

# PAGANINI

## MASTER OF STRINGS

*By*  
*Opal Wheeler*



Illustrated by Henry S. Gillette

 **Zeezok**<sup>TM</sup>  
PUBLISHING

## *Paganini, Master of Strings*

Written by Opal Wheeler

Originally published by E.P. Dutton & Company, New York, 1950.  
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ISBN 978-1-61006-013-4

Copyright © 2011 by Zeezok Publishing, LLC

Published January, 2011

Printed in the United States of America

Zeezok Publishing, LLC

PO Box 1960 • Elyria, OH 44036

info@Zeezok.com • 1-800-749-1681

[www.Zeezok.com](http://www.Zeezok.com)

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## CHAPTER ONE

A gusty wind whirled the gray mist into a mighty curtain and chased it away, high over the blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea. And what a busy harbor of Genoa it left behind!

Fish peddlers were everywhere, hurrying to fill their baskets for the day. Deck hands, shouting and laughing noisily, loaded the boats along the waterfront with brawny arms. Over all, market bells clanged a rousing good morning.

In the bustling throng, five-year-old Nicolo darted here and there, his slender face anxious as he searched for his good friend.

“Romano! Where are you, Romano?” he called, his brown toes slipping and sliding over the wet cobbles as he ran toward the wharf.

Squirring his way through the busy group at the water’s edge, his dark eyes lighted as he spied the old fisherman at the bottom of his boat, the silvery new catch heaped high at his feet.

“Beauties they are!” he was shouting to the crowd of buyers.  
“The best to come in for many a day!”

“Beauties!” echoed Nicolo in ringing tones. “Five for a copper!”

A shout of laughter came from the peddlers as they watched the pale-faced little visitor, trying to help with the sale.

In a few minutes the fish were gone, and Nicolo sat contentedly beside his good friend, his short legs dangling happily over the edge of the dock.

“So, little shadow!” The weathered man of the sea wrinkled his long nose in pleasure. “Early you are this morning.”

Nicolo frowned, screwing his small face into a knot.

“It’s the bells, Romano, waking me with their noise. If only they would sing in tune!” he sighed.

Raising his shaggy head, he listened to their rousing clatter. How harshly they clanged through the market square! Creeping closer to his friend, Nicolo buried his face in the old woolen jacket, glad of the comforting strong arm around him.

Suddenly he sat up, alert, thoughts racing through his mind.

“Romano! When I am as big as you, I will make new bells, all of shining silver!” he declared. His face was alight now as he went on with his plan, his voice lowered to a whisper. “And at night, I will climb the dark stairs and hang them in the high tower. Then in the morning, the beautiful tones will ring all over Genoa. And the people will run from their houses, and they will say, ‘See what Nicolo Paganini has done!’ ”

Romano smiled and patted the short legs, swinging now in perfect time to the peddler’s cry behind them:

“FISH ... FRESH FISH.... IN THE OVEN, IN THE POT, ..  
FISH FOR MOM AND FISH FOR POP! ... FRESH FISH.... !”

