

Libretto

Freely translated from the Italian by James Meena

"Mimi was a charming girl, specially apt to appeal to Rodolfo, the poet and dreamer. Aged twenty-two, she was slight and graceful. Her face reminded one of a sketch of a high-born beauty; its features had marvelous refinement. The hot, impetuous blood of youth coursed through her veins, giving a rosy hue to her clear complexion that had the white velvety bloom of the camellia. This frail beauty allured Rodolfo. But what served to enchant him were Mimi's tiny hands, that, despite her household duties, she contrived to keep whiter even than those of the Goddess of Ease." *From Scenes de la vie de Boheme by Henri Murger*

Paris, around 1830

Act I *(In a garret on Christmas eve. A spacious window overlooks the snow covered rooftops.)*

Marcello This painting of the Red Sea
Makes me even more chilly and damp.
As if its icy water was flowing down my back!
For revenge, I'll drown Pharaoh!
And what are you doing?

Rodolfo Just staring at the smoke billowing
Over the rooftops of Paris;
and thinking of that lazy stove,
that deceives us with its idleness,
just sitting there like a rich, fat nobleman!

Marcello Its honest reward for our not feeding it!

Rodolfo Of what use are all those silly forests
Out there, covered under the snow?

Marcello Rodolfo, my friend, I want to share
with you a profound thought:
I'm freezing like a dog!

Rodolfo And I, Marcello candidly advise
that the sweat on my brow is a ruse!

Marcello My fingers are frozen!
As if they were held motionless
against that great frozen block
that Musetta calls a heart!

Rodolfo Ah, love is a fireplace
that is all consuming . . .

Marcello . . . And fast burning!

Rodolfo When a man is under its spell.

Marcello And the woman is striking the match.

Rodolfo He burns up in a puff of smoke.

Marcello And she just stands there and watches.

Rodolfo But in the meantime, we're freezing!

Marcello And dying of hunger!

Rodolfo We have to light this stove!

Marcello Wait. We'll sacrifice the chair!

Rodolfo Eureka!

Marcello An inspiration?

Rodolfo Yes!
Flashes of genius blaze in my imagination!

Marcello We'll burn my painting?

Rodolfo No --
The paint will stink out the apartment.
My fiery drama will heat us up!

Marcello You're not going to read it to me, are you?
I'm already suffering!

Rodolfo No. Into ashes the papers will peel themselves
one by one into heavenly inspiration.
(with feigned importance)

My masterpiece will be lost to the ages:
And great Rome shall fall!

Marcello Not that!

Rodolfo To you I grant Act One.

Marcello I accept your offering.

Rodolfo Tear it.

Marcello I send it to its fate.

*(Rodolfo lights the stove, setting part of his
manuscript ablaze. Meanwhile Colline enters.)*

Rodolfo & Marcello Such joyous rays of brilliance!

Colline Truly the Apocalypse is dawning.
On Christmas Eve not one soul
took pity on my begging!
Hark - a fire!

Rodolfo Quiet! We're enjoying my drama.

Colline Such blazing inspiration.

Rodolfo Thank you.

(The fire dwindles)

Colline But it is a mere flash in the pan.

Rodolfo Brevity is a great virtue in the theater.

Colline Dear author, kindly give me your chair.

Marcello These intermissions make me shiver.
Quickly!

Rodolfo Act Two!

Marcello We quietly await more of your brilliance!

(The fire glows as the manuscript burns)

Colline Such profound thoughts!

Marcello Such colorful language!

Rodolfo In that languid blue flame
is a blazing love scene.

Colline The pages crackle.

Marcello As though they were kissing!

Rodolfo *(Throwing the rest of the manuscript in the
fire)*

Now we can hear all three acts at once.

Colline Only an audacious writer could create such rich thoughts.

All Beautiful ideas that vanish in a cheerful blaze.

Marcello Merciful God. Already the flame dies down.

Colline Such a frail, vain drama!

Marcello The pages crackle, dying -- dead!

Marcello & Colline Down with the author!

(Enter Schaunard with armfuls of wood, cigarettes, wine and food)

All Wood! Cigarettes! Bordeaux! Destiny smiles on us.

Schaunard *(Throwing coins on the floor)*
The Bank of France has poured out its riches for you.

Colline Pick them up.

Marcello Those must be fake!

Schaunard Then you're deaf and blind!
Whose face is this on the coin?

Rodolfo King Louis Philip! Our monarch!

All Yes. Louis is at our feet!

Schaunard Now I'll tell you what happened:
This gold, or rather, silver coins have a brave story . . .

Marcello *(Putting wood on the stove)*
Relight the stove!

Colline It has suffered so from the cold.

Schaunard *(Continuing his description of events)*
I came across an English nobleman. His lordship wanted a musician . . .

Marcello *(Ignoring Schaunard, and throwing Colline's books off the table)*
Off! Prepare the table!
Here are the candles.

Rodolfo *(Also ignoring Schaunard)*
Where is the fuel?

Colline There!

Rodolfo Now the room flashes brilliantly.

Marcello What's this - no tablecloth?

Rodolfo I have an idea -
use the newspaper as a tablecloth.

Schaunard *(Continuing, oblivious that he is being ignored)*
I presented myself and offered to give him lessons, to which he said "We begin immediately. Look:" he said, "There is a parrot in that apartment on the first floor. I want you to play until he dies!" And thus it was I played for three long days. Then, I used my charms to get the attention of the maid and convinced her to feed the parrot dried parsley.
She complied and like Socrates - he fell dead!

Colline *(Looking up from his feast long enough to*

hear Schaunard's last words)
Who?

Schaunard What the hell are you all doing?
These are our provisions for days of darkness and obscurity.
To dine in on Christmas Eve while the Latin Quarter is adorned with sausages and delicacies?
When the fragrance of savory fritters fills the old streets,
and where the girls sing contentedly . . .

