

FREDERIC CHOPIN

*Son of Poland*

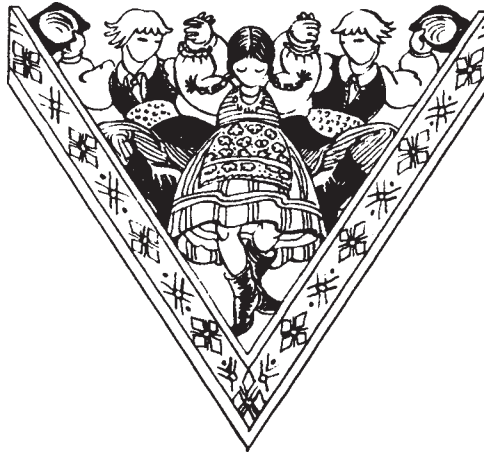
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*Later Years*

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*By*

*Opal Wheeler*



*Illustrated by* Christine Price

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## CHAPTER ONE

THE EARLIEST MILK cart rumbled through the frosty streets of Warsaw, stopping with groaning brakes at the lamp-lit home of Nicolas Chopin. Stiff with the cold, the bearded driver climbed down to leave a tall bucket of precious liquid at the door.

“Special happenings in this household today,” he muttered, peering in at the window.

There, bobbing in the light were Louise and Isobel, the long stairs creaking under their flying footsteps as they darted from their brother’s room, arms laden with his belongings. And struggling through the doorway was Nicolas with the leather trunk, and with noisy clatter he deposited it on the shining waxed floor.

“There now, Justine, — your skillful hands can begin the packing,” said he, rubbing a kink in his aching shoulder.

But lovely Mother Chopin, her heart too full for speech, could not stay her tears as she folded the garments of her son, and in vain her husband tried to comfort her.

“Do not grieve so, my dear,” he urged gently. “We should be happy that the boy is eager to seek his fortune in cities other than our own.”

“Hush, — here he comes!” warned Louise and Isobel as scurrying footsteps sounded outside the door.

In bounded Frederic, and with cries of delight his family gathered around him.

“Everyone in Warsaw is asking me to give more concerts!” he announced jubilantly. “As if the last three were not enough!”

Justine looked up hopefully. “Then you will stay, my son?”

An anxious frown made Frederic look years older.

“But the people of Vienna,” he began, his brown eyes serious. “I have promised to return and play for them again.”

“And you must keep your promise,” decided Nicolas, patting the slender shoulders.

The packing was at last finished and as Frederic stood at the door, ready to leave, he looked intently into each face, as if to mirror it forever in his mind.

“Be sure to send us word of your success in Vienna,” admonished his parents, gently.



“And keep your coat buttoned in damp weather!” His sisters hovered over him, rearranging his cravat with loving care.

Frederic laughed merrily, his arms encircling the two who had been so close to him all of his days.

“How shall I live without your constant care of me, my chickadees?” he cried gaily.

Then, the sudden knowledge that he was leaving the home where he had spent so many happy years made his throat tighten, and with a hurried good-bye he climbed into

the carriage, waving from the frost-dimmed windows as long as he could see the little group in the doorway.

Out to Wola, the country place of his birth he jogged, never dreaming of what was in store for him there.

Since sunrise the village folk had been busy at the tavern, polishing with a will to have all in shining order when the finest pianist and composer of all Warsaw would be in their company. The very thought quickened their eager hands as the long oaken table was set with the best silver and china, used only on the most special occasions.

The odor of meats browning on spits wafted to the streets outside, and sniffing hungrily in their carriages were old and young in best attire, waiting patiently for the great moment to arrive.

Sounds of practicing came from an upstairs room of the inn where Frederic's music master, Elsner, was rehearsing a band of singers in a cantata that he had written for the big event.

"Quiet! He is coming!" signaled a messenger from his watchtower.

A hush fell upon the people as the lone coach came down the last stretch of roadway and stopped. Surprised at the

gathering, Frederic opened the door to investigate. How handsome he looked, and so like a young king with long brown cloak thrown over his shoulders.

A gasp of surprise came from his lips as the band of singers approached him slowly, chanting his master's song of homage.

Quietly he stood with head bared until the music was ended and his beloved Elsner came toward him, a silver goblet held high in his hands.

"Frederic," said he, "we know that many times on your journeys you will yearn for your homeland. And so in this tumbler you will find a precious reminder to bear you company: a bit of the sacred soil of Poland. May you never cease to love the land of your birth with a warm and devoted heart. And now the prayers and good wishes of your countrymen go with you. Bless you, my boy."

Deeply stirred at the words of the master, Frederic could make no reply, and when a lovely young girl filled his hands with flowers of Poland, tears ran unheeded down his cheeks and he could only nod his thanks to the cheering townfolk.

"Come, come, Frycek, you must help to make us merry!" chided Elsner, trying to hide his sadness at parting from his old pupil.

Leading the honored guest indoors, he placed him at the head of the gaily decked table, where speeches and music lasted well into the day.

At last it was time to go on, and with a sorrowful heart at leaving behind him all that he held dear, Frederic climbed into the carriage, and turning his face to the February sunset, started out into the world with only a mind full of music to make his fortune.

The next morning his spirits rose again at the thought of meeting his good friend, Titus, at the Polish border. And just as the light broke over the land, there he was, waving his long arms in greeting.

“Just in time for *barszcz*, Mister Freddie,” he cried, taking his comrade by the arm and strolling into the low, smoke-filled tavern by the roadside.

Hungrily they ate big bowls of rich, steaming beet soup, their favorite dish, followed by potatoes and lamb that had been done to a turn on long rods before the fire.

Satisfied and well content, they rode on toward Breslau, Frederic telling of the many happenings since last they had been together. What a wonderful companion was Titus, this giant who spoke little and listened so sympathetically. It had

always been so, even in their young days when they had plotted tricks to play on their companions in Nicolas Chopin's school for boys of noble families.

“But see, Frycek, — a part of our journey is over — and so soon!” exclaimed Titus. “I give you the city of Breslau, my friend.”

And glad they were to settle themselves at the comfortable Golden Gorse Inn, and bask contentedly in the warm glow of the bright hearth fires.

