

*Arkady Alexeev was born in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 1937. He spent many years studying European languages and history. After graduating from the St. Petersburg Herzen Institute he taught English at that school where he received the degree of Candidate of Sciences in English linguistics. He emigrated to the U.S. in 1975. He received a doctorate from the University of California - Berkeley and teaches Russian and history there. Alexeev has written some articles, a historical play and has done a number of translations of Russian poetry into English, "The Lay of Prince Igor's Host" being a recent example.*



*The book describes Mazarini's service in the Papal armed forces and as the Pope's diplomat. As a protégé of Constable Colonna he receives the rank of captain and is sent to the town of Ancona with a secret mission to expose and neutralize a Spanish spy ring acting in the army. After many dangerous adventures he manages to fulfill this task but faces the wrath of the Spaniards who are formally the Pope's allies. Through his ingenuity and resourcefulness he finds a way to allay the Vatican's fears of the Spaniards, survives the Spanish threats, and even defeats them diplomatically.*

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Arkady Alexeev \* The Adventures of Giulio Mazarini 2

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The Adventures of  
Giulio Mazarini  
His Holiness' Diplomat



**The Adventures of Giulio Mazarini**  
Servant — Diplomat — Cardinal — Ruler of France

**His Holiness' Diplomat**

by

**Arkady Alexeev**

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## FROM THE AUTHOR

This is the second novel out of a series of four:

**In the Service of Constable Colonna**

**His Holiness' Diplomat**

**Richelieu's Admirer**

**Ruler of France**

Although the four books were written in about four and a half years it has been almost a lifetime that I devoted to studying the history of Europe and France in particular. Together with my wife who had always been my first reader I often went to Europe to visit the places where Mazarini had lived and advanced his amazing career.

### SPAIN

This is the country where Giulio Mazarini first revealed his talent for gaining friends and outsmarting enemies. We came to the town of Alcala de Henares near Madrid. Here was an ancient university founded in 1507 by Cardinal Jimenes de Cisneros. This was the place to where Giulio Mazarini and his master Geronimo Colonna had come to study from Italy in 1620 when they both were 18. In our time the ancient university buildings are intact and full of students. They told us about their constantly present feeling of communing with the past centuries when they saw the old uneven stones of the walls, the worn out stairs and wind eroded statues on the cornices, the storks on roofs whose nests seemed as old as the eaves and gables themselves. In the 17th century when Mazarini

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and Geronimo Colonna came there the prestige of this school was quite high. Mazarini's stay in Spain is described in Book 1: "The Adventured of Giulio Mazarini. In the Service of Constable Colonna"

### **ITALY**

Here we stayed in Rome and after standing for hours in a colossal line to the Vatican could finally see the palatial chambers visited by my hero. We saw the famous Vatican library where the young Giulio Mazarini first met with the Pope of Rome, His Holiness Urban VIII, also the Vatican gardens frequented by Cardinal Bentivoglio. Italy is mainly the place where the scene is laid in Book 2 now offered to the readers.

An important stop in Italy was Ancona. This Adriatic port was the place where Mazarini served as captain in the army of the Papal states. His garrison was stationed some 10 miles from Ancona in Loreto. We came to Loreto to see the famous basilica. Here Mazarini had met with a priest who turned out to be a Spanish secret agent. Their talk was near the Holy House of the Virgin or Santa Casa inside the cathedral – a sacred shrine believed to be miraculously transported to Italy from Palestine. Together with other pilgrims we entered the sanctuary. It was a cubicle, 28 by 12.5 feet, made of roughly hewn stones almost blackened by their age. About twenty people were inside standing in front of the small image of the Virgin and Child in a niche. No one talked, some prayed silently. It seemed the air itself was filled with the energy of people's faith and holiness of the shrine.

In Ancona we sat at a café on a high hill near the Cathedral of San Ciriaco and looked down at the port and roofs of houses and churches. Of course the café did not exist at the time of Mazarini, but he definitely visited the cathedral and saw the same beautiful sight minus the modern ships and cranes of the port.

We came to Falconara Marittima 10 miles north of Ancona. Its ancient part is on the hills away from the sea. Here, in a square with ancient buildings with no people around we saw a very old church. It was in this church that we met the kind old priest who showed us the church's sacarium and afterwards introduced us to

some local people telling them that I was writing a book about their famous compatriot Giulio Mazarini or Mazzarino as they preferred to call him. They did not know much about him though and were surprised to hear that he had once lived in Ancona and visited their church in Falconara which was there in the 17<sup>th</sup> century looking almost the same.

The amiable priest of Falconara became the prototype of Father Luciano who appears in Book 2 of the novel.

## **FRANCE**

This was Mazarini's adoptive country. Here he became cardinal, Richelieu's assistant and, after Richelieu's and Louis XIII's death, the ruler of the kingdom. Here he waged and won the war against the princes and aristocrats and defended the reign of the young Louis XIV. In spite of all the slander poured on Mazarini by his detractors this Italian was a greater French patriot than most of the highly born native pretenders to the supreme power who fought against him.

In Paris we went to see the building of the National Library occupying the mansion bought by Mazarini in 1650's. An imposing building with an elaborate gate and a guard near it who said he was guarding the entrance to the book stacks and did not know much about Mazarini. This used to be the cardinal's home. From here a short walk led him to the Palais Royal where the queen and Louis liked to stay.

Another Mazarini place in Paris is the l'Institut de France. It stands on the left bank of the Seine and is one of the eye-catchers in the center of Paris with its high dome and wide façade. Mazarini presented this building as a gift to the city of Paris to house The Collège of Four Nations later renamed Institute of France an institution for students coming from the territories conquered through the cardinal's military and diplomatic efforts: Alsace, d'Artois, Southern Flanders, and Roussillon. Behind the Collège starts a long street called Rue Mazarine.

These trips to Europe were very helpful in making the imagined Mazarini more real and full of life.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

In 1624, at the time when Captain Giulio Mazarini was transferred to the staff of Giovanni Francesco Sacchetti and left his service in the army, many European countries were at war. It was one of the most devastating armed conflicts in the history of Europe that later historians would call the Thirty Years' War. It began in 1618 and in 1624 no one could predict when and how it would end. Least of all could it be predicted by Giulio Mazarini, who would be immensely surprised if someone told him that he himself would be one of the most important European leaders who would end the hostilities in 1648.

Working on Sacchetti's staff Giulio began to lead quite a relaxed life in comparison to his duties in the regiment. The war had not yet reached the Papal States. On the contrary, by occupying Valtellina in the Alps the Pope's army guaranteed the peace in this part of the world while the war raged in Germany and the Netherlands. The papal forces kept apart the three main powers which, otherwise, would definitely clash. Two of the three were allies: Spain and Austria. They were ruled by the same dynasty – the Habsburgs. Spain was the stronger of the two, although Austria was at the head of the so-called Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, a loose confederation of large and small German states, ruled by an emperor. The enemy of the two allies was France. It was France which, in 1623, was able to convince her opponents that disengagement of the troops would bring peace and thus would be in the interests of all the parties. If Spain or Austria linked their troops and solidified their presence in Valtellina, encirclement of

France by hostile powers would be a reality. France was in a weak position at that time because of continuous turmoil caused by her Huguenot subjects. The Huguenots, members of the reformed church, followers of Calvin, had been given vast autonomy by King Henry IV. Now they wanted more.

The papal diplomats had to perform a difficult balancing act between France and her two adversaries in the attempt to maintain the peace. The most difficult task was to keep Spain and Austria satisfied, especially Spain. About two-thirds of Italy had been occupied by Spain. The Papal States had Spanish neighbors in the north and south. The independence of the Pope's possessions was in reality quite limited. There was another special circumstance in the relations with the Spaniards. Spain proclaimed itself the defender of the Catholic faith, the protector of the Pope, and, by extension, posed as the Pope's closest ally. How could the Papal States do anything that would be construed as a non-friendly act, such as, for example, punishing someone for being a Spanish agent?

This was exactly the plight that befell Commissioner Sacchetti after the arrest of the Spanish spy-ring exposed by Captain Mazarini. Sacchetti was not surprised when he received a letter sent from Rome by the Prince de Palestrine that read as follows:

“To Father Giovanni-Francesco Sacchetti, His Holiness' Commissioner at General Conti's headquarters.

Your Eminence,

His Holiness has received a complaint from Ambassador of Spain Count Rodriguez de Ventana about the arrest and prosecution of a Spanish national and seven subjects of the Papal States who were loyal to the Spanish cause that fully coincides with His Holiness' cause. Due to these actions His Holiness found Himself in a very embarrassing position and would like to have some explanation from Your Eminence. He also asked me to have a personal talk with a certain Captain Mazarini because he is suspected of being responsible for these embarrassing events. His Holiness asked me to decide whether Captain Mazarini should be subjected to punishment, basing my decision on your written explanations and an interview with Mazarini. Your letter can be carried to Rome by Mazarini.

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Yours,

Prince de Palestrine, Commissioner for defense.”

The situation was quite peculiar. Everyone: the Pope, the Prince de Palestrine, Ambassador Ventana, Sacchetti and Giulio Mazarini himself knew very well that the Spanish claim was false. The Pope’s cause was not the same as Spain’s, the six papal subjects together with the Spanish national were ordinary spies, Mazarini was an Italian patriot, and Sacchetti had won the Pope’s gratitude for what he did. That was reality. But there was also another reality: that of appearances, beautiful phrases, and all encompassing ambitions – in other words a false reality.

“So, – thought Sacchetti, – the only way out is to be logical. The results of the false situation should be false too. Mazarini’s punishment should not be real, the spy’s rehabilitation should be such only in appearance and my explanation should be self critical only in empty words, not deeds. The purpose of the false reality is to replace the real one. Isn’t His Holiness’ embarrassment caused by the fact that both he and the Spanish had to face this replacement being in danger?”

Sacchetti took a piece of paper and began to write:

“To the Prince de Palestrine.

Your Highness,

The Spanish Ambassador must have been misled by something or someone. The Spanish national he mentioned was not prosecuted, he was simply asked questions in friendly interviews and was not punished in any way; he was banished from the Papal States only because he had an illicit affair with a married woman, Elvira Nero, alias Santi. This decision corresponds to the high moral standard supported by both Spain and His Holiness’ states. The seven subjects of His Holiness were punished for various offenses that had nothing to do with our relations with Spain. One of them was a murderer; another, a priest, who had violated the secrecy of confession; three others had immoral relations with Elvira Nero, alias Santi, mentioned above; and one was demoted for drunkenness and inefficiency. Elvira Nero herself was punished for prostitution.

As you see these actions were as offensive to the Vatican as to Spain. I am sure Spanish authorities would have acted in an absolutely identical manner should they have had to face a similar situation.

As to Captain Mazarini, he was very instrumental in disclosing these criminal actions. He is going to bring you, Your Highness, this letter and, I am sure, will be able to explain his part in this affair much better than I.

I remain, Your Highness, respectfully yours,  
Giovanni-Francesco Sacchetti.”

In a little while Captain Mazarini, with the sealed letter in a pocket under his jacket, was riding out of Ancona on the road to Rome. Sacchetti had told him about the situation in great detail and allowed him to read the letter. Of course the task of the young captain was not easy. His career was at stake. Sacchetti hoped Mazarini understood that.

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It took Giulio about two weeks to cover the distance from Ancona to Rome. The road was familiar; the beauty of the mountains, the fragrance of flowers flourishing in the warmth of June, the constant singing of the birds, all that filled his soul with some kind of blissful calm. The Spaniards, the Pope, and even his own career seemed to be insignificant in the presence of God’s marvelous creation.

In Rome, he went straight to Prince Vittorio de Palestrine’s Palace. He asked the usher to announce his arrival to His Highness. The usher went out of the lobby and Giulio heard him pronouncing his name and the name of Constable Colonna. In about ten minutes the servant reappeared and signaled Giulio to follow him. Giulio expected to be brought to a vast office full of bookcases and beautiful furniture. He was quite surprised when the servant led him through several rooms and took him to a back door and into a large park.

– Go straight along this alley please. You will find His Highness on a bench at the end of it, – said the servant.

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Giulio walked down the alley and, if it were not close to its end, might have missed the prince who was sitting on a marble bench in the shape of a crescent almost hidden by tree branches.

– Your Highness, – said Mazarini bowing quite gracefully.

– Ah, this is the famous Captain Mazarini, – said the prince looking at Giulio with genuine interest.

– Your Highness, I was asked by Commissioner Sacchetti to bring you this letter.

Mazarini took out the letter and gave it to the Prince de Palestrine.

While the prince was reading, Giulio was examining the place from the corner of his eye, astonished by the informal setting chosen by Palestrine for a serious talk.

– Sit down, – said the prince, – gesturing towards the far end of the curved bench he was sitting on so that Mazarini could face him.

Mazarini obeyed.

– So, according to Sacchetti, you were defending a noble cause, – said Palestrine.

– I don't know, Your Highness.

– What do you mean you don't know. You are not sure it was noble?

– I believe what I think of it is not important. It's more important what the Spaniards think.

– Ha, you are right. But what the Pope thinks of it, isn't that also important?

– No, it isn't.

– Young man, you are speaking irreverently of His Holiness.

– Your Highness, I have quite an opposite attitude toward His Holiness. What he thinks is not important to the Spaniards but is very important to me.

– I like the second part of this remark, but the first part still sounds irreverent.

– It is not meant to be, Your Highness. If the Spaniards consider His Holiness' opinions unimportant, it casts a shadow on them, not His Holiness. They should be ashamed of their arrogance.

Palestrine was amazed.

– I’ve never seen someone, – he said, – who could so deftly defend himself.

– I am only telling the truth, – said Giulio softly.

– Well then, what is the truthful situation of His Holiness? Do you understand that your actions made his relations with the Spaniards quite tense?

– I understand.

– So then, you should agree that His Holiness has grounds to be disappointed with you and even to subject you to some kind of punishment.

– I don’t think so.

– You don’t think so what?

– I don’t think His Holiness would like to punish me.

– Why?

– His Holiness’ decisions are always wise because they are based on a balance between good and bad. If what is good is greater than what is bad, he considers it good, and thus not punishable.

– Ah, that means what you did was not only bad, but somehow good too?

– Yes, Your Highness.

– What is that good? Only don’t tell me that the fact that you helped to catch Spanish spies is the good. This good is exactly what embarrassed His Holiness.

– I was not going to say that.

– Then what?

– Your Highness, if you knew about a military secret, if you solemnly swore that you would not reveal it to anyone but His Holiness, would you violate such an oath even if asked by the highest authority after the Pope?

– So, you are under an oath. Who did you give it to?

– General Conti.

– My dear fellow, General Conti is my subordinate.

– Then you should order him to allow me to reveal the secret, – said Mazarini calmly.

– H’m, that sounds logical. But you say he wanted it revealed only to the Pope

– Yes, Your Highness.

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– Then perhaps the general would not allow you to reveal the secret and would not tell me either.

Palestrine paused for a moment.

– But why is that secret so important after all?

– It will remove His Holiness' embarrassment and show that the good I did outweighs the bad.

– So, you mean you would like to be received by the Pope of Rome himself?

– Yes, Your Highness.

Palestrine thought for a moment.

– It would not be easy, – he said.

– What if such a request were made to His Holiness by two important people rather than one?

– Besides me? Who do you mean?

– Constable Colonna.

Palestrine's mouth dropped.

– Do you know that I am waiting for him right now?

– I not only know, but I am almost sure.

– You are? Why?

– For two reasons. First, because he was the one who recommended that I be sent to the reserve army to catch the spies. Second, after the usher learned who I was and asked me to wait in the lobby, I heard him call an errand boy and ask him to go to Constable Colonna's house with a note.

Palestrine looked at Mazarini wide eyed and did not know what to say.

At that moment a man appeared in the alley. It was the Constable. He saluted Palestrine and smiled at Giulio.

– I am glad to see you back to Rome from the army in one piece, – said Colonna still smiling.

Mazarini stood up, bowed to the Constable politely and said:

– I was in the reserve army, Your Highness. They do not shoot there.

– Sit down, gentlemen, – asked Palestrine. – We will all fit here.

The Constable sat down in the middle of the bench.

– The reason I wanted to see you, Filippo, is quite simple, – said Palestrine. – I wanted to know your opinion about the result of Captain Mazarini’s mission. In your opinion, did he succeed or not?

– Vittorio, you should not play games with this young gentleman here, – said Colonna seriously. – We, all three of us, as well as His Holiness, know very well what the result is. For his selfless, I would say, heroic actions, he should be rewarded instead of being punished to please the Spaniards. I would do anything I would reverse the court edicts, even free the spies, but, remember I would not let anyone touch a single hair on Giulio’s head. He has been my faithful servant for years, he has fooled the Spaniards. I will hide him if necessary, but not abandon him and let him fall into the hands of the Spanish. So, this is what I will do and I am sure you know it pretty well.

– At first I thought so too. But not any more, – said Palestrine pensively.

– Do you mean you would not let me help Giulio?

– Oh, no, no. If you think I am not as great a patriot of Italy as you are, you are mistaken. No, no, Filippo. Simply ,your protégé here seems to be able to help himself.

– What does that mean? – asked Colonna.

– Well, he says he knows how to rid His Holiness of his embarrassment and let everything stand as it is: the spies in jail and he in favor with the Pope.

– Giulio, is that true?

Mazarini did not have time to open his mouth when Palestrine cut in:

– He says he knows some kind of secret that will resolve all these problems.

– And the secret is?

– He won’t tell. He gave an oath not to reveal it to anyone except the Pope of Rome himself.

– Is that true, Giulio?

– Yes, Your Excellency.

– Does that mean he has to be received by Urban VIII himself?

– It looks like it, – said Palestrine.

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Colonna looked bewildered.

– But how can it be arranged? – he asked.

– You know, your wonderful Mazarini has thought of that too. He said that if not just one but two of the highest nobles in Italy, like you and I, asked the Pope, he might agree.

– That might work, – said Colonna pensively, – that might work.

Mazarini tried to remain calm sitting near the two aristocrats driven into action by his ideas.

– All right, – said Colonna, – I agree. We can write a joint petition to His Holiness asking for the audience.

– Yes, a petition would look good. It will stress the importance of this matter. All right, Captain Mazarini, we will try to give you a chance to reveal your secret to the right man.

When Colonna and Mazarini were out of the Prince de Palestrine's palace the constable asked Giulio:

– Do you know why he was receiving you on a bench in the garden?

– No, – answered Giulio, – I thought it was strange.

– Not at all, my friend, not at all. He always sits on that bench rather than in his office when he thinks well of his visitor and trusts him.

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The Vatican palace, the residence of the Popes of Rome, was in construction for many centuries and consisted of several buildings. The most famous Italian painters and sculptors decorated them. In the Renaissance Italian artistic genius found its wonderful expression in the halls and chapels of the palace buildings. Giovanni dei Dolci built the Sistine Chapel, a wonder for all time. The Sala Regia and the Pauline Chapel were designed by Antonio Sangallo the Younger. The Sala Regia was decorated by Giorgio Vasari and Taddeo Zuccaro. The martyrdom of St. Peter and the conversion of St. Paul were painted by Michelangelo in the Pauline Chapel.

Pope Urban VIII whose name, before he was elected Pope, was Maffeo Barberini, belonged to an aristocratic Italian family that

had produced many important politicians and church officials. Maffeo Barberini himself had occupied various ecclesiastical posts including such a high one as papal nuncio in France. His stay in France might have been the reason for his life long fondness for that country and his leaning to the pro-French policy after he became Pope in 1623.

The Pontiff agreed to meet with Captain Giulio Mazarini for two reasons: first, because he was asked to do so by two of his highest officials and, second, because he had heard from his Commissioner Giovanni Sacchetti about this unusual young man who had outwitted a bunch of inveterate Spanish spies. “What a pity, – thought the Pope, – “that this talented man should be sacrificed to the altar of my forced and often reluctant alliance with Spain.

Urban VIII decided to meet the captain in the Vatican Library, a very beautiful place built in the 15th century at the time of Pope Nicholas V by the architects Leon Battista Alberti and Bernardo Rossellino.

A Swiss guard led Mazarini to the library, told him to wait in the aisle near the main entrance, and disappeared.

Giulio stood there in complete silence, surrounded by marble sculptures and long rows of bookcases. The library was semi-dark. Giulio’s heart was beating so strongly that he thought it could be heard in the hall. Suddenly a servant came in and without saying a word quickly lit up several chandeliers near the main entrance. As silently and as quickly he went away.

Giulio heard footsteps, the door opened and in came the Pope. He was a tall strongly built man of 55 with a piercing gaze and a handsome masculine face. He wore a mustache and a full beard neatly trimmed. He was in a white pontiff’s robe with a red cape, but instead of a miter he wore a red cap.

Giulio fell on his knees in front of the Pope. The pontiff stretched out his hand and Giulio kissed it.

– Rise, my son, – said the Pope smiling. His voice was unexpectedly friendly. – You know we can walk along this aisle for a while and talk. Unfortunately I am a very busy man and can’t afford the luxury of sitting and chatting in pleasant company.

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Giulio got up and followed the Pope in reverent silence.

– Well, let's talk business, – said the Pope. – What is it that you wanted to tell me?

– It's a secret I swore I would not reveal to anyone except Your Holiness.

– Two questions, my friend. First, who asked you to tell the secret to me? Second, why were you trusted with such an important secret that it could be revealed only to the Pope of Rome?

– I was asked to tell the secret to Your Holiness by general Conti of the reserve army. He did not trust any couriers or mail service. General Conti knew that I was appointed to my army post by Constable Colonna, so he hoped I might have a chance to speak to Your Holiness.

– But why did he reveal the secret to you out of all the other officers?

– He did not have to. I already knew it.

– What do you mean?

– The secret is about an event in which I participated.

The Pope looked at Mazarini a little bit surprised: a young captain involved in a secret that only the Pope of Rome could know?

– That sounds interesting. Well, now tell me your secret.

– It concerns the presence of our army in Valtellina. If not for a certain action, the Spaniards would never have agreed to our prolonged presence in Valtellina.

– And that action was?

– A quarantine around Ancona, which temporarily stopped a leak of information to Spain, and gave us just enough time to move our troops to Valtellina in force, which made the Spaniards face a fait accompli and helped us to persuade them to agree to this occupation.

– That quarantine was of course helpful but what's so secret about it? Everybody knew there was a quarantine.

– Yes, Your Holiness. But no one knew, except General Conti and myself, that the quarantine was false.

– Do you mean there was no legitimate reason for the quarantine?

– Yes, Your Holiness.

– And the Spaniards did not know about it?

– No, Your Holiness.

The Pope was quite amazed.

– Who was the author of this interesting idea?

– That was I, Your Holiness.

– You?

– Yes, Your Holiness. I gave this idea to General Conti, who immediately implemented it.

– So, the secret is that the Spanish never knew the quarantine was false?

– Yes, Your Holiness.

The Pope thought for a while.

– Well, my son, the secret is very serious. It's very good that General Conti asked you not to reveal it to anyone but me. However, you put me in a very difficult situation. I have to explain to the Spaniards the punishment dealt to their agents. Your role in this story is known by them to be quite prominent. Now you tell me you committed yet another anti-Spanish action, much more serious than the first one, by the way. The Spanish asked me to deliver you up to them, and I begin to see why, my son.

– Your Holiness, delivering me to them may be very dangerous to the Italian cause.

– Do you mean you could tell the Spanish about our quarantine deception if we gave you up to them? Is that a threat?

– Not at all, Your Holiness. I simply meant that we all know what methods the Spanish Inquisition uses to loosen tongues.