All Yes - Christmas Eve!

Schaunard And every young student echoes their song.
A bit of religious decorum, dear sirs.
By all means drink at home,
but tonight we dine out!

(They are ready to leave but are stopped by a knocking at their door)

Marcello Who is it?

Benoit Just me - Benoit!

Marcello Good God - the landlord!

Schaunard Bolt the door!

Colline *(out loud)*
No one is here!

Schaunard Locked!

Benoit One word, if you please.

Schaunard Alright - but just one.

Benoit *(entering)*
The rent!

Marcello Hey there. Give the man a chair.

Rodolfo Quickly!

Benoit No, that's not necessary.

Schaunard Please sit down.

Marcello Some wine?

Benoit Thank you!

Rodolfo To your health!

Benoit This is the last quarter . . .

Schaunard Another glass?

Benoit Thank you.
. . . and therefore . . .

All We drink to your health!

Benoit . . . your rent is past due and you promised to pay it.

Marcello And we will keep our promise.

Rodolfo & Schaunard *(aside)* Are you crazy?

Marcello *(showing Benoit the sack of money)*
You see? We have it ready for you.
Now, stay a while and keep us company.
Tell me, dear signor Benoit, how old are you?

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| Benoit | My age? Please! | Marcello | Make it quick. |
| Rodolfo | More or less our age? | Rodolfo | Five minutes. I know how to finish it. |
| Benoit | Oh no -- older -- much older. | Colline | We'll wait for you outside. |
| Marcello | The other evening, at Café Mabil, I saw you in the throws of passion! You deny it? | Marcello | If you're late - you'll suffer our singing! |
| Benoit | Well . . . | Rodolfo | Five minutes and I'll cut the tail of this beaver! <i>(Marcello, Colline and Schaunard leave)</i> |
| Marcello | And she was beautiful. | Marcello | <i>(from the stairwell)</i> Watch where you're going! |
| Benoit | . . . Yes -- Very! | Colline | It's pitch black in this hallway! |
| All | You rogue - What a seducer. | Schaunard | Damned doorman! |
| Marcello | He's like a sturdy old oak tree -- like a cannon! Her hair blond and curly. And he strutted like a rooster! | Colline | I'm injured! |
| Benoit | I may be old, but I've still got it! | Rodolfo | Colline - are you dead? |
| Marcello | And feminine virtue falls before him. | Colline | Not yet. |
| Benoit | I was bashful as a boy, and now I'm making up for it. You know, common girls are my weakness. They are so curvaceous and healthy! Now, don't get me wrong - I don't like them too plump -- but skinny ones are no fun at all. All they do is complain, just like my wife! | Marcello | Rodolfo - be quick about it. |
| Marcello | What? You have a wife? Infamy! | Rodolfo | I'm not in the mood to write. <i>(He puts his pen aside. Jus then, a timid knock at the door)</i> Who is it? |
| Rodolfo | The stench of his infidelity infects our honest abode! | Mimi | Excuse me. |
| Marcello | We must fumigate the place! | Rodolfo | A woman! |
| Colline | Drive him out! | Mimi | If you please, my candle has gone out. |
| Schaunard | My morality is offended! | Rodolfo | Come in. |
| Benoit | But I . . . But you . . . | Mimi | Would you please . . . |
| All | Out with you this instant! <i>(slamming the door behind the bewildered landlord)</i> And have a pleasant evening, your lordship Benoit. Ha! Ha! Ha! | Rodolfo | Make yourself comfortable. |
| Marcello | Well -- we've paid the rent! | Mimi | No, that's not necessary. |
| Schaunard | And now off to Café Momus. | Rodolfo | Please, do come in. <i>(Mimi is seized by a fit of coughing)</i> You're not well! |
| Marcello | Long life to the banker! | Mimi | No . . . It's nothing. |
| Schaunard | We'll divide the loot! | Rodolfo | You're so pale. |
| Marcello | In the Latin Quarter it seems the beauties descend as if from heaven. <i>(to Colline)</i> Now that we're rich, pay tribute to common decency: Bear! Arrange your fur! | Mimi | My breath . . . Those stairs. <i>(she faints)</i> |
| Colline | First chance I get I will lead my beard to his executioner. Guide me to that ridiculous outrage you call a barber! Let's go. | Rodolfo | What do I do now? <i>(sprinkling some water on her face)</i> Such a lovely, yet pale visage. <i>(she comes around)</i> Do you feel better? |
| Rodolfo | I want to stay behind and finish this article for <i>The Beaver</i> . | Mimi | Yes. |
| | | Rodolfo | It is so cold in here. Come, sit by the fire. Wait. A little wine? |
| | | Mimi | Thank you. But just a little. |
| | | Rodolfo | Like this? |
| | | Mimi | Like that. Thank you. |
| | | Rodolfo | <i>(aside)</i> She is so lovely. |
| | | Mimi | Now, if you would be so kind as to light my candle, I will be off. |
| | | Rodolfo | So soon? |

Mimi Yes. Thank you. Good night. (*exits*)

Rodolfo Good night.

Mimi (*from the hallway*) Oh! How awful, I have lost my key in your room. How can I find it?

Rodolfo Don't stand at the doorway, your candle will go out again.

Mimi Goodness! Come back and light it.

Rodolfo (*blowing his out*) Oh my! Mine has also gone out!

Mimi How can I find my key? I'm so sorry for all this trouble.

Rodolfo It's pitch black in here. Where could it be?

Mimi Inopportune was my coming - I am so sorry.

Rodolfo No, no. It's nothing. (*they both are on the floor groping for the key*)

Mimi Search!

Rodolfo I am searching. (*Rodolfo finds the key. Saying nothing he puts it in his pocket and takes Mimi's hand*)

Aria

How cold your tiny hand is, come, let me warm it back to life.
It is useless to search in this darkness.
But, by fortune, the moon illumines the night,
and will help our search.
But not just yet. Just a few words to tell you who I am, what I do, how I live.
Is that alright?

