

'Fante was my god' Charles Bukowski

JOHN FANTE

WAIT UNTIL SPRING, BANDINI!



C

• THE CANONS •

Chapter One

He came along, kicking the deep snow. A man. His name was Svevo Bandini, and he was walking down that street. He was cold and the snow was on his shoes. That morning he had patched the holes in his shoes with pieces of cardboard from a macaroni box. The cardboard in that box was not paid for. He had placed the cardboard inside of his shoes.

He hated the snow. He was a bricklayer. The snow had froze the mortar between the brick he was laying. He was on his way home, but what was the sense in coming home when he was a boy in Italy, in Abruzzi, he had seen the sun and sunshine, no work. He was in America now, in Rocklin, Colorado. He had just been in Italy. In Italy there were mountains, too, like the ones he had seen a few miles west of him. The mountain peaks were like a dress dropped plumb-like to the earth. When he was twenty years old, he had seen the snow in the folds of that savage white dress. He had seen a fireplace in a mountain lodge. It was cold in the winter. He had said the devil with the snow. He was only twenty then, and he had a girl who needed money. But the roof of the lodge was covered with the suffocating snow.

WAIT UNTIL S

Here was a disgusted
he lived three blocks
ere were holes in his
ne holes on the inside
ni box. The macaroni
thought of that as he
s.

klayer, and the snow
e laid. He was on his
going home? When
ted the snow too. No
a now, in the town of
the Imperial Poolhall.
those white mountains
ns were a huge white
Twenty years before,
starved for a full week
He had been building
dangerous up there in
he danger, because he
rl in Rocklin, and he
ge had caved beneath

It harassed him always, that beautiful
understand why he didn't go to California
Colorado, in the deep snow, because
The beautiful white snow was like the
Svevo Bandini, so white, so fertile, lying
house up the street. 456 Walnut Street,

Svevo Bandini's eyes watered in the
brown, they were soft, they were a
he had stolen them from his mother –
Svevo Bandini, his mother was never quite
ill, always with sickly eyes after his birth
and it was Svevo's turn to carry soft

A hundred and fifty pounds was
Bandini, and he had a son named Arturo
his round shoulders and feel for the snow
a fine man, Svevo Bandini, all muscle
named Maria who had only to think of
and her body and her mind melted like
was so white, that Maria, and looking
through a film of olive oil.

Dio cane. Dio cane. It means God
Bandini was saying it to the snow. When
dollars in a poker game tonight at the
He was such a poor man, and he had
the macaroni was not paid, nor was the
three children and the macaroni were kept

Svevo Bandini had a wife who never
for food for the children, but he had a
eyes, sickly bright from love, and those
them, a sly way of peering into his mouth
his stomach, and into his pockets. Those

snow. He could never
rnia. Yet he stayed in
it was too late now.
beautiful white wife of
ng in a white bed in a
, Rocklin, Colorado.
e cold air. They were
oman's eyes. At birth
for after the birth of
quite the same, always
th, and then she died
rown eyes.

the weight of Svevo
o who loved to touch
nakes inside. He was
s, and he had a wife
the muscle in his loins
the spring snows. She
at her was seeing her

is a dog, and Svevo
y did Svevo lose ten
e Imperial Poolhall?
d three children, and
e house in which the
kept. God is a dog.

r said: give me money
wife with large black
eyes had a way about
uth, into his ears, into
se eyes were so clever

in a sad way, for they always knew when they had done a good business. Such eyes for he was and all he hoped to be, but they

That was an odd thing, because Maria was a woman who looked upon all the living. Maria knew what a soul was. A soul was what she knew about. A soul was an immortal to argue about. A soul was an immortal to say it was, a soul was immortal.

Maria had a white rosary, so white as the snow and lose it forever, and she thought of Svevo Bandini and her children. At no time, she hoped that somewhere in the world a nun in some quiet convent, someone would pray for the soul of Maria Bandini.

He had a white bed waiting for him to lay, warm and waiting, and he was kneeling thinking of something he was going to do. Just an idea he had in his head: a snow globe, a miniature of it out of cigar boxes. He thought. And then he shuddered as you do when someone touches your flank, and he was suddenly remembering he had got into the warm bed beside Maria. The cross on her rosary touched his flesh on the tittering little cold serpent, and how he had found an even colder part of the bed, and then he left the bedroom, of the house that was not peaceful, his wife endlessly waiting for passion, and he went out, and straightway in his fury he plunged off the sidewalk, letting his anger fight the cold.
Dio cane. Dio cane.

WAIT UNTIL S

at the Imperial Poolhall
for a wife! They saw all
y never saw his soul.
Maria Bandini was a
and the dead as souls.
was an immortal thing
al thing she would not
hing. Well, whatever

you could drop it in
e prayed for the soul
nd because there was
this world someone,
e, anyone, found time

m, in which his wife
icking the snow and
to invent some day.
w plow. He had made
He had an idea there.
en cold metal touches
bering the many times
aria, and the tiny cold
n winter nights like a
e withdrew quickly to
en he thought of the
aid for, of the white
he could not endure
ged into deeper snow
it out with the snow.

He had a son named Arturo, and owned a sled. As he turned in front of the house that was not paid for, his feet slipped on the tops of the trees, and he was lying on his back. Arturo's sled was still in motion, slicing through the snow-weary lilac bushes. *Dio cane!* He cursed that little bastard, to keep his sled on the snow. Svevo Bandini felt the snow's cold bite on his face like frantic ants. He got to his feet, brushed the snow from the sky, shook his fist at God, and ran in a fit of fury. That Arturo. That little bastard! He crawled from beneath the lilac bush and with a sharp knife tore the runners off. Only when the sled had stopped did he remember that the sled had cost seven dollars. Brushing the snow from his clothes, he felt the snow in his ankles, where the snow had entered the soles of his shoes. Seven dollars and fifty cents. *Diavolo!* Let the boy buy another sled. He would buy one anyway.

