

# Post-Romanticism: A Brief History

*Justin Vicari*

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You were the first person I knew who had her own apartment,  
near the corner of Hamlet and Ophelia Streets,  
by the playhouse, the railroad tracks, the sheer edge of river.  
You were sane then, on a scholarship, a visa, still no green  
card. I bused to visit you from the suburbs, dark lady  
with frizzed hair and fingers you could snap  
like castanets. My high school friends  
thought we were lovers, and I let them think. I mixed tapes for you:  
you came to like Leonard Cohen. We argued gently about what he meant  
by “going clear” in “Famous Blue Raincoat.” I suggested  
a blond dye-job, and you hushed me like I was a fool.

I was. Teenage stammerer, stumbler  
through your word of local rock musicians, artists’ bars.  
When you served me boiling tea in a glass  
I needed napkins to handle it.

We listened to “Suzanne.” You fixed eggs with tomatoes  
and peppers, keftas, tabouleh,  
and we climbed out the window  
to eat on your black tar roof  
overlooking the sticks of birch trees.

When you got sick and stayed in bed I read you  
*The Legend of St. Julian the Hospitaller.*  
When the leper turned into the Angel of God  
you sat up, eyes shivering a vision.

Someone got to you. Your real lover,  
who’d learned not to be jealous of me,  
took a machete to the mattress where you and he conceived  
the baby you aborted. He left the shredded bedding  
in the alley, a raped thing, and you were never the same after that.  
The voices lost you  
apartments, jobs. You wandered  
through summers unrecognizably

swathed in thick scarves,  
and we could not eat anywhere  
that you did not hide your face behind the menu,  
pointing out a waiter, a cook, another customer,  
as someone who picked you up and never called.

You had become Suzanne, and didn't need to hear it.  
You were Tess, and you ran until you reached Stonehenge  
and slept, and woke to watch the dawn between the menhirs,  
high priestess, martyr, now, go clear.

*Justin Vicari*