Happy Rhodes

Despite eleven recorded albums before age forty-five, her grace-noted, four-octave range, the instances accumulate when her music’s not, for me, moving. Even as I play the albums that moved me for years it’s not.

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The way a buck’s velvet rack reproduces itself from skull each July in an act contrary to entropy until each new growth must function simply as a memory of those first shoots. Or the one I loved who after a year of living together excited me only accidentally, by some involuntary pose, shoulders gently cleft outside the sheet.

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Every ticket to her Philadelphia show sold out weeks in advance but still she receded from public appearances, as if sensing the importance of ephemerality—never headlining a tour, never performing outside the country. Even now critics say her decision to retire was premature.

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Early in life I felt I understood
her shivering falsetto, constructing
out of nothing concern for a man
who fails to demonstrate his longing—
concern the heart’s center has always
been liquid and valves, capillaries
growing sensitized in the dark—
that, between us, there never was a thread.

Note: The last line is from Larissa Szporluk’s poem “Guillotine,” found in The Wind, Master Cherry, The Wind (Alice James Books, 2003).

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