The house was not paid for. It was his house. The house had a voice, and it was always talking. It was always forever chattering the same thing. Whenever he heard the porch floor creak, the house said in its own voice, own me, Svevo Bandini, and I will not be paid for. Whenever he touched the front doorknob, the house said, For fifteen years that house had heckled Svevo Bandini with its idiotic independence. There were times when he wanted to set dynamite under it, and blow it up. If it had been a challenge, that house so liked to challenge him to possess her. But in thirteen years

Arturo was fourteen
into the yard of his
t suddenly raced for
ng on his back, and
ling into a clump of
e had told that boy,
ut of the front walk.
attacking his hands
, raised his eyes to
nearly collapsed with
He dragged the sled
systematic fiendishness
struction was complete
seven-fifty. He stood
at strange hot feeling
ntered from the tops
cents torn to pieces.
. He preferred a new

enemy, that house. It
g to him, parrot-like,
enever his feet made
nsolently: you do not
never belong to you.
nob it was the same.
d him and exasperated
e were times when he
ow it to pieces. Once
ke a woman, taunting
s he had wearied and

weakened, and the house had gained in value. Bandini no longer cared.

The banker who owned that house had many enemies. The mental image of that banker's heart pound with a hunger to consume Helmer, the banker. The dirt of the earth he had been forced to stand before Helmer had not enough money to feed his family. Helmer's neatly parted gray hair, with the soft hands that looked like oysters when Svevo Bandini asked for money to pay the installment on his house. Helmer had done that many times, and the soft hands of Helmer's wife. He could not talk to that kind of a man. Helmer would like to break Helmer's neck, to tear out his heart and jump on it with both feet. Of Helmer's wife he muttered: the day is coming! the day is coming! Helmer's house, and he had but to touch the knob and the house would not belong to him.

Her name was Maria, and the darkness of her black eyes. He tiptoed to the corner of the room near the window with the green shades. He sat down and seated himself both knees clicked. It was a bell of two bells to Maria, and he thought he had never loved to love a man so much. The room was filled with a vapor tumbled from his breathing. He was a wrestler with his shoe laces. Always with his shoe laces. *Diavolo!* Would he be in the death bed before he ever learned to talk to other men?

'Svevo?'

'Yes.'

WAIT UNTIL S

its arrogance. Svevo

was one of his worst
banker's face made his
me itself in violence.
earth. Time and again
Helmer and say that he
ily. Helmer, with the
ands, the banker eyes
andini said he had no
use. He had had to do
Helmer unnerved him.
He hated Helmer. He
ear out Helmer's heart
er he would think and
oming! It was not his
obb to remember it did

ness was light before
er and a chair there,
ade down. When he
was like the tinkling
now foolish for a wife
was so cold. Funnels
lips. He grunted like
ays trouble with his
an old man on his
ie his shoe laces like

‘Don’t break them, Svevo. Turn on the light. Turn on the light. Don’t break them. Don’t get mad and break them.’

God in heaven! Sweet Mother Mary! What was there to be done with a woman? Get mad? What was there to be done with God, he felt like smashing his fist through the wood gnawed with his fingernails at the knot of the shoe laces! Why did there have to be a woman? Unnh. Unnh.

‘Svevo.’

‘Yes.’

‘I’ll do it. Turn on the light.’

When the cold has hypnotized you, the thread is as obstinate as barbed wire. With a gasp, his arm and shoulder he vented his impatience with a cluck sound, and Svevo Bandini fell back in his chair. He sighed, and so did his wife.

‘Ah, Svevo. You’ve broken them again.’

‘Bah,’ he said. ‘Do you expect me to break the shoes on?’

He slept naked, he despised underclothes. With the first flurry of snow, he always found a blanket laid out for him on the chair in the bedroom. He sneered at this protection: that was the way he died of influenza and pneumonia; that was the way he had risen from a death bed, delirious and feverish with pills and syrups, and staggered to his feet. He had down his throat a half dozen garlic bulbs, he had had to sweat it out with death. Maria had cured him, and thereafter his religious fervor. But Maria maintained that garlic came from the earth, and was too pointless for Svevo Bandini to

the light and I'll untie

Wasn't that just like
to get mad about? Oh
ugh that window! He
ot of his shoe laces.
e shoe laces? Unnh.

ur fingers, a knotted
With the might of his
ence. The lace broke
almost fell out of the

ain.'
o go to bed with my

thing, but once a year,
found long underwear
corner. Once he had
e year he had almost
was the winter when
with fever, disgusted
o the pantry, choked
ulbs, and returned to
believed her prayers
on of cures was garlic,
e from God, and that
dispute.

He was a man, and he hated the long underwear. She was Maria, and underwear, every button and every thread, every touch, made the points of her breasts that came out of the middle of the earth. He married fifteen years, and he had a thousand and often of this and that, but rarely had you. She was his wife, and she spoke to him often with her constant, I love you.

He walked to the bedside, pushed back the covers, and groped for that wandering hand slipped between the blankets and seized her arms pinioned around hers, his legs locked. It was not passion, it was only the cold of the stove she was a small stove of a woman whose warmth had attracted him from the first. Fifteen years, night, and a woman warm and welcoming like ice, hands and arms like ice; he turned and sighed.

And a little while ago the Imperial Palace had last ten dollars. If only this woman had a hiding shadow upon his own weakness. DeRenzo. He would have married Teresa if that she was extravagant, she talked too much, she smelled like a sewer, and she – a strong woman liked to pretend watery weakness in his arms. And Teresa DeRenzo was taller than he, like Teresa he could enjoy giving the money in dollars in a poker game. He could think of a chattering mouth, and he could thank her for waste his hard-earned money. But not

WAIT UNTIL S

sight of himself in every blemish on his forehead, every odor and taste ache with a joy of earth. They had been tongue and spoke well and he ever said, I love rarely, but she tired

his hands beneath the string rosary. Then he held her frantically, his arms locked around hers. It was of a winter night, and the sadness and warmth of winters, night upon night, coming to her body feet with the thought of such love

Imperial Poolhall had taken his share of some fault to cast his own. Take Teresa DeRenzo, except for so much, and her breath of a strong, muscular woman — his arms: to think of it! Well, with a wife of Imperial Poolhall ten times that breath, that God for a chance to Maria.

‘Arturo broke the kitchen window,’

‘Broke it? How?’

‘He pushed Federico’s head through

‘The son of a bitch.’

‘He didn’t mean it. He was only pla

‘And what did you do? Nothing, I s

‘I put iodine on Federico’s head. A
serious.’

‘Nothing serious! Whaddya mean, no
you do to Arturo?’

‘He was mad. He wanted to go to th

‘And he went.’

‘Kids like shows.’

‘The dirty little son of a bitch.’

‘Svevo, why talk like that? Your ow

‘You’ve spoiled him. You’ve spoiled

‘He’s like you, Svevo. You were a b

‘I was – like hell! You didn’t catch me
head through a window.’

‘You didn’t have any brothers, Sve
your father down the steps and broke l

‘Could I help it if my father . . . Oh

He wriggled closer and pushed his
hair. Ever since the birth of August,
wife’s right ear had an odor of chlorofo
it home from the hospital with her ten
his imagination? He had quarreled wi
years, for she always denied there wa
in her right ear. Even the children ha
they had failed to smell it. Yet it was
just as it was that night in the ward,

she said.

it.'

ying.'

suppose.'

A little cut. Nothing

thing serious! What'd

he show.'

own son.'

l them all.'

bad boy too.'

pushing my brother's

evo. But you pushed

his arm.'

, forget it.'

face into her braided

their second son, his

orm. She had brought

years ago: or was it

th her about this for

as a chloroform odor

ad experimented, and

s there, always there,

when he bent down

to kiss her, after she had come out yet alive.

‘What if I did push my father down t
got to do with it?’

‘Did it spoil you? Are you spoiled?’

‘How do I know?’

‘You’re not spoiled.’

What the hell kind of thinking was th
spoiled! Teresa DeRenzo had always to
and selfish and spoiled. It used to delig
– what was her name – Carmela, Carme
Rocco Saccone, she thought he was a de
she had been through college, the Un
a college graduate, and she had said
scoundrel, cruel, dangerous, a menace t
Maria – oh Maria, she thought he was ar
Bah. What did Maria know about it? Sh
education, why she had not even finish

Not even high school. Her name
but before she married him her name
and she never finished high school.
est daughter in a family of two girls
and Teresa – both high school graduat
family curse was upon her, this lowest
this girl who wanted things her own
graduate from high school. The ign
one without a high school diploma –
three and one-half years, but still, no
Teresa had them, and Carmela Ricci,
had even gone to the University of
against him. Of them all, why had h

WAIT UNTIL S

of it, so near death,

the steps? What's that

that? Of course he was
told him he was vicious
tought him. And that girl
ela Ricci, the friend of
evil, and she was wise,
iversity of Colorado,
he was a wonderful
to young women. But
n angel, pure as bread.
he had had no college
ed high school.

was Maria Bandini,
was Maria Toscana,
She was the young-
ls and a boy. Tony
ates. But Maria? The
t of all the Toscanas,
way and refused to
orant Toscana. The
— almost a diploma,
o diploma. Tony and
the friend of Rocco,
Colorado. God was
e fallen in love with

this woman at his side, this woman with a diploma?

‘Christmas will soon be here, Svevo,’ she said in prayer. Ask God to make it a happy Christmas.

Her name was Maria, and she was a woman of something he already knew. Didn’t he know that told that Christmas would soon be here on the night of December fifth. When a man dies on his wife on a Thursday night, is it necessary that the next day would be Friday? And that was he cursed with a son who played with a ball, *America!* And he should pray for a happy Christmas.

‘Are you warm enough, Svevo?’

There she was, always wanting to know if he was warm enough. She was a little over five feet tall, whether she was sleeping or waking, she was a woman like a ghost, always content in her room, saying the rosary and praying for a merciful God. No wonder that he couldn’t pay for this house occupied by a wife who was a religious fanatic. A wife to goad him on, inspire him, and make him a man. But Maria? *Ah, povera America!*

She slipped from her side of the bed, and in a precision found the slippers on the rug. He knew she was going to the bathroom, and he knew the boys afterward, the final inspection, and he went to bed for the rest of the night. A woman slipping out of bed to look at her throat, a woman’s life! *Io sono fregato!*

How could a man get any sleep in this world of turmoil, his wife always getting out of bed?

without a high school

vo,' she said. 'Say a
Christmas.'

s always telling him
know without being
ere? Here it was, the
goes to sleep beside
sary for her to tell him
at boy Arturo – why
with a sled? *Ah, povera*
ppy Christmas. Bah.

know if he was warm
ll, and he never knew
she was that quiet. A
little half of the bed,
erry Christmas. Was it
house, this madhouse
anatic? A man needed
make him work hard.

d, her toes with sure
; in the darkness, and
m first, and to inspect
n before she returned
wife who was always
ree sons. Ah, such a

his house, always in a
bed without a word?

Goddamn the Imperial Poolhall! A fu
deuces, and he had lost. *Madonna!* An
a happy Christmas! With that kind of
talk to God! *Jesu Christi*, if God rea
answer – why!

As quietly as she had gone, she was
'Federico has a cold,' she said.

He too had a cold – in his soul. Hi
have a snivel and Maria would rub men
lie there half the night talking about i
suffered alone – not with an aching h
aching soul. Where upon the earth v
than in your own soul? Did Maria help
him if he suffered from the hard times? D
my beloved, how is your soul these d
Svevo? Is there any chance for work th
maledetto! And she wanted a merry Chr
have a merry Christmas when you ar
sons and a wife? Holes in your shoes,
work, break your neck on a goddamn
a merry Christmas! Was he a million
been, if he had married the right kind
was too stupid though.

Her name was Maria, and he felt th
recede beneath him, and he had to
she was coming nearer, and his lips
receive them – three fingers of a sma
lips, lifting him to a warm land insid
she was blowing her breath faintly in
pouted lips.

'*Cara sposa,*' he said. 'Dear wife.'

WAIT UNTIL SP

ull house, queens on
d he should pray for
luck he should even
ally existed, let Him

beside him again.

s son Federico could
thol on his chest, and
t, but Svevo Bandini
body: worse, with an
was the pain greater
him? Did she ever ask
did she ever say, Svevo,
ays? Are you happy,
is winter, Svevo? *Dio*
ristmas! How can you
e alone among three
bad luck at cards, no
sled – and you want
aire? He might have
l of woman. Heh: he

the softness of the bed
smile for he knew
s opened a little to
ll hand, touching his
le the sun, and then
nto his nostrils from

Her lips were wet and she rubbed them. He laughed softly.