Mimi Yes.

Rodolfo Who am I? I am a poet.
What do I do? I write.
And how do I live? I live!
In poverty I am wealthy, living as a grand lord, with my rhymes and songs of love.
With dreams and illusions and castles in the air, my soul is a millionaire.
But sometimes all my jewels are stolen from my fortress by two thieves: beautiful eyes.
You entered and your lovely eyes have quickly stolen my beautiful dreams.
But I don't grieve this theft
Because you have brought to this room a radiant hope.
Now that you know a bit about me, will you tell me who you are?

Mimi *Aria*

Yes. I am called Mimi, but my name is really Lucy. My story is a short one.
I embroider linens and silk in my house.
I am content and happy,
and as a pastime, I make lilies.
I love those things that have a special charm;
those things that speak of love, and of springtime. Those things that speak of dreams and illusions; those things we call poetry.
You understand?

Rodolfo Yes.

Mimi They call me Mimi; why, I don't know. I usually dine alone, and I rarely go to church, but I often pray to the Lord.
I live alone in a white room from which I can see the rooftops, and the sky.
But when winter is over,
the first ray of spring is mine.
The first kiss of April is for me.
My rose buds begin to open; and one by one I watch the petals grow.
So gentle is the perfume of a flower.
But the lilies I make, alas, have no perfume.
There really is not much more to tell.
I am your neighbor who has come at an awkward moment.

Schaunard (*from the street*) Hey! Rodolfo!

Marcello Hey! Can't you hear us you snail!

Colline Poetaster - come on!

Schaunard Damn your laziness!

Rodolfo I have to write three more lines and I'm done.

Mimi Who are they?

Rodolfo My friends.

Schaunard You'll feel our wrath . . .

Marcello What can you be doing up there all by yourself?

Rodolfo I'm not alone. Someone is with me.
You go ahead to Momus.
Get a table - we'll be there shortly.

All Momus. Gently and with discretion we're off to find love and poetry.

Duet

Rodolfo Oh gentle girl; your sweet face is radiant in the gentle moonlight.
In you I recognize the dream I have dreamed so long. My soul trembles at your gentleness. (*he embraces her*)

Mimi Love alone commands. (*pulling away*) No, please.

Rodolfo You are mine!

Mimi But your friends are waiting for us.

Rodolfo Do you want me to leave?

Mimi I want to say . . . No, I dare not.

Rodolfo Say it.

Mimi May I come with you?

Rodolfo What? Mimi!
It would be so sweet to stay here.
It's freezing out there.

Mimi You will be close to me.

Rodolfo And when we return?

Mimi We'll see.

Rodolfo Give me your arm, my lady.

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| Mimi | I obey, my lord. | | What are you looking at? |
| Rodolfo | That you love me -- say it. | Mimi | Are you jealous? |
| Mimi | I love you. | Rodolfo | To a true love, suspicion is always close at hand. |
| Together | Love. | Mimi | Are you happy? |
| | | Rodolfo | Completely. |
| Act II | The Latin Quarter | Colline | I hate the vulgar mob, as did Horace! |
| | "Mademoiselle Musetta was a pretty girl of twenty. Very coquettish; somewhat ambitious; but not pretentious. Those delightful dinners at the Latin Quarter. A perpetual coming and going of blue broughams and an omnibus; from the Rue Breda and the Latin Quarter. 'Well, what do you want? From time to time I myself need to breathe the air of this life. My mad existence is like a song; each of my loves is a strophe' - but Marcello is not the refrain." <i>From <u>Scenes de la vie de Boheme</u> by Henri Murger</i> | Schaunard | And I need space when I'm ready to satiate my appetite. |
| | <i>(The scene is filled with people milling about, street vendors of all kinds, children, entertainments, all in front of Caf  Momus)</i> | Marcello | <i>(to the waiter)</i> We want the choicest of suppers! Quickly! |
| People | What chaos! What an uproar! | Colline | For many of us! |
| Vendors | Oranges! Dates! Fine Nougat! Whipped Cream! Caramel! Flowers for your sweetheart! Kick-Knacks! | Students Parpignol | Let's go to Momus! Parpignol is here with his toys! |
| Schaunard | <i>(testing a French horn)</i> This 'd' is out of tune. How much for the flute and the horn? | Rodolfo | <i>(entering the caf , to the waiter)</i> Two seats - here we are. |
| Colline | <i>(buying an overcoat)</i> It seems a bit shabby, but it's a good coat, and cheap too. | Colline | Finally! |
| Rodolfo | <i>(to Mimi)</i> Come along. Hold my arm tightly. | Rodolfo | This is Mimi, my cheerful flower maker. Her joining us completes this wonderful company. I am the poet -- she the poem. From my imagination flow songs, from her hands flowers. From our rejoicing souls love flows! |
| Mimi | Let's go look for a new bonnet. Yes, I will hold tightly to your arm. | All | Ha! Ha! |
| Marcello | Even my shouting "Who wants a bit of love, my ladies?" would be in vain! <i>(accosting a passing girl)</i> Do you want my wounded heart? | Marcello | Lord, such lofty wit. |
| Schaunard | The crowd delights in pushing and shoving in this mad endeavor! | Colline | <i>(with a low, exaggerated bow to Mimi - speaking in Latin)</i> A worthy introduction. |
| Colline | <i>(now looking at a book)</i> A rare copy; rather unique; the grammar of Runic! | Schaunard | <i>(with droll dignity)</i> Department is required. |
| Marcello | Onward to dinner! <i>(seeing Rodolfo)</i> Ah! He's acquired a seamstress! | Colline | <i>(snapping at Schaunard)</i> I'll not grant you an accessit! Waiter! Salami! |
| Rodolfo | Come, my friends are waiting. | Children | Here is Parpignol! I want the toy trumpet! I want the toy horse! I want the cannon! For me the toy soldiers! |
| Mimi | Don't you like this new red bonnet? | Schaunard | <i>(to the waiter)</i> Roast boar! German wine! And lobster - without the shell! |
| Rodolfo | The color is perfect for you. | Mothers | <i>(to their children who have surrounded Parpignol)</i> You rascally children -- what do you think you're doing? We're going home! To bed! Go on -- or will get a whipping! Off to bed! |
| Mimi | <i>(looking into another shop window)</i> What a lovely coral necklace! | One boy | <i>(crying)</i> I want the toy trumpet and the horse! |
| Rodolfo | I have an uncle who's a millionaire. If the good Lord takes him, I'll have enough to buy a necklace far more beautiful for you! <i>(Rodolfo and Mimi enter the Caf . She notices a group of handsome students)</i> | Rodolfo | And Mimi, what would you like? |
| | | Mimi | Some custard. |
| | | Schaunard | <i>(to the waiter)</i> And the best you have! She is a lady. |
| | | Marcello | Madamoiselle Mimi, what rare gift has your |

