

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.



This is the fourth and last book in the series devoted to Giulio Mazarini. After Mazarini's arrival in France Richelieu sends him to negotiate a peace agreement between France and Spain whose armies face each other in Savoy. Mazarini finds an ingenious way to obtain cessation of hostilities. For bringing peace to Northern Italy Mazarini is rewarded by the Pope of Rome with the rank of cardinal. Richelieu, on his deathbed, recommends to Louis XIII that he make Mazarini a member of the Royal Council. The king agrees and when he dies the queen keeps Mazarini in her Regent's Council. Feeling that Mazarini is her staunch supporter, the queen appoints him prime minister to the consternation of most aristocrats. As a result a civil war starts known in history as the Fronde. But Mazarini defeats his enemies and becomes the uncontested ruler of France.

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The Adventures of Giulio Mazarini

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Ruler of France





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by

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CHAPTER ONE

Giulio Mazarini left Rome on December 13, 1639, heading for France. He was thirty-seven years old and had had a remarkable career as a diplomat of the pope. But with time, the Vatican began to notice his pro-French sympathies and stopped supporting him. In spite of Richelieu's insistence, or maybe because of it, the pope refused to appoint Mazarini a cardinal and did not entrust him with diplomatic missions any more. The experienced diplomat remained out of employ.

At the beginning of 1639 Mazarini appealed to the French king with a petition in which he applied for French citizenship. King Louis XIII, who held Mazarini in high esteem, gave his consent. Toward the end of 1639 Mazarini at last made up his mind and left his native Italy.

He arrived in Marseilles by boat and at first wanted to travel to Paris on horseback; but then he realized that he was thirty-seven rather than twenty-seven and decided to take stagecoaches. He traveled incognito; thus he had discarded his ecclesiastic robe and was dressed as an itinerant nobleman: a wide brimmed hat with a feather, doublet, cape, black trousers, jackboots and a sword. Mazarini knew that the journey would take him more than a month. So he relaxed and spent his time admiring the lush landscapes of southern France.

Two weeks before his departure from Italy, he had communicated to Richelieu, through a messenger, his entire route, telling the cardinal that he was going to bypass Avignon, as it was a papal territory and he did not want to face Italian authorities. So, his

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route would take him from Marseilles to Cavaillon and Carpentra, around Avignon, then to Orange. From there he would proceed directly to Lyon and then, through the heart of France, to Paris. Richelieu approved. The only thing that differed from his original plan was that the trip would now take much longer since he would be riding in a stagecoach, not on horseback.

On the road to Orange, Mazarini decided to send his servant Xavier, a giant who doubled as his body-guard, ahead on horseback to arrange for lodging in that town, which was not too far away. At the previous coach station where they had spent the night the accommodations were terrible. Mazarini had to sleep, or rather toss around, on a bunch of straw. He dreamed of a good rest in the larger town of Orange. They didn't even offer a decent breakfast at the station. But to send Xavier forward, Mazarini needed to procure a horse for him. At the first station none could be found. So they continued in the coach until they reached a village. It looked larger than the previous one, and Mazarini thought he could find a horse there.

It was very early in the morning; the village was sleeping. However, two men were sitting on a bench in front of a tavern.

– Do you work in the tavern? – asked Mazarini.

– Yes, Your Honor, I am the owner, and this is my brother.

– Do you have a horse? I will pay well for one, – said Mazarini.

– Yes, Your Honor, we have a spare horse.

Mazarini took out several silver coins.

– Will that be enough to buy the horse?

– Yes, Your Honor.

– Wait a minute, – the brother interrupted. – He speaks with an accent. He called the horse “chevallo” instead of “cheval.” And look at his servant, he is huge.

– So what? – answered the tavern owner. – You keep out of it.

The owner went to the back of the tavern and quickly emerged with a good young horse.

– Are you hungry? – Mazarini asked Xavier.

– No, Señor Julio, I'll eat in Orange. I'll wait for you at the

largest hostel in the town.

Xavier mounted the horse and it bobbed under his weight. He used his spurs, and in a moment disappeared.

– Can I have breakfast in your tavern now? – asked Mazarini, turning to the owner.

– No, Monsieur. It's too early. The kitchen is still closed, and the tavern is closed, too. If you return in an hour we'll prepare a good breakfast for you.

– All right, – said Mazarini with a resigned look. – I didn't sleep well last night, so I'll doze off in my coach for an hour.

The tavern owner and his brother went into the tavern.

Mazarini huddled in his coach seat and tried to sleep.

After about twenty minutes of futile attempts to relax in his uncomfortable seat, Mazarini heard some noise and, looking out the coach window, saw a strange picture: a young man, about nineteen years old, jumped out of the tavern door almost naked. He had just his trousers on, but no shirt. A crowd of locals, some ten people strong, headed by the tavern owner and his brother, emerged from the tavern in hot pursuit of the fugitive, threatening him with sticks and kitchen utensils. The young man was rushing away, terrified. Unlike his pursuers, who looked like village bumpkins, the young man had a noble face, which fact was apparent despite his grimace of fear. He ran up to Mazarini's coach.

– Monsieur, Monsieur, – he cried, gasping, – a sword! All I need is a sword!

– Here it is, – said Mazarini, tossing him his own sword through the coach window.

The young man grabbed it and turned towards his pursuers. It seemed the attackers did not notice that their quarry was now armed. They caught up with him. Then the young man swung his sword with easy grace, which seemed incongruous with the wild behavior of the peasants, and lunged forward. There was a scream and one of the pursuers fell to the ground, grasping his arm, which was bleeding profusely. The crowd became even more furious, but the young hero was now swinging his sword, which flashed like lightning, and every now and then one of the attackers would fall, with blood gushing from a wound. Several people were twitching

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on the ground; one was possibly dead. The pursuers hesitated. The young man's strength seemed to double; he attacked without a pause. Finally, the remaining three or four men turned their backs and rushed away, dropping their sticks.

The victorious knight ran after them into the tavern and Mazarini thought that the battle would continue. However, in about five minutes, the young man emerged from the house fully dressed, and went up smiling to Mazarini, who was still in the coach.

– Thank you, Monsieur, – he said. – Here is your sword. It saved me from an ignominious death at the hands of this scum. But now I've gotten back my own sword, which the scoundrels had hidden.

He touched a long épée attached to his belt.

– Monsieur, – said Mazarini, getting out of the coach, – is there anyone in the house?

– No, they all fled.

– That's what I thought. Then I think we should help these wounded men ourselves. If we don't bandage them they'll bleed to death.

– Unfortunately, Monsieur, I will have to leave this care to you or some local doctor. I am in a great hurry. Besides, to tell you the truth, I won't feel sorry if all of these riff-raff give up their filthy souls.

The man bowed slightly, returned to the tavern, and rode out of the yard on horseback. He then dug the spurs into his horse and disappeared in a cloud of dust.

Mazarini followed him with his eyes in amazement, struck by the cold cruelty of the man who looked like an elegant youth, but talked and behaved like a butcher.

In the coach there was a trunk of Mazarini's, in which he had some nice silk shirts. He cut two or three of them into strips and began to bandage the wounded. Soon the local people appeared and quickly helped Mazarini finish the difficult work. Unfortunately, one of the wounded was already dead.

– Do you have a doctor here? – asked Mazarini.

– No, Your Honor, – said the tavern owner, – but we have a barber who heals everyone, even those who live as far as ten

leagues away. We'll bring the wounded inside and will take care of everything. And we want to thank you for your help.

– What happened? – asked Mazarini.

– The young devil had lived for a week in my tavern. I gave him everything he wanted – lots of food, lots of wine, to say nothing of the personal attention of the tavern maid to whom he took a liking. Yesterday he said he was leaving the next day, that is, today. I gave him a bill for all the catering he had received, and the bill was quite reasonable, I must tell you. I didn't even include the special services of the maid who is, by the way, my niece. Seeing the bill, he laughed and said he'd pay tomorrow. I and my cousin suspected he would try to escape without paying. So I called some of my friends and relatives and we went to his room very early in the morning. The rogue was sleeping. You saw our weapons – just sticks and frying pans. So, we decided to hide his sword. When we found it under his bed and were taking it out, it clanked against the floor and the young devil woke up. He saw us with his sword in our hands and demanded that we give it back to him. I said: "First pay the bill." "I don't have the money," – he answered, and unexpectedly jumped at me, trying to grab the sword, but my brother struck him on the head with the frying pan. We brandished our sticks. So he ran out of the house almost naked. You know what happened next. We saw you giving him your sword. After he wounded several of my men, we ran away; we hid behind my tavern and agreed among ourselves that we would kill you for helping the murderer. But when we came out from behind the tavern, with my brother holding an ax rather than a frying pan, we saw you helping out the wounded. I said: "Brothers, this man is a good Christian, let's give him a hand rather than kill him." So we helped you.

– Yes, – said the brother, – we decided not to kill you even though you had a foreign accent.

– What does my accent have to do with all that? – asked Mazarini, surprised.

– Nothing, – said the tavern owner. – Don't listen to my brother. He is not too bright and often blurts out bunk. I am glad you didn't see the ax, which my brother quickly threw aside.

– I saw it when you were nearing me, – said Mazarini.

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– Why didn't you run away?

– I knew I was not guilty and I also thought that you were good Christians.

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On that day Mazarini arrived in Orange late, and stayed overnight in the only big hostelry that Xavier had found for him, which was close to the road. While Xavier was snoring on a mattress in their second floor room, Mazarini was pacing it, thinking about the indefinite future awaiting him in Paris.

“Although the future is uncertain, – he thought, – I can at least pose some questions about it. I won't have answers now, that's for sure, but in time the answers will be found.

In addition to Richelieu and the king, who might be my allies in Paris? A big question mark. I will have to win some. Richelieu is in poor health. He won't last long. The only sponsor who will remain will be the king. But the king is ill, too. With both Richelieu and king gone, I will be discarded as a presumptuous foreigner. I need allies. Let's see. D'Arville? Just a cog in Richelieu's power machine; besides, a secret cog. No, not enough. Someone from the nobility? But they all know that I am a Richelieu man, and they all hate Richelieu. How could they like me? That's a problem: how can I find allies at court?

Next question: how will Richelieu employ me? To take part in diplomatic negotiations? That would be best. But what if he wants to use me as an informer about his enemies. Richelieu doesn't have friends, he has agents. Like d'Arville. If this is what he plans for me to do I'll refuse and that'll be the end of my career in France.

Next. The Pope said that he could not appoint me a cardinal on a petition from Richelieu because he could not consider petitions of foreigners about Italian citizens. All right, now I am a French citizen, but will that help me? Now the Pope may simply say that he does not promote turncoats.

Next. Even if Louis XIII lives a long life, even if I remain in his favor, what will become of me when his two-year-old son Louis

grows up and becomes the next king? What will I be able to do to gain his favor, too? Indefinite as everything else. Even more so since Louis XIII has just had another son, Philip, who, being two years younger than his brother, could still one day be king.

And finally. What about the queen? Anne of Austria is a capricious and independent-minded woman. Everybody knows that she hates Richelieu, and there's no love lost between her and her husband. How can she be on good terms with me, a creature of Richelieu and Louis XIII? To have her as an enemy is more dangerous than to be hated by all the French princes taken together. Another problem with no definite solution."

All these uncertainties ended up fatiguing Mazarini and he went to bed without answering any of his questions, just as he had predicted.

The next morning he overslept his usual rising time of seven o'clock. It was past nine. Mazarini dressed and was ready to go downstairs to have some breakfast.

There was a knock on the door.

In came a tall handsome man dressed in elegant black clothes. The only bright spot in his attire was a dazzlingly white lace collar. A long sword was smartly hanging on his left side.

– D'Arville! – exclaimed Mazarini.

Yes, it was Count Gilbert d'Arville, his old friend, Richelieu's secret agent, an illegitimate son of Cardinal Bentivoglio, a man of valor and unpredictable behavior. He always appeared in Mazarini's life unexpectedly and then, as unexpectedly, disappeared.

They embraced and went to the dining hall together.

After they settled at an oak table in one of the corners of the room, they ordered two bottles of Burgundy and a hearty breakfast consisting of two whole chickens braised to perfection, and supplemented with fried garlic, *pâté de gibier en croûte*, that is, game pie, and some brioches.