‘I’ll kill you,’ he whispered.

She laughed, then listened, poised, listening for the boys awake in the next room.

‘*Che sara, sara,*’ she said. ‘What must it be?’

Her name was Maria, and she was so good to him, touching the muscle at his loins, so here and there, and then the great heat of him and she lay back.

‘Ah, Svevo. So wonderful!’

He loved her with such gentle fierceness, himself, thinking all the time: she is Maria, she knows what is good. The big heat toward the sun exploded between them, a joyous release, groaned like a man glad to forget for a little while so many things, and in her little half of the bed, listened to his heart and wondered how much he had in Poolhall. A great deal, no doubt; possibly Maria had no high school diploma but she was a man’s misery in meter of his passion.

‘Svevo,’ she whispered.

But he was sound asleep.

Bandini, hater of snow. He leaped out of bed in the morning, like a skyrocket out of bed, hating the cold morning, sneering at it: bah, this is the end of God’s creation, always frozen, never melting; bricklayer; ah, he was cursed with this life. On his feet he walked to the chair and snatched

them against his eyes.

listened for a sound of

st be, must be.'

o patient, waiting for

o patient, kissing him

at he loved consumed

rceness, so proud of

not so foolish, this

g bubble they chased

, and he groaned with

d he had been able to

and Maria, very quiet

o the pounding of her

d lost at the Imperial

sibly ten dollars, for

t she could read that

t of bed at five that

making ugly faces at

his Colorado, the rear

no place for an Italian

fe. On the sides of his

l his pants and shoved

his legs through them, thinking he was a day, union scale, eight hours hard work that! He jerked the curtain string; it shot a machine gun, and the white naked man room, splashing brightly over him. He *chone*: dirty face, he called it. *Sporcacc* dirty face.

Maria slept with the drowsy aware that curtain brought her awake quick ble terror.

‘Svevo. It’s too early.’

‘Go to sleep. Who’s asking you? Go’

‘What time is it?’

‘Time for a man to get up. Time for sleep. Shut up.’

She had never got used to this early morning was her hour, not counting the times once, she had stayed in bed until nine because of it, but this man she had made of bed at five in winter, and at six in summer torment in the white prison of winter; she arose in two hours he would have of snow from every path in and around down the street, under the clothes lines piling it high, moving it around, cutting flat shovel.

And it was so. When she got up inside of slippers, the toes aburst like looked through the kitchen window and out there in the alley, beyond the high man, a dwarfed giant hidden on the other

WAIT UNTIL SP

losing twelve dollars
rk, and all because of
ot up and rattled like
orning dove into the
growled at it. *Sporca*
ione ubriaco: drunken

ness of a kitten, and
ly, her eyes in nim-

o to sleep.'

or a woman to go to

morning rising. Seven
in the hospital, and
, and got a headache
rried always shot out
ummer. She knew his
she knew that when
e shoveled every clod
the yard, half a block
s, far down the alley,
g it viciously with his

and slipped her feet
e frayed flowers, she
nd saw where he was,
h fence. A giant of a
her side of a six-foot

fence, his shovel peering over the top no puffs of snow back to the sky.

But he had not built a fire in the kitchen. He never built a fire in the kitchen stove. A woman, that he should build a fire? Some woman he had taken them into the mountains for? Absolutely no one but himself was permitted. But a kitchen stove! What was he — a

It was so cold that morning, so cold and ran away from her. The dark ground had been a sheet of ice under her feet, a block of ice. What a stove that was! a black bear of a stove subject to fits of rebellion. She always coaxed it, so ill-tempered. She always coaxed it, so black bear of a stove subject to fits of rebellion to make him glow; a cantankerous stove pouring sweet heat, suddenly went black and hot and threatened to destroy the very wood it could handle that black block of sulking. She would feed it a twig at a time, caressing the shy stove with a piece of wood, then another and another, under her care, the iron heating up, the oven heat thumping it until it grunted and bled like an idiot. She was Maria, and the stove was a devil. Let Arturo or August drop a lump of coal into its mouth and it went mad with its own heat, blistering the paint on the walls, turning a chunk of hell hissing for Maria, who was capable, a cloth in her hand as she twisted the stove, shutting the vents deftly, shaking its body into its stupid normalcy. Maria, with hands like roses, but that black devil was her slave.

ow and then, throwing

itchen stove. Oh no,
ve. What was he – a
ometimes though. Once
or a beefsteak fry, and
itted to build that fire.

woman?

d. Her jaw chattered
green linoleum might
eet, the stove itself a
despot, untamed and
othed it, cajoled it, a
bellion, defying Maria
e that, once warm and
rserk and got yellow
y house. Only Maria
ng iron, and she did
flame, adding a slab
ntil it purred beneath
en expanding and the
groaned in content,
stove loved only her.
f coal into its greedy
n fever, burning and
ng a frightful yellow,
o came frowning and
ted it here and there,
owels until it resumed
no larger than frayed
e, and she really was

very fond of it. She kept it shining and the nickel-plated trade name grinning evilly proud of its beautiful teeth.

When at length the flames rose a morning, she put water on for coffee by the window. Svevo was in the chicken yard on his shovel. The hens had come out as they eyed him, this man who could knock the heavens off the ground and throw them from the window she saw that the hens came close to him. She knew why. They were afraid from her hands, but they hated him; they were afraid as the one who sometimes came of a S. This was all right; they were very grateful to have the snow away so they could scratch the earth for it, but they could never trust him as the one who came with corn dripping from his beard and spaghetti too, in a dish; they kissed him when she brought them spaghetti; but they were afraid.

Their names were Arturo, August, and Federico. They were awake now, their eyes all brown and shining in the black river of sleep. They were a family of twelve, August ten, and Federico eight. They were around, three in a bed, laughing the quietest of obscenity. Arturo, he knew plenty. He knew plenty of what he knew, the words coming from his mouth like vapor in the cold room. He knew plenty. He knew plenty. You guys don't know anything. I was about sitting on the porch steps. I was about to see you. I saw plenty.