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| | Rodolfo given you? | | The Heart! |
| Mimi | A delicate rose colored embroidered bonnet. It suits my dark hair. I've admired it for some time now, and he read my desire in my heart. He who can read my heart is the author of love. | Musetta | <i>(aside)</i> Marcello is here. But he's ignoring me, the villain! Schaunard is laughing! They are provoking me! Oh, if I could beat him and claw at him! But I have this old pelican to contend with. But wait! <i>(grabbing a plate from a nearby table)</i> |
| Schaunard | Yes, an expert professor . . . | | Hey! Waiter! This plate stinks from burned fat! <i>(throws the plate on the ground)</i> |
| Colline | Who has earned his diploma, and not only with his poems. | Alcindoro | No, Musetta. Calm down! |
| Schaunard | Every word he says seems to be true. | Musetta | He's still ignoring me. Now what? Oh, I could beat him! |
| Marcello | Oh this beautiful age of utopian deception! If you believe, hope, then everything will appear for you! | Alcindoro | Who are you talking to? |
| Rodolfo | My friend, the most divine of all poems is that which teaches us love. | Musetta | To the waiter. Don't bother me. I want to do as I please. And don't you bore me! <i>(aside)</i> Could he possibly be jealous of this old mummy? We'll see if I still have the power to sway him. |
| Mimi | Love is sweeter than honey. | Schaunard | This comedy is stupendous! |
| Marcello | To some palates, the honey tastes like gall! | Musetta | <i>(directly to Marcello)</i> So, you won't look at me! No? But I know your heart is pounding! |
| Mimi | <i>(to Rodolfo, surprised)</i> Oh dear! I have offended him! | Rodolfo | You know I would never forgive you if . . . |
| Rodolfo | He's mourning, dear Mimi. | Mimi | I love you, and am yours only. Why speak of forgiveness? |
| All | A toast! Away with sorrows! We drink! | Schaunard | <i>(commenting on Musetta's tirade)</i> She speaks to one, but wants the other to hear. |
| Marcello | <i>(hearing Musetta laughing)</i> Bring me a glass of poison! | Colline | And the other pretends not to hear, but laps up every word like honey. |
| All | Oh! It's Musetta! | Musetta | <i>Aria</i> <i>(with exaggeration for Marcello's sake)</i> Whenever I want, I can stroll alone down any street, and everyone will stop and stare. And all take in my beauty from head to toe! |
| Women | Look at her. Dressed to kill! | Marcello | <i>(boiling with fury)</i> Tie me down to this chair or I'll . . . |
| Alcindoro | You treat me like a porter -- running here and there! That's enough! Here I stay! I can't stand any more! | Alcindoro | Stop this - what will people say? This lewd song upsets me greatly. |
| Musetta | <i>(as if calling a pet dog)</i> Heel, Lulu! Sit here. | Musetta | <i>(continuing)</i> And I savor subtle jealousy in their eyes; And every man's obvious ensnarement by my fascinating beauty. Thus an outburst of desire encircles me; And I am happy with my conquest. |
| Schaunard | That old fellow is earning his keep. | | You hold the memories of our past, so why flee from them? Very well. You rather die than confess your anguish. |
| Alcindoro | What! Outside? Here? | Mimi | I see it now. She is still in love with Marcello. |
| Musetta | Sit, Lulu. | Rodolfo | Marcello loved her. But she left him for someone with money. |
| Alcindoro | <i>(grumbling)</i> Please keep these nicknames between us. | Schaunard | Ah! Marcello will soon give in. He will find her trap to be sweet. |
| Musetta | Oh, don't be a mean Bluebeard. | | |
| Colline | <i>(looking Alcindoro over)</i> Dignified -- but still a dirty old man. | | |
| Marcello | <i>(spitefully)</i> With the pure Susanna! | | |
| Mimi | Whose very well dressed! | | |
| Rodolfo | The angels are naked by comparison. | | |
| Mimi | <i>(to Rodolfo)</i> Do you know her? Who is she? | | |
| Marcello | You can ask me that question. Her name is Musetta. Last name - Temptation! For her avocation, like roses in the wind, is to go back and forth from one lover to the next. Like a coquettish bird of prey -- and her food: | | |