They started to eat and Mazarini at last asked his friend the natural question that had been on the tip of his tongue since d'Arville appeared: what brought him to Orange.

D'Arville told his friend that the order of Richelieu was to

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meet Mazarini somewhere on his way from southern France to Paris. Richelieu knew the itinerary and indicated several towns where d'Arville could meet Mazarini, the closer to Marseilles the better.

– Why this fatherly care? – asked Mazarini.

– It looks like Richelieu values you a lot.

– Gilbert, don't tell me fairy tales. The cardinal wouldn't raise a finger without a serious reason.

– I agree. But to tell you the truth, I can't see any reason.

– Well, anyway, I am grateful to you that you agreed to be my companion, – said Mazarini.

– Don't thank me, my friend. I fulfill Richelieu's orders whether I like them or not. But to tell you the truth, I do like this one.

– Maybe he wanted you to prepare me for life in Paris and inform me of all the present day intrigues and scandals?

– I doubt that. You lived in Paris for almost two years when you were the Pope's nuncio, just three years ago. You know Paris.

– Yes, but now I am not a nuncio. Just a rootless refugee. I have no idea what I should start with.

– I can tell you. You should start with choosing a place to stay after you arrive. Actually, the place is not as important as the person to whom it belongs. If that person is a favorite of Richelieu or the king, and is accepted by the nobles, you will have a good stepping stone from which to be launched into Parisian society.

– Do you have any idea as to who that might be?

– Well, let me think . . . You know, yes, I have an idea. Richelieu now is supporting a brilliant young man. His name is de Cinq-Mars, he is the son of Richelieu's old friend Marshal d'Effiat. Cinq-Mars is a new idol of the Parisian beau monde. At first the rest of society frowned at him because he was known to be Richelieu's man. But he was able to conquer everyone by his elegance, fabulous riches, wonderful swordsmanship, gallantry towards women, and amiable attitude to all. Every now and then Richelieu gives him errands. People speak of him as a future member of the royal council. And he is so young, just nineteen. If only you could somehow win his friendship, if he could open the doors of his house

to you, your acceptance by high society would be guaranteed.

– I don't even know who you are talking about. How can I win his friendship?

– Don't forget that you are Richelieu's man just like Cinq-Mars is. If Richelieu orders him to play host to you, he will gladly let you stay in his house for some time; the rest will depend on your well-known ability to charm people.

– And if Richelieu doesn't care to issue such an order?

– Then it will be my turn to act. I will advise our enigmatic cardinal what to do.

– Cinq-Mars . . . Hm, well, I agree to try your plan, – said Mazarini pensively.

They drank to it and had just turned their attention to the braised chickens when the tavern door opened and a tall young man appeared on the threshold.

He looked at the two guests and went straight to them.

– D'Arville! – he said. – And you, Monsieur! I didn't expect to see familiar faces in these backwoods.

– Cinq-Mars! – exclaimed d'Arville. – Speak of the devil!

Mazarini was also surprised to recognize in the newcomer the brave swordsman who, with the help of Mazarini's sword, had defeated a band of peasants the previous day.

D'Arville invited the young man to sit at their table, and another chicken and a bottle were quickly brought by the host.

– Monsieur, – said Cinq-Mars, – I never had time to thank you properly for your help yesterday, nor do I even know your name.

– My name is Giulio Mazarini, I am traveling to Paris from Italy.

– What?! The famous Mazarini, or as we call you here in France – Jules Mazarin?! The hero of Casale of whom I heard even in my childhood!

– Yes, that's him, – said d'Arville with a grin.

– Oh, Monsieur, I'm glad to see you alive.

– What do you mean? – asked Mazarini.

– Richelieu had sent me to Savoy on a mission I can't talk about. There I found out that the Spaniards had learned about your

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coming trip to Paris and arranged for your murder somewhere in southern France. I immediately sent a messenger to Richelieu and he of course has taken some measures.

– You see his measures right in front you, – said d’Arville. – He sent me to meet Monsieur Mazarini (or Mazarin) and travel to Paris with him.

– Ha, interesting! – exclaimed de Cinq-Mars. – He gave me the same assignment. He asked me to meet Monsieur in Marseilles. But Marseilles is a big city, it’s not easy to meet someone there, so I decided to go to some smaller town in southern France and chose Orange. Unfortunately, on the way to Orange I dropped by a tavern in a village, saw a beautiful maid and stayed there for a week. I spent all my money on gifts to her and finally was evicted in the rude manner which you, Monsieur, witnessed. But here I am, in Orange, and I finally have met you.

– Didn’t you guess it was me whom you met near the village tavern and who gave you the sword? – asked Mazarini.

– To tell you the truth, that thought crossed my mind. But you saw the situation I was in. I had to run for my life. Besides, at that time nothing threatened you.

– No, you are wrong, – said Mazarini seriously. – My life was in as great a peril as yours. I’d like to ask you a question. From your intelligence on the plot to kill me, do you know how the murderers were to recognize me?

– Yes, of course, and I sent this information to Richelieu. They were supposed to kill a traveler speaking with an Italian accent and escorted by a huge servant speaking with a Spanish accent.

– Well, Monsieur Cinq-Mars, that’s what was going to happen to me in that same village from which you fled. After you were gone the peasants were trying to kill me because I’d helped you, but also because I spoke with a foreign accent.

– How do you know?

– Because they rushed at me with an ax and afterwards mentioned my foreign accent. They also had seen my giant servant Xavier and heard him speak to me in Italian with his Spanish accent when we were buying a horse for him from the tavern owner. They

were happy to sell us the horse and thus get rid of my huge protector.

– Why didn't they kill you? Did you use your sword too?

– No, I used my silk shirts. I cut them in strips and bandaged the wounded. That scum, as you called them, turned out to be good Christians.

– Good Christians?! – exclaimed Cinq-Mars in genuine surprise. – They simply saw your sword and didn't dare assault you. Well, anyway, you are alive and well and I can report to Richelieu that I have fulfilled my assignment. Moreover, as the murderers have been revealed and neutralized, I can now travel to Paris at full speed, leaving you in the care of your friend Count d'Arville.

– Cinq-Mars, – said d'Arville, – I have a request that I hope you'll agree to fulfill. Can I ask you to let Monsieur Mazarin lodge in your house for several weeks after his arrival in Paris?

– Oh, yes, my friend. You are always welcome in my house, Monsieur Mazarin. I will consider it a great honor.

– Thank you, Monsieur, for your kind words, – said Mazarini, a bit more dryly than might have been expected.

Cinq-Mars finished off his chicken, bowed to the two friends, and went away.

– Will you stay at his house? – asked d'Arville. – You don't look too happy.

– Of course not.

– But why?

– I can't be friends with a person who doesn't have the heart to help the dying men he has slain, who left me in danger even though he knew about it and was assigned to protect me, and who is going to call his failure a success, thereby deceiving his benefactor.

– Then who will you stay with? – asked d'Arville.

– I'll stay with Chavigny.

– The Count de Chavigny? The Secretary of State, member of the Royal Council? Someone who is rumored to be Richelieu's natural son? You're aiming high, my friend.

– I knew Chavigny when I was nuncio in Paris and I'm simply using your formula for success: stay with a highly placed person and be introduced by him to Paris society.

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- But don't try to go too high.
- We'll see. After all I can stay with you or in a hotel.
- No, no, that is too low.

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Mazarini, Xavier and d'Arville arrived in Paris about a month after the described events.

In the first half of the 17th century, Paris was still very much a medieval city. Its population was about 400,000 inhabitants who lived mostly in poverty and squalor. Only the mansions of the high nobility stuck out from a sea of two- or three-story decrepit houses. There was no running water in the houses, no sewage system. The waste was mainly thrown out the windows, including the contents of chamber pots. A terrible stench enveloped the city, but the permanent residents did not notice it. It's said that odors are easy to get used to. During the 17th century there was no idea of hygiene. Even the British queen Elizabeth used to say: "I take a bath once a month whether I need it or not." Instead of washing, noble ladies and gentlemen decked themselves in sumptuous clothes and poured perfume on themselves, which created a strange mixture of a sweet and rotten smell. But precisely because there was no idea of hygiene no one was disturbed by its absence.

Mazarini knew Paris very well. He admired its palaces and churches and could enumerate them by heart. Since the former dungeon of the Louvre was rebuilt by Francis I, it had almost fully acquired its famous shape by the 17th century. Richelieu had built himself a palace behind the Louvre that was called the Palais Cardinal later known as the Palais Royal. Notre-Dame de Paris, finished in the 14th century, stood in all its magnificence on the Isle de la Cité. The Place Royale, later to be called the Place des Vosges, had acquired its famous square shape and was the most fashionable place a member of the nobility could live in, although just a century before it had been a marshy field known as Le Marais ("swamp"). The Pont Neuf, the "New Bridge" built under Henry IV, now was adorned with his equestrian statue. Across from Notre-Dame stood the medieval looking building of the Conciergerie with

the elegant structure of Sainte-Chapelle inside its courtyard. Behind the hill of Montmartre, in the suburb of Saint-Denis, the asymmetrical basilica of Saint-Denis was awaiting the body of the present day king, which would eventually be added to the tombs of the French Royalty, kept there from the 11th century. The fortress of the Bastille stood sentry on the eastern approaches to Paris.

After entering Paris, Mazarini, together with Xavier and d'Arville, was riding to see Richelieu in his Palais Cardinal.

The travelers were met at the palace by guards, then by a liveried lackey who let Xavier stay in one of the rooms downstairs and led Mazarini and d'Arville to Richelieu's second floor office.

Mazarini was struck by the change in the cardinal's appearance since he last saw him three years ago. An old man, with a gray, wrinkled face and bags under his eyes was hard to recognize as the former politician, who had once been so full of energy. But looking into his eyes Mazarini saw that his intelligence and sharp memory had not been affected.

The two friends told their chief about their adventures. They didn't say much about the meeting with Cinq-Mars.

– When I sent Cinq-Mars to meet you, – said Richelieu, addressing Mazarini, – I wanted you to get acquainted so that you, Monsieur Mazarin, could stay in his house for the initial period in Paris. But somehow I feel now that you wouldn't like this idea.

– Well, we don't want to say anything bad about Cinq-Mars, – answered Mazarini, a little bit hesitantly.

– Tell me bluntly: do you want to stay with him or not?

– No, Your Eminence, – said Mazarini, now quite firmly.

– Good, – said Richelieu, – I know all he did. But you shouldn't be too stern with him, he is just a boy. He told me how successfully he fulfilled my errand, but then, quite naively, answered all my questions giving me details which showed what he really did. You are young yourselves, it's more difficult for you to forgive than it is for me, who will soon face the eternal judge. But I want you to know that I like the boy, he is my protégé, and I won't let anyone harm him. However, I respect your feelings and will not compel you to be a friend of someone you don't like.

– Thank you, Your Eminence, – said Mazarini.

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– I wanted to ask Your Eminence, – said d’Arville, – would it be a good idea if Monsieur Mazarin stayed in my house?

– Just a moment, – said Richelieu.

He looked at the clock.

– Just a moment.

The clock struck eleven in the morning.

The door opened and a young man of about thirty years of age entered the room. It was the Count de Chavigny.

– Your Eminence, – said Chavigny, – you told me to come at eleven. Here I am.

– Yes, my friend. Have you met Messieurs d’Arville and Mazarin?

– Monsieur d’Arville is my old friend; as to Monsieur Mazarin, I often saw him three years ago when he was the pope’s nuncio here, and I have long wanted to count him among my friends.

He bowed to Mazarini with a pleasant smile, and Mazarini answered him in the same way.

– Well then, – said Richelieu, – I have just one question to ask you, Monsieur de Chavigny, will you agree to receive Monsieur Mazarin in your house for several weeks until he is fully accustomed to our Paris society?

– I will be happy to, – answered Chavigny, and then turning to Mazarini, – Monsieur, my home is yours and I’d like you to know that I wouldn’t concede this honor to anyone.

Mazarini went up to Chavigny and shook his hand, perhaps violating some strict rules of etiquette, but expressing his sincere feelings.