Federico, eight years old.

WAIT UNTIL SP

and flashily vicious, its
lly like a mouth too

and it groaned good
and returned to the
, panting as he leaned
of the shed, clucking
d lift the fallen white
n over the fence. But
s did not saunter too
ere her hens; they ate
they remembered him
aturday night to kill.
ul he had shoveled the
arth, they appreciated
they did the woman
er small hands. And
her with their beaks
beware of this man.

and Federico. They
and bathed brightly
all in one bed, Arturo
. Italian boys, fooling
uick peculiar laugh of
was telling them now
his mouth in hot white
y. He had seen plenty.
y what I saw. She was
t this far from her. I

‘What’ya see, Arturo?’

‘Shut yer mouth, ya little sap. We a

‘I won’t tell, Arturo.’

‘Ah, shut yer mouth. You’re too litt

‘I’ll tell, then.’

They joined forces then, and threw
bumped against the floor, whimpering
him with a sudden fury and pricked hi
needles. He screamed and tried to get up
but they were stronger than he and he d
and into his mother’s room. She was p
stockings. He was screaming with dism

‘They kicked me out! Arturo did. A

‘Snitcher!’ yelled from the next room

He was so beautiful to her, that Fe
so beautiful to her. She took him into
her hands into his back, pinching his b
squeezing him hard, pushing heat into
of the odor of her, wondering what it
was in the morning.

‘Sleep in Mamma’s bed,’ she said.

He climbed in quickly, and she clamp
him, shaking him with delight, and he v
Mamma’s side of the bed, with his head
hair made, because he didn’t like Papa
of sour and strong, but Mamma’s smelt
warm all over.

‘I know somethin’ else,’ Arturo sa
ing.’

August was ten; he didn’t know muc
more than his punk brother Federico,

ain't talkin' to you!

le!

him out of bed. He
. The cold air seized
him with ten thousand
under the covers again,
blashed around the bed
pulling on her cotton
may.

August did!

n.
ederico; his skin was
her arms and rubbed
beautiful little bottom,
him, and he thought
was and how good it

bed the covers around
was so glad he was on
in the nest Mamma's
's pillow; it was kind
sweet and made him

id. 'But I ain't tell-

h. Of course he knew
but not half so much

as the brother beside him, Arturo, who was
women and stuff.

‘What’ll ya give me if I tell ya?’ Arturo

‘Give you a milk nickel.’

‘Milk nickel! What the heck! Who v
winter?’

‘Give it to you next summer.’

‘Nuts to you. What’ll ya give me no

‘Give you anything I got.’

‘It’s a bet. Whatcha got?’

‘Ain’t got nothing.’

‘Okay. I ain’t telling nothing, then.’

‘You ain’t got anything to tell.’

‘Like hell I haven’t!’

‘Tell me for nothing.’

‘Nothing doing.’

‘You’re lying, that’s why. You’re a

‘Don’t call me a liar!’

‘You’re a liar if you don’t tell. Liar!

He was Arturo, and he was fourteen
of his father, without the mustache. His
such gentle cruelty. Freckles swarmed
over a piece of cake. He was the oldest
was pretty tough, and no sap kid brother
and get away with it. In five seconds
Arturo was under the covers at his bro

‘That’s my toe hold,’ he said.

‘Ow! Leggo!’

‘Who’s a liar!’

‘Nobody!’

Their mother was Maria, but they

o knew plenty about

turo said.

wants a milk nickel in

ow?’

liar.’

,

a. He was a miniature
upper lip curled with
over his face like ants
st, and he thought he
er could call him a liar
August was writhing.
ther’s feet.

r called her Mamma,

and she was beside them now, still fr
of motherhood, still mystified by it. Th
it was easy to be his mother. He had
hundred times a day, out of nowhere a
thought, that her second son had yellow
August at will, lean down and taste the
her mouth on his face and eyes. He wa
was. Of course, she had had a lot of tro
kidneys, Doctor Hewson had said, but
and the mattress was never wet anym
August would grow up to be a fine ma
the bed. A hundred nights she had spe
side while he slept, her rosary beads cl
she prayed God, please Blessed Lord,
the bed anymore. A hundred, two hundr
had called it weak kidneys; she had cal
Svevo Bandini had called it goddamn ca
favor of making August sleep in the chic
or no yellow hair. There had been all so
cure. The doctor kept prescribing pills.
the razor strap, but she had always tricke
and her own mother, Donna Toscana ha
drink his own urine. But her name was
Savior's mother, and she had gone to t
miles and miles of rosary beads. Well,
hadn't he? When she slipped her hand u
hours of the morning, wasn't he dry a
Maria knew why. Nobody else could e
said, by God it's about time; the docto
pills had done it, and Donna Toscana i
stopped a long time ago had they foll

frightened at the duty
there was August now;
and yellow hair, and a
at all, there came that
w hair. She could kiss
yellow hair and press
s a good boy, August
ouble with him. Weak
t that was over now,
ore in the mornings.
n now, never wetting
nt on her knees at his
licking in the dark as
don't let my son wet
ed nights. The doctor
led it God's will; and
arelessness and was in
cken yard, yellow hair
orts of suggestions for
Svevo was in favor of
ed him out of the idea;
d insisted that August
Maria, and so was the
that other Maria over
August had stopped,
under him in the early
nd warm? And why?
xplain it. Bandini had
or had said it was the
nsisted it would have
owed her suggestion.

Even August was amazed and delighted when he wakened to find himself dry. He remembered those nights when he woke up with her knees beside him, her face against his, her breath in his nostrils and the whisper of the Hail Mary, Hail Mary, poured into his nose. It had an eerie melancholy as he lay between them, a helplessness that choked him and made him want to please them both. He simply *wouldn't* please them.

It was easy to be the mother of August with the yellow hair whenever she pleased. He was filled with the wonder and mystery of her so much for him, that Maria. She had made him feel like a real boy, like Arturo tease him and hurt him because he was a sissy. When she came on whispering feet to his bed, he had only to feel the warm fingers card his hair, and he was reminded again that she and another woman had turned him from a sissy to a real guy. No wonder he was so good. And Maria never forgot the yellow hair. Where it came from God only knew, but she was proud of it.

