that, for the Europeans in Algeria, being a man means first and foremost superiority to the Moslems. But what if the Moslem finds in his turn that his manhood depends on equality with the settler? It is then that the European begins to feel his very existence diminished and cheapened.

It is not only the economic consequences of the emancipation of the 'wogs' that appall him but the implied threat to his own status as a human being.

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In his rage he may dream romantically of genocide. But this is pure fantasy. Rationally he is aware of his need for the native proletariat to provide surplus labour, and chronic unemployment to allow him to fix his own wage rates.

Anyway, if he accepts the Moslems as human beings, there is no sense in killing them. The need is rather to humiliate them, to crush their pride and drag them down to animal level. The body may live, but the spirit must be killed. To train, discipline and chastise; these are the words which obsess them. There is not enough room in Algeria for two kinds of human beings; they must choose the one or the other.

I am certainly not suggesting that the Algerian Europeans invented torture, nor even that they incited the authorities to practise it. On the contrary, it was the order of the day before we even noticed it. Torture was simply the expression of racial hatred. It is man himself that they want to destroy, with all his human qualities, his courage, his will, his intelligence, his loyalty—the very qualities that the coloniser claims for himself. But if the European eventually brings himself to hate



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his own face, it will be because it is reflected by an Arab.

In looking at these two indissoluble partnerships, the coloniser and the colonised, the executioner and his victim, we can see that the second is only an aspect of the first. And without any doubt the executioners are not the colonisers, nor are the colonisers the executioners. These latter are frequently young men from France who have lived twenty years of their life without ever having troubled themselves about the Algerian problem. But hate is a magnetic field: it has crossed over to them, corroded them and enslaved them.

It was thanks to Alleg's lucid calm that all this became apparent. We would be grateful to him if he had done nothing else. But in fact he did far more. By intimidating his torturers he won a victory for humanity against the lunatic violence of certain soldiers and against the racialism of the settlers. And what does this word 'victims' not evoke in terms of human tears? Among these little cads, proud of their youth, their strength, their numbers, Alleg is the only really tough one, the only one who is really strong.

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We, the rest of us, can say that he paid the highest price for the simple right to remain a man among men. That is why this paragraph of his book is so moving. 'I suddenly felt proud and happy. I hadn't given in. I was now sure I could stand up to it if they started again, that I could hold out to the end, and that I wouldn't make their job easier by killing myself.' A tough one, yes, and one who, in the end, made the archangels of anger afraid.

In some respects at least we feel that the torturers can sense this and that they are expecting some nebulous and scandalous revelation. When the victim wins, then it is goodbye to their absolute power, their lordship. Their archangels' wings droop and they become just brutish men, asking themselves, 'And I, will I be able to take it too, when I am tortured?' Because in the moment of victory, one system of values is substituted for another; all it needs is that the torturers should become dizzy in their turn. But no, their heads are empty and their work keeps them too busy and then they only half-believe in what they are doing.

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What is the point then in trying to trouble the consciences of the torturers? If one of them defaults, his chiefs will quickly replace him: one lost, ten found. Perhaps the greatest merit of Alleg's book is to dissipate our last illusions. We know now that it is not a question of punishing or re-educating certain individuals, and that the Algerian war cannot be humanised. Torture was imposed here by circumstances and demanded by racial hatred. In some ways it is the essence of the conflict and expresses its deepest truth.

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

## THE QUESTION

## THE QUESTION

IN THIS enormous overcrowded prison, where each cell houses a quantity of human suffering, it is almost indecent to talk about oneself. The 'division' for those condemned to death is on the ground floor. There are eight of them in there, their ankles chained together, waiting for reprieve or death. It is by the pulse of these condemned men that we all live. There is not one of them who does not turn on his straw mattress at night with the thought that the dawn may be sinister, who falls asleep without wishing with all his might that nothing will happen at dawn. Yet it is from this section of

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the prison that the forbidden songs are heard every day, those magnificent melodies that always spring from the heart of a people struggling for their freedom.

Torture? The word has been familiar to us all for a long time. Few of those imprisoned here have escaped it. The first questions put to new arrivals, when it is possible to speak to them, are these, and in this order: When were you arrested? Have you been tortured? By 'the Paras'\* or the detectives?

My particular case is exceptional in that it has attracted public attention. It is not in any way unique. What I have said in my petition and what I am saying here illustrates by one single example what is common practice in this atrocious and bloody war.

It is now more than three months since I was arrested. I have survived so much pain and so many humiliations during this time that I would not bring myself to talk once again of those days

\* Paratroops.

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and nights of agony if I did not believe that it would serve a purpose, and that by making the truth known I might do a little towards bringing about a cease-fire and peace. For whole nights during the course of a month I heard the screams of men being tortured, and their cries will resound for ever in my memory. I have seen prisoners thrown down from one floor to another who, stupefied by torture and beatings, could only manage to utter in Arabic the first words of an ancient prayer.

But, since then, I have come to know of other atrocities. I have been told of the 'disappearance' of my friend Maurice Audin, arrested twenty-four hours before me, tortured by the same group who afterwards took me in hand. He disappeared like Sheikh Tebessi, President of the Association of Oulamas, Doctor Cherif Zahar, and so many others. At Lodi, I met my friend De Milly, employed previously at the Psychiatric Hospital at Blida, who had also been tortured by the 'Paras', by means of a new technique. He was fastened down, naked, on a metal chair through which an electric current was passed; he still has the deep marks of severe

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burns on both legs. In the corridors of the prison I recognized among the new "entries" Mohamed Sefta, Registrar of the Mahakma of Algiers (the Moslem Court). 'Forty-three days with the Paras. Excuse me, but I still have trouble in speaking. They burnt my tongue.' And he showed me his slashed tongue. I have seen others: a young trader from the Casbah, Boualem Bahmed, showed me, in the prison car in which we were driven to the Military Tribunal, the long scars on the calves of his legs. 'The Paras . . . with a knife; I hid a member of the F.L.N.'\*

On the other side of the wall, in the wing reserved for women, there are young girls, not one of whom has given way: Djamila Bouhired, Elyette Loup, Nassima Hablal, Melika Khene, Lucie Coscas, Colette Gregoire and many others. Undressed, beaten, insulted by sadistic torturers, they too have been submitted to the water and the electricity. Each one of us here knows of the martyrdom of Annick Castel, raped by a parachutist and who, believing herself pregnant, dreamed only of death.

\* Fédération Libre Nord-Africaine.

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On reading this account, one must think of all those who have "disappeared" and of those who, sure of their cause, await death without fear; of those who have known torturers and who have not feared them; of those who, faced with hatred and torture, reaffirm their belief in future peace and friendship between the French and Algerian peoples. This could be the account of any one of them.

IT WAS four o'clock in the afternoon of Wednesday, June 12th when Lieutenant C— of the Paratroops, accompanied by one of his men and a policeman, arrived at Audin's house to arrest me. On the previous day my friend Maurice Audin, an assistant at the Faculty of Science of Algiers, had been arrested at his house and the police had left a detective behind. It was this man who opened the door to me when I fell into the trap. I tried, without success, to escape, but the detective, revolver in hand, caught me on the first floor and forced me into the apartment. The detective, who was very nervous, telephoned to Paratroop headquarters to ask for immediate reinforcements, watching me all the time out of the corner of his eye.

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From the moment when the lieutenant entered the room I knew what to expect. Underneath an enormous beret, his small face, closely-shaven, triangular and long like that of a desert fox, gave me a tight-lipped smile. 'An excellent capture', he said, enunciating each syllable. 'It's Henri Alleg, former editor of the *Alger Républicain*.' Then, turning immediately to me, he asked:

'Where have you been hiding?'

'That I won't tell you!'

He smiled, raised his head and then, very sure of himself, said: 'We will prepare a little questionnaire for you later on which will change your mind. You'll answer, I promise you.' And then to the others: 'Handcuff him!'

Escorted by the Paras, I walked down the three flights of stairs to the street. The lieutenant's car, an Aronde, was waiting for us on the other side of the street. They made me sit in the back. The Para was next to me: the barrel of his sten-gun jarred against my ribs: 'There's a good packet for you inside there, if you start any nonsense.'

We drove towards the higher part of the town. After a short stop in front of a villa (no doubt

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one of the communication posts of the Paratroops), where C— entered alone, we continued to climb towards Chateauneuf by the Boulevard Clemenceau. Finally, after passing the Place El-Biar, the car stopped in front of a large building under construction.

I crossed a court filled with jeeps and military lorries and arrived before the entrance of the unfinished building. I went upstairs: C— went ahead of me, the Para behind. The bars in the reinforced concrete stuck out here and there from the masonry; the staircase had no balustrade; from the grey ceilings hung the wires of an unfinished electrical installation.

There was a constant movement of Paratroopers going up and down from one floor to another pushing in front of them Arabs, prisoners dressed in rags with several-day old beards, all this amid a great noise of boots, laughter and intermingled obscenities and insults. I was at the 'centre de tri'\*

\* Clearing centre.

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of the sub-section of the Bouzareah. I was soon to learn how this 'tri' worked.

I went into a large room on the third or fourth floor behind C—, apparently the living room of a future apartment. Several collapsible tables, blurred photographs of wanted suspects on the wall, a field telephone: these made up all the furniture. Near the window stood a lieutenant. I learnt later that his name was S—. He had a great ape-like body, much too big for his small head with its sleepy eyes set between fat cheeks and for his little pointed voice which came out like the honeyed and spoilt tones of a vicious choirboy.

'We're going to give you a chance', said C—, turning towards me. 'Here is paper and pencil. You're going to tell us where you live, who has been sheltering you since you went into hiding, who are the persons you've met, what your activities have been. . . .'

His tone was polite. The handcuffs had been taken off. I repeated for the two lieutenants what I had already said to C— during the car journey: 'I went into hiding in order not to be arrested since I knew that an internment order had been

made out against me. I have been looking after the interests of my paper and I am still doing so. In this connection I met M. Guy Mollet and M. Gérard Jacques in Paris. I have nothing else to say to you. I shall write nothing and don't count on me to betray those who have had the courage to hide me.'

Still smiling and very sure of themselves, the two lieutenants exchanged glances.

'I think there's no point in wasting our time,' said C—. S— agreed. At heart I, too, agreed with them; if I was going to be tortured, it didn't matter very much if it was earlier or later. And rather than being kept in suspense, it was better to face the worst right away.

C— went to the telephone. 'Get ready for a session: it's a "prize catch" this time and tell L— to come up.'

A few moments later L— came into the room. Twenty-five years old, short, sunburnt, pomaded hair, small forehead. He came up to me, smiling, and said, 'Ah! So you're the customer? Come with me.'

I went ahead of him. One floor further down I

entered a small room on the left of the corridor, the kitchen of the future apartment. There was a sink and an earthenware cooking stove, surmounted by a shelf on which the tiles had not yet been laid and only the metal frame was in place. At the back was a large glass door hidden by broken boxes which darkened the room.

'Get undressed,' said L—, and when I did not obey him: 'if you don't we'll make you.'

While I was undressing, Paras were coming and going all around me and in the corridor, curious to see who L—'s 'customer' was. One of them, a blond with a Parisian accent, put his head through the frame of the door where the glass had not yet been inserted and said: 'Well, a Frenchman! He's sided with the rats against us? You'll take care of him, won't you L—!'

L— now laid on the ground a black plank, sweating with humidity, polluted and sticky with vomit left, no doubt, by previous 'customers'.

'Lie down!'

I lay down on the plank. L—, with the help of another man, attached me by the wrists and ankles with leather straps fixed to the wood. I saw L—



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standing above me, his legs apart, one foot on each side of the plank, at the height of my chest, with his hands on his hips in the attitude of a victor. He looked me straight in the eyes, trying to intimidate me like his superiors.

'Now listen,' he said, in his North African accent. 'The lieutenant is giving you time to think, but afterwards you'll talk. When we have a European we look after him better than the "wogs." Everybody talks. You'll have to tell us everything—and not only a little bit of the truth, but everything!'

During all this time I was being taunted by the 'blue berets' standing around me.

'Why don't your friends come and rescue you?'

'Well, well, what's he doing stretched out like that? Relaxing?'

Another one, more vicious, snarled: 'It's better not to lose time with trash like that. I'd bump them off right away.'

A current of cold air was blowing in from underneath the window. Naked on the damp plank, I started to tremble with cold. L— insinuated with a smile 'Are you afraid? Do you want to talk?'

'No, I'm not afraid. I'm cold.'

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'You're still playing the hero, are you? It won't last long. In a quarter of an hour, you'll talk very nicely.'

I remained without answering amid the Paras who continued to joke and fling insults, forcing myself to remain as calm as possible. Then I saw C—, S—, and a captain coming into the room. Tall, thin, with pinched lips, scarred cheek, elegant and taciturn, this was Captain D—.

'Well, have you thought things over?' It was C— who put the question.

'I haven't changed my mind.'

'Good, we can proceed,' and addressing himself to the others: 'It would be better to go into the room next door. There's more light and it will be easier to work.'

Four Paras picked up the plank to which I was bound and carried me into the next room facing the kitchen, and put me down on the cement floor. The officers sat down around me on boxes brought in by their men.

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'Now!' said C—, still very sure of the final result, 'I need some paper and a box, or something hard, to write on.'

He was given a piece of wood which he put down beside him. Then, taking from L— a magneto which the latter handed him, he raised it to the level of my eyes, turning for my inspection the machine which had already been described to me a hundred times by its victims.

'You know what this is, don't you? You've often heard it spoken about? You've even written articles about it?'

'You have no right to employ these methods.'

'You will see.'

'If you have any charge to bring against me, hand me over to the appropriate authorities. You have twenty-four hours in order to do it. And I would prefer not to be addressed as "tu".'

There were bursts of laughter around me. I knew very well my protestations were useless and that under the circumstances it was ridiculous to ask these brutes to respect the law, but I wanted to show them that they had not intimidated me.

'Go ahead,' said C—.

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A Para sat on my chest: he was very sunburnt, his upper lip curled into a triangle under his nose, with the broad smile of a boy who is going to play a good trick. . . . I was to recognize him later on in the office of the judge. It was Sergeant J—. Another Para (from Oran, to judge by his accent) was on my left, another by my feet, the officers all around me. Several others with no particular function were also in the room, no doubt just to watch the fun.

J—, SMILING all the time, dangled the clasps at the end of the electrodes before my eyes. These were little shining steel clips, elongated and toothed, what telephone engineers call 'crocodile' clips. He attached one of them to the lobe of my right ear and the other to a finger on the same side.

Suddenly, I leapt in my bonds and shouted with all my might. C— had just sent the first electric charge through my body. A flash of lightning exploded next to my ear and I felt my heart racing. I struggled, screaming, and stiffened myself until the straps cut into my flesh. All the while the shocks controlled by C—, magneto in hand, followed each other without interruption. Rhythmically, C— repeated a single question, hammering out the syllables: 'Where have you been hiding?'

Between two spasms, I turned my head towards him and said, 'You are wrong to do this. You will regret it!'

Furious, C— turned the knob on the magneto to its fullest extent. 'Every time you say that, I'll give you a packet!' And as I continued to shout, he said to J—: 'My God, he's noisy! Stuff his mouth with something!'

J— rolled my shirt into a ball and forced it into my mouth, after which the torture continued. I bit the material between my teeth with all my might and found it almost a relief.

Suddenly, I felt as if a savage beast had torn the flesh from my body. Still smiling above me, J— had attached the pincer to my penis. The shocks going through me were so strong that the straps holding me to the board came loose. They stopped to tie them again and we continued.

After a while the lieutenant took the place of J—. He had removed the wire from one of the pincers and fastened it down along the entire width of my chest. The whole of my body was shaking with nervous shocks, getting ever stronger in intensity, and the session went on interminably.

They had thrown cold water over me in order to increase the intensity of the current, and between each spasm I trembled with cold. All around me, sitting on the packing cases, C— and his friends emptied bottles of beer. I chewed on my gag to relieve the cramps which contorted my body. In vain.

At last they stopped. 'All right, untie him!' The first session was over.

I got up, reeling, and put on my trousers and my undershirt. S— was in front of me. My tie was on the table. He picked it up and knotted it like a cord round my neck, and, amid the laughs of the others, dragged me off behind him, as he would have dragged a dog, into the office next door.

'Well,' he said, 'so you haven't had enough? We're not going to let you go. Get down on your knees!' With his enormous hands, he slapped me with his full strength. I fell on my knees, but I was incapable of keeping myself upright. I teetered to

left and right. The blows of S— kept me from falling, except when he threw me to the floor. 'Well, do you want to talk? You're finished, do you understand? You're a dead man living on borrowed time!'

'Bring in Audin,' said C—. 'He's in the other building.' S— continued to hit me, while the other, sitting on a table, watched us.

My glasses had long since fallen off. My shortsightedness strengthened the impression of unreality, of nightmare which had taken possession of me and against which I forced myself to struggle, lest it should weaken my will.

'Well, Audin, tell him what's in store for him. Save him from the horrors of yesterday evening!' It was C— talking. S— raised my head. Above me I saw the pale and haggard face of my friend Audin looking at me while I wavered on my knees. 'Go on, tell him,' said C—.

'It's hard, Henri,' Audin said to me. And they took him away.

Suddenly S— pulled me up. He was beside himself. This was going on too long. 'Listen, you scum! You're finished! You're going to talk! Do you hear, you're going to talk!' He brought his

face up close until it was almost touching mine and shouted: 'You're going to talk! Everybody talks here! We fought the war in Indo-China—that was enough to know your type. This is the Gestapo here! You know the Gestapo?' Then, with irony: 'So you wrote articles about torture, did you, you bastard! Very well! Now it's the Tenth Paratroop Division who are doing it to you.'

I heard the whole band of torturers laughing behind me. S— hammered my face with blows and jabbed my stomach with his knee. 'What we are doing here, we will do in France. We will do it to your Duclos and your Mitterrand, we will do to them what we are doing to you. And your whore of a Republic, we will blow it up into the air, too! You're going to talk, I tell you.'

On the table was a piece of cardboard. He picked it up and used it to beat me. Each blow stupefied me a little more, but at the same time confirmed me in my decision not to give way to these brutes who flattered themselves they were like the Gestapo.

'All right,' said C—. 'You've asked for it! We're going to throw you to the lions.' The 'lions' were

those whose acquaintance I had already made, but they were going to exercise their talents still further.

S— dragged me back into the first room, the one with the plank and the magneto. I just had time to see a naked Moslem being kicked and shoved into the corridor. While S—, C— and the others were 'looking after' me, the rest of the group were continuing their 'work' using the same plank and the magneto. They had been 'questioning' a suspect in order not to lose any time.

L— fastened me down to the plank: a new session of electrical torture began.

'This time, it's the real thing,' he said.

'In my torturer's hands I saw a different machine, larger than the first, and even in my agony I felt a difference in quality. Instead of the sharp and rapid spasms that seemed to tear my body in two, a greater pain now stretched all my muscles and racked them for a longer time. I was taut in my bonds. I tightened my teeth on the gag with all my might and kept my eyes closed. They stopped, but I continued to shake with nervous convulsions.

'Do you know how to swim?' said L—, bending

over me. 'We're going to teach you. Take him to the tap!'

Together they picked up the plank to which I was still attached and carried me into the kitchen. Once there, they rested the top of the plank, where my head was, against the sink. Two or three Paras held the other end. The kitchen was lit only by a weak light from the corridor. In the gloom, I could just make out the faces of S—, C— and Captain D—, who seemed to have taken over the direction of these operations. L— fixed a rubber tube to the metal tap which shone just above my face. He wrapped my head in a rag, while D— said: 'Put a wedge in his mouth.'

With the rag already over my face, L— held my nose. He tried to jam a piece of wood between my lips in such a way that I could not close my mouth or spit out the tube.

When everything was ready, he said to me: 'When you want to talk, all you have to do is move your fingers.' And he turned on the tap. The rag was soaked rapidly. Water flowed everywhere: in my mouth, in my nose, all over my face. But for a while I could still breathe in some small gulps of

air. I tried, by contracting my throat, to take in as little water as possible and to resist suffocation by keeping air in my lungs for as long as I could. But I couldn't hold on for more than a few moments. I had the impression of drowning, and a terrible agony, that of death itself, took possession of me. In spite of myself, all the muscles of my body struggled uselessly to save me from suffocation. In spite of myself, the fingers of both my hands shook uncontrollably.

'That's it! He's going to talk,' said a voice.

The water stopped running and they took away the rag. I was able to breathe. In the gloom, I saw the lieutenants and the captain, who, with a cigarette between his lips, was hitting my stomach with his fist to make me throw out the water I had swallowed. Befuddled by the air I was breathing, I hardly felt the blows.

'Well, then?' I remained silent. 'He's playing games with us! Put his head under again!'

This time I clenched my fists, forcing the nails into my palm. I had decided I was not going to move my fingers again. It was better to die of asphyxiation right away. I feared to undergo again

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that terrible moment when I had felt myself losing consciousness, while at the same time I was fighting with all my might not to die. I did not move my hands, but three times I again experienced this insupportable agony. In extremis, they let me get my breath back while I threw up the water.

The last time, I lost consciousness.

On opening my eyes, it took me a few seconds to establish contact with reality. I was stretched out, unbound and naked, in the midst of the Paras. I saw C— bending over me.

'It's all right,' he said to the others. 'He's coming round.' Then he addressed himself to me: 'You know, you did well to pass out. Don't think that you will always be able to lose consciousness . . . get up!'

They propped me up. I staggered, even grasping the uniforms of my torturers, ready to collapse at any moment. With blows and kicks they threw me like a ball from one to the other. I made a movement of defence.

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'He's still got some reflexes—the pig,' one of them said.

'And now, what shall we do with him?' said another.

Between their laughs I heard: 'We'll roast him.'

'Good. I haven't seen that yet.' It was C—, in the tone of somebody about to enjoy a new experience.

They pushed me into the kitchen and there they made me lie down on the stove and sink. L— wound a wet rag around my ankles, which he then tied tightly with rope. Then, altogether, they lifted me up in order to hang me head downward from the iron bar of the shelf above the sink. Only my fingers touched the ground. They amused themselves for a while, swinging me from one to the other like a sack of sand. I could see L—, who slowly lit a paper-torch at the level of my eyes. He stood up and all of a sudden I felt the flame on my penis and on my legs, the hairs crackling as they caught fire. I straightened myself with such a violent jerk that I bumped L—. He scorched me again, once or twice, then he started to burn me on the nipple of my breast.

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But my reactions were now dulled and the officers moved off. Only L— and one other man stayed with me. From time to time they beat me or stepped on the extremities of my fingers with their boots as if to remind me of their presence. My eyes wide, I forced myself to look at them in order not to be taken by surprise by their blows, and in the moments of respite I tried to think of something other than the cords cutting into my ankles.

Then, from the corridor, two boots headed towards my face. I saw the upside-down face of C—, who squatted in front of me, glowering furiously. 'Well, are you going to talk? You haven't changed your mind?'

I looked at him and said nothing.

'Untie him.' L— untied the rope which held me to the bar while another pulled me by the arms. I fell flat on the cement.

'Get up!'

'I wasn't able to get up by myself. Held up on

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each side, I felt the soles of my feet swollen to the point where I had the impression that each step disappeared into a cloud. I put on my undershirt and my trousers, and, toppling over, fell all the way down a staircase.

There, another Para picked me up and propped my back against the wall, holding me up with both hands. I was trembling with cold and nervous exhaustion, my teeth chattering. L—'s companion—the one who had 'looked after' me in the kitchen—had arrived on the landing.

'Move!' he said. He pushed me ahead of him and, with a kick, knocked me on the ground.

'Can't you see he's groggy?' said someone with a French accent. 'Leave him alone!' These were the first human words I had heard.

'Rats like that, they should be taken care of right away,' answered my torturer.

I was trembling on my legs, and in order not to fall I put my palms and my forehead against the wall of the corridor. He pulled my hands behind my back and handcuffed them together, after which he threw me into a cell.

On my knees, I moved towards a mattress against



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the wall. I tried to lie on my stomach but the mattress was stuffed with barbed wire. I heard a laugh behind the door: 'I gave him the barbed-wire mattress.' It was still the same man. Another voice answered him: 'All the same, he has gained a night to give his friends a chance to get away.'

The handcuffs cut into my flesh, my hands hurt, and the position in which my arms were locked cramped my shoulders. I rubbed the tips of my fingers against the rough cement in order to make them bleed and take away a little of the pressure from my swollen hands, but I did not succeed.

From a small window, set high in the wall, I could see the night getting lighter. I heard a cock crow and I estimated that the Paratroopers and officers, tired from the night's exertions, would not come back before nine o'clock at the earliest. It was thus imperative for me to use this time to the best advantage, in order to get back some strength before the next 'questioning'. Sometimes on one shoulder, sometimes on the other, I tried to relax, but my body did not respond. I trembled constantly and was unable to get a moment's rest.

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I knocked several times against the door with my foot. At last someone came.

'What do you want?'

I wanted to urinate.

'Piss on yourself,' he answered me from behind the partition.

It was already daylight when a Paratrooper, the same one who had found the brutality of his colleague excessive, appeared and said, 'Come on, we're leaving.' He helped me to get up and supported me while I climbed the stairs.

They led me out on to an immense terrace. The sun was already very strong and beyond the building one could see a whole quarter of El-Biar. From the descriptions I had read, I realized right away that I was in the huge building where Ali Boumendjel, Barrister at the Court of Appeal of Algiers had died. It was from this terrace that (according to the torturers) he had committed 'suicide'. We went down by another staircase into a different part of the building, where my gaoler

locked me up in a small dark room. It was a dungeon, no bigger than a cupboard, where daylight never entered. Only a small narrow slit, high up in the wall facing an air-vent, let a little light in. Crawling as best I could, I advanced towards a corner to support my back and give some relief to my shoulders which were contracted by cramp.

Very soon the traffic in the corridors became heavier. The building was waking up and I prepared myself for the return of my torturers. But S— appeared all alone. He seized me by the shoulders to pull me up and led me to the landing.

‘This is the man, Major,’ he said.

Before me was a major of the Paratroops in camouflage uniform and blue beret. He was tall and ill-looking, extremely thin. In a soft ironical voice he asked me: ‘You are a journalist? Then you should understand that we want to be informed. We must be informed.’

He had only wanted to make my acquaintance; I was taken back to my cell. I did not stay alone for very long, for a few moments later S— appeared. This time he was accompanied by C— and by another Para carrying a magneto. On the

threshold of the door they looked at me: ‘You still don’t want to talk? You’d better realise that we’ll go on with this to the end.’

I was leaning against the wall facing the door. They came in, put the light on, and settled themselves into a semi-circle around me.

‘I need a gag,’ said C—. He put his hand into one of the packages which were lying there and came out with a filthy towel.

‘Don’t bother,’ said S—. ‘He can shout as much as he wants, we’re three floors underground.’

‘All the same,’ said C—, ‘it’s disagreeable.’

They unfastened my trousers, took down my underpants and attached the electrodes to each side of my groin. They took turns in manipulating the knob of the magneto—it was a large one of the second type used the previous day. I only cried out at the beginning of the shock and at each new wave of current and my movements were much less violent than during the previous sessions. They must have expected it, as they hadn’t considered it necessary to tie me down to the plank. While the torture was going on I could hear a loud-speaker blaring out popular songs of the day.

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Without doubt the music was coming from a mess or common-room nearby. It largely drowned my cries and this was what S— had meant. The torture session continued and gradually exhausted me. I fell down, sometimes to the right, sometimes to the left. One of the two lieutenants detached one of the clasps and fastened it to my face until I jerked upright.

‘My word,’ said C—, ‘he likes it.’

They consulted together and decided they had better give me time to recover. ‘Leave him the electric wires,’ said S—, ‘as we’re going to return.’ They went away leaving the clasps still sticking into my flesh.

I must have fallen asleep suddenly, because, when I saw them again, I had the impression that only an instant had passed. And at this point, I lost all idea of time.

S— was the first to come into the room. He gave me a kick, saying: ‘Sit up!’ I didn’t move. They seized me and propped me up in an angle of the

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wall. A moment later I was writhing once again under the electric current. I felt that my resistance was making them more and more brutish and irritated.

‘We’ll give it to him in the mouth,’ said S—. ‘Open your mouth,’ he commanded. In order to make me obey, he held my nostrils and the moment I opened my mouth to breathe, he pushed the naked wire as far in as he could, right to the back of the palate, while in the meantime C— set the magneto in motion. I could feel the intensity of the current increasing, and my throat, my whole jaw, all the muscles of my face up to my eyelids contracted in a contortion that became more and more agonising.

It was C— who was holding the wire now. ‘You can let go,’ S— said to him. ‘It will stay there by itself.’ In fact, my jaws were soldered to the electrode by the current, and it was impossible for me to unlock my teeth, no matter how hard I tried. My eyes, under their wrinkled lids, were crossed with images of fire, and geometric luminous patterns flashed in front of them. I thought I could feel them being torn from their sockets by the shocks,

as if pushed out from within. The current had reached its limit and so had my sufferings. The agony was constant and I thought that there was no greater harm they could do me. But I heard S— say to the person who was working the magneto: 'Do it by little shocks: first you slow down then you start again. . . .'

I felt the intensity diminish, the cramps which had stiffened my whole body decrease, and all of a sudden, as he turned the magneto back to its full force, the current was tearing me to pieces again. In order to escape these sudden easings and sharp increases towards the maximum agony, I started to bang my head against the ground with all my force and each blow brought me relief. S— shouted into my ear at close quarters: 'Don't try to knock yourself out, you won't succeed.'

Finally they stopped. The flashes and points of light still danced in front of my eyes and my ears continued to buzz with the noise of a dentist's drill.

After a while I was able to distinguish all three standing up in front of me. 'Well?' said C—. I did not answer him.

'Good God!' said S—, and with all his force he slapped me.

'Listen,' said C—, rather calmer. 'Where can it get you—all this? If you won't say anything, we'll take your wife. Do you think she'll stand it?' S— leaned over me in his turn and said: 'Do you think that your children are safe just because they're in France? We'll bring them here whenever we want.'

In this nightmare, it was only with the greatest difficulty that I was able to separate the menace I had to fear from the blackmailer's bluff. But I knew that they were capable of torturing Gilberte, as they had already tortured Gabrielle Giminez, Blanche Moine, Elyette Loup and other young women. I learnt later on that they had even tortured Madame Touri (the wife of a well-known Radio Algiers actor) in front of her husband, in order to make him talk. I was afraid that they would guess my anguish at the thought that they might carry out their threats and it was almost with relief that I heard one of them say: 'He doesn't care, he just doesn't care about anything.'

They left me alone, but the idea that Gilberte

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might at any moment be attached to the torture plank could no longer be dispelled from my mind.

C— came back a little later with another Paratrooper. They tortured me once again and then left. I now had the impression that they were coming and going continually, only leaving me a few minutes of respite in which to recover. C— tortured me again, moving the wire across my chest, while continually rapping out the same question: 'Where did you spend the night before your arrest?'

He put the photograph of one of the leaders of the Party, who had gone into hiding, under my eyes: 'Where is he?'

I looked at C—, who this time was accompanied by S—. He was in civilian clothes, very elegant. I had to clear my throat, and he stepped away from me, saying: 'Look out! He's going to spit.'

'What does it matter to us?' one of the others asked.

'I don't like it, it's not hygienic.'

He was in a hurry and he was afraid of getting

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his suit dirty. He rose and left. I thought to myself that he had to go to some reception and that consequently at least one more day had gone by since the time of my arrest. And I felt a sudden wave of joy at the thought that these brutes had not yet got the better of me.

S— also left, but I did not stay alone long. Into the dark cell, they brought an Arab. The door opened for a moment, letting in a ray of light. I saw his silhouette. He was young and well-dressed; he had handcuffs on his wrists. He came forward, groping in the darkness, and sat down next to me. From time to time I was shaken by fits of trembling and I would jump, groaning, as if the torture by electricity were still pursuing me. He felt me shaking and pulled my undershirt over my icy shoulders. He held me, so that I could get down on my knees and relieve myself against the wall, and then helped me to stretch out.

'Lie down, brother, lie down,' he said.

I decided to say to him, 'I am Alleg, formerly editor of the *Alger Républicain*. Tell them outside, if you can, that I died here.' It required an effort and there was not enough time. The door suddenly

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opened and I heard somebody in the corridor say: 'Why did they dump him here?' And he was taken away.

A little later the door opened again: two Paras. An electric torch was shone on my face. I waited for the blows, but they did not touch me. I tried in vain to see who they were, but I only heard a young voice say: 'Horrible, isn't it?' and the other one answered: 'Yes, it's terrible.' And they went away.

Suddenly the electricity was switched on. These were men from S—'s group. 'Still hasn't said anything?'

'Don't worry about it, in five minutes he's going to talk.'

'Ah!' said the second. 'You told your idea to the lieutenant?'

'Yes.'

I understood that I was to undergo new sufferings. S— appeared behind them. He leaned towards me, pulled me up and propped me against

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the wall. He opened my undershirt and stood facing me, his legs keeping mine astride on the floor. He took out a box of matches from the pocket of his uniform, lit one and very slowly passed it in front of my eyes to see if they followed the flame, and if I was afraid. Then, using his matches he set about burning the nipple first of one breast, then the other.

He addressed one of his assistants: 'You can go ahead!' The man lit the paper torches which he had been holding in readiness and started to scorch the soles of my feet. I didn't move and made no sound. I had become completely insensitive, and while S— burnt me I was able to look straight at him without blinking.

Furious, he hit me in the stomach and shouted: 'You're finished! Finished! Do you hear? Can you talk? I'll make you shit! You'd like me to kill you right away, wouldn't you? But it's not finished yet. Do you know what thirst is? We're going to let you die of thirst!'

The current had completely dehydrated my tongue, my lips, my throat, which were as rough and hard as wood. S— must have known that tor-

ture by electricity induced an unbearable thirst. He had given up his matches, and in his hand he held a glass and a zinc jug.

'It's two days since you've had anything to drink. Another four days before you die of thirst. Four days can be a long time! You'll want to lick up your piss.'

He poured a stream of water into the glass in front of my eyes and whispered into my ear: 'Talk and you can drink . . . talk and you can drink.'

With the rim of the glass, he forced my lips open. He had only left a finger of water in it and I could see the clear water moving at the bottom, but I was unable to drink a drop. His face close to mine, S— laughed at my exhausted efforts.

'Tell the boys to come and see the torture of Tantalus,' he joked.

Other Paras were looking in the open doorway, and in spite of the fatigue against which I was fighting, I raised my head and refused to look at the water so as not to make my suffering an entertainment for these brutes.

'Oh, we're not as bad as all that. We'll let you drink all the same.' And he raised to my lips the

glass which he had filled to the brim. I hesitated a moment. Holding my nose and pushing my head back, he poured the whole glass down my throat; it was atrociously salty water.

Minutes or perhaps hours later there was a new interruption. D—, the captain, appeared in his turn. With him were L—, S— and the big Paratrooper who had taken part in Wednesday's session. They propped me up against the wall and L— attached the clips to my ear and my finger. At each shock I started but did not cry out; I had become almost as insensitive as a machine. D— made a sign for them to stop.

Sitting on a packing-case, almost at ground level, he smoked and talked in a very soft voice which contrasted with the sharp tones of the others and their shouts, which still rang in my ears. He joked about subjects of no apparent importance and without any reference to the questions which had been hammered into my head since the beginning. Among other things, he asked me if many newspapers belonged to the French Press Federation. I would certainly have answered him, but I could not move my dry hard lips except with the greatest

effort and only a dry whistle came out of my throat. Painfully, I tried to articulate certain syllables, while he went on talking as if one question were connected with the next: 'And Audin, he's a good friend of yours, isn't he?'

This was like an alarm signal: I saw that he wanted to lead me on gradually, without my realising it, to talk about what interested him. Stupefied as I was by the blows and the tortures I had undergone, one single idea was still clear in my mind: 'To tell them nothing, not to help them in any way.' I didn't open my mouth.

At this, D— lost his calm. He got up and started to hit me in the face with both fists. My head bounced from one side to the other to the rhythm of his blows, but I had lost all feeling, to the point where I no longer closed my eyes when his hand came towards me. He stopped after a while to ask them to bring him some water.

'We've already tried that, sir,' said S—.

All the same, he took the glass and the jug that they handed to him. As the lieutenant had done earlier, he started to pour the water from one vessel to the other in front of my eyes, bringing the glass

to my lips, but so that I could not drink it, but discouraged by my lack of reaction, because I made no effort to drink, he put it on the ground. I fell to one side. In my fall I knocked over the glass. 'Better mop it up,' said S—, 'or he'll lick it up.'

D— having gone away, S— took over in turn and with his sharp voice started to scream, bending over me: 'You're finished! This is your last chance! Your last chance! That's why the captain is here.'

A Paratrooper who had come in with L— was sitting cross-legged in a corner. He had taken out his revolver and he was now examining it in silence, ostensibly to make sure that everything was in readiness. Then he put it on his knees as if waiting for an order. During this time, L— had connected the clips to me again and he worked the magneto by little jerks, but without conviction. I jumped at each shock, but I was more worried about something else. I seemed to see, lying on the ground against the wall, an enormous pair of pincers wrapped in paper, and I tried to imagine what new tortures were in store for me. I thought that with this instrument they could perhaps tear out my fingernails. At the same time I was rather aston-



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ished that I felt so little fear and almost reassured myself with the thought that my hands had only ten nails. When they had finished and the door was closed, I crept towards the wall and saw that the pincers were nothing more than a piece of drain-pipe sticking out of the masonry.

It had become more and more difficult for me to think without fever dragging me back into unreality, but I realised there was not much more they could do to me. Memories of old tags kept coming to my mind: 'The body cannot go on forever, a time comes when the heart gives up.' It was in this way that my young friend Djegri had died two months earlier in a dungeon of the Villa S—the domain of the 'Green Berets' of Captain F—.

When, some considerable time later, the door opened again, I saw S— come in, accompanied by two officers whom I had not seen before. In the semi-darkness one of them crouched down in front of me and put his hand on my shoulder, as if to inspire confidence: 'I am the *aide de camp* of Gen-

assu?

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eral M—. 'It was Lieutenant R—. 'It grieves me to see you in this state. You are only thirty-six years old: that's young to die.'

He turned toward the two others and asked them to leave. 'He wants to talk to me alone,' he explained.

The door closed again and the two of us were alone.

'You're afraid that they'll know you talked? Nobody will know and we will take you under our protection. Tell me everything that you know and I will have you taken immediately to the infirmary. In a week you will be in France with your wife. You have our word. If not, you will disappear.'

He waited for a reply. The only one which came to mind, I gave him: 'Too bad!'

'You have children,' he went on. 'I could perhaps see them; do you want me to tell them that I knew their father? . . . You won't talk. If you let me go away now, the others will come back. And this time they won't stop.'

I remained silent. He got up, but before leaving, he said, 'There is nothing left for you to do but to kill yourself.'

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I heard him exchange a few words with the others who were waiting for him in the corridor: 'For ten years, fifteen years they've all had the same idea, that if captured they must say nothing: and there is no way to change them.'

I felt that I had arrived at the end of one stage of my ordeal, in fact, shortly after two Paras came in. They untied my hands, helped me to stand up, and then conducted me, supporting me all the time, to the terrace. Every second or third step, they stopped to enable me to get my breath back. In the passage other Paras, standing around the stairs or on the landings, taunted them: 'Do you have to carry him? Can't he walk alone?'

One of my guides answered them as if making an excuse, 'It's because he's had twelve hours grilling.' Then we went down into the other building.

AT THE end of the corridor, I was taken into a cell on the left-hand side; this was in fact a bathroom without fixtures. One of the Paras took me by the knees, the other under the arms, and they put me on a mattress thrown against the wall. I heard them debating for a moment whether or not to put the handcuffs on me.

'He can hardly move; there's no point.'

The other did not agree: 'We would be taking a risk we might regret.'

Finally they attached my wrists, not behind my back, but in front. I had the most extraordinary sensation of relief.

High up on the wall, on the right, the lights of the town lit the room feebly through a small win-

dow, quartered by barbed wire. It was evening. Pieces of plaster had come loose on the ceiling and cracks ran down the rough cement of the walls. My fever turned these into living forms, half seen, all mixed up together. In spite of my exhaustion, I was unable to sleep. I was shaken by nervous trembling and the dazzling tired my eyes painfully.

In the corridor they were talking about me: 'Give him a little to drink, a very little every hour, not much; otherwise, he'll be a goner.'

One of the Paratroopers who had accompanied me, a young man with a French accent, came in with a blanket which he put over me. He made me drink. I swallowed a little, but felt no thirst.

'Doesn't it interest you, the proposition of General M—?' he said. His voice was not hostile. 'Why are you so determined not to talk? You don't want to betray your friends? You have to have courage to hold out like that.'

I asked him what day it was. It was Friday night, and they had started to torture me on Wednesday.

In the corridor there was an incessant noise of

steps and shouts, broken from time to time by the shrill voice of S— giving orders. And suddenly, I heard terrible screams, very near by, probably in the next room. Somebody was being tortured, a woman. I thought I recognised the voice of Gilberte. It was only several days later that I knew I had been mistaken.

The torture went on until dawn, or very nearly. Through the partition, I could hear shouts and cries, muffled by the gag, and curses and blows. I soon knew that this was in no way exceptional, but just the routine order of the day. The cries of suffering were part of the familiar noises of the 'Centre de Tri'. None of the Paras paid any attention to it, but I don't believe that there was a single prisoner who did not, like myself, weep with hatred and humiliation on hearing the screams of the tortured for the first time.

I was only semi-conscious. I didn't really get to sleep until morning and woke up very late when the Para of the previous evening brought me some hot soup: my first meal since Wednesday. I swallowed a few spoonfuls with great difficulty. My lips, my tongue, my palate were still extremely

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inflamed from the burns of the electric wires. My other wounds, the burns on my groin, my chest, my fingers, were infected. The Para took off my handcuffs and I realised that I was unable to use my left hand, which was stiff and without any feeling. My right shoulder was extremely painful and I could not raise my arm.

I saw my torturers again in the afternoon. I had the impression that they had agreed to meet in my cell. They were all there: soldiers, officers and two civilians (probably from the DST\*) whom I had not previously seen. They started to talk among themselves, as if I were not present.

'So he doesn't want to talk?' one of the civilians said.

'We have time,' said the major. 'They're all like that at the beginning. We'll take a month, two months, or three months, but he'll talk.'

'He's the same type as Akkache or Elyette Loup,' answered the other. 'What he wants is to be a

\* Direction de la Surêté de Territoire.

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hero, and have a little plaque on a wall in a few hundred years.' He laughed at his joke.

Turning towards me, he said, smiling: 'They have taken good care of you.'

'It's his own fault,' said C—.

'He doesn't care about anything,' said. S—. 'He doesn't care about his wife or his children; he prefers the Party.'

He rested his boot on top of me as though I were a dead animal. Then he announced, as if it had only just occurred to him: 'You know that your children are arriving tonight by plane? They will have an accident.' They started to go out, but D— and C—, who felt that I hesitated to take this blackmail seriously, lingered in the doorway:

'Don't you really care what happens to your children?' said the lieutenant. They waited a moment in silence and C— concluded:

'Good! Then, you will die.'

'Everybody will know how I died,' I said to him.

'No, nobody will know anything.'

'Yes,' I replied. 'Everything is always known.'

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He returned the following day, which was Sunday, with S—, but only for a moment. Both were smiling.

'You haven't changed your mind?' C— asked. 'Then you are preparing new troubles for yourself. We have scientific methods (he emphasized the adjective) to make you talk.'

When they were gone, I knocked on the door and asked to be helped up. Supported by a Para, I went to the kitchen and, leaning against the wall, splashed some water over my face. When I lay down again, another Para—the European-Algerian who belonged to S—'s group—put his head through the half-open door and asked mockingly: 'Well, feeling better?'

'Yes,' I answered, in the same tone, 'you'll soon be able to start on me again.'

I would have liked him to go on jabbering for a bit, as he might have given me a clue as to what was in store for me, and what the 'scientific' means were to be. But he only answered venomously, 'You're right, it's not finished. We'll open your mouth.'

IT WAS Monday afternoon when S— woke me. Two Paras helped me to my feet and the four of us went down the stairs. One floor down was the infirmary, a large room with many windows. There were several camp beds and a table overflowing with medical supplies in complete disorder. The only person there for the moment was a military doctor, a captain, who seemed to be waiting for me. He was quite young, thin, with a dark skin badly shaven, his uniform torn. With his southern French accent he asked me, in place of greeting:

'Are you afraid?'

'No,' I said to him.

'I shall not beat you and I promise not to do you any harm.'

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They laid me out on one of the camp beds. Bent over me, he took my pulse and ran over me with his stethoscope. 'We can go ahead. He's just a bit nervous,' he said to S—. I was upset that my heartbeats had betrayed my feelings. All these preparations confirmed my apprehensions. They were going to experiment on me with 'truth drugs'. These were the 'scientific means' of which C— had spoken.

Since the previous day, I had tried to remember everything I had ever read in the papers about pentothal. 'If the will-power of the patient is strong enough, he cannot be forced to say what he does not want to.' This was my conclusion, which I repeated to myself in order to keep calm and confident. It would not help to struggle. They would have tied me down, and it was preferable to save all my energy in order to resist the drugs as best I could.

They waited a while for the medical assistant. He had, no doubt, returned from a sortie or a patrol, because he was dressed in campaign uniform. He took off his sten-gun and his equipment before listening to the doctor's explanations: 'First

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of all, use only five cubic-centimetres because there are some people who show resistance. He was thinking of the intolerance certain organisms have toward narcotics, but at this point I thought that he was talking about psychologic resistance and I decided to give them the impression that I was not 'resisting.' I thought this was the best way to get off with the smallest possible dose of the drug.

I was shaking with cold and nerves: I was naked to the waist because my shirt, which no doubt somebody else had found to his taste, had never been given back to me. One of the Paras threw a blanket over my body and the attendant came up to me. He took my right arm, tightened the vein with a piece of rubber and plunged in the needle. Underneath the blanket I slid my left hand, stiff and numb, into the pocket of my trousers and, through the cloth, pressed it against my thigh, forcing myself to think that as long as I felt the contact, I would know I was not dreaming and would be able to remain on guard. The attendant pressed very slowly on the syringe and the liquid must have entered my bloodstream drop by drop.

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'Count slowly,' the doctor said to me. 'Start now!'

I counted: 'One, two three . . .' until ten and then I stopped as if I were already asleep. At the base of my skull I felt a frozen numbness which mounted to my head and pushed me into unconsciousness. 'One, two, three,' said the doctor to encourage me. 'Continue.' I repeated after him: 'Fourteen . . . fifteen . . . sixteen . . .' I missed out two or three numbers on purpose, started again at nineteen, twenty, and twenty-one, and was silent. I heard him say: 'The other arm now.' Under the blanket, I slowly moved my right hand in order to put it in my pocket, always with the same idea that as long as my nails pinched my flesh, I would remain anchored to reality. But in spite of all my efforts, I fell asleep . . .

The doctor gently patted my cheeks. Almost whispering, he said to me in a voice that he tried to make as friendly as possible: 'Henri! Henri! It's Marcel; are you all right?' I opened my eyes. Slowly, with a great effort, I became aware of what

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was happening. It was dark in the room; he had pulled the blinds. Around me, sitting on camp beds, were Paras and officers—those that I knew and others, who, no doubt, had been brought in to watch the experiment—listening in silence. I saw that the doctor had a piece of paper in his hand and understood that it was the list of questions he would ask me.

In the familiar voice of someone who greets an old friend, he started by asking me: 'Have you been working long for the *Alger Républicain*?' The question was harmless, probably intended to put me at ease. I heard myself answering with extraordinary volubility: I gave details about difficulties of production on a newspaper, then I went on to describe how the pages were made up. I felt drunk, as if somebody else were talking in my place, but I retained sufficient awareness to remember that I was in the hands of my torturers and that they were trying to make me denounce my friends.

All this, however, was no more than an introduction. The doctor whispered to his assistant: 'It's working, you see; that's the way to do it.'

He broke into the middle of my explanations and said to me in a low voice: 'Henri, I've been told to come to you in order to see X—. How shall I go about it? In 'friendly' guise, this was a question he had put to me twenty times under torture. A thousand pictures came into my befuddled mind: I was in the street, in an apartment, in a square, and always this 'Marcel' pursued me and plied me with his questions. I made a great effort and, forcing open my eyelids, I managed to get a grip on reality only to plunge back immediately into semi-consciousness. He shook me a little to make me answer:

'Where is X—?' and a lunatic dialogue ensued.

'I'm astonished,' I answered him, 'that you've been sent to me. I don't know where he is.'

'When he wants to see you, how does he go about it?'

'He never needs to see me. I have nothing to do with him.'

'Yes, of course, but if he did want to see you, how would he go about it?'

'No doubt he would write to me, but he has no reason to do so.'

I was making a great effort in this cautious conversation, still sufficiently master of myself, in spite of the drug, to resist these brutes.

'Listen,' he went on. 'I have a soft job for X—. I have to see him urgently. If you see him, can you put me in touch with him?'

'I can promise you nothing,' I said to him. 'I would be astonished if he agreed to meet me.'

'Fine; but if by chance he came, how could I get in touch with you?'

'Where do you live?' I asked him.

'26, rue Michelet, 3rd floor on the right. Ask for Marcel.'

'Very well,' I said to him, 'I'll remember the address.'

'No, that's not the best way: I gave you my address, you should give me yours. You must have confidence in me.'

'Well, then,' I said to him again, 'if you like, we can meet at Parc de Galland Station in two weeks time at six o'clock. I have to go now. I don't like loitering about in the street.'

'Do you live near the Parc de Galland? Tell me your address,' he said to me again.



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I was exhausted and I wanted to bring the conversation to an end, even rudely:

'You're wasting your time,' I said to him. 'Goodbye.'

'Goodbye,' he said.

He waited a moment, doubtless to make sure that I was fast asleep, and I heard him whispering to someone near me: 'He won't say any more.' Then I heard them all getting up and filing towards the door, as though after a show. One of them, in passing, turned on the electric light, and all of a sudden I was entirely conscious. They were all by the door, some of them already outside, others, including S— and C—, still in the room and looking at me. As loud as I could, I shouted at them, 'You can bring back your magnetol! I'm ready for you! I'm not afraid of you!' The doctor, a little bag in his hand, went out, too; he signalled to them not to answer. Before leaving the room, he said to the attendant, 'He will probably be a bit difficult now. Give him some pills.'

Before the two Paras who had brought me there took charge of me again, the attendant dressed my wounds and covered the burns on my hips and

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chest with adhesive bandages. Then they helped me to return to my cell. One of the two, taking two pills out of his pocket, said, 'Swallow these.'

I took them, slid them under my tongue, drank a mouthful of water and said, 'All right.'

As soon as the door was closed I spat them out. Probably they were only aspirin tablets, but I was no longer able to think clearly and I felt sharply defiant about everything. Most of all, I asked myself if this might not be just the beginning of the 'treatment.' I felt that I was no longer in my normal state: my heart and pulse were racing feverishly. I had a meeting with 'Marcel.' This pentothal phantom took on the reality of flesh and blood. I had succeeded in not answering his questions, but how would I evade him the next time? I knew that I was delirious. I struck and pinched myself in order to be certain that I was not dreaming. But every time I returned to reality, I was unable to allay the fears that the drug raised in me.

'Come on, we're moving!' Here were my two guides from the infirmary. It must have been quite

late, perhaps eleven at night, and as we climbed up to the terrace the idea came to me that they were going to make me 'commit suicide.' In my present condition, this thought did not upset me: 'I have not given way under torture, the serum hasn't worked; this is the end.'

But we went down again into the second building and they opened the door of the dungeon where I had been before. It had been cleaned; there was a camp bed in it now, and a straw mattress.

As soon as they were gone, the same thoughts, put out of mind by this diversion, assailed me once again.

I asked myself if I was not going mad. If they continued to drug me, would I still be able to resist as I had done the first time? And if the pentothal made me say what I didn't want to, my agony under torture would have served no purpose.

The door of the cupboard on the right was open and I could see a roll of copper wire inside it. The open window above me left the hook of the latch free. I could have attached the end of the wire to it, climbed on the camp bed, and at the right mo-

ment pushed it away with a kick. But the idea of suicide revolted me. They would think after my death that it was the fear of torture that had driven me to it. I also asked myself if these 'facilities' had not been placed there on purpose, and the words of the *aide de camp* of M— came back to me: 'There is nothing left for you to do but kill yourself.' And at the very instant when I had decided not to kill myself, saying that if I had to die it was better to do so under the blows of the Paras, I also asked myself if it was not perhaps the fear of approaching death which had put these arguments into my head. Death was death. Wasn't it better to die right away without running the risk of helping the torturers? I tried to make a decision as calmly as possible and I decided that in any case they would not come back for me before the following morning at least, that I still had sufficient time to kill myself if necessary. I also realised that I was not in a normal state and that I needed to sleep in order to think better.

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I slept until morning. The night had taken away both my fever and my fears of the day before. I suddenly felt proud and happy not to have given way. I was convinced that I could still hold out if they started again, that I would fight them to the end, that I would not help them in their job of killing me.

TOWARDS THE middle of the afternoon, I was taken to my first cell in the other building, but I did not stay there long. At night, I was taken back again and put into the dungeon, where I spent a second night. The snatches of conversation which I had picked up in the corridor gave me the explanation of these orders and counter-orders: they were waiting for a visit from a Commission (I didn't know which one\*), and it was necessary that they should not see me. I was hidden away in the second building which was not actually part of the 'Centre de Tri' and was only used for the accommodation of Paras and for the mess.

\* It was in fact the Commission de Sauve-Garde represented by General Zeller.

I felt better and I managed to stand up and stay on my feet. I could sense from the different attitude of the Paras toward me, that they regarded my refusal to speak as 'sporting.' Even the big Para in L's group had changed his attitude. He came into my cell one morning and said to me:

'Were you tortured in the Resistance?'

'No; it's the first time,' I replied.

'You've done well,' he said with the air of a connoisseur. 'You've very tough.'

During the evening another Para, whom I did not know, came in on his round. He was a short blond, with a strong northern accent, a conscript. He said to me with a big smile: 'You know, I was present all the time! My father talked to me about the Communists in the Resistance. They died, but they never talked. That's very fine!'

I looked at this youth with the sympathetic face, who could talk of the sessions of torture I had undergone as if they were a football match that he remembered and could congratulate me without spite as he would a champion athlete. A few days later I saw him, shrivelled up and disfigured by hatred, hitting a Moslem who didn't go fast enough

down the staircase. This 'Centre de Tri' was not only a place of torture for Algerians, but a school of perversion for young Frenchmen.

One Para at least was not like the others. He was young with a country accent. He opened the door of my cell towards seven o'clock at night, when there was nobody else in the corridor. He had a bag of provisions in his hand: cherries, chocolate, bread, some cigarettes. He offered them to me and said: 'Come on, take this. Excuse me, but here one can't talk.' He shook my hand hard, very quickly, before closing the door. But S— must have given orders, for I didn't see anyone else.

During the following days I was taken to the infirmary. The first time I went there my heart was beating hard. I feared a new injection of pentothal, but they only wanted to dress my infected wounds. I was given penicillin injections and several times my bandages were changed. I didn't know what to conclude from this attention. In any case it was in their interest to look after me. If they wanted to torture me again, I must not be too weak. On the other hand if they decided to execute me, they had to have (other than the normal bullet-wounds) a

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'clean' body in case of an autopsy. And with every day that passed my hopes grew that public opinion would be alerted and would succeed in rescuing me from their grasp, although at the same time I was convinced that they would rather face the scandal of my death than have me alive and able to reveal my experiences. They must have weighed this question themselves, because one of the Paras said to me ironically, before I was able to stand by myself: 'It's a pity, isn't it? You could have told them enough to make a first-class row!'

They tried once again to question me. First, C—, D—, and another whom I did not know. They made me come to the office on the same floor. I sat facing them and for the hundredth time they asked me the same questions, but more politely.

'Where did you spend the night before you were arrested?'

'I have already answered that question under torture,' I said. 'My answer is that I won't tell you.'

They smiled without insisting, then D— said to me:

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'The lease of your apartment—is it in your own name? You can answer that question: if you don't, the concierge will tell us. You can see for yourself it's not important.'

'Ask the concierge, if you like; I won't help you.'

The interview had not lasted more than two or three minutes and C— accompanied me back to my cell.

A few days later I was visited by Lieutenant R—, the *aide de camp* of General M—. He started off by saying, without irony, that he was glad to see I was better. Then, very verbose, he gave me a 'digest' of the political philosophy of the army of occupation in Algeria: 'We're not going to leave.' That was the theme. The miserable condition of the Algerians? One mustn't exaggerate. He knew a native who earned 80,000 francs a month. 'Colonialism?' A word invented by the defeatists. Yes, there had been injustices, but all that was finished now. Torture? You don't wage war with choirboys. The war would have been over a long time ago, but the Communists, the Liberals and the senti-

mental press worked up opinion against the Paras and hampered their 'work'. I had very little wish to get involved in a conversation of this nature. I only said that he was lucky that France had other representatives and other claims to glory and contented myself with replying ironically to each of his colonialist platitudes.

Finally, he came to the object of his visit. They were making me a new proposition. I would not be asked to answer any more questions, but only to write what I thought about the present political situation and the future of Algeria, and I would be set free. Of course, I refused.

'Why?' he asked. 'Are you afraid that we will use it against you?'

'That, for one thing,' I answered. 'For another, I don't intend to help you. If you are interested in what my friends and I think of the Algerian problem, look at the old issues of the *Alger Républicain*. You have them all, since your paper, *Le Bled*, has taken over our offices.'

He did not press me further, and going to another subject he said to me point-blank: 'By the way, I had a visit from your wife and a lawyer.

They asked me if you were alive. I answered that you were *still* alive.'

Then he went on: 'It's really a pity. I like you. And I admire your resistance. I'd like to shake your hand as I shall probably never see you again.' With this, he left.

On the evening before my departure for Lodi, one month after my arrest, I was taken into an office on the floor below. A captain of the Paras wearing the green beret of the Foreign Legion was waiting for me. He had a crew-cut, a face like the blade of a knife slashed with long scars, thin wicked lips, and clear, prominent eyes. I sat down facing him and at the same moment he got up. With a blow in my face, he threw me to the ground and knocked off the glasses which had been returned to me: 'You're going to take that insolent look off your face,' he said.

L— had come in and was standing near the window. The presence of this "specialist" made me think that more torture was about to follow. But the captain sat down again as I stood up.

'Do you want a cigarette?' he asked me with a sudden change of tactics.

'No, I don't smoke, and I wish to be addressed as "vous".'

I didn't so much want to provoke him, as to know what he was leading up to: more torture or just a 'friendly' talk? Whether or not he slapped me again, or just swallowed my remark, I felt that my fate was already sealed. He replied that it was of no consequence and from then on addressed me as 'vous'. I asked him if I could pick up my glasses. He thought my object was to remember his face better.

'You can look at me, if you want to. I am Captain F—. You know, the famous SS captain. You've heard that name before?'

I was in the presence of F— the head of the torturers at the Villa S—, whose reputation was particularly bloodthirsty.

He evidently regretted having let his hatred carry him away. He tried to talk calmly and, in order to wipe out the first impression, had two bottles of beer brought in. I drank slowly, watching him out of the corner of my eye, in case another spasm of rage should cause him to throw the bottle in my teeth.

'You must have a nice dossier on me, haven't you? What would you do to me if the tables were turned? But I know how to take a risk.'

Then, in the same tone of voice, he embarked on a dissertation on Liberal and Communist writers, painters, and intellectuals in general. He talked with profound ignorance and with so much hatred that it changed the lines of his mobile face into a skull-like grin. I let him go on talking, interrupting him occasionally with the sole purpose of gaining time and reducing that which would be devoted to torture, if more was to come.

He asked me the usual questions, but without insistence. Then he came back to politics. He walked around the room like a madman, coming up to me sometimes to shout a phrase in my face. He hoped that the war would spread to Tunisia and Morocco. He regretted that the Suez Expedition had not led to a general conflagration: 'I would have liked an American submarine to have attacked a French boat. We would have gone to war against the Americans. At least things would have been clear!'

I contradicted him, but as one would contradict an invalid who must not be excited. Several times

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he wanted to hit me, but he restrained himself and once he shouted at me: 'You don't want to talk? As for me, I make them talk by putting a knife to their throats at night. I'll get you back one day.'

Undoubtedly, it was the general intention to 'get me back', when they decided to send me to the camp at Lodi, which was reserved for suspects who could be removed whenever it was deemed advisable.

BUT BEFORE this final questioning and the transfer which nothing had enabled me to foresee, I had been able, for a month, to observe how the torture factory worked. From my cell, I was able to see through the keyhole part of the corridor, the landing and some of the stairs. The thin walls of the partition enabled me to hear the sounds in the neighbouring rooms.

During the day there was an incessant coming and going on the stairs and in the corridors. The Paras were either alone or pushing imprisoned suspects brutally in front of them. On each floor—as I later found out—they kept fifteen or twenty persons in rooms which had been converted to cells. The prisoners slept on the cement itself or divided a mattress between three or four. They



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were constantly in darkness because the blinds were always closed so that nobody could see in from the houses opposite. During days, weeks, sometimes more than two months, they waited there either to be questioned, to be transferred to a camp or prison, or else to be the victims of an 'attempt to escape,' that is to say, a burst of machine-gun fire in the back.

Twice a day, at two o'clock and eight o'clock, when they didn't forget, we were given army biscuits, at five in the morning and five in the afternoon occasionally some bread and some spoonfuls of soup made from the leftovers of the meals of our overlords. One day I found a maggot, another time a paper label, and another time the stones spat out from some fruit.

It was a Moslem who was in charge of the distribution of food. Formerly a rifleman, he deserted to the maquis and was taken prisoner during the course of combat. In exchange for his life, he had agreed to serve the Paras. His name was Boula—, but in derision they had changed it to 'Pour-la-France' and this is the name he was given. They had dressed him in a blue beret and armed him with a

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rubber truncheon, which he used on occasion in order to be more popular with his masters. This lackey was despised by everyone: by the Paras as well as by the prisoners.

But it was at night that the 'Centre de Tri' really came to life. I heard the preparations. In the corridors there was a stamp of boots, of weapons, the orders of S—. Then, from the window, other noises came to me. In the court, jeeps and Dodges started up. Everything was silent for an hour or two, up to the time when they came back, their vehicles filled with 'suspects' arrested during the course of the expedition. I saw them for an instant, as they passed across my field of vision: the stairs, the landing and the corridors. Most often they were young men. They had hardly been given time to dress: some of them were still in pyjamas, others in bare feet or slippers. Sometimes there were also women. The latter were imprisoned in the right wing of the building.

The 'Centre de Tri' was then filled with screams, insults, loud and brutal laughs. S— would start to question an Arab. He would shout at him: 'Say your prayers in front of me.' And I could picture in

the next room a man, humiliated to the roots of his soul, made to prostrate himself in an attitude of prayer before the lieutenant-torturer. Then, all of a sudden, the first cries of the victims cut through the night. The real 'work' of S—, of L— and the others had begun.

One night, on the floor above me, they tortured a man: a Moslem, quite old, to judge by the sound of his voice. Between the terrible cries which the torture forced out of him, he said, exhausted: 'Vive la France! Vive la France!' Undoubtedly, he was hoping in this way to appease his tormentors. But they continued to torture him and their laughter rang through the whole building.

When he didn't go on a sortie, S— and his men 'worked' on the suspects who had previously been arrested. Towards midnight or one o'clock in the morning, the door of one of the prison rooms would open suddenly. The voice of a Para would shout: 'Get up, you scum!' He would call one, two, three names. Those who had been called out knew what awaited them. There was always a long silence and the Para was always obliged to repeat the names a second time, which sent him

into a fury: 'Bastards! Can't you even say "here"?'

Those who had been called would get up and I could hear the blows which rained on them as the Para pushed them before him.

One night, S— sent out his men to assault all the rooms at once. Truncheon in hand, they hurled themselves into the cells.

'Get up!' The door of my cell, violently thrown open, slammed against the wall, and I received a kick in the kidneys.

'Get up!' I got up, but S—, passing in the corridor, saw me and said: 'No, not him,' and slammed the door himself. I lay down again on my mattress, while a great rumpus of boots, blows and cries of pain invaded all the floors.

Every morning and evening, when Boula— half opened the door to give me my 'meal' or when I went to the privy, I would pass Arab prisoners in the corridor, on the way back to their collective dungeon or cell. Some of them knew me from having seen me at political rallies organised by the paper, others only knew my name. I was always naked to the waist, still marked by the blows I had received, my chest and hands covered with

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bandages. They understood that, like themselves, I had been tortured, and they greeted me in passing, 'Have courage, brother!'

In their eyes I read a solidarity, a friendship, and such complete trust that I felt proud, particularly as a European, to be among them.

I LIVED like this for the space of a month, with the prospect of death always in front of me. It might happen that evening, it might be the next day at dawn. My sleep was still peopled with nightmares and nervous shocks which woke me with their violence. I was not surprised when one evening C— came into my cell. It must have been about ten o'clock. I was standing near the window and looking towards the Boulevard Clemenceau where a few cars were still passing.

He said only: 'Get ready. We're not going far.'

I put on my torn and dirty undershirt. In the corridor I heard him say: 'Get Audin and Hadjadj ready too. But we'll take them separately.'

Ten times already I had come to grips with the end of this life that I thought was over for me.

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Once again, I thought of Gilberte, of all those I loved, of their suffering. But I was exalted by the fight that I had survived without weakening, and by the thought that I would die as I had always hoped to die, true to my beliefs and to my companions in battle.

In the courtyard, I heard a car start up, then move away. A moment later, in the direction of the Villa des Oliviers, I heard a long burst of machine-gun fire. I thought to myself: 'Audin.'

I stayed in front of the window so as to breathe the air of the night and to see the lights of the town as long as possible. But minutes passed, hours passed and C— did not come back to fetch me.

My account is finished. Never have I written anything with so much difficulty. Perhaps it is because all these events are still fresh in my memory. Perhaps, too, it is because although this nightmare is behind me, it is being lived by others as I write and will go on as long as this odious war continues.

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But it was necessary for me to tell what I know. I owe it to Audin who 'disappeared', and to all those who are being humiliated and tortured, and who still continue the struggle with courage. I owe it to all those who, each day, die for liberty.

I have written these lines four months after having left the Paras, in cell 72 of the civil prison of Algiers.

It is only a few days since the blood of three young Algerians has joined that of the Algerian, Fernand Yveton, in the courtyard of the prison. In the immense cry of pain which sprang from the prisoners in all the cells at the moment when the executioner went to fetch the condemned men, in the absolute and solemn silence which followed, it was the soul of Algeria that vibrated. It was raining and the drops, shining in the darkness, fell across the bars of my cell. All the shutters had been closed by the guards, but we were able to hear one of the condemned men cry out before he

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was gagged: 'Tahia El Djezair! Vive l'Algérie!' And with a single voice, at no doubt the very moment when the first of the three mounted the scaffold, the anthem of free Algeria rose from the women's section of the prison.

'Out of our struggle  
Rise the voices of free men:  
They claim independence  
For our country.  
I give you everything I love,  
I give you my life,  
O my country . . . O my country.'

All this, I have had to say for those Frenchmen who will read me. I want them to know that the Algerians do not confuse their torturers with the great people of France, from whom they have learnt so much and whose friendship is so dear to them.

But they must know what is done **IN THEIR NAME.**

*November, 1957.*

## SOLEMN PETITION TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC

The undersigned:—

—protest against the seizure of Henri Alleg's book, **THE QUESTION**, and against all the attacks against liberty of opinion and expression of ideas that recently preceded this seizure.

—ask that the facts reported by Henri Alleg be disclosed publicly and with complete impartiality.

—call on the Administration, in the name of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, to condemn unequivocally the use of torture, which brings shame to the cause that it supposedly serves.

—and call on all Frenchmen to join us in signing this 'personal petition' and in sending it to the League for the Rights of Man. . . .

*signed. . . .*

ANDRE MALRAUX  
ROGER MARTIN DU GARD  
FRANCOIS MAURIAC  
JEAN-PAUL SARTRE