

FREDERIC CHOPIN
Son of Poland

Early Years

By
Opal Wheeler



Illustrated by Christine Price

Zeezok
publishing

Elyria, OH

FREDERIC CHOPIN: SON OF POLAND, EARLY YEARS written by **Opal Wheeler** and illustrated by **Christine Price**. Copyright © 1948 by E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc. Copyright renewed © 1976 by Opal Wheeler. Published by arrangement with Dutton Children's Books, a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, a member of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

All rights reserved. This book may not be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior written consent of Zeezok Publishing.

ISBN 10: 1-933573-11-2

ISBN 13: 978-1-933573-11-3

Published by:
Zeezok Publishing
PO Box 1960
Elyria OH 44036

www.Zeezok.com
1-800-749-1681

Books by Opal Wheeler and Sybil Deucher

Sebastian Bach, The Boy from Thuringia

Ludwig Beethoven and the Chiming Tower Bells

The Young Brahms

Frederic Chopin, Son of Poland, Later Years

Stephen Foster and His Little Dog Tray

Handel at the Court of Kings

Joseph Haydn, The Merry Little Peasant

Mozart, The Wonder Boy

Franz Schubert and His Merry Friends

Robert Schumann and Mascot Ziff

MUSIC

Mazurka	93
Mazurka	98
Waltz	103
Mazurka	108
Prelude	117
Prelude	120
Theme	130
Grand Waltz	153

FREDERIC CHOPIN
Son of Poland



CHAPTER ONE

A BLUSTERY WINTER'S night was sweeping an icy cloak toward the wide frozen plains of far away Poland, soon to wrap them in long chilling sleep.

Nowhere, in all that snowbound land, stretching far into the brooding dusk, was there even a breath of spring.

But long captive peasant folk in poorly built huts and cottages dotting the barren countryside, were already bravely dreaming of better days ahead.

“There’s food aplenty under those snow banks,” rumbled Farmer Pavel, peering through a frostbitten crack in his simple dwelling on the edge of the village of Zelazowa Wola. “A fine crop of winter wheat is sending up strong, green shoots this very minute. And no better soil to grow in, the world over.”

His neighbor helper sniffed the wintry air and pulled on stout leather boots.

“Better be showing soon, or there’ll be nary a bite for the master’s cattle and not a drop of milk for the young ones at the palace.”

“Patience, my good man — there’s an end to all winters,” cautioned Pavel, chief caretaker of Count Skarbek, lord and ruler of peoples and lands for miles around.

Uneasily Pavel watched the last red sun rays light the village windows with tongues of fire. Soon now, with the lengthening shadows, stray wolves would be on the march, stalking unguarded farmyards for a nice fat goose or suckling pig for midnight feasting.

“Time to be finishing chores and locking barns,” he growled in deep bass voice.

Tying their heads in bright woolen scarves, the children scrambling to help, the hard working men strode into the gray twilight. Quietly they gazed toward the meadows where the fine palace of their master lay slumbering in soft white snow mantle.

“There’s news of a young one just arrived for the Count’s tutor,” announced Pavel, slapping his arms briskly to keep them warm. “Over yonder in the palace cottage.”

“For Schoolmaster Chopin! Tsch, tsch, tsch!” clucked his neighbor in surprise. “A bad time of year to keep new ones alive.”

It was true. In the low, three-room cottage, almost buried in whirling drifts, Nicolas Chopin bent anxiously over the



rude cradle of his frail new son and drew it closer to the blazing hearth to keep the baby from the icy breath of winter.

“See that no sparks come near the little brother, my good maiden,” he cautioned the three-year-old Louise at his side. “And take good care of the tiny creature while I am away.”

Pulling on his sheep-lined coat, he smiled down at the small nurse, so like a proud little mother with gay kerchief drawn snugly over her narrow shoulders as tenderly she rocked the cradle in the fire glow.

“I will sing him Polish songs,” she whispered, her dark eyes shining. “And Mother can listen, too.”

The gentle crooning, telling of the days when the people of the land were free, followed him as Nicolas went out into the snowy February night.

Over at the palace, just a stone's throw away, he found the Countess Skarbek in her favorite satin chair, reading aloud to her children by the light of the glittering crystal chandelier.

“How now, my good Nicolas,” she queried. “What brings you out again on such a night as this? Surely the little one is safe?”

“Ah, yes, safe for the moment,” answered her slender, handsome tutor. “But his mother could not rest until I had come to ask a great favor. Justine and I would be pleased if you would grant us permission to name the child after your own son.”

Countess Skarbek tapped her richly slippered foot on the rug and sighed.

“Ah, my lovely Justine,” she murmured, “there is nothing that I would not do to gladden her heart. How I have missed her since you took her from my house to be your bride! No woman ever had a better lady-in-waiting than I.”

She paused a moment in thought.

“Yes, yes, the child,” she went on. “Frederic Chopin. A good name, Nicolas. And the christening?”

A shadow passed over the face of her tutor.

“As to that I cannot say, Your Highness. We are struggling to keep the spark of life going.”

“Courage, my good Nicolas. There is plenty of time for christening,” comforted the kindhearted Countess, taking up her book again.

But sounds of music sent the children scurrying to the window.

“Two violins and a horn!” they announced. “And the players are on horseback!”



“Another invitation to a wedding,” laughed their mother. “Neighbors of my faithful Pavel. But the music should bring luck to the little Frederic. Take him my blessing, good Nicolas.”

Hurrying back to the three-room cottage, so homelike with its snowy curtains and rows of red geraniums at the windows, Nicolas stole to the back of the house where Justine lay resting on her couch, long fair braids encircling her lovely face.

“Ah, the songs of Poland!” she cried, her cornflower blue eyes bright with tears. “There is nothing in all the world so beautiful. Go quickly, my Nicolas, and invite the players for soup and cakes.”

In true Polish fashion, Nicolas greeted the musicians at the low doorway, hand raised in salute.

“Praised be Jesus Christ.”

“Forever and ever, Amen,” came the fervent reply.

The musicians, gay in special invitation costume of high white hats bedecked with flowers, and with brightly colored ribbons flowing from the left shoulder, stole to the sheltered oaken cradle to gaze solemnly down at the sleeping child.

“A little melody, gentlemen,” begged Nicolas quietly.

“It is said to bring him good fortune.”

Very softly, at the far end of the room, the players began an old song of country:

“She shall not die, brave Poland,
Arise, ye sons, and set her free.”

Sad and haunting, the melody crept to the next room where Justine listened hungrily, a prayer moving in her heart.

“Pray God our little one will grow strong and brave,” she murmured, “that one day he may take his place beside his countrymen, to fight for the freedom of his native land.”

Into the great black pot, swinging on its hook in the yawning hearth, the little serving maid dipped her ladle into the bubbling cabbage soup, bringing speedy warm strength to the grateful neighbor folk.

Small Louise, her long red skirt bouncing merrily, proudly served poppy seed cakes, saving out the largest and thickest for her own.

Anxious weeks crept slowly by, and it was not until the ice melted in the River Utrata and the storks had begun to nest in the tall chestnuts over the door, that Justine folded the delicate baby in a long satin pillow. With Nicolas beside her, she stepped proudly into the crisp April sunshine, radiant with spring.