

La Bohemienne
by Claudia Beechman

My first flat was the size of a cracker jack box,
so commented a beau, but the rent was cheap:
Three sun-colored rooms where I listened to jazz
learned to love Chris Connor, Carmen McCrae and Ella.
I tuned in often, as loud as I wanted,
bought cutlery, bric-a-brac, jeans from the thriftshop on South,
Shot pool at long-gone Longo's next door,
Grooved to the percussion of my percolator,
before I learned it was the wrong way to make coffee.
The old radiators played all day, had their own
rhythm session: "pop,pop", "bang, bang", " ssssssssss!!"

My father, the restaurateur, brought eggs to the feast,
filet, bottles of Burgundy and olive oil, carried three flights up
on his well-muscled shoulders, humming,
and gleefully proclaiming, "You're a Townie!"

My mother, the comedienne, hung a rainbow of beads
which went click-a-clack-click when I passed through them;
Once, we had lunch in the bright tiny kitchen,
watercress omelettes on mismatched plates,
a wedge of French bread with peach jam and sweet butter.

My friends, mostly musicians, visited, jammed,
perched on leatherette cushions and kitchen chairs,
Drank tea that I kept in bright-colored tins
lined up on the tiny gas stove. The tea-kettle's whistle
trilled high above conjoined guitar chords..

Sometimes I'd listen to Piaf or Brel, and
sometimes to Aznavour, while I gazed at a cheap print
of Frans Hals' "La Bohemienne" that hung from the wall.
All of it seemingly about my life:
just enough to get by and enough for awhile:
But, one night, after I heard "Brazilian Byrd,"
while I slept in my narrow bed,
I dreamed in scarlet, stabbed through the heart
by an arrow aflame as the lush strings played,
and when I awoke, knew the carnival was over