Empire Burlesque

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To an Unknown Poet, Dead at 39

—Phil Perelson, 1956–1995

Love, it seems, when all is said and done,
Kept you (maintained, withheld) indefinite.
In bