

# PUCCINI

## LA BOHEME

English Version by Donald Pippin

### ACT I

It is a cold, cold afternoon in early winter, Christmas Eve to be exact. Almost as cold, says Marcello, as the glacial void they call the heart of Musetta. More of that later. The tiny stove, clearly undernourished, a victim of slow starvation, has shamelessly reneged on its duty. No doubt everything flammable has found its way to the pawnshop, but there is one rather bulky item that no self-respecting pawnbroker would deign to consider -- a five-act drama by Rodolfo. Aha! Let there be fire! It can be safely said that never in theatrical history have five acts gone by so quickly. Never have lines of dialogue so glowed and sparkled. Seldom if ever have spectators wished so fervently that the play were longer.

But there is little time to shiver. Schaunard, the musician, returns in triumph, like Santa Claus, laden with firewood, wine, food, all manner of luxuries, thanks to the caprice of an eccentric English Lord who has paid him handsomely for a bizarre assignment, the entertainment of a dying parrot. These English. Among the roommates, share and share alike is evidently the policy. The fire is lit, money divided, and the happy go lucky *nouveau riche* are soon off to celebrate their new found wealth by dining out. Rodolfo will join them a little later on after finishing up some work -- a fateful decision.

While he is alone, grappling for inspiration, there is a gentle, hesitant knock at the door. The wind on the staircase has blown out a young lady's candle. If he would be so kind as to relight it . . . . . The rest is history.

### CAST OF CHARACTERS

Rodolfo, *a poet*

Marcello, *a painter*

Colline, *a scholar*

Schaunard, *a musician*

Benoit, *their landlord*

Mimi, *a seamstress*

Musetta, *a singer*

Alcindoro, *an elderly state councilor, and admirer of Musetta*

Shopkeepers, venders, parents, children, waiters, soldiers, *etc.*

Paris, circa 1830.

*Scene: A Parisian garret, obviously unheated. While Rodolfo peers thoughtfully out of the window, Marcello is busy at his easel, trying to ignore the cold.*

**MARCELLO:** Not the right day for painting this Red Sea of mine!  
Chilled by that water, looking on, I shiver.  
So in revenge, old Pharaoh I shall drown!  
And you?

**RODOLFO:** Over the roofs of Paris I see the sky  
Gray from countless smoking chimneys.  
Compare this stove of ours ---  
A lazy lout that never lifts a finger,  
And long retired, is living on the dole.

**MARCELLO:** With no fuel to feed on  
It dies of slow starvation.

**RODOLFO:** An extended vacation  
Of uncertain duration.

**MARCELLO:** Rodolfo, let me offer a deeply felt confession:  
I'm frozen solid.

**RODOLFO:** My friend, it's also my impression  
That I'm hardly in danger of melting.

**MARCELLO:** *(in alarm)*  
And my fingers are frosting,  
As if locked up inside of a freezer,  
Trapped in the glacial void they call  
The heart of Musetta.

**RODOLFO:** But love's a fire, implacable, fierce and cruel.

**MARCELLO:** And fleeting!

**RODOLFO:** Where the man is the fuel . . .

**MARCELLO:** . . . by the woman ignited.

**RODOLFO:** While he burns to a cinder. . . .

**MARCELLO:** She calmly pokes the ashes.

**RODOLFO:** And meanwhile here we shiver . . .

**MARCELLO:** Nearly dead of starvation.

**RODOLFO:** Let there be fire!

**MARCELLO:** The chair! Throw it upon the altar!

**RODOLFO:** *(after resisting Marcello's suggestion)* Eureka!

**MARCELLO:** A solution?

**RODOLFO:** *(producing a bulky manuscript)*  
Yes, a rare inspiration! Let art ignite the fire.

**MARCELLO:** By burning my painting?

**RODOLFO:** Lord! Spare us the awful aroma.  
But my drama!  
Its passionate pages will warm the heart.

**MARCELLO:** *(in mock horror)*  
Don't tell me you're planning to read it!

**RODOLFO:** No, the paper will crackle and crumble,  
And genius will rise to Olympus.  
A masterpiece lost, but no matter:  
We live for the moment!

**MARCELLO:** Profound!

**RODOLFO:** Beginning with Act One.

**MARCELLO:** Right!

**RODOLFO:** Rip it.

**MARCELLO:** And light it.

**RODOLFO:** Oh, heavenly heat!

**MARCELLO:** So heavenly sweet!

*Colline enters, carrying a bundle of books.*

**COLLINE:** You wretched sinners, tremble!  
For judgment day is dawning.

**On Christmas Eve the broker says  
Tonight no pawning.  
Do I see fire?**

**RODOLFO: Quiet, my play's in progress.**

**MARCELLO: A rouser! A play that glows and sparkles!**

**RODOLFO: Brilliant!**

**COLLINE: But all too brief.**

**RODOLFO: Brevity's back in fashion.**

**COLLINE: Encore, let's have another.**

**MARCELLO: This intermission seems interminable. Curtain!**

**RODOLFO: Act Two commences.**

**MARCELLO: *(to Colline)* Hush, not a whisper**

**COLLINE: hat warmth of feeling!**

**MARCELLO: Sparks of delight!**

**RODOLFO: Consumed by a slender flicker of fire,  
Two brave but ill-fated lovers expire.**

**COLLINE: The pages crackle.**

**MARCELLO: Ah! Sizzling passion!**

**RODOLFO: Three acts in one and the play is done.  
*(He tosses the three remaining acts into the fire.)***

**COLLINE: Thus is the action accelerated.**

**ALL THREE: Hoping for more, this play we applaud.**

**MARCELLO: Though now hanging on by a thread.**

**COLLINE: A play that was fatally flawed.**

**MARCELLO: Declining and drooping, now dead.**

**COLL. & MAR.:** Fiasco! The author clearly a fraud!

*Porters enter laden with packages, to the joy and astonishment of all.*

**VARIOUSLY SHOUTED:** Firewood! Burgundy! Cigars!

**ALL THREE:** Food and wine and fine tobacco  
From the gods on Christmas Eve!

*Schaunard makes a triumphant entry.*

**SCHAUNARD:** Last minute reprieve from the National Bank of France.  
*He scatters coins on the floor.*

**COLLINE:** The gods have gone crazy.

**MARCELLO:** No doubt counterfeit.

**SCHAUNARD:** You donkey! You question the king on the coin!

**MARCELLO:** His Majesty's face is a good guarantee.

**ALL FOUR:** Our Louis Phillippe's good enough for me.

**SCHAUNARD:** As you will see, behind the gold and silver  
There lies a noble story.

**MARCELLO:** Let us get the stove going.

**COLLINE:** Then I might begin thawing.

**SCHAUNARD:** *(trying to continue his story)*

A mad but rich English peer ---

Lord or Milord, whatever ---

Required a musician. I scurried . . . .

**MARCELLO:** Set the table! I'm ravenous.

**RODOLFO:** Which is the food?

**COLLINE:** There!

**MARCELLO:** Here!

**SCHAUNARD:** I was presented. Accepted, I inquired,  
When do I start performing?

**COLLINE:** Bacon and sausage.

**MARCELLO:** Preserves and pastry.

**SCHAUNARD:** *(struggling on)* Once presented, accepted, I inquire,  
So when do I start performing?  
He answers, “Why not now?”  
With that, turning, he points to a mangy parrot  
Green and red, calmly adding,  
“Play your flute until the old bird is dead.”  
So I began, and played three days on end.  
Impatient, slyly adopting the role of Latin lover,  
The maid I soon won over.

*Throughout Schaunard’s narrative, his audience has by no means stopped to listen.*

**RODOLFO:** Let there be luxury, feasting and revelry!

**COLLINE:** Chile con carne!

**MARCELLO** Light up the candles! No cloth over the table?

**RODOLFO:** *(pulling out a newspaper from Schaunard’s overcoat pocket)*  
Here you are!

**MAR. & COLL.** Aha! *Le Figaro!*

**RODOLFO:** What could be better?

While eating, you digest the daily news.

**SCHAUNARD:** *(continuing)* A dose of hemlock we applied,  
Some hemlock sprinkled sparsely  
Upon a sprig of parsley.  
And Polly opened wide.  
A bonified philosopher,  
Like Socrates, she died.

**COLLINE:** Who?

**SCHAUNARD:** You haven’t heard a word that I’ve been saying!  
Come, clear the table. No!  
This rich reserve of fabulous fare we’re saving  
For days ahead when rations may be meager.  
Why dine inside on a night of celebration,

While in the Latin Quarter we can find  
A menu that defies imagination?  
Take in the smell of apple fritters  
As Paris in its glory glitters.  
Girls in abundance. passionate and eager . . .

**THE OTHERS:** Christmas comes but once a year.

**SCHAUNARD:** Tested for prudence  
By surrounding students.  
To share a smidgen  
Of good old time religion,  
Like true Parisians, we are dining out!

*A bottle is uncorked. From outside, a couple of loud knocks at the door.*

**BENOIT:** *(from outside)* May I?

**MARCELLO:** Who is there?

**BENOIT:** Benoit!

**MARCELLO:** Our pesky old landlord!

**SCHAUNARD:** Have the door bolted!

**COLLINE:** *(calling out)* Nobody home!

**SCHAUNARD:** We're out!

**BENOIT:** One little word.

**SCHAUNARD:** One only.

*After a brief consultation the door is opened and Benoit enters.*

**BENOIT:** Rent!

**MARCELLO:** My friend! Won't you sit down, sir?

**RODOLFO:** A chair.

**BENOIT:** Too obliging. I merely . . . .

**SCHAUNARD:** Sit!

**MARCELLO:** Some wine?

**BENOIT:** Thank you.

**ROD. & COLL.** A toast!

**SCHAUNARD:** Drink!

**RODOLFO:** Your health!

**BENOIT:** I am here because you owe me . . . .

**MARCELLO:** Good to see you!

**BENOIT:** And therefore . . . .

**MARCELLO:** (*bottle in hand*) Let's have another.

**BENOIT:** Gladly.

**ROD. & COLL.** To you! To you!

**ALL FOUR:** Long life, prosperity!

**BENOIT:** I'm here because three months ago you promised . . . .  
Word of honor!

**MARCELLO:** My word's as good as gold, sir.  
(*He indicates the money on the table.*)

**RODOLFO:** (*stunned*) What's up?

**SCHAUNARD:** (*aghast*) Are you crazy?

**MARCELLO:** (*ignoring them*) Your money. So now let us relax.  
Stay a while and get acquainted.  
Tell me, what is your age?  
So much get up and go!]

**BENOIT:** Heavens! Why do you ask?

**RODOLFO:** Our own age, I would guess.

**BENOIT:** Older . . . .older by far.

**COLLINE:** He did mean more or less.

**MARCELLO:** Monday midnight in a murky tavern  
You were seen making love.

**BENOIT:** Me?

**MARCELLO:** As they say, in *flagrante delicto*. Confess!

**BENOIT:** Well, yes, but. . . .

**MARCELLO:** She was gorgeous!

**BENOIT:** (*gathering steam and becoming progressively more tipsy*) A beauty!

**ROD. & SCHAU.:** You rascal! You devil!

**COLLINE:** Casanova!

**MARCELLO:** Superhuman! Herculean!

**RODOLFO:** Women take warning.

**MARCELLO:** Mature but hardly haggard,  
With fiery passion our hero won her over.

**COLLINE:** The rogue!

**BENOIT:** I'm old, but who would know it?

**ROD., SCHAU., COLL.** Put to the test, our hero proudly swaggered.

**MARCELLO:** To him she yielded, as you might have guessed.

**BENOIT:** Backward and shy when young,  
I've turned into a tiger.

Oh, yes! And for hanky panky

I like my ladies like so:

Not meager skin and bone,

Not too fat nor too lean,

Betwixt and between,

Neither scrawny nor bloated,

No rounded moon but ample.

No, no, no!

Scrawny women are cross and cranky,

A fact I long have noted.

They're the bane of your life!

For example, my wife . . . .

**MARCELLO:** A married man, stained with lust!

Sir, have you no shame?

**OTHERS:** For shame!

**RODOLFO:** You dare defile and pollute our respectable home?

**OTHERS:** Out!

**MARCELLO:** We'll have to fumigate the air.

**COLLINE:** Shoo the lecher out of here.

**SCHAUNARD:** His flagrant immorality!

**BENOIT:** *(stunned)* I say . . . . I say . . . .

**ROD., MAR., COLL.** Outrageous! Outrageous! Outrageous!

**SCHAUNARD:** Send him running!

**BENOIT:** Sirs, forgive me!

**OTHERS:** Off! Be on your way! On your way!  
Do not return till you're ready to repent.

*They all show him out the door. Marcello returns.*

**MARCELLO:** That should settle the rent.

**SCHAUNARD:** A cafe at the Latin Quarter awaits.

**MARCELLO:** Money to squander!

**SCHAUNARD:** Let us divvy the loot.

**ROD. & COLL.** Divvy up! Divvy up!

**MARCELLO:** *(handing Colline a mirror)*  
There we're bound to meet beauty made to order.  
Your hairy chin compels me to be candid:  
Beards nowadays are shorter.

**COLLINE:** I'll celebrate our recent turn of luck  
With scissor, comb and razor.  
Though a heavy price to pay,  
I'll make the sacrifice demanded.

**EACH IN TURN:** Come on! Come on! Come on!]\

**RODOLFO:** I'm staying. I must complete an article  
For something called *The Busy Beaver*.

**MARCELLO:** Then hurry!

**RODOLFO:** This I can finish in no time at all.

**COLLINE:** We shall be waiting down in the hall.

**MARCELLO:** Delay we're not condoning.

**RODOLFO:** Five minutes only.

**SCHAUNARD:** Give your beaver a quick and painless death.

**MARCELLO:** *(from outside)* Watch for the stairs,  
And hold on to the railing.

**RODOLFO:** *(calling)* Walk slowly!

**COLLINE:** As dark as Hades!

**SCHAUNARD:** That skinflint landlord!

*Sound of someone falling.*

**COLLINE:** Now I've done it!

**RODOLFO:** Colline, are you dead?

**COLLINE:** No, not quite.

**MARCELLO:** I made it!

*Rodolfo sits down to write, then impatiently tears up the page and throws down his pen.*

**RODOLFO:** No inspiration.

*A timid knock at the door is heard. Who's there?*

**MIMI:** *(from outside)* Excuse me.

**RODOLFO:** *(getting up)* A woman . . . *(He opens the door.)*

**MIMI:** I'm sorry. The wind blew out my candle.

**RODOLFO:** May I? . . . .

**MIMI:** Oh, would you?

**RODOLFO:** Do come inside a moment.

**MIMI:** I'm intruding.

**RODOLFO:** Not at all. Please!

*Mimi comes in and is suddenly seized with a coughing spell.*

**RODOLFO:** Are you unwell?

**MIMI:** No . . . . Nothing.

**RODOLFO:** You seem unsteady.

**MIMI:** Climbing stairs . . . .Out of breath . . . .

*She faints, dropping both the candle and the key that she has been holding. Rodolfo helps her to a chair.*

**RODOLFO:** If only I could help her! Perhaps . . . .

*He gets some water and sprinkles a few drops on her face, gazing with deep interest. (Her face so pale, so fragile!) Recuperated?*

**MIMI:** Yes.

**RODOLFO:** Here it's cold as ice.  
Get warm over by the fire.  
Still better . . . a glass of wine.

**MIMI:** Thank you.

**RODOLFO:** To you.

**MIMI:** Just a little.

**RODOLFO:** Like so?

**MIMI:** Perfect.

**RODOLFO:** (So young and so lovely!)

**MIMI:** Now if you'll kindly relight my candle,  
I'm fully recovered.

**RODOLFO:** Such a hurry!

*Seeing the candlestick on the floor, he picks it up, relights it and silently hands it to Mimi.*

**MIMI:** Yes. Thank you for your kindness.

**RODOLFO:** More than welcome.       *(She leaves.)*

**MIMI:** *(from outside)* Oh! How awkward! How clumsy!  
The key was in my pocket.  
Where could I have dropped it?

**RODOLFO:** Why stand out there and shiver?  
The wind is too much for your candle.  
*(The candle indeed goes out.)*

**MIMI:** Oh, heavens! Please light it up again.  
*In his haste to reach her, Rodolfo's candle also goes out. The room is dark.*

**RODOLFO:** Oh, Lord! Mine is out as well.

**MIMI:** Ah! How'll we ever find the key?

**RODOLFO:** Total dark!

**MIMI:** What a bother!

**RODOLFO:** We'll have to hunt.

**MIMI:** You've a tiresome, intrusive neighbor.

**RODOLFO:** What are you saying?

**MIMI:** You've a careless, tiresome neighbor.

**RODOLFO:** Not at all what I was thinking.

*Both are on the floor, searching for the missing key.*

**MIMI:** Somewhere!

**RODOLFO:** Somewhere!

**MIMI:** Where can it be?

*Rodolfo finds the key, gives out an exclamation, but then checks himself and puts the key in his pocket.*

**RODOLFO:** Ah!

**MIMI:** Did you find it?

**RODOLFO:** No.

**MIMI:** You sounded . . .

**RODOLFO:** Still not a clue.

**MIMI:** Somewhere!

**RODOLFO:** Somewhere!

*As both are searching, their hands meet.*

**RODOLFO:**



With just a candle,  
No point in looking further.  
But we're in luck, for the moon will be shining,  
Due any moment to peer through my window.  
Be patient for a little.  
We can talk a while together,  
And heart to heart,  
Share and get to know each other.  
Shall we?

