

***La Vie Boheme* and other Stereotypes I Love to Fantasize Epitomizing
(When I Feel Like I've Sold Out)**

By Cynthia Miley

You never thought you would be one of those girls, did you? One of those girls that moved somewhere with a significant other. You always figured, hey, you're young and hip, and one day you're going to move to Chicago or New Orleans. You wanted to be an activist and you wanted to be a teacher and you thought these two things fit together perfectly; you majored in physics because why aren't there more women in science these days? You're going to change that. Egotistical as it sounds even to your own ears, you're going to be the first domino in a long string of them. Soon, science will be awash with female scientists and they'll all have a high school teacher or two to thank.

But here you are, in a sprawling suburban landscape. Your boyfriend needed to be close to his parents while he's in post-college debt. You never thought you would find yourself back in the suburbs after you graduated high school. Moving in "with" your boyfriend; it feels more like an accusation. You moved here because of your boyfriend-he needed it and you wanted his company. You could have moved anywhere if not for that. You've told him it's temporary. You'll move from here in a year or two whether he comes or not. Still, you nag yourself, thinking you'd frown on other people (especially women) who made this decision. It feels too much like what society expects of women.

On rare days, you pretend this is your go at a carefree boho lifestyle, working a dead-end part-time job full-time hours to try to pay for your apartment. Or sometimes you pretend this isn't your life at all, but that you're like some of your other peers, just "slumming" for a year after college, taking time off before starting the real world. Something about the suburbs takes the luster out of those fantasies; you feel more like Betty Crocker-to-be than Betty Friedan-to-be out here.

Ignoring that, you admit you're here now. The real world makes it hard to pay bills. If you weren't sharing this apartment, you'd barely be able to cover just the rent. It took too long to find a job. When you did, it was one that doesn't fit into any of your passions and it was in sales no less! The thought makes your skin crawl; you pride yourself on being anti-consumerist.

Then there you are one day at a deli a friend of your boyfriend recommends. He swears the deli caters to your low-budget vegetarian lifestyle while the three of you are hanging out one afternoon. You're up for trying anything at least once. You've had terrible luck with restaurants around here, you miss a city atmosphere like you had at college. You were in the middle of several places that catered to college kids and their unusual eating patterns and cravings at unconventional times of day. You keep hoping to see a place like that around here.

So you enter the deli and your waitress (a cute blonde named Ashley) takes your order. You laugh when you realize that they've marked all the vegetarian items on the menu with a palm tree; you'd been reading meticulously through every listed ingredient. There are indeed several so you explain to Ashley that you'll need several more minutes to think about the whole thing. Her eyes are friendly and blue like your favorite flavor of kool-aid. Perhaps she wears colored contacts.

What was it precisely? You look back on that afternoon and you have no idea, but the next thing you know, Ashley is talking to you as if you're a superstar that just walked into her humble restaurant. Perhaps it's your bracelet (a silver bangle sporting "V-Day Warrior 2004," you tell her your mother bought it and had no idea of what V-Day was for). Perhaps it's because you're the first person she's seen in this city besides herself to sport a facial piercing-hers is a cute little gemstone nose ring, yours is a silver curved barbell in your left eyebrow. Either way, she frequents your table and each time she comes, she spends more time chatting with you specifically. You figure for a while that maybe it's just because business is slow today-there's only one other group in the diner, a well-to-do looking family.

You invite her to sit at the table with you once those people leave and it's just you and the two guys. She sits down next to your boyfriend's friend and ignores him the whole time just to speak to you. She's getting a tattoo; what is your suggestion? Oh, you're into astronomy? Hey, do you like art? Here's an art gallery her photography is displayed at-she'll write down the address. Are you a feminist? You know, some people around this town try to have style, but you really have it together. Superstar treatment the whole way; grilled for information about your lifestyle, where one can find organic produce, why don't you eat meat, and where the "cool" people hang out.

Sitting there, you're excited; Ashley comes across as the kind of wishy-washy liberal, but she's the first liberal you've really seen. You're shy but you find a confidence you don't find around more of your kind (you joke about being a typical tree-hugging hippie, about being a liberal stereotype). It's a surreal switch to see someone else feeling the way you usually feel; you always wonder if the interested new people you meet will think you're a poser. She doesn't think you've sold out by moving here with your boyfriend, she's too busy admiring how much you know about farmer's markets and how open you are with your opinions.

She asks if you're planning on marrying your boyfriend-it's one of her few acknowledgments that either guy is there-and you look at him while you laugh. You cynically interpret the question as, "Why else would you move out here?" You tell her that you're not really into marriage. Maybe if it changed or maybe if you changed, but you think it's more likely it'll change first. You're too set in your

ways. To your surprise, this seemed to make enough sense to her because it isn't greeted with her typical stream of questions.

When you leave, your boyfriend recommends coming back. The food was pretty good and the company was new and different. Perhaps Ashley will be working again. Perhaps you can go to the art gallery she said her photography was in—you could tell people you know the artist. You can give her back some of the esteem she just gave to you. It feels more bohemian now; it feels as if you've gotten in touch with yourself. The liberal, the activist, the crazy political dreamer in you did not run away the moment you moved from city to suburbs. You did not turn into a hypocrite. You're still yourself, just in a different location. And perhaps, just perhaps, living out here can help you start your changes. You'll make it to a city soon enough. People here could use a change; it's your ego talking again. You helped Ashley pick out an astronomically correct star pattern for her new tattoo. It's still a permanent change in the world. It feels like victory.