

A Drop Of Blood



GIORGIOS MANGAKIS

Giorgios Mangakis was a criminal-law professor, attorney, and politician born in 1922 in Athens, Greece. After a military junta seized power in Greece in 1967, Mangakis provided legal defense for students and workers targeted by the regime. In 1969 he was arrested on charges of terrorism, interrogated, tortured, and convicted. While imprisoned he wrote articles for the underground press, some of which were also published abroad. Though sentenced to eighteen years, he was released after two due to his declining health and sent into exile. Mangakis worked as a prodemocracy lecturer in Germany until the Greek military regime collapsed in 1974, at which time he returned to Greece and took part in the new government. He was soon elected to the Greek parliament and continued to serve in several roles, including minister of justice, until the 1990s. He died in 2011 at the age of eighty-nine. The following is from "Letter to Europeans," by Giorgios Mangakis, first published in full in the U.S. by The Atlantic Monthly in October 1971 under the title "Letter in a Bottle from a Greek Prison." Republished here with permission of Bloomsbury Academic, from This Prison Where I Live, edited by Siobhan Dowd. © International PEN 1996; permission obtained through Copyright Clearance Center, Inc.

I would like to write about a friendship I formed the autumn before last. I think it has some significance. It shows the solidarity that can be forged between unhappy creatures. I had been kept in solitary confinement for four months. I hadn't seen a soul throughout that period. Only uniforms — inquisitors and jailers. One day, I noticed three mosquitoes in my cell. They were struggling hard to resist the cold that was just beginning. In the daytime they slept on the wall. At night they would come

buzzing over me. In the beginning, they exasperated me. But fortunately I soon understood. I too was struggling hard to live through the cold spell. What were they asking from me? Something unimportant. A drop of blood — it would save them. I couldn't refuse. At nightfall I would bare my arm and wait for them. After some days they got used to me and they were no longer afraid. They would come to me quite naturally, openly. This trust is something I owe them. Thanks to them, the world was no longer merely an inquisition chamber. Then one day I was transferred to another prison. I never saw my mosquitoes again. This is how you are deprived of the presence of your friends in the arbitrary world of prisons. But you go on thinking of them, often.

During the months when I was being interrogated, alone before those men with the multiple eyes of a spider — and the instincts of a spider — one night a policeman on guard smiled at me. At that moment, the policeman was all men to me. Four months later, when the representative of the International Red Cross walked into my cell, once again I saw all men in his friendly face. When one day they finally put me in a cell with another prisoner and he began to talk to me about the thing he loved most in life — sailing and fishing boats — this man too was all men to me. It is true, then, that there are situations in which each one of us represents all mankind. And it is the same with these papers: I have entrusted them to a poor Italian prisoner who has just been released and who was willing to try and smuggle them out for me. Through him I hope they will eventually reach you. That man is all men to me. But I think it is time I finished. I have raised my hand, made a sign. And so we exist. We over here in prison, and you out there who agree with us. So: *Freedom my love.* ■

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