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| Colline | Great gods above, never allow Colline to fall into such a trap. | | times they were at the point of separating . . . It must be confessed that their existence was a living hell. Nonetheless, in the midst of this tempest of strife, they would agree to enjoy the pleasures of a night of love . . . but at dawn a new battle drove love away. Thus - if life it was - a few happy days alternated with many wretched ones, awaiting divorce." <i>From Scenes de la vie de Boheme by Henri Murger</i> |
| Musetta | Ah, Marcello is weakening - he is vanquished. | | |
| Mimi | I feel sorry for her. | | |
| Musetta | Now I must get rid of the old man. <i>(pretending to suffer a violent pain in her foot)</i> Ah! Such pain, such suffering! | Peasants | <i>(shouting at the customs guards)</i> Hola! Guards! Open up! Let us in. We're street sweepers. <i>(stamping their feet from the cold)</i> It's snowing out here! We're freezing! |
| Alcindoro | Where? | Guard | I'm coming. |
| Musetta | My foot! <i>(Alcindoro unties her shoe and goes off to buy a replacement)</i> | People | <i>(from within the tavern)</i> Who enjoys a glass of beer - pass the glass. From your lips I find love! |
| Marcello | My goddess, you are not dead after all, for love has revived you! | Musetta | Ah! If in your glass is pleasure, then in the young mouth is love. |
| Schaunard & Colline | This comedy is truly stupendous! | Guards | <i>(seeing some women approach)</i> The milk maids are here. |
| Musetta | Marcello! | Milk maids | Good morning. We bring butter, cheese and eggs to St. Michaels. We should be there by mid-day. |
| Marcello | Enchantress! | | <i>(as the scene clears of merchants, Mimi enters. She looks anxious, as if not sure of her whereabouts. She is seized by a violent fit of coughing, but recovers herself and continues, approaching the guard.)</i> |
| Schaunard | Now for the finale. | Mimi | Excuse me. Can you tell me if this is the inn where a certain painter is now working? |
| All | The bill? So soon? | Guard | Yes, this is it. |
| Colline | Who asked him to bring it? | Mimi | <i>(approaching a woman who has just come out of the inn)</i> Oh, good woman, if you would do me the favor of finding the painter Marcello. I need to speak with him urgently. Tell him, quietly, that Mimi is here waiting for him. |
| Schaunard | Let's see . . . <i>(takes the bill and passes it around)</i> | Guard | <i>(to some passersby)</i> Hey! What's in those baskets? <i>(searching them)</i> They're empty. You may pass. |
| All | Oh dear! All the money has disappeared! We're broke! | | <i>Duet</i> |
| Rodolfo | I only have thirty livre left! | Marcello | Mimi? |
| All | What? That's all? | Mimi | I hoped to find you here. |
| Schaunard | What happened to my fortune? <i>(the sound of a parade is heard entering the square)</i> | Marcello | Yes. We've been here for about a month. Musetta teaches singing to the travelers and I'm doing a portrait of the regiment for the façade of the inn. It's cold. Come inside. |
| Musetta | The parade is coming this way. | Mimi | Is Rodolfo here? |
| All | We'll leave the bill for the old man! | Marcello | Yes. |
| Musetta | <i>(to the waiter, placing the bills at Alcindoro's place)</i> And give my gentleman friend who was sitting here my regards! | Mimi | I can't enter then. |
| All | Yes, give our gentleman friend our regards! | Marcello | Why? |
| Marcello | See. Here comes the parade. Let's follow it and the old man will never find us in the crowd. | Mimi | Oh! Good hearted Marcello, help me! |
| All | Here is the parade. Here is the drum major! He looks like a general! How grand, what splendor. <i>(the bohemians, with Mimi and Musetta, follow the band out of the square as Alcindoro returns, only to be presented with the bill by the waiter as the curtain falls.)</i> | Marcello | What has happened? |
| Act III | Outside the city walls. The Barriere d'enfer. | | |

"Mimi's voice was as a sound that penetrated Rodolfo's heart like a death knell . . . He, however, had a love for her that was consumed by bizarre, eccentric jealousy. . . Twenty

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| Mimi | Rodolfo loves me, yet he has left me -- my Rodolfo is consumed with jealousy! A passing glance, a single word, a single flower suffice to raise his jealousy and his fury. One night, feigning to be asleep, I could tell he was awake, staring at me. He screams at me: "You are not mine! You've taken another lover!" It's his temper speaking, I know, but how can I answer him, Marcello? | Rodolfo | Mimi is a coquette who flirts with everyone. A little dandy Viscount makes fish eyes at her; and she wiggles and shows her ankle to entice him . . . |
| Marcello | If it is like this, you should not live together. | Marcello | I must tell you, my friend; that doesn't sound sincere. |
| Mimi | You're right. I should let him go. But help us, Marcello, we've tried before and can't stay apart. It is for the best. | Rodolfo | Alright -- no. I am not being sincere. In vain I try to hide my true torment. I love Mimi above everything in the world -- I love her, but I am afraid. Mimi is so sick! Every day she is worse. The poor girl is doomed! |
| Marcello | <i>(to himself)</i> I am so happy with Musetta, and she with me. Our life here is carefree -- singing and laughing -- the flowers of undying love. <i>(to Mimi)</i> Very well, I'll try. I'll go wake him. | Marcello | Mimi? |
| Mimi | He's asleep? | Mimi | What is this he is saying? |
| Marcello | He arrived an hour before dawn, exhausted. So he is resting inside. You can see him through this window. <i>(she is seized with another fit of coughing)</i> But you're ill. | Rodolfo | A terrible cough shakes her fragile chest, and already her emaciated cheeks are flushed . . . |
| Mimi | Since yesterday it has gotten worse, shaking me to the bone. And now he walked out last night saying, "It's over." At daybreak I hurried here to find him. | Marcello | Poor Mimi! |
| Marcello | <i>(looking through the window)</i> He's waking up - he's looking for me. Come. | Mimi | Alas, am I truly dying? |
| Mimi | No. He must not see me. | Rodolfo | My room is a squalid little place; there is no fire; and that damned north wind enters my pathetic place and blows about. Yet she sings and smiles, and I'm consumed with guilt! It is my fault this cough is killing her. |
| Marcello | Then please go home quickly, Mimi. I will speak to him. Don't make a scene here. <i>(Mimi leaves, but hides behind the tree, listening to their conversation)</i> <i>Trio</i> | Marcello | What to do, then? |
| Rodolfo | Marcello, finally I can talk to you with no one hearing me. I want to end it with Mimi. | Mimi | Oh -- my life! |
| Marcello | Can you really be so fickle? | Rodolfo | Mimi is like a delicate flower that poverty has blighted; Love is not enough to restore her health. |
| Rodolfo | Before this time the love in my heart was already dying; but her beautiful blue eyes once again restored it. Now, boredom attacks it . . . | Marcello | Poor Mimi. |
| Marcello | And you want to complete your heart's funeral? | Mimi | My life is over -- alas, to die! <i>(she is overcome with coughing, mixed with tears)</i> |
| Rodolfo | Forever! | Rodolfo | What? Mimi, you're here? You've heard me? |
| Marcello | Think it over. Only madmen revel in a love that is gloomy and brings tears. If it doesn't laugh and sparkle, love is weak. You are jealous. | Marcello | She was listening? |
| Rodolfo | A little. | Rodolfo | Don't be frightened; it was nothing; you know how my temper can take over what I say. <i>(indicating the tavern)</i> Come here in the warmth. |
| Marcello | You're sick, a lunatic, filled with stubborn, troubling preconceptions! | Mimi | No, the moldy smell in there will choke me! |
| Mimi | <i>(to herself)</i> That will make him lose his temper. Ahime, he'll blame me. | Rodolfo | Ah, Mimi. <i>(taking her hands)</i> |
| | | Marcello | <i>(hearing Musetta laughing in the tavern)</i> That's Musetta laughing. Who is she laughing with? Ah, you flirt! I'll teach you! |
| | | Mimi | Goodbye. |
| | | Rodolfo | What? You're going? |
| | | Mimi | <i>Aria</i> Mimi is going back to her happy nest, That she left when she heard your call of love. She returns to weave false flowers! Goodbye - we part without bitterness. Listen, gather the few things I left scattered in your room. You'll find that gold ring in my drawer; and the book of prayers. |