Breakfast for three boys and a man. He wanted to be called Bandini, but he hated it and wanted to be called something else. His father was Bandini, and he wanted it to be Joe. His father were Italians, but he wanted to be something else. His father was a bricklayer, but he wanted to be something else. He wanted to be a Chicago Cub. They lived in Rocklin, California, but he wanted to live in Chicago. He had ten thousand, but he wanted to live in Chicago. His face was freckled, but he wanted to be something else. He went to a Catholic school, but he wanted to be something else.

WAIT UNTIL SP

ed on those mornings
and clean. He could
o to find his mother on
his, the beads ticking,
ered little words, Hail
and eyes until he felt
these two women, a
le him determined to
pee the bed again.

August. She could play
eased because he was
f her. She had done
made him grow up.
and no longer could
of his weak kidneys.
his bedside each night
essing his hair, and he
er Maria had changed
onder she smelled so
onder of that yellow
new, and she was so

His name was Arturo,
d John. His last name
ones. His mother and
be an American. His
to be a pitcher for the
Colorado, population
Denver, thirty miles
nted it to be clear. He
nted to go to a public

school. He had a girl named Rosa, but he was an altar boy, but he was a devil and he wanted to be a good boy, but he was afraid because he was afraid his friends would call him a sissy. He was Arturo and he loved his father, but he was afraid of the day when he would grow up and leave his father. He worshipped his father, but he was a sissy and a fool.

Why was his mother unlike other mothers and everyday he saw it again. Jack Haver had a mother who had a way of handing him a heart purr. Jim Toland's mother had a way of making her mother never wore anything but a gingham dress and she swept the floor of the Molla kitchen and she sat on the porch in an ecstasy, watching Mrs Molla dance and gulping the movement of her hips. He had a realization that his mother did not excite him, but he loved her secretly. Always out of the corner of his eye he saw his mother. He loved his mother, but he was afraid.

Why did his mother permit Bandini to be in the house? Was she afraid of him? When they were in the bathroom, sweating in hatred, why did his mother smile at him? When she left the bathroom and went to her bedroom, why did she smile in the darkness? He could see her smile, but he knew it was upon his face. In the middle of the night, so much in love with the moonlight, the lights warming her face. Then he hated her. His hatred of her was greatest. He felt like a fool long after she had returned to bed the next morning. His face, the muscles in his cheeks weary with the night.

Breakfast was ready. He could hear the

ut she hated him. He
d hated altar boys. He
raid to be a good boy
all him a good boy. He
out he lived in dread
nd be able to lick his
e thought his mother

others? She was that,
wley's mother excited
ookies that made his
ight legs. Carl Molla's
gham dress; when she
ne stood on the back
a sweep, his hot eyes
e was twelve, and the
e him made him hate
of his eye he watched
ne hated her.

o boss her? Why was
bed and he lay awake
er let Bandini do that
d came into the boys'
rkness? He could not
her face, that content
darkness and hidden
d them both, but his
e spitting on her, and
hatred was upon his
with it.

his father asking for

coffee. Why did his father have to yell and he talk in a low voice? Everybody in the house knew everything that went on in their house or was constantly shouting. The Moreys next door never gave a peep out of them, never; quiet, American. His father wasn't satisfied with being an Italian, he was a noisy Italian.

'Arturo,' his mother called. 'Breakfast is ready.'

As if he didn't know breakfast was ready. He was in Colorado didn't know by this time that he was having breakfast!

He hated soap and water, and he couldn't understand why you had to wash your face every day. He hated the bathroom because there was no bath, no toothbrushes. He hated the toothpaste he had to use. He hated the family comb, always clogged with his father's hair, and he loathed his own hair that would stay down. Above all, he hated his complexion. His freckles like ten thousand pennies poured out of his eyes. The only thing about the bathroom he liked was the window. It was in the corner. Here he hid *Scarlet Crime* and his mother's keys.

'Arturo! Your eggs are getting cold.'

Eggs. Oh Lord, how he hated eggs.

They were cold, all right; but not as cold as the eyes of his father, who glared at him as he ate. He remembered, and a glance told him that his father had snatched. Oh Jesus! To think that his father had snatched on him! Bandini nodded to the window. The pane across the room, one pane gone, the open window with the dish towel.

'So you pushed your brother's head through the window?'

WAIT UNTIL SP

all the time? Couldn't
the neighborhood know
an account of his father
poor – you never heard
American people. But his
Italian, he had to be a
st.'

ready! As if everybody
that the Bandini family

ould never understand
y morning. He hated
thtub in it. He hated
his mother bought. He
with mortar from his
hair because it never
own face spotted with
d over a rug. The only
the loose floorboard in
and *Terror Tales*.

colder than the eyes
e sat down. Then he
that his mother had
own mother should
dow with eight panes
ening covered with a

through the window?'

It was too much for Federico. All of a sudden Arturo angry, Arturo pushing him into a pane of glass. Suddenly Federico began to cry. He hadn't cried last night, but now he remembered: blood on his hair, his mother washing the wound, tears on his face. It was awful. Why hadn't he cried last night? He couldn't remember, but he was crying now, twisting tears out of his eyes.

'Shut up!' Bandini said.

'Let somebody push *your* head through that glass,' Arturo sobbed. 'See if *you* don't cry!'

Arturo loathed him. Why did he have to be his brother? Why had he stood in front of that window? What kind of people were these wops? Look at that man. Look at him smashing eggs with his forehead. Look at he was. Look at the egg yellow on his forehead. Look at his mustache. Oh sure, he was a dago with a mustache, but did he have to pour that egg yolk on his ears? Couldn't he find his mouth? Oh, he was a dago.

But Federico was quiet now. His mother's face no longer interested him; he had found something better. His milk, and it reminded him of a boat. *Drrrrrrr*, said the motor boat, *drrrrrrr*. What was that made out of real milk – could you get it from the North Pole? *Drrrrrrr*, *drrrrrrr*. Suddenly he was crying again. A gusher of tears filled his eyes as the bread crumb was sinking. *Drrrrrrr*, *drrrrrrr*. Don't sink! boat! don't sink! Bandini was watching.