But how to start? I am a poet.  
My occupation? Writing.  
How do I manage? Somehow!

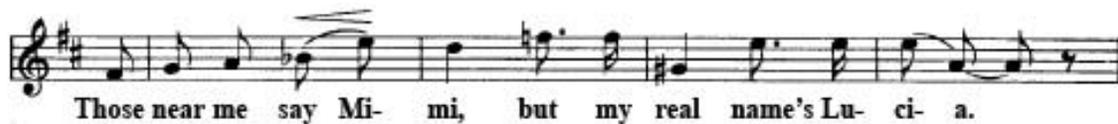
I'm often short of money,  
But I have poems to squander  
Like the lord of the manor.  
In dreams and gorgeous fantasies.  
In castles built of air,  
I am a multi-millionaire.

Unwarned, I now discover  
That my heart has been plundered  
By two gentle eyes that sparkle.  
My dreams, my treasured jewels,  
Stolen while I stood gazing,  
Goals and idle ambitions  
Gone in a flash of light!

The loss has been my blessing:  
Replacing the frenzy and fever,  
New hope has taken over.

But enough of my story!  
Do tell me yours.  
By what name shall I call you?  
I long to hear. . . .

MIMI: Well . . . .



My story's short and simple.  
With needle, thread and a thimble  
I embroider . . . . Quiet and contented,  
I sew my lilies and budding roses.

I'm most at home with flowers  
And their magical beauty  
That speaks to me of love, of joy and springtime,  
Of dreaming and the stuff that dreams are made on.  
I suppose some would laugh and call it childish,  
But you wouldn't? . . . .

RODOLFO: No.

MIMI: I'm often called Mimi,  
Though I can't say why.  
I live alone, and cook my simple supper,  
Attending mass but rarely,

Yet to our Lord I pray.  
Though alone, not unhappy,  
And from my tiny garret window overlooking Paris  
I see clear sky.

When ice and snow are thawing,  
When days begin to mellow,  
Mine is the warming kiss of April, so tender!  
Mine are the first rays of sunshine!  
I watch as the rose starts to open  
Slowly petal by petal.  
How sweet to breathe the perfume of a flower!  
The flowers I fondly sew,  
My embroidered flowers  
Are dear, but have no fragrance.

Aside from this, my life is unexciting.  
I am simply a neighbor  
Dropping by to interrupt your writing.

*Rodolfo's three friends call impatiently from outside.*

**SCHAUNARD:** Hey, Rodolfo!

**COLLINE:** Rodolfo!

**MARCELLO:** Come on! Where are you? You loafer!

**COLLINE:** You illiterate!

**SCHAUNARD:** Take your time, no hurry.

*Rodolfo speaks to them through the window which he has opened, letting in a flood of moonlight.*

**RODOLFO:** I've a few more lines to finish.

**MIMI:** Who are they?

**RODOLFO:** My buddies.

**SCHAUNARD:** Anytime tomorrow.

**MARCELLO:** There all alone, still slaving.

**RODOLFO:** You're mistaken. Far from lonely!  
Go on to the cafe and grab a table.  
We'll join you later.

**THE THREE:** *(as they depart)* Ho ho! Ho ho! Ho ho!  
Thus we discreetly fade into the night.

We go, we go, we go . . . .

**MARCELLO:** So love can come to light.

**RODOLFO:** *(alone with Mimi, whose face is in a halo of moonlight)*  
You adorable darling!

**MARCELLO:** *(outside)* So love has come to light!

**RODOLFO:** Could I be dreaming?  
Your lovely face made magic by the moon!  
No fleeting phantom! A dream that must go on,  
Forever on and on!

So enthralled, yes, overcome  
By a fire so tender!  
Trembling, I gaze at you,  
And overpowered, in a daze I surrender,  
A captive slave of love.

**MIMI:** So enthralled, yes, overcome  
By fire so fierce and yet so tender!  
Trembling, I gaze at you,  
And overpowered, I surrender,  
A captive slave of love. *They kiss.*

**MIMI:** No . . .no, not yet!

**RODOLFO:** Be mine!

**MIMI:** Your buddies are waiting.

**RODOLFO:** You send me away already?

**MIMI:** I would like . . . .How to say it?

**RODOLFO:** Speak.

**MIMI:** You could take me along.

**RODOLFO:** Why, Mimi! We'd be so warm and cozy where we are.  
Outside is freezing.

**MIMI:** I'll be warm if near you.

**RODOLFO:** Maybe later?

**MIMI:** *(mischievously)* No telling!

**RODOLFO:** Come, give me your arm, my darling.

**MIMI:** I cannot but obey.

**RODOLFO:** Oh, say again . . . .

**MIMI:** I love you!       *(They slowly leave.)*

**BOTH:** *(from outside)* My love! My love!

## ACT II

From the moonlit garret, Rodolfo and Mimi in a state of blissful trance have drifted out into the night to join Rodolfo's roommates at the popular Cafe Momus in the Latin Quarter where all of Paris seems to have turned out to celebrate Christmas Eve. Venders of everything from exotic fruit, such as pineapple, oranges and bananas, to puppies and parrots; children clamoring for toys; parents and nannies struggling valiantly to keep them in tow; spectators out to enjoy the parade of Parisians on display; young men exploring for adventure and romance; young women eager to attract their attention.

The roommates are flush with excitement at their unexpected wealth which seems destined to last about as long as Rodolfo's ill-fated five-act drama. But what a delightful glow, what a delicious tingle of warmth it gives off before it, too, burns itself out! As Rudolfo picks out a pretty pink bonnet for Mimi, the mood of bliss shared by the two lovers is barely disturbed by a brief hint that he is already somewhat susceptible to the disease of jealousy.

And here we meet Musetta at her most outrageous, and it becomes evident that there is indeed fire beneath the ice. The love affair of Marcello and Musetta is far from over, to the chagrin of the rich and elderly admirer and escort whom she is frankly trying to shake off.

In short, a joyous scene for all concerned. Well, maybe one exception -- this same elderly admirer, who discovers too late that it is he who foots the bill.

*Scene: The Latin Quarter, with varied shops, the Cafe Momus, and throngs of people out celebrating Christmas Eve, including our five friends.*

**VENDERS:** Bananas, strawberries, peaches and cherries!  
Pineapple, pastry and custard.  
Roast beef and mustard.  
Toast hot and buttered!

**THE CROWD:** All of Paris carousing!  
All of Paris! Old and young.  
Hold on to me, stay closer. Take my hand.

**CHILDREN:** Try and catch me. Bet you can't!

**VENDERS:** Have a pastry, very tasty.  
Fine peanut brittle. Eggs from the griddle.  
Popovers! Your favorite savories!  
Fresh from the ovens, blueberry muffins,  
Rock bottom prices.

