

“Mi chiamano Mimi” (Although I’m called Mimi) LA BOHÈME, Act I, music by Giacomo Puccini, 1896. Based on the novel by Henri Murger, *Scènes de la vie de bohème*; libretto by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa, *La bohème* is one of the most popular operas in the standard repertoire.

SYNOPSIS: A group of four friends, all starving artists, share meager shelter in a freezing garret in 1830’s Paris. Tonight is Christmas Eve and they plan to celebrate, thanks to some unexpected funds one of them has received. Three of the men leave, but Rodolfo, a poet, stays behind to finish some work. Mimi, a neighbor in the building, knocks at his door and asks his help because her candle has gone out. Rodolfo finds Mimi irresistible and tells her all about himself in “Che gelida manina” (How cold your little hand is); he then asks if she would give him some details about her life...She agrees.

MIMI

Sì.

Mi chiamano Mimi,
ma il mio nome è Lucia.
La storia mia è breve--
a tela o a seta
ricamo in casa o fuori;
Son tranquilla e lieta
ed è mio svago far gigli e rose.
Mi piaccion quelle cose
che han sì dolce malia
che parlano d’amor, di primavera,
che parlano di sogni e di chimere
quelle cose che han nome poesia...
Lei m’intende?

RODOLFO: Sì.

MIMI

Mi chiamano Mim;
Il perchè non so.
Sola, mi fo il pranzo da me stessa.
Non vado sempre a messa
Ma prego assai il Signor.
Vivo sola, soletta,
Là in una bianca cameretta,
guardo sul tetti e in cielo.

Ma quando vien lo sgelo,
Il primo sole è mio,
Il primo bacio dell’aprile è mio!
Il primo sole è mio,
Germoglia in un vaso una rosa
Foglia a foglia la spio!

Yes...

Although I’m called “Mimi,”
really my name is Lucia.
My story is a short one—
on canvas or silkens,
I sew at home or elsewhere.
I’m quite calm and happy,
and when I’m free, I make lilies and roses.
I like those things around me
that are filled with sweet magic,
that speak of tender love, and of the springtime,
that speak of dreams and fantasies I long for,
all that myst’ry that people call “poetic...”
You understand me?

Yes.

Although I’m called Mimi,
I don’t know just why...
Living alone, I make my simple dinner;
I don’t attend mass always,
but pray a lot to God.
All alone, sometimes lonely;
there in a room that’s white and very tiny,
I can see the rooftops and high heaven...

But, when winter is thawing,
I can see the first sunbeams.
only for Mimi, the first kisses of April.
only for Mimi, that sunshine....
A rosebud is op’ning in water,
leaf by leaf, how I watch it!

Così gentil è il profumo d'un fior! Oh, what a gift: the perfume of a flower!
I fior ch'io faccio, ahimè, The flowers, I make, alas!;
I fior ch'io faccio, ahimè, non hanno odore. My pretty flowers, alas! they have no odor...

Altro di me non le saprei narare; There's nothing much more about me I can tell you ;
Sono la sua vicina I'm just your bothersome neighbor
Che la vien fuori d'ora a importunare. who came by so late at night, to disturb you.

---From "Great Operatic Scenes," a course for Osher Lifelong Learning
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