'For Christ's sake!' he said. 'Will you stop crying and quit fooling around?'

To use the name of Christ carelessly.

over again he saw it:
the window, the crash
cry. He had not cried
good coming out of his
telling him to be brave.
last night? He couldn't
the knuckle of his fist

h a window,' Federico

have to have a little
f the window? What
k at his father, there.
k to show how angry
father's chin! And on
rop, so he had to have
nose eggs through his
God, these Italians!

tyrdom of last night
d a crumb of bread in
floating on the ocean;
What if the ocean was
ce cream at the North
thinking of last night
nd he sobbed. But the
rr. Don't sink, motor
him.

u drink that milk and

sly was like slapping

Maria across the mouth. When she m not occurred to her that he swore. She to it. But Bandini swore at everything words he learned were God damn it. of his swear words. When he was furious himself in two languages.

‘Well,’ he said. ‘Why did you push through the window?’

‘How do I know?’ Arturo said. ‘I just Bandini rolled his eyes in horror.

‘And how do you know I won’t k block off?’

‘Svevo,’ Maria said. ‘Svevo. Please.’

‘What do *you* want?’ he said.

‘He didn’t mean it, Svevo,’ she smiled. ‘Boys will be boys.’

He put down his napkin with a bang. and seized the hair on his head with h swayed in his chair, back and forth, ba

‘Boys will be boys!’ he jibed. ‘That his brother’s head through the window boys! Who’s gonna pay for that window pay the doctor bills when he pushes his Who’s gonna pay the lawyer when they murdering his brother? A murderer in *uta me!* Oh God help me!’

Maria shook her head and smiled. A in a murderous sneer: so his own father too, already accusing him of murder. A sadly, but he was very happy that he out to be a murderer like his brother A

married Bandini it had
never quite got used
ing. The first English
He was very proud
us he always relieved

a your brother's head

st did it, that's all.'

knock your goddamn

d. 'It was an accident.

He clinched his teeth
both hands. There he
ck and forth.

t little bastard pushes
w, and boys will be
ndow? Who's gonna
is brother off a cliff?
y send him to jail for
n the family! *Oh Deo*

Arturo screwed his lips
her was against him
August's head racked
wasn't going to turn
Arturo; as for August

he was going to be a priest; maybe he would deliver the last sacraments before they took him to the electric chair. As for Federico, he saw his brother's passion, saw himself lying in state at the funeral; all his friends from St Catherine's were there and crying; oh, it was awful. His eyes were closed and he sobbed bitterly, wondering if he had any milk in his glass of milk.

'Kin I have a motor boat for Christmas?'
Bandini glared at him, astonished.

'That's all we need in this family,' he said, and he flitted sarcastically: 'Do you want a real motor boat? One that goes put put put put?'

'That's what I want!' Federico laughed. 'Puttedy puttedy put put!' He was already at the kitchen table and across Blue Lake. Bandini's leer caused him to kill the motor. He was very quiet now. Bandini's leer was still there through him. Federico wanted to cry but he didn't dare. He dropped his eyes to the empty glass and a drop or two at the bottom of the glass. He looked carefully, his eyes stealing a glance at his father's face of the glass. There sat Svevo Bandini – goose flesh creeping over him.

'Gee whiz,' he whimpered. 'What did you say?'

It broke the silence. They all relaxed. The silence had held the scene long enough. Quietly Federico said:

'No motor boats, understand? Absolutely no motor boats.'

Was that all? Federico sighed happily. He believed his father had discovered the pennies he had stolen the pennies out of his wallet.

ne would be there to
y sent Arturo to the
himself the victim of
g stretched out at the
e were there, kneeling
es floated once more,
e could have another
mas?’ he said.

said. Then his tongue
motor boat, Federico?

ghed. ‘One that goes
y in it, steering it over
up in the mountains.
otor and drop anchor.
r was steady, straight
again, but he didn’t
oty milk glass, saw a
ss, and drained them
is father over the top
leering. Federico felt

id *I* do?’

d, even Bandini, who
ly he spoke.

utely no motor boats.’

ily. And all the time

that it was he who

rk pants, broken the

street lamp on the corner, drawn the
Mary Constance on the blackboard, hit
the eye with a snowball, and spat in the
St Catherine's.

Sweetly he said, 'I don't want a mother,
I don't want me to have one, I don't want

Bandini nodded self-approvingly to himself
way to raise children, his nod said. When
to do something, just stare at him; that was
a boy. Arturo cleaned the last of his
and sneered: Jesus, what a sap his old
that Federico, Arturo did; he knew what
Federico was; that sweet face stuff was
long shot, and suddenly he wished he
Federico's head but his whole body, he
through that window.

'When I was a boy,' Bandini began
back in the Old Country —'

At once Federico and Arturo left the
stuff to them. They knew he was going to
thousandth time that he made four cents
on his back, when he was a boy, back
carrying stone on his back, when he was
hypnotized Svevo Bandini. It was dream
and blurred Helmer the banker, holes
that was not paid for, and children that
was a boy: dream stuff. The progression
of an ocean, the accumulation of mouths
of trouble upon trouble, year upon year
boast about too, like the gathering of gold
not buy shoes with it, but it had happened

WAIT UNTIL SP

that picture of Sister
Stella Colombo in
the holy water font at

or boat, Papa. If you
want one, Papa.'

his wife: here was the
When you want a kid
that's the way to raise
egg from the plate
man was! He knew
that a dirty little crook
wasn't fooling him by a
had shoved not only
head and feet and all,

. 'When I was a boy

the table. This was old
to tell them for the ten
s a day carrying stone
in the Old Country,
was a boy. The story
n stuff that suffocated
in his shoes, a house
must be fed. When I
of years, the crossing
s to feed, the heaping
ar, was something to
reat wealth. He could
ened to him. When I

was a boy —. Maria, listening once more, always put it that way, always deferring to herself old.