**CHILDREN:** I want a soda, strawberry ices!

**ADULTS:** Never before such a throng!  
Get a move on, come along.  
You! Pay attention.

**CHILDREN:** Marshmallows toasted! Chewy tutti frutti!

**VENDERS:** Best in the city, creamy almond butter!  
Buy tutti frutti, lime in soda water.

**AT THE CAFE:** Hey, garcon! Say, garcon! Over here!  
Waiter! Waiter! A beer!  
Waiter, a beer and a glass. You there!

**ADULTS:** Sheer pandemonium! Stay close and hold my hand.

**CHILDREN:** Look, cherry tarts, lemon pie, marzipan!  
Buy me some candy.  
Whipped cream and three layer cake!

**ADULTS:** Emma! Come when I call you.  
My feet are starting to ache.

**VENDERS:** Cabbage and carrots! Puppies and parrots!

**CHILDREN:** Puppies and parrots, oh buy me a dog!

**ADULTS:** Far too crowded. Come along.

**SCHAUNARD:** *(trying out a trumpet)*  
This you call a "D"? . . . Definitely sharp.  
But I'm not one to carp.

**COLLINE:** *(handing his overcoat to a seamstress)*  
It needs some patching,  
The coat and owner matching.

**RODOLFO:** *(with Mimi)* Come on.

**MIMI:** To buy a pretty bonnet?

**RODOLFO:** Stay close to me forever.

**MIMI:** You're all I've wanted.

**BOTH:** Come on.

**MARCELLO** I'm strong and sturdy, talented and smart.  
Which of you ladies would ensnare my heart?

**VENDERS:** Halibut . . . Melons . . . Hot buttered rum.

**MARCELLO:** *(approaching a lady of the streets)*

So how about it?

My virgin soul, your face so fair,

Together we should make the perfect pair.

**VENDERS:** Hot buttered rum.

**SCHAUNARD:** Some with giddy expectations

Look for lasting joys

In spectacle and noise,

Seeking soul satisfaction

In mere distraction.

**SOPRANOS:** Laces, ribbons, ruffles!

Caramels and chocolate truffles!

**BASSES:** Lovely corsages.

**COLLINE:** *(rushing in, greatly excited)*

Out of print, and in fact unique,

Here's a grammar of early Greek!

**SCHAUNARD:** *(with more than a hint of sarcasm)* Fascinating!

**MARCELLO:** I'm starving!

**COLLINE & SCHAUNARD:** Rodolfo?

**MARCELLO:** Gone shopping for a bonnet.

**RODOLFO:** *(returning with Mimi)*

Come, my dear, they wait impatiently.

**MIMI:** Does the pink go well with my complexion?

**RODOLFO:** The color suits you to perfection.

**BASSES:** Whiskey and brandy!

**CHILDREN:** Pink cotton candy!

**BASSES:** Wine for the table! Look for the label.

**AT THE CAFE:** Over here . . . Another beer. . . .  
Right away . . . Right away . . . .

**MIMI:** That lovely corral necklace . . . .

**RODOLFO:** I've an uncle, rich and feeble.  
Soon to pay his debt to nature,  
And when he goes,  
I'll buy you ten of those.

**SOPRANOS:** The streets are overflowing,  
A crowd that keeps on growing.

**TENORS:** You children, mind your manners.  
Converging from all corners.

**VENDERS:** *(echoed by children)*  
Almonds and walnuts! Strawberry shortcake!  
Flowers for ladies.

**SOPRANOS:** I need some room for breathing.

**TENORS:** Cafe Momus is near. Thank heaven, here we are!

**CHILDREN:** Dates and bananas and hot macaroons!

**VENDERS:** Favorite savories, bagels and buns!

**RODOLFO:** You're flirting?

**MIMI:** Are you jealous?

**RODOLFO:** A man so happy tends to grow uneasy.

**MIMI:** Are you happy now?

**RODOLFO:** I'm in seventh heaven! And you?

**MIMI:** In heaven!

**COLLINE:** People in droves are like a herd of cattle.

**SCHAUNARD:** When I go out for dining  
I need room for reclining.

**MARCELLO:** *(to waiter)* The best that your kitchen has to offer! Pronto!

**SCHAUNARD:** A banquet!

**STUDENTS:** Let's take a seat. Come on, come on!

**PARPIGNOL:** *(from outside)*  
Toys for all from your friend Parpignol!

**RODOLFO:** *(joining the others)* Two places.

**COLLINE:** So you made it.

**RODOLFO:** Yes, here we are.  
Meet dear Mimi, creator of flowers,  
A gift the gods might envy.  
Let her complete the circle,  
For while I am only a poet,  
She is the source of poetry.  
Lyrics abound here in my brain,  
But from her fingers violets bloom.  
And from our hearts united  
Rapture and love blossom again.

**MARCELLO:** *(with mock reverence)* Worthy of Keats or Dante!

**COLLINE:** *Digna est intrari.*

**SCHAUNARD:** Must you converse in Latin?

**COLLINE:** You prefer Greek or Hebrew?

**PARPIGNOL:** Toys for all from your friend Parpignol!

**COLLINE:** *(to waiter)* Salami!

**CHILDREN:** Parpignol, Parpignol, Parpignol!  
Here is Parpignol, Parpignol, Parpignol!  
Bringing all anyone could want.  
I want the great big battleship.  
Mommy, buy me the flute!  
That hobby horse with riding whip!  
And the knife is a beaut!

**SCHAUNARD:** *(to waiter)* Roasted suckling.

**MARCELLO:** Breast of turkey.

**SCHAUNARD:** Rhenish wine.

**COLLINE:** Plain old burgundy.

**SCHAUNARD:** Lobster, please, with lots of butter.

**MOTHERS:** You naughty rascals, mind or you'll be sorry!  
Oh, why provoke me? Why be such a bother?  
Behave, before I have to tell your father.  
Long after bedtime, home for you and hurry!  
You heard me . . . It's home and bed for you, so hurry!  
I warn you!

**BOY:** (*whimpering*) Let me have the drum, oh please!

**RODOLFO:** (*to Mimi*) So name your heart's desire.

**MIMI:** A salad.

**SCHAUNARD:** (*to waiter*) Make it special, for the lady.

**CHILDREN:** Follow Parpignol! Rat-a-tat! Rub-a-dub!

**MARCELLO:** So Mimi, you must tell us in detail  
Of your present from Rodolfo.

**MIMI:** He bought for me a lovely bonnet  
He himself selected,  
The style and color I have always wanted.  
The perfect present, partially  
Because so unexpected.  
He read my mind; I never even hinted!  
And he who delves into the heart  
Is born to be the lover  
For whom I've waited.

**SCHAUNARD:** He's been through basic training.

**COLLINE:** His school was love, where he graduated  
*Magna cum laude.*

**SCHAUNARD:** There he was one of those over-achievers.

**MARCELLO:** Dear child, on rosy dreams so intoxicated!  
(*to Mimi*) Still unaware of love's subversive fevers.

**RODOLFO:** The most exalted poetry created  
Immortalizes lunatics and lovers.

**MIMI:** To be in love is like the taste of honey, Only sweeter!

**MARCELLO:** I happen to differ. Not honey, but hemlock.

**MIMI:** *(to Rodolfo)* Oh, dear! He's offended.

**RODOLFO:** Not anger, but despair.

**SCHAUNARD & COLLINE:** A toast to the future!

**MARCELLO:** I'll drink to that!

**TUTTI:** Forget the past! For lasting love, A cheer! A cheer!

**MARCELLO:** *(catching sight of Musetta, who enters with Alcindoro in tow)*  
I'll drink though I choke on it. Viper!

**OTHERS:** Ah! Musetta!

**SHOPWOMEN:** Look! Her! No! Yes! Her! Musetta!  
Lucky lady! Now upgraded!

**ALCINDORO:** *(panting, out of breath)*

Am I your flunkey?

Running this way and that

Like some acrobat!

No, it has to stop. It has got to stop.

**MUSETTA:** *(as if calling a puppy)*

Here, Lulu. Here, Lulu.

**SCHAUNARD:** Hopping around, the old goat is sweating.

**MUSETTA:** Sit, Lulu.

**ALCINDORO:** What! Here outside? Me?

Spare me that ghastly nickname

Until I am alone with you.

**MUSETTA:** You tell me what to do?

**COLLINE:** *(observing Alcindoro)*

Behind the mask, a Satan.

**MARCELLO:** *(bitterly)* Making off with the virgin.

**MIMI:** Her attire is gorgeous.

**RODOLFO:** Venus, of course, goes naked.

**MIMI:** Do you know who she is?

**MARCELLO:** Put the question to me.  
Though her name is Musetta,  
Medusa would be better.

**MUSETTA:** (Marcello has noticed,  
Pretending not to --- the coward.  
And Schaunard is laughing.  
How they ruffle my feathers!  
Let them see what I'm like:  
I can claw, I can strike.  
But it must be deferred  
While stuck with this old bird.  
Or must it?)

**MARCELLO:** (*to Mimi*) The art of flirtation  
Is her chosen vocation.  
Blown about like a feather,  
Inconstant as the weather,  
A man-eating tiger,  
See her prowl on the quiet,  
Her favorite diet  
The heart!  
The heart she devours!  
And she began with mine.  
(*concealing his pain*) Say, pass along the wine.