Wrap everything in an apron and I will send someone for them . . .
Mind you, under the pillow is our pink bonnet.
If you want -- keep it as a memory of our love. . .
Goodbye - we part without bitterness.

Quartet

Rodolfo Then it's really over!
You're leaving, my little one?
Goodbye dreams of love!

Mimi Goodbye sweet mornings, rising together!

Rodolfo Goodbye, life of dreams . . .

Mimi Goodbye jealousies and rebukes!

Rodolfo Which one of your smiles would calm.

Mimi Goodbye suspicions . . .

Rodolfo Kisses . . .

Mimi Sharp bitterness . . .

Rodolfo Which I, as a true poet, rhymed with 'caresses'!

Together Alone in winter, causes one to die!

Mimi Alone.

Together While in spring, there is the sun for a companion.
(Musetta and Marcello are heard arguing)

Marcello What were you doing?
What were you saying?

Musetta What do you mean?

Marcello By the fire - with that grand gentleman?

Musetta What are you saying?

Mimi *(to Rodolfo, ignoring the quarreling lovers)*
No one is alone in April . . .

Marcello You blushed when you saw me come in.

Musetta That gentleman only asked:
"Do you like dancing, miss?"

Marcello Vain, frivolous flirt!

Rodolfo *(to Mimi, ignoring Musetta and Marcello)*
One can speak with lilies and roses . . .

Mimi And the sound of hatchlings in their nest . . .

Musetta Yes, I blushed and answered him:
"I would dance from evening to morning . . ."

Marcello You're not telling me everything.

Musetta I want my freedom!

Marcello I could strike you for saying that!
If I catch you flirting,
Mind you, some things I won't put up with.

Musetta Don't take that tone with me!
We're not married!
I detest lovers who behave like husbands!

Mimi & The fountains chatter, the breeze of evening

Rodolfo calms the suffering soul.

Marcello I won't be make a laughing stock!

Musetta I make love with whomever I please!

Marcello You vain, frivolous flirt! You're going! Good!
I'm the richer for it.

Musetta Musetta's leaving - yes!

Musetta & Marcello Get out!

Mimi & Rodolfo Do you want to wait until spring to separate?
Yes, we'll leave each other at the season of flowers.

Musetta Hack - housepainter!

Marcello Viper!

Musetta Toad!

Marcello Witch!

Mimi I wish this winter would last forever.

Act IV. The apartment of Act I

At that time, yes for some time, the friends lived alone. Musetta once again took up with a public official - for three or four months Marcello did not see her. And Mimi too -- Rodolfo had no word from her, except when he talked to himself about her. One day, Marcello secretly kissed a bunch of flowers, thinking of Musetta; and he saw Rodolfo hiding the bonnet - that rose colored bonnet - left behind by Mimi. 'Good', muttered Marcello, 'he is as miserable as I!' A gay life - and a terrible one. *From Scenes de la vie de Boheme by Henri Murger*

(Marcello is once again at his easel, and Rodolfo is seated at a table. They try to convince each other that they are busy working, but all they do is talk to each other)

Marcello She was in a carriage?

Rodolfo With a pair of horses and a coachman.
She waved and smiled at me.
"Why, Musetta!" I said to her:
"What of your heart?" And she replied:
"It doesn't beat, or I don't feel it . . .
Thanks to this rich velvet that covers it."

Marcello I am truly delighted to hear this.

Rodolfo *(to himself)*
Go on, you hypocrite. You laugh outside, but are consumed with rage inside.

Marcello Doesn't beat? Good! And I saw . . .

Rodolfo Musetta?

Marcello Mimi.

Rodolfo *(shuddering at first, then with composure)*
You saw her? Well fancy that.

Marcello She was in a carriage, dressed like a queen.