A letter from Donna Toscana arrived. Donna Toscana with the big red tongue to check the flow of angry saliva at her daughter married to Svevo Bandini letter over and over. The flap gushed Donna's huge tongue had mopped it. Walnut Street, Rocklin, Colorado, for use the married name of her daughter writing might have been streaks from a beak, the script of a peasant woman's goat's throat. Maria did not open the substance.

Bandini entered from the back yard. In a heavy lump of bright coal. He dropped behind the stove. His hands were smeared. He frowned; to carry coal disgusted him. He looked irritably at Maria. She propped against a battered salt cellar. The heavy writing of his mother-in-law's serpents before his eyes. He hated Donna's fury that amounted to fear. They clashed like animals whenever they met. It gave him a letter in his blackened, grimy hands. It was open raggedly, with no care for the name he read the script he lifted piercing eyes to know once more how deeply he hated her given her life. Maria was helpless; this all of her married life she had ignored in

re, wondered why he
g to the years, making

ved, Maria's mother.
gue, not big enough
the very thought of
ni. Maria turned the
d glue thickly where
Maria Toscana, 345
or Donna refused to
r. The heavy, savage
m a hawk's bleeding
who had just slit a
letter; she knew its

n his hands he carried
it into the coal bucket
ared with black dust.
im; it was a woman's
e nodded to the letter
n the yellow oilcloth.
aw writhed like tiny
onna Toscana with a
d like male and female
a pleasure to seize that
delighted him to tear
message inside. Before
s to his wife, to let her
the woman who had
was not her quarrel,
t, and she would have

destroyed the letter had not Bandini found the open messages from her mother. He got out of her mother's letters that was quite clear there was something black and terrible hidden under a damp stone. It was the diseased mind of a man who got an almost exotic joy from the thought of a mother-in-law who enjoyed his misfortune come upon hard times. Bandini loved it because it gave him a wild impetus to drunkenness to excess because it sickened him, but the wine of Toscana had a blinding effect upon him, a pretext that prescribed oblivion, for if he could hate his mother-in-law to the point where he could forget, he could forget his debts, his unpaid bills, the pressing monotony of his life: an escape: a day, two days, a week of hypnotic forgetfulness. He remembered periods when he was drunk and he was no longer concealing of Donna's letters from her rarely, but they meant only one thing: to spend an afternoon with them. If she carried a letter, Bandini knew his wife had hidden it. The time she did that, Svevo lost his temper and gave her a terrible beating for putting too much senseless and meaningless offense, and, of course, on occasions noticed under ordinary circumstances. Every letter concealed, and someone had to suffer for it.

This latest letter was dated the day of the eighth, the feast of the Immaculate Conception. When he read the lines, the flesh upon his face and his blood disappeared like sand swallowed. The letter read:

WAIT UNTIL SP

forbidden her even to
got a vicious pleasure
e horrifying to Maria;
about it, like peering
l pleasure of a martyr,
out of the castigation
sery now that he had
, that persecution, for
ness. He rarely drank
a letter from Donna
n. It served him with
when he was drunk
he point of hysteria,
s house that remained
of marriage. It meant
osis – and Maria could
for two weeks. There
from him. They came
g; that Donna would
me without his seeing
en the letter. The last
er and gave Arturo a
alt on his macaroni, a
e he would not have
But the letter had been
for it.

ay before, December
nception. As Bandini
ce whitened and his
ng the ebb tide. The

My Dear Maria:

Today is the glorious feast day of our Lady and I go to Church to pray for you and your heart goes out to you and the poor children who are by the tragic condition in which you are. May the Blessed Mother to have mercy on you and bring happiness to those little ones who do not have you. I will be in Rocklin Sunday afternoon on the eight o'clock bus. All love and sympathy for you and the children.

Without looking at his wife, Bandini pulled his shirt and began gnawing at an already ravaged breast. He pulled and plucked his lower lip. His fury began to rise and spread to him. She could feel it rising from the walls and the floor, from the walls and the floor, an odor not completely outside of herself. Simply to straighten her blouse.

Feebly she said, 'Now, Svevo —'

He arose, chucked her under the chin and looked fiendishly to inform her that this show was not sincere, and walked out of the room.

'Oh Marie!' he sang, no music in his voice, pushing a lyrical love song out of his throat. 'Oh Marie! *Quanto sonna perdato per te! Fodor me!* Oh Marie, Oh Marie! How much I suffer because of you! Oh let me sleep, my dear Marie.'

There was no stopping him. She listened to the soles as they flecked the floor like drops of oil on the stove. She heard the swish of his patches.

*our Blessed Mother,
in your misery. My
children, cursed as they
you live. I have asked
you, and to bring
not deserve their fate.
e, and will leave by
mpathy to you and*

Donna Toscana.

at the letter down and
numb nail. His fingers
somewhere outside of
corners of the room,
moving in a whirlpool
to distract herself, she

chin, his lips smiling
of affection was not

is voice, only hatred
throat. 'Oh Marie. Oh
fa me dor me! Fa me
much sleep I have lost
arling Marie!'

ned to his feet on thin
of water spitting on a
d and sewed overcoat

as he flung himself into it. Then silence. She heard a match strike, and she knew he had lit a cigar. His fury was too great for her to have been to give him the temptation of a cigarette. As his steps approached the front door she saw there was a glass panel in that front door. She looked at it quietly and was gone. In a little while she saw her good friend, Rocco Saccone, the most despicable human being she really hated. Rocco Saccone was a friend of Svevo Bandini, the whiskey-drinking man who had tried to prevent Bandini's marriage. Rocco wore white flannels in all seasons and bore a reputation for his Saturday night seductions of married women at the Old-time dances up in the Odd Fellows hall. She trusted Svevo. He would float his brains out for her but he would not be unfaithful to her. What could she do? With a gasp she threw her chair over the table and wept as she buried her face in her hands.

WAIT UNTIL SP

... for a moment, until
... ew he was lighting a
... . To interfere would
... f knocking her down.
... , she held her breath:
... or. But no – he closed
... e now he would meet
... stonecutter, the only
... Saccone, the boyhood
... rinking bachelor who
... ; Rocco Saccone, who
... oasted disgustingly of
... d American women at
... llows Hall. She could
... on a sea of whiskey,
... . She knew that. But
... self into the chair by
... ce in her hands.