**MUSETTA:** Hey, over here! Hey, over here!  
Waiter, look at this plate, absolutely filthy!  
(*She throws it to the ground.*)

**ALCINDORO:** No, Musetta! Temper, temper!  
Quiet, quiet! Try to be a lady.

**MUSETTA:** (*looking at Marcello*) Not even turning . . .  
Still ignoring, driving me crazy on purpose!

**COLLINE:** The potage is poetic.

**SCHAUNARD:** The wine a draft of nectar!

**ALCINDORO:** Said to whom?

**MUSETTA:** To the waiter. You object?  
I'll behave to suit my pleasure.  
I don't need your permission.  
What a bore!

**ALCINDORO:** Not so loud! Keep it down, keep it down.

**SOPRANOS:** See who's seated over there,  
Oh, sure enough, Musetta.

**TENORS:** With the moldy millionaire,  
Of course, our own Musetta.

**SOPRANOS:** Yes, our own Musetta.

**MUSETTA:** (Can he be jealous of this old mummy?  
Let's see if the charm I wielded before  
Has still some power over him.)

**ALCINDORO:** My reputation! . . . Be quiet and behave!

**SCHAUNARD:** The encounter is cosmic!

**MUSETTA:** (*confronting Marcello*) So you ignore me?

**ALCINDORO:** (*thinking that she is addressing him*)  
Can't you see that I'm ordering?

**SCHAUNARD:** A misreading already.

**COLLINE:** Start counting.

**RODOLFO:** (*to Mimi*) No need for me to say it,  
But such behavior I could never pardon.

**MIMI:** But I adore you! I love you so completely,  
How can you even speak of pardon?

**SCHAUNARD:** She teases one to tantalize the other.

**COLLINE:** Marcello understands;  
Yet he is putty in her pretty hands.

**MUSETTA:** But your heart I hear pounding,  
Hear it pounding and throbbing.

**ALCINDORO:** Softer, softer!

**MUSETTA:** (*obviously directing her attentions to Marcello*)



Toast of the town, a lady fond of pleasure now and then,  
I stroll about at leisure.  
Eager, with eyes aglow,  
Men look me up and down,  
Men look me up and down, top to toe.

**MARCELLO:** (*to friends*) Hold on to me and don't let go.

**ALCINDORO:** Don't you care what people say?

**MUSETTA:** The unspoken longing, the subtle interplay,  
Like champagne I sip and savor,  
And slowly magnetize the would-be lover,  
Overcome with desire.  
The surging fire, the ignited ember  
Of throbbing fever  
I live to inspire!

**ALCINDORO:** A song so improper! But how can I stop her?

**MUSETTA:** You know as well,  
With so much to remember,  
So many times tormented ---  
However hard you try to stay away,  
However hard you try,  
You will return, come what may.

**ALCINDORO:** What on earth will people say?

**MIMI:** Her song reveals  
That inwardly she suffers,  
In love head over heels.  
(She is in love head over heels,  
Head over heels in love.)

**RODOLFO:** Marcello gave his heart,  
But the fantasy fell apart  
When she gave up rags for riches.

**SCHAUNARD:** (And his love is far from dead.)

**COLLINE:** (Who can say what lies ahead?)

**SCHAUNARD:** (He was but a mere rehearsal  
For the man that had it all.)

**COLLINE:** (Into a pit so universal  
May Colline never fall!)

**ALCINDORO:** Keep it down! Quiet, quiet!

**MUSETTA:** (Ah, Marcello struggles,  
But soon will surrender.)  
(*to him directly*) However hard you try,  
You'll return, come what may.

(*to Alcindoro*) Sir, I shall do what gives me pleasure,  
As I've said to you before.  
What a bore! What a bore! What a bore!

**MIMI:** he clearly suffers,  
Pretending not to care,  
I fear that love gone awry  
Has led her to despair.  
Poor wretched lovers!  
Their pain I seem to share.  
It's all too clear,  
She's in love, and with Marcello.

**COLLINE:** To her beauty I'm not blinded;  
Yes, I could fall for her.  
But I need not be reminded,  
Tobacco I prefer.  
My pipe, though, I prefer,  
With my Cato and Catullus.

**RODOLFO:** When trod upon and then supplanted,  
No love can endure.  
Reduced to rubble,  
There's no happy cure.  
Disdained, tormented,  
Love fades into shadow;  
Gone is the allure.

**SCHAUNARD:** Though resistant, he's a sucker for a song.  
Our friend will soon surrender;  
He'll not hold out for long.  
(*to Colline*) If a charming girl in satin

Were to wink and smile at you,  
You would toss away your Latin  
And behave as others do.

MUSETTA: (From this deadbeat I must get my freedom.) Ow!

ALCINDORO: What now?

MUSETTA: Such a pain, I cannot bear it!

ALCINDORO: Where?

MUSETTA: My foot. Pull it, yank it! Break the laces!  
Get it off me! Nearby's a good shoemaker.  
Hurry, please, sir! I need another pair.  
How agonizing! Tighter than a wheel of torture.

MARCELLO: Love of my life, no, no!  
I've not forgotten the days of carefree ecstasy!  
Should you come knocking at my door,  
How gladly I would open as before!

MUSETTA: (*handing him her slipper*) What relief! So here you are!  
Right away, take it! Right away, go!

SCH. & COLL. (The performance of an artist!)  
Prize display of an artist!

ALCINDORO: What on earth will people say?  
My position . . . This could lead to gossip, to scandal!  
All right, I'll go! (*He hurries off.*)

MUSETTA: Marcello!

MARCELLO: Musetta! (*They embrace passionately.*)

SCHAUNARD: What a touching finale!

*The waiter returns with the bill.)*

MAR., SCHAU., COLL. The bill!

SCHAUNARD: Not already!

COLLINE: The bitter reckoning.

SCHAUNARD: Let's see!

ROD., COLL. Robbery!

ROD., COLL., SCHAU. Out with the money!

**SCHAUNARD:** Rodolfo, Marcello and you ---Colline?

**MARCELLO:** Broke as a beggar.

**SCHAUNARD:** What?

**RODOLFO:** And I am down to pennies.

**OTHERS:** Pennies! And nothing more?

**SCHAUNARD:** *(with horror, after frantically searching through his pockets)*  
My purse has disappeared!

**MUSETTA:** *(calmly in command, to waiter)*  
Bring my own bill, if you would.  
Thank you. I want the two bills added together.  
When he returns, my escort of course will pay.

**OTHERS:** Yes, he will pay!

**MARCELLO:** Her escort!  
**MUSETTA:** He'll find where he was seated  
A note of thanks for having treated.

**THE FOUR FRIENDS:** Here come the military!  
As people push and shove,  
We shall have his ladylove  
Concealed, cut off and surrounded.  
The fool will be confounded.  
Scamper, scamper! Hurry!

*(During this scene a crowd has gathered, eagerly awaiting the arrival of the military on parade.)*

**CROWD:** The military! Coming toward us, but from where?  
Over there. here they come from over there.  
No! Over here! Clear the passage.

**BOYS:** I want to see! I want to hear!

**CHILD:** Mommy, I want to see.

**MAMA:** Stay close, hold on to me.

**CHILD:** Papa, I want to hear.

**MAMA:** You heard him say stand clear.

**CHILD:** Let me see the military.

**MAMA:** Standing clear you'll see and hear.

**SOPRANOS:** Here they come from over there. Over there!

**CHILDREN:** Now just around the corner,  
Come, maybe we can join 'em.

**VENDERS:** The glory of the nation  
Approaching on parade.  
May those colors never fade!  
Make way there!

**VARIOUSLY:** With flags and banners waving,  
Hats off to the soldiers who come  
To the fife and drum.  
Hats in the air,  
Cheer them along their way  
With a hip hooray,  
A rousing hip hooray!

**TUTTI:** Proud, on parade,  
With leader in command,  
So brave, so bold!  
(The boldest of the bold!)  
In fact, all told,  
The heroes of the day!

**THE FOUR:** Viva, Musetta, give her a hand!  
Worth, as of old,  
Her weight in gold,  
The hero of the day!

### ACT III

Another aspect of winter, far from festive. Also another less happy aspect of love. It is early morning in late February -- cold, bleak, gray and misty. A few people are straggling to work past the decidedly lax security guard. From inside the nearby tavern some late night revelers are still bravely at it. And here, incongruously, Mimi shows up, in great distress, seeking out Marcello for advice and consolation. The glow of romance has darkened. Rodolfo has turned moody, jealous, belligerent, even cruel.

Pressured by Marcello, Rodolfo will soon give his side of the story, overheard in part by Mimi. He admits that the charges against him are all too true, but not because of indifference. He is in torment, helpless and guilt stricken, his frustration often exploding into uncontrollable anger. He loves Mimi and cannot cope with the brutal reality that she is dying. Her grim disease is taking its toll. She grows weaker by the day, while the only shelter that he has to offer can only hasten

her death, as the winds of a northern winter roar through the rafters of their unheated garret.

For Mimi, overhearing, this is the first confirmation that her disease is truly as serious as she secretly fears it to be, that her time has nearly run out. For Rodolfo's sake, she resolves to leave him --but not yet, not quite yet. Loneliness in winter is unbearable. Perhaps it will be easier when spring comes in a few weeks, when the flowers start to bloom again.

*Scene: the Boulevard d'Enfer, with toll gate. At the left, a tavern. Early dawn.*

**SWEEPERS:** Wake up! You guards! Open up!  
We have to get to work . . . . We are the sweepers . . .  
Starting to snow . . . .Come on! We are freezing!

**CUSTOMS OFFICER:** Patience!

**VOICES:** *(from inside the tavern)*  
In the glass my pleasure lies,  
So pass the jug and pour the wine.  
Love is born in sparkling eyes,  
And with a kiss becomes divine.

**MUSETTA:** *(also inside)* Within the glass our pleasure lies;  
But love is born in sparkling eyes.

**VOICES:** Trallerala! Trallerala! One last hurrah!

**OTHER OFFSTAGE VOICES:** Hopla! Hopla!

**OFFICER:** The early morning regulars.

**VENDERS:** Good morning! Good morning! Good morning!  
Cheese and butter! Eggs and poultry!  
Which way will you be going?  
St. Michael's market. perhaps we'll see you later.  
At twelve or so.  
All right by me.

*Mimi enters, and approaches the officer after a brief but violent coughing spell.*

**MIMI:** Excuse me . . . . Please, sir . . . .  
Point me to the tavern  
Where the artist is painting.

**OFFICER:** There you are.

**MIMI:** Thank you.

*(to a waitress who has emerged from the tavern)*

Begging your pardon, ma'am, do me a favor.

I must talk with the painter Marcello ---

Personal matters . . . . Tell him it's urgent.

Say on the quiet that Mimi is waiting.

**OFFICER:** *(to a passerby)* Hey! Show me the basket.

**PASSERBY:** Empty.

**OFFICER:** Pass.

**MARCELLO:** *(entering)* Mimi!

**MIMI:** I was hoping so to find you here.

**MARCELLO:** Yes, here we've found safe haven,

Hired hands of the tavern.

Musetta entertains, told to sing for her supper.

I earn my bread and butter

Turning out murals. *(Mimi again coughs.)*

Inside is warmer.

**MIMI:** Meet Rodolfo? . . . No, I can't go in, I can't!

**MARCELLO:** Why not?

**MIMI:** Dear, kind Marcello, help me! Oh, help me!

**MARCELLO:** What is the matter?

**MIMI:** Rodolfo, Rodolfo loves me very much,

But he can be cruel.

My own Rodolfo, unkind, unjust and so jealous!

A tiny gesture, a passing smile

Can waken fiery demons,

Doubt and distrust, then fury.

Sometimes at night, pretending to be sleeping,

I feel his eyes upon me,

As if spying on my dreams.

How many times he's told me,

"This can't go on! Go find another lover.

It's what you want!"

He breaks my heart!

His jealousy is speaking, not he.

I know, but how am I to answer?

**MARCELLO:** When it turns into torture,

Lovers cannot live together.

**MIMI:** You are wise, wise and thoughtful.  
You've given the answer.  
We should separate.  
Oh, if only we could!  
So many times we have tried, but all for nothing.  
However hard, still you are right:  
We're better apart.  
Now I need your support.

**MARCELLO:** For instance, me and Musetta;  
We are happy together  
Because we take each other lightly.  
Song and laughter  
So far keep us rolling along.  
I'll do my best.  
First to go wake him.

**MIMI:** Wake him?

**MARCELLO:** Showing up in the wee hours of the morning,  
Right away he fell asleep, exhausted.  
*(Mimi has another coughing spell.)*

That cough . . . .

**MIMI:** The stress and strain of worry.  
Last night he hurried out after telling me,  
"This is final."  
I waited wide awake,  
Then left the house at dawn to find you.

**MARCELLO:** *(observing Rodolfo inside the tavern)*  
He's stirring . . . . Looking around . . . .He's coming . . . .

**MIMI:** Don't let him see me.

**MARCELLO:** Mimi, go home! For heaven's sake, go back!  
Leave us alone for now.

*Mimi withdraws. Rodolfo rushes out of the tavern.*

**RODOLFO:** Marcello, stay a moment! I've got to talk!  
To hell with it, I want to leave Mimi.

**MARCELLO:** And I thought it was love!

**RODOLFO:** So I believed, but the affair has long run its course.

Always before, when love was on the wane,  
Fire rose rekindled.  
Now I'm tired, fed up . . . .

**MARCELLO:** You'd abandon her once and for all?

**RODOLFO:** I have to.

**MARCELLO:** Try some changes.  
For love is close to madness  
Unless relieved by laughter.  
Mired in fear, doubt and worry,  
The strongest wall will crumble.  
I'm told you're jealous . . . .

**RODOLFO:** What of it?

**MARCELLO:** Irascible. . . . belligerent . . . .  
Loaded down with a ton of garbage,  
Obnoxious . . . explosive . . . .

**MIMI:** (He is playing with fire ---- I know his temper.)

**RODOLFO:** Mimi is hardly blameless.  
Over fond of flirtation,  
To a foppish Count, a well-known lecher  
Who has eyed her with relish,  
She has responded by showing off her bust ---  
Oh, yes! By shamelessly leading him along.

**MARCELLO:** My friend, you don't mean a word that you say.

**RODOLFO:** Oh, very well. I'll confess.  
I know what drives me crazy,  
For I'm truly tormented.  
I love Mimi!  
With all my soul and body, I love her!  
But I am frightened; I live in terror.  
Her grim disease will be fatal.  
Day by day she grows weaker,  
The sun will set and she'll be gone forever.

**MIMI:** (Can he mean it?)

**RODOLFO:** Coughing that wracks her body,  
Fragile and frail already . . .

Now a ghostly pallor, then burning fever. . .

**MARCELLO:** Horrible to hear.

**MIMI:** (Is my life nearly over?)

**RODOLFO:** And my room colder than Siberia . . . .  
Heat is unheard of.  
Winds of a northern winter  
Roar through the rafters.  
While she's merrily singing,  
I'm devoured by guilt  
For providing the pathway that leads to death.

**MARCELLO:** But you love her . . . .

**MIMI:** (Nearly over!)

**RODOLFO:** Mimi's a sheltered flower,  
Needing sun for survival.  
My love is not enough to nurture her back to life.  
Far from enough . . . .

**MARCELLO:** What can I say? Only sorrow!  
Delicate Mimi . . . . Beautiful Mimi . . . .

**MIMI:** Oh, no! Oh, no!  
I have barely started living . . . . barely started . . .  
And so soon to die. Too soon to die!

*Mimi's presence is revealed by her coughing and by her choked sobs.*

**RODOLFO:** Ah! Mimi! Mimi! What have you heard?

**MARCELLO:** Standing close by, she listened.

**RODOLFO:** Always exaggerating, I tremble over nothing.  
Here, come and get warm.

**MIMI:** No! So close, I would suffocate.

**RODOLFO:** Ah, Mimi!

*(He embraces her lovingly, while from inside, Musetta's laughter is heard.)*

**MARCELLO:** So Musetta's now laughing.  
Who is with her? Why does she do it?

Flirting as always!        (*He rushes inside.*)

MIMI: Goodbye, dear.

RODOLFO: What! You're leaving?

MIMI:



For the place that I left at the sound of your voice.

There I'll return alone  
To my secluded corner  
To weave unscented roses  
With colors made of thread.  
No rancor, only farewell.

One final favor:

Go, gather up a few beloved belongings --  
Inside my basket, a locket and a golden cross,  
My prayer book as well.  
Whatever else you find, just wrap in a bundle.  
I shall send for it later.  
Also, folded in tissues, my pretty little bonnet . . . .  
You may . . . . You may prefer to keep it  
To remember our love.  
No rancor. No, no, only farewell.