Rodolfo Hurrah! I am happy about it.

Marcello *(to himself)*
Liar. He's consumed with love.

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| Together | Back to work. <i>(they start back to work)</i> | | I am in a hurry. The King awaits me. |
| Rodolfo | What a terrible pen! | Marcello | Is there some plot? |
| Marcello | What a wretched brush! | Rodolfo, Marcello & Schaunard | Some mystery? |
| | <i>Duet</i> | Colline | The King has called me to the ministry. |
| Rodolfo | Oh Mimi, to return no more; Oh beautiful days gone by. Your tiny hands and fragrant hair . . . Your neck as pure as snow! Ah, Mimi, the love of my brief youth. | Rodolfo, Marcello & Schaunard | Good! |
| Marcello | I don't know how it is, but my brush Mixes colors and paints against my will. If I want to paint skies or landscapes, Or winters or springs, My brush draws two dark eyes for me, Then an alluring mouth; And out comes the face of Musetta once again With its charm, and its deceit. Meanwhile Musetta enjoys herself While my cowardly heart calls for her, And waits. | Colline | <i>(with feigned importance)</i> However, I will see Prime Minister Guizot! |
| | | Schaunard | <i>(to Marcello)</i> Hand me the goblet! |
| | | Marcello | Yes! Drink; I'm feasting. |
| | | Schaunard | <i>(with feigned solemnity)</i> If this noble company would permit me . . . |
| | | Rodolfo & Colline | <i>(stopping him)</i> Enough! |
| Rodolfo | And you, lovely bonnet that she hid under the pillow; you know all our happiness. Come, little bonnet, I place you on my heart, for love is dead. | Marcello | <i>(after having tasted the wine)</i> Weak! |
| Rodolfo | What time is it? | Colline | What a concoction! |
| Marcello | Time for dinner -- yesterday's! | Marcello | Get out! |
| Rodolfo | And Schaunard hasn't returned yet? <i>(Schaunard and Colline enter, carrying four loaves of bread)</i> | Colline | Give me the goblet! |
| Schaunard | Here we are! | Schaunard | <i>(feigning inspiration)</i> I'm inspired by the genius of song! |
| Rodolfo | Well? | Rodolfo, Marcello & Schaunard | No! |
| Marcello | <i>(with disdain)</i> Well? Only some bread? | Schaunard | Some choreography, then? |
| Colline | <i>(bringing out a herring)</i> It is a dish worthy of Demosthenes: A herring! | Rodolfo, Marcello & Schaunard | Yes! |
| Schaunard | Salted! | Schaunard | A dance, accompanied by song! |
| Colline | Dinner is on the table. <i>(they sit, pretending to enjoy a sumptuous banquet)</i> | Colline | Clear the halls! <i>(they move the furniture, preparing themselves for 'the ball')</i> |
| Marcello | This abundance is worthy of Carnival! | Colline | Gavotte. |
| Schaunard | <i>(putting Colline's hat on the table and placing a bottle of water in it)</i> Now to put the champagne on ice. | Marcello | Minuet. |
| | | Rodolfo | A little pavanne. |
| Rodolfo | <i>(to Marcello)</i> Choose, oh Baron -- trout or salmon? | Schaunard | Fandango! |
| Marcello | <i>(to Schaunard)</i> Duke -- would you like a tongue of parrot? | Colling | I propose the quadrille. |
| Schaunard | No, thank you -- it is too fattening. This evening I must go to the ball. <i>(Colline getting up from his chair)</i> | Rodolfo | Offer your hand to the ladies. |
| Rodolfo | <i>(to Colline)</i> You're full? | Colline | I'll call the dance. |
| Colline | <i>(with feigned solemnity)</i> | Schaunard | <i>(singing)</i> Lallera, lallera la . . . la |
| | | Rodolfo | <i>(gallantly to Marcello)</i> Charming little damsel . . . |
| | | Marcello | Observe propriety. I beg you. |

