

THE STORY OF PANETTONE

BY Heather Edwards



Once, in a little village in the hills above Milan, there was a baker named Antonio and a very good baker he was too. He made bread for all the people in the village. Good coarse country bread that kept the villagers from going hungry when they worked in the fields, ploughing and tending the grapes.

Now the baker was a widower and he had one daughter a beautiful girl, but spoilt. Because her father was so very fond of her, he wouldn't let her do any work. Not in the bakery or anywhere else. He wouldn't even allow her to help with the housework. All poor Seraphina had to do each day was sit in her window and watch the world go by.

She spent most of her time looking out into the street and the market square - and eating sweets! So she wasn't only spoilt and bored, if truth were told, she was getting sadly fat!

One day in November, not long before Christmas, there was great excitement as a group of young huntsmen rode into the village looking for something to eat and drink. As Seraphina leaned out of her window, her eyes met those of one of the young men and 'pouf!' it was love at first sight!

Luckily it was love at first sight for the young man as well and he gave her a big wink! He then sat down to talk to the old ladies who are always to be found in Italian village squares. He wanted to find out about the lovely lady in the window. They in their turn were eager to know who he was. It turned out the young man was called Angelo. He was the son of the Duke of Milan and a very important person. Between them, Angelo and the old ladies hatched a plot so that Seraphina and Angelo could meet.

Angelo called for ink and paper and wrote two letters, one to Antonio and one to his daughter Seraphina. This is what they

said. To Seraphina he wrote,

"Dear Seraphina, I love you. Soon we will meet and I will hold you in my arms".

To Antonio he wrote,

"Dear Antonio, I like your bread. Please meet me at the Market Square after Mass tomorrow. I have a plan that will make you rich and famous!"

He asked the old ladies to deliver the letters. Next day they all met and Angelo told Antonio of his plan to set him up in a bakery in Milan and for him to marry Seraphina. Both Seraphina and Antonio thought that this was a good idea and the next day they left for Milan.

Once in Milan, Antonio and Seraphina spent the day going round the bakeries of the great city. They tasted Torte, Pane and Biscotti and found them delicious. The biscuits were sweet and crisp and the bread soft and white, and scattered with wonderful seeds.

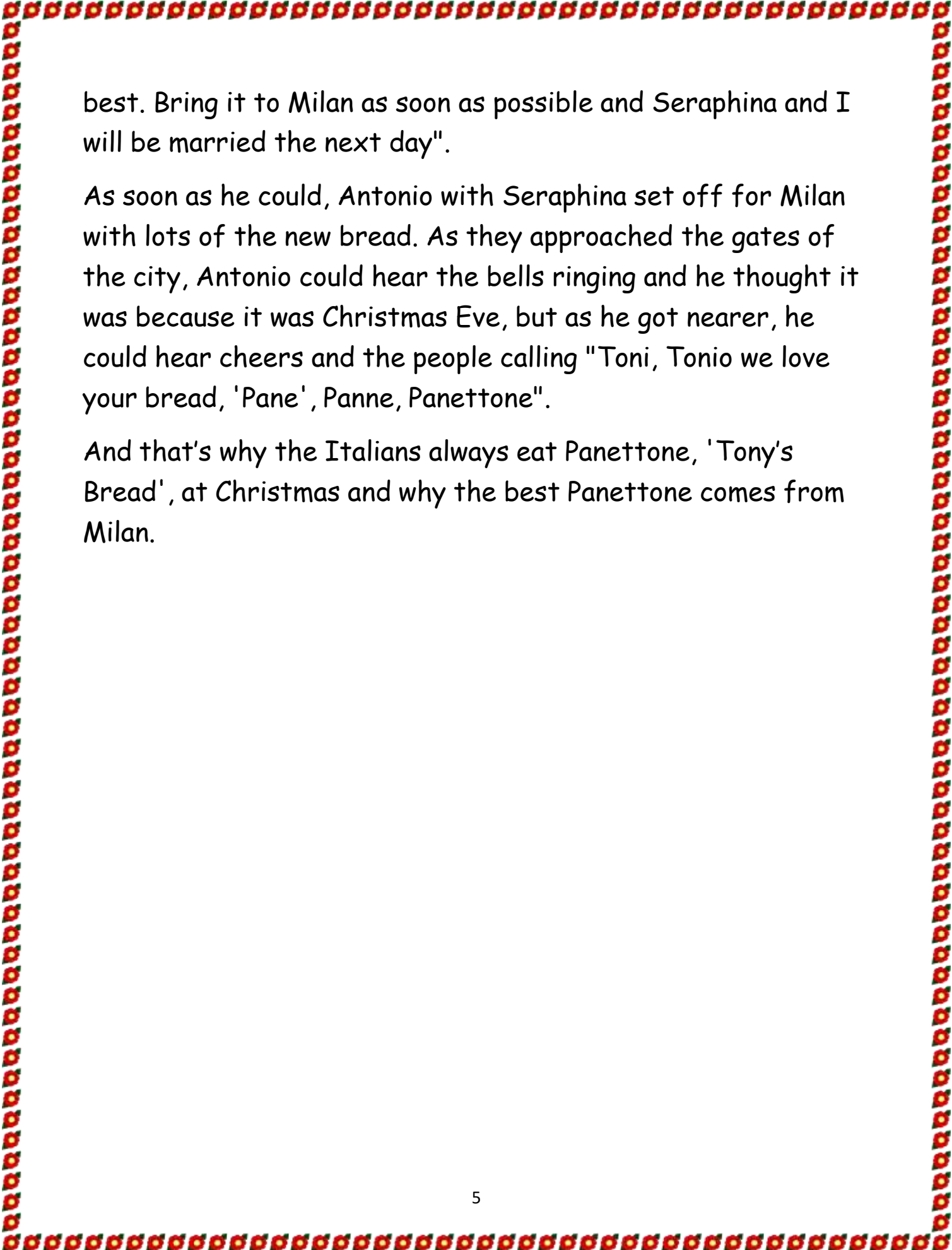
While they walked and nibbled at the bread, Antonio became more and more sad. At the end of the day he went to Angelo and said, "I cannot make bread here, my bread is good bread but it is bread for the workers in the hills. Your friends would not buy my bread". "Oh", said Seraphina, "if only you could

make bread as sweet and rich as these dried fruits and candies". "Yes", said Angelo, "and as rich and sweet as this punch fortified with eggs and milk and honey". "THAT'S IT!" said Antonio, "I'll make a bread that tastes like all of these things!". And soon Seraphina and her father departed back to their village with wagonloads of the biggest eggs the sweetest honey and the plumpest raisins and fruit.

All the next day Antonio experimented and muttered to himself in his bakery and at the end of the afternoon, he put all the dough into bowls to rise overnight. The next day he filled every baking tray and tin in the bakery with the dough. There was still some dough left over so he put what was left into clean flowerpots and baked it in them.

Soon the whole village was filled with the delicious smell of baking bread. Antonio, Seraphina and the people of the village, plus Angelo (who had ridden up from Milan), could hardly wait for the bread to be cool enough to be cut and tasted. At last Antonio took his first bite and everyone waited with bated breath, "YES!" he shouted, and soon everyone was munching and laughing. And then Angelo loaded up the cart and took what was left back to Milan.

Everyone in the village waited and within the week, a cartload of new supplies came up from Angelo with a note, "My friends loved your bread and please can you make lots more? Also, make it all in flowerpot shapes because my friends liked that



best. Bring it to Milan as soon as possible and Seraphina and I will be married the next day".

As soon as he could, Antonio with Seraphina set off for Milan with lots of the new bread. As they approached the gates of the city, Antonio could hear the bells ringing and he thought it was because it was Christmas Eve, but as he got nearer, he could hear cheers and the people calling "Toni, Tonio we love your bread, 'Pane', Panne, Panettone".

And that's why the Italians always eat Panettone, 'Tony's Bread', at Christmas and why the best Panettone comes from Milan.