RODOLFO: Then it really is over?  
Can it be that my little one is leaving?  
Farewell to our nights of love.

MIMI: Farewell to waking up together to greet the morning.

RODOLFO: Farewell to the hours of dreaming.

MIMI: Farewell to jealousy and anger . . . .

RODOLFO: Sweet reconciliations . . . .

MIMI: Wild accusations . . . .

RODOLFO: Kisses . . . .

MIMI: . . . and tears of distress.

RODOLFO: Shameless poet, your distress  
I rhymed with "soft caress."

**BOTH:** Always I've dreaded  
(Dreadful) To be alone in winter,  
Withered . . . .  
But when spring returns,  
The buds will bloom again,  
Basking in the sun.

*From inside, Marcello and Musetta are in the midst of a spat.*

**MARCELLO:** What exactly were you gushing  
To that would-be Casanova?

**MUSETTA:** You imply? . . . . You imply? . . . .

**MARCELLO:** When I came in you looked away and started blushing.

**MUSETTA:** (*provocatively*) In my ear he merely whispered  
"You and I were made for dancing."

**MARCELLO:** Then I saw you smirk and simper.

**MUSETTA:** My reply was "How entrancing!  
I could dance from night till morning."  
So you start to whine and whimper.

**MARCELLO:** An admission that is only too revealing.

**MUSETTA:** Perfect freedom I demand!

**MARCELLO:** Fine excuse for double dealing.

**MUSETTA:** Ever carping!

**MARCELLO:** Look for more than flare of temper.

**MUSETTA:** Ever carping and complaining  
At my style of entertaining.

**MARCELLO:** Running rampant, chasing after  
Any man who comes a-calling!

**MUSETTA:** Same old tiresome tune unvaried ---  
You would think that we were married.

**MARCELLO:** I become the butt of laughter  
For behavior so appalling.

**MUSETTA:** I shall flirt when I've a mind to,

And remember, I can leave when so inclined to.

**MARCELLO:** Yes, I saw you smirk and simper.  
Talk of leaving, why delay it?  
I'll be richer, need I say it?

**MUSETTA:** Musetta's not your slave, bound to obey.

**BOTH:** To your health!

**MUSETTA:** A fond farewell! I'm off and on my way.

**MARCELLO:** I cheer you on your way!

**MIMI:** No one's lonely in spring.  
With merry meadow larks we sing in chorus  
As we expand like budding flowers  
Stretching in the sun.  
Stroking the leaves that whisper,  
The gentle evening breezes  
With soft embraces  
Soothe away all sorrows.  
Can we part before we share that warmth again?

**RODOLFO:** Attune to the language of nature,  
We'll expand like budding flowers, etc.

**MUSETTA:** (*shouting*) Go back to painting houses!

**MARCELLO:** (*also shouting*) Learn to sing!

**MUSETTA:** Ogre!

**MARCELLO:** Vampire!

**MIMI:** All my life I shall love you . . . .

**RODOLFO:** We'll stay together . . . .

**MIMI:** Together till the flowers bloom again.

**RODOLFO:** Till flowers bloom again.

**MIMI:** Oh, would that winter could last forever!

**BOTH:** Together till the flowers bloom again!

## ACT IV

## ACT FOUR

Winter is over, but back at the garret cold has been replaced by emptiness. Mimi and Musetta have both taken off for parts unknown. The poet and the painter are each trying to conceal from the other how deeply the wound has penetrated, how obsessively the loss still gnaws within, while making a half-hearted effort to keep on working even though the mind is concentrated elsewhere.

They are soon joined by the other two roommates, and life seems to get back to normal, the usual horseplay and banter, the playacting that makes hunger and insignificance a bit more palatable. You have to hand it to these down and out Bohemians; they do manage to have a good time, or at least put on a good show.

But the fun and games are suddenly interrupted. Musetta is back, bringing Mimi back with her, or at least the frail shadow of Mimi ...

*Scene: The garret as in Act I.*

**MARCELLO:** Riding in style?

**RODOLFO:** And with footmen to boot.

She greeted me with laughter.

“Ah, Musetta!” I said. “How’s your heart?”

She answered, “Muffled and silent,

Covered in layers of velvet.”

**MARCELLO:** She’s got what she wants.

I’m happy for her.

**RODOLFO:** (My friend’s a fraud; he’s inwardly writhing.)

**MARCELLO:** In velvet? Ha, ha! Guess who I saw.

**RODOLFO:** Musetta?

**MARCELLO:** Mimi!

**RODOLFO:** You saw her? (No matter.)

**MARCELLO:** Dressed like a queen,  
And riding in a horse drawn carriage.

**RODOLFO:** Good going! I’m glad to hear it.

**MARCELLO:** (That bright happy front is a lie.)

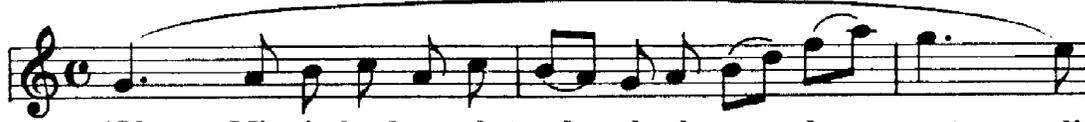
**RODOLFO:** Back to work.

**MARCELLO:** Back to work.

**RODOLFO:** This pen is rubbish!

**MARCELLO:** Subversive old paintbrush!

**RODOLFO:**



(Oh, Mi-mi, the dream that ended when you departed!  
Our journey over when just barely started.  
Dearest Mimi,  
My joy, my hope! Both now forever gone.)

**MARCELLO:** (I'm bewildered by my rebellious brush!  
Taking over, it moves independently and on its own.  
I start to paint a summer field in flower,  
A brook or leafy bower,  
Yet there appears on canvas sparkling eyes, sweet lips,  
Ah! Before I realize, I see Musetta smiling back again.  
Ah! How that smile entices,  
Keeps luring me on!  
So dear, so deceptive!  
Gaily she captures lovers,  
And while she carouses, riding high,  
My lonely heart can only pine and sigh.)

**RODOLFO:** (Ah, dear little bonnet, now all that remains ---  
A parting memento  
Of a thousand dreams as we soared on high.  
Unto my heart allow a moment's reprieve  
From love so full of pain,  
That yet will never die.)

**RODOLFO:** What is the time?

**MARCELLO:** Time now for yesterday's dinner.

**RODOLFO:** And Schounard not back!

*Schaunard and Colline enter.*

**SCHAUNARD:** Here we are!

**RODOLFO:** With what?

**MARCELLO:** (*with disdain*) Let's see! Stale bread?

**COLLINE:** And a dish worthy of Hyperion! Pickled herring!

**SCHAUNARD:** (*politely refusing*) Too salty.

**COLLINE:** For the hearty appetite.

**MARCELLO:** Fit for a king, a feast out of fable!

**SCHAUNARD:** Pass the champagne to this end of the table.

**RODOLFO:** Choose, fellow mobster: salmon or lobster?

**MARCELLO:** Baron, here is nightingale tongue, do try it.

**COLLINE:** Sorry, too fatty. I'm strictly on diet.

**RODOLFO:** *(to Colline)* All finished?

**COLLINE:** *(with grand importance)* My duty . . . . The king is waiting.

**MARCELLO:** Rebellious armies storming the gate?

**RODOLFO:** Storming the gate?

**SCHAUNARD:** Storming the gate?

**COLLINE:** The king has named me head of state.

**THE OTHERS:** Bravo! Bravo! Bravo!

**COLLINE:** To keep the peace I've called police.

**SCHAUNARD:** Send him our greeting.

**MARCELLO:** But tell him we're eating.

**SCHAUNARD:** With deep devotion I drink to your promotion.

**RODOLFO & COLLINE:** Stuff it!

**MARCELLO:** Stuff it! Oh, come off it!

**COLLINE:** His orations try the patience.

**SCHAUNARD:** The lofty muse of lyric song  
Has inspired my tongue . . . .

**THE OTHERS:** No! No! No!

**SCHAUNARD:** Then let us turn to classical dancing.

**THE OTHERS:** That's it!

**MARCELLO:** For dancing, bring on the ballerina!

**COLLINE:** Prepare the grand arena. Gavotte!

**MARCELLO:** Menuetto!

**RODOLFO:** Tarantella!

**SCHAUNARD:** Fandango!

**COLLINE:** The grand quadrille has started.

**RODOLFO:** Pair up with ladies.

**COLLINE:** (*indicating Marcello*) Your partner.

**RODOLFO:** (*gallantly offering his hand to Marcello*)  
If I might have the pleasure.

**MARCELLO:** (*in modest falsetto*) Oh, sir, I'm far too bashful.  
(*in natural voice*) So beat it! (*Nonetheless, they pair up.*)