The Pope looked at Giulio attentively. He saw the sincere and courageous gaze of the young man.

– Ugh, you are right, I would not like to get into their hands.

He was silent for a while. They continued to walk up and down the aisle.

– Well, young man. You've persuaded me. We will not give you up to the Spanish. Although, to tell you the truth, we were ready to do it. But you must understand that your career in the papal service and in general in public service is ended. You must hide from any exposure to the politicians.

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– I understand, Your Holiness. But there is a second secret you may like to know.

The pontiff stopped, although he was on the verge of moving towards the door.

– Well?

– The thing is that my disappearance would waste an important asset that I might become to the policy of Your Holiness.

– Captain Mazarini, what are you talking about? I understand that you have been useful in catching the spies, but many other people could also have done it. You are just one of the junior army officers who disappear very easily and very often at the time of an imminent war. You are not any different.

– Actually I am, – said Mazarini, – and that is my second secret.

– You are different?

The Pope looked at him, surprised.

– Yes, Your Holiness. Did you hear about the circumstances of the death of King Philip III of Spain?

– It sounds like you are examining me.

– Your Holiness, I simply would like to inform you of certain details.

– All right. The death of Philip III. Yes, it was almost a year before I was elected Pope. He had been given medicine by a student who was then accused by the Duke de Uceda of poisoning the king, but later exonerated with the help of Count Olivares.

– That’s right. Although it was Count Olivares who was exonerated of the same accusation thanks to the student. That student was I.

The pontiff stopped, rooted to the ground.

He could not believe his ears.

– Any proof?

– Here it is.

Mazarini took a gold medallion from around his neck, opened its cover and gave it to the Pope. Inside the medallion, the pontiff saw a carved cross with light beams emanating from it and read: “A Julio Mazarini, un fiel amigo. Conde Gaspar Olivares.”

The Pope closed the medallion and slowly returned it to Mazarini.

– So you think you could be a trump card in my games with the Spanish?

– Yes, Your Holiness. If you tell them who I am, if they know that I am one of the close friends of their prime minister, they would never dare touch me. Moreover, they would stop accusing Your Holiness of an anti-Spanish stance when they learn you have on your staff Olivares' friend. They will have to forget the whole Ancona spy affair.

– That's true. . . . But, nevertheless, we cannot make them lose face. Some plausible explanation of the arrests in Ancona should be offered them.

– It would be quite simple. Your Holiness can use the explanation of the events offered by Commissioner Sacchetti in his letter to the Prince de Palestrine. None were judged to be spies, only regular criminals. Because of that I was not involved in anti-Spanish activity, but rather just performed police functions. The secret of the Ancona quarantine and our deception would not get into their hands because I would not be given up to them. And they would only be relieved to know that they did not do anything bad to the best friend of their Prime Minister, the friend who was not involved in any spy catching scheme, but just in the punishment of regular criminals.

– I see, – said the Pope. – Only one question: being a friend of Olivares, are you not a Spanish spy?

– No, Your Holiness, I am not.

– Can you swear by this holy cross, – said the Pontiff and showed a big gold cross on his chest.

– Willingly, Your Holiness.

Mazarini knelt, the Pope took off his cross and brought it to the lips of Mazarini. "I swear I am not a Spanish spy," said Giulio and, in awe kissed the cross. When he stood up the Pope noticed tears in his eyes.

– You are a good Christian, my son, – said the Pope. – I knew you were not a Spanish agent. Why would you catch a spy-

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ring if you were. I simply wanted to see whether you would be moved by the touch of the cross. You were. I am happy.

Giulio stood, his head lowered in silence.

– Now, my son, you may go. Return to Commissioner Sacchetti's service. But don't forget, from now on you are in my service too.

Giulio kissed the pontiff's hand.

The Pontiff went to the exit, then suddenly stopped.

– By the way, – he said, – when you happen to be in Rome drop by for a friendly chat.

The Pope smiled and went away.

Having left the Vatican Palace Giulio Mazarini breathed in the sweet air of summer verdure around him. He was free, he was ready to pursue his destiny.