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| Colline | <i>(acting as ballet master)</i> Balancez! | Marcello | Nothing! |
| Schaunard | First the Rondo. | Musetta | No coffee? No wine? |
| Colline | No! You beast! | Marcello | Nothing! Ah! Such poverty! |
| Schaunard | What manners - like a lackey! | Schaunard | <i>(sadly to Colline)</i> In half an hour, she will be dead! |
| Colline | You insult me, if I'm not mistaken! <i>(taking the fireplace tongs)</i> Unsheathe your sword! | Mimi | I'm so cold . . . if I had a muff! These hands of mine; can they ever be warm? |
| Schaunard | <i>(takes the fireplace shovel)</i> Ready. Taste this! I want to drink your blood! | Rodolfo | Warm them here in mine! Quiet now; talking tires you so. |
| Colline | <i>(fighting a mock duel)</i> One of us will be disemboweled. | Mimi | I have a bit of a cough! But I am used to it. <i>(looking around, seeing everyone)</i> Good day Marcello; Schaunard, Colline, good day. All of you here, smiling at Mimi. |
| Schaunard | Get a stretcher ready. | Rodolfo | Don't try to talk. |
| Colline | Prepare the cemetery. <i>(while they 'duel', Rodolfo and Marcello dance around them, singing)</i> | Mimi | I'm speaking softly, don't worry. Marcello listen to me: She's very good, your Musetta. |
| Rodolfo & Marcello | While combat rages, the Rigadoon leaps and turns. <i>(the door flies open. Musetta, agitated, enters)</i> | Marcello | I know. |
| Marcello | Musetta! | Musetta | <i>(to Marcello; taking off her earrings)</i> Here . . . sell them and bring some medicine; and call for a doctor. |
| Musetta | Mimi is here -- she is very sick. | Rodolfo | Rest now. |
| Rodolfo | Where is she? | Mimi | You aren't leaving me? |
| Musetta | Climbing the stairs her strength failed her. | Rodolfo | No! No! |
| Rodolfo | <i>(running through the doorway)</i> Ah! | Musetta | <i>(to Marcello who is about to leave)</i> Listen! This may be the last time she asks for anything, poor thing! I'll go with you to buy a muff for her. |
| Schaunard | <i>(to Colline)</i> Move the cot closer. | Marcello | You are so good, my Musetta. |
| Rodolfo | <i>(to his friends, after setting Mimi on the cot)</i> There . . . Something to drink. <i>(Musetta gets some water)</i> | Colline | <i>Aria</i> <i>(taking off his overcoat)</i> Old coat, listen; I must stay behind while you return to the sacred mountain where I found you; Receive my thanks. Never did you bend your worn back to the rich and powerful. Rather, philosophers and poets passed through your pockets, as if they were peaceful grottoes. Now that happy days have fled, To you I bid farewell, my faithful friend. <i>(to Schaunard)</i> Schaunard, each of us, in our own way, should combine two acts of mercy; I sell my coat . . . and you, leave them here alone for awhile. <i>(they leave together)</i> |
| Mimi | Rodolfo. | | |
| Rodolfo | Quet now, rest. | | |
| Mimi | Oh my Rodolfo! Do you want me here with you? | | |
| Rodolfo | Ah! My Mimi -- always, always! | | |
| Musetta | <i>(quietly)</i> I heard that Mimi left the Viscount; That she was near death. Where could she have gone? I searched . . . Then I saw her passing by me in the street . . . Dragging herself. She said, "I can't bear anymore; I'm dying, I can feel it. I want to die with him! Maybe he is waiting for me . . ." | | |
| Mimi | I feel much better . . . | | |
| Musetta | ". . . Will you come with me, Musetta?" | Mimi | Are they gone? I pretended to be asleep because I wanted to be alone with you. I have so many things to say to you; or only one; but it is as big as the sea -- deep and infinite: You are my love, and my life. |
| Mimi | Let me look around. Ah, how good it is here. One is reborn. Once again I feel life here . . . No, you won't leave me again! | | |
| Rodolfo | Blessed words; you speak to me once again. | Rodolfo | Ah Mimi; my beautiful Mimi. |
| Musetta | What do you have here? | | |

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| Mimi | Am I still beautiful? | | What did the doctor say? |
| Rodolfo | Beautiful like the dawn . . . | Marcello | That he'll come. |
| Mimi | Your comparison is mistaken; you meant to say, "Beautiful like the sunset." They call me Mimi; why, I don't know. . . | Musetta | <i>(warming the phial over the lamp, almost unconsciously praying)</i> Blessed Mother, be merciful on this poor one, who must not die. <i>(to Marcello)</i> |
| Rodolfo | <i>(finishing her thought)</i> The singing swallow has returned to the nest. <i>(he takes the bonnet and hands it to her)</i> | | The lamp is flickering from the draft, bring a screen. <i>(Marcello complies)</i> Like that. <i>(resuming her prayer)</i> |
| Mimi | My bonnet . . . Ah! Do you remember the first time I came here? | | And that she may recover, Holy Mother; I am not worthy of forgiveness, But Mimi is an angel from Heaven. |
| Rodolfo | Do I remember . . . ? | | |
| Mimi | The fire had gone out . . . | Rodolfo | <i>(coming over to Musetta)</i> I still have hope. Do you think it's serious? |
| Rodolfo | You were so upset! Then you lost your key . . . | Musetta | I don't believe so. <i>(Schaunard has gone to the cot to see Mimi, then, quietly approached Marcello)</i> |
| Mimi | And you, groping, began looking for it. | | |
| Rodolfo | And I looked . . . and looked. | Schaunard | Marcello . . . she's gone. |
| Mimi | My dear sir, I can tell you now; I know you found it quickly, and hid it. | Colline | <i>(entering, gives some money to Musetta)</i> Musetta . . . for you. <i>(approaching Rodolfo)</i> How is she? |
| Rodolfo | I was just helping destiny. | Rodolfo | See? She's quiet not. <i>(he looks at Marcello who, filled with dismay, looks at him with profound pity)</i> |
| Mimi | The room was dark and you couldn't see me blushing. <i>(quoting Rodolfo)</i> "How cold your tiny hand is, come, let me warm it back to life." It was dark, and you took my hand. . . <i>(suddenly she is overcome with coughing)</i> | | What does this mean? Why are you looking like that? |
| Rodolfo | Oh! God! Mimi! | Marcello | Courage! |
| Schaunard | <i>(entering)</i> What's happened? | Rodolfo | <i>(realizing Mimi has expired, he runs to the cot)</i> Mimi! |
| Mimi | Nothing, I'm alright. | | |
| Rodolfo | Hush now, for pity's sake. | Curtain | |
| Mimi | Yes, yes, forgive me, now I'll be good. <i>(Musetta and Marcello enter with a muff and medicine)</i> | | |
| Musetta | <i>(to Rodolfo)</i> Is she asleep? | | |
| Rodolfo | Yes, she's resting. | | |
| Marcello | I've seen the doctor: he says he'll come. I told him to hurry. Here's the cordial. | | |
| Mimi | Who is it who's talking? | | |
| Musetta | Me --Musetta. | | |
| Mimi | <i>(holding the muff)</i> Oh, how soft and lovely. No more pale cold hands. The warmth of the muff will make them beautiful again. <i>(to Rodolfo)</i> Did you give it to me? | | |
| Musetta | <i>(preempting Rodolfo's reply)</i> Yes. | | |
| Mimi | You spend thrift! Thank you. But the cost . . . You're crying? I'm well now . . . No need to cry like this. <i>(dozing off little by little)</i> Here, love . . . always with you . . . The hands . . . warm . . . and . . . to sleep. | | |
| Rodolfo | <i>(to Marcello)</i> | | |