**COLLINE:** *Balancez!*

**SCHAUNARD:** You've got it wrong!

**COLLINE:** How dare you!

**SCHAUNARD:** You contradict a Lord?

**COLLINE:** Pride and honor you've offended.  
Draw your sword!

**SCHAUNARD:** Ready! On guard!  
And your blood will start to flow.

**COLLINE:** Manly words you like to bandy.

**SCHAUNARD:** Have a sturdy stretcher handy.

**COLLINE:** You will writhe in hell below.

**ROD. & MAR.** We, the painter and the writer,  
Hand it to the fearless fighter.

*Amid the merriment, Musetta enters in great agitation.*

**MARCELLO:** Musetta!

**MUSETTA:** It's Mimi!  
It's Mimi! She is here and very ill.

**RODOLFO:** Oh, where?

**MUSETTA:** The many stairs were too hard to manage.

*Rodolfo and Marcello both rush out, and return carrying Mimi.*

**SCHAUNARD:** Drag the bed a little closer.

**RODOLFO:** (*to Mimi*) Here . . . some water.

**MIMI: Rodolfo!**

**RODOLFO: Rest . . . be quiet.**

**MIMI: Oh, my Rodolfo! May I stay here with you?**

**RODOLFO: Dearest Mimi! Always, always!**

**MUSETTA: (*aside to the others*)**

**I was told Mimi had run away from the wealthy Count**

**And now was nearly dying.**

**Where to look? Hoping . . . searching . . .**

**I found her at last, close by.**

**Barely able to whisper,**

**She told me, "I am gasping,**

**Dying . . . I know it.**

**I want to die near him.**

**He may be waiting. . . ."**

**MIMI: I feel so much better!**

**MUSETTA: "Will you take me, Musetta?"**

**MIMI: Just let me look around a little!**

**How wonderful to be back home!**

**I'll recover, I'll recover!**

**I feel the blood begin to flow.**

**RODOLFO: Just to have you here again!**

**MIMI: Stay forever close to me.**

**MUSETTA: (*to the others*) Have you nothing for her?**

**Nothing hot? Nothing strong?**

**MARCELLO: Nothing! Nothing! Ah, no money!**

**RODOLFO: (*to Mimi*) To hear your voice!**

**SCHAUNARD: (*to Colline*) She'll not last an hour.**

**MIMI: I shake and shiver.**

**A muff would be so welcome.**

**But will my hands, now cold and frozen,**

**Ever be warm again?**

**RODOLFO: Right here in mine! (*Mimi starts coughing.*)**

**Talking will only tire you.**

**MIMI:** A little cough, by now second nature.  
Hello, dear Marcello. Schaunard, Colline,  
How are you? All my beautiful friends  
Here to welcome me back.

**RODOLFO:** Say no more, try to rest.

**MIMI:** I'm all right speaking softer.  
*(She beckons Marcello to come closer.)*  
Marcello, let me tell you . . . .  
Musetta's good; none are kinder.

**MARCELLO:** I know . . . . I know . . . .

**MUSETTA:** *(softly to Marcello while removing her earrings)*  
Be quick . . . . sell them . . . .  
And buy whatever she needs.  
Send for a doctor.

**RODOLFO:** Try sleeping.

**MIMI:** You will not leave me?

**RODOLFO:** No, no!

**MUSETTA:** *(to Marcello)* Marcello, let us honor the last wish  
Of one whose life will all too soon be over.  
We have to find a muff . . . . So come with me.  
**MARCELLO:** Despite all, you're an angel.

*(They leave together. Colline takes off his overcoat and solemnly folds it up)*

**COLLINE:** Old overcoat, now tattered,  
I stay behind  
While you journey on to greater glory,  
Unexplored territory.  
You've been a faithful friend,  
And deserve all accolades of honor,  
Holding pockets that shelter,  
Though at times helter-skelter,  
Herodotus and Homer.

Now I am forced to tell you, it's time I sell you.  
Farewell, my close and warm companion!  
Farewell, farewell!

Schaunard, both you and I can demonstrate

A show of kindness, each acting on his own --  
Me first, then you -- by leaving them alone.

**SCHAUNARD:** No Aristotle needed.  
You're right . . . .Come on! *(They quietly leave.)*

**MIM:** Have they gone yet?  
I wasn't really sleeping,  
Waiting rather till we could be alone.  
So little time, so much I have to tell you!  
No, only this --- even deeper than the ocean,  
Like the sky reaching outward into heaven,  
So is my love! My all, my soul and being!  
So is my love, a stream that flows forever!

**RODOLFO:** Ah, Mimi! My lovely Mimi!

**MIMI:** To you I'm still lovely?

**RODOLFO:** Beautiful as the sunrise!

**MIMI:** Rather more to the purpose,  
Perhaps you meant beautiful as the sunset . . .  
"Those near me say Mimi,  
Though I don't know why."

**RODOLFO:** My little swallow flies homeward to her nest.

*He takes out the pink bonnet, and places it on Mimi.*

**MIMI:** My pretty bonnet! Ah, do you remember  
When I first came calling and stood there at the door?

**RODOLFO:** Do I remember!

**MIMI:** The wind blew out the candles.

**RODOLFO:** You were so shy and flustered  
Over losing your key.

**MIMI:** And in the dark  
How you tried so hard to find it!

**RODOLFO:** Down searching . . . .blindly . . . .

**MIMI:** Ah, my handsome liar! Now I can tell my secret:  
I knew you had it in your pocket.

**RODOLFO:** Fate needed my assistance.

**MIMI:** And so dark you could not see me turning crimson!

“Your tiny hand is freezing . . .

Let me warm it up in mine . . . .”

In the dark you took my hand in yours.

*She has a sudden spasm, a fit of choking.*

**RODOLFO:** Dear God! Mimi!

**SCHAUNARD:** (*rushing in*) I heard!

**MIMI:** (*recovering*) Nothing to worry . . . .

**RODOLFO:** Quiet . . . . and close your eyes.

**MIMI:** Yes, yes. I promise, I’ll be good.

*Musetta and Marcello return.*

**MUSETTA:** Sleeping?

**RODOLFO:** And smiling.

**MARCELLO:** I have called on the doctor. He’ll come.

I made him hurry.

Here is some brandy.

**MIMI:** Who is it?

**MUSETTA:** I . . . . Musetta. (*places the muff in Mimi’s hands.*)

**MIMI:** How comforting and warm it is!

My hands . . . no more . . . .

Will look so dry and withered.

Warm again, they will revive.

(*to Rodolfo*) Did you go out and buy it?

**MUSETTA:** (*promptly*) He did.

**MIMI:** My foolish spender!

Thank you . . . But such extravagance!

You’re weeping . . . Be happy.

Why are you sobbing so?

My love . . . we’ll start again!

So happy . . . . so lazy . . . . so, so sleepy . . . .

**RODOLFO:** (*to Marcello*) What did the doctor say?

**MARCELLO:** He'll come.

**MUSETTA:** Oh, blessed holy virgin, humbly I beg you,  
Pity one who suffers and do not let her die!  
*(Breaking off, she turns to Marcello.)*  
Find a shade for the candle;  
The flame has started flickering.  
Good man!

Help your child to recover, O blessed Mary!  
Though I myself deserve no mercy,  
Mimi is an angel wafted down from heaven.

**RODOLFO:** She's getting better.  
You don't believe it's hopeless?

**MUSETTA:** Of course not!

**SCHAUNARD:** *(softly)* Marcello, she's dead.

**COLLINE:** *(returning with money)*  
Musetta, for you. How's Mimi?

**RODOLFO:** Peaceful . . . . sleeping soundly . . . What's the matter?  
Are you trying to tell me? . . . .  
Why stare at me like that?

**MARCELLO:** *(rushing over to embrace him)*  
Have courage.

**RODOLFO:** *(realizing)* Mimi! . . . . Mimi! . . . . *(He clasps her in his arms with uncontrollable sobs.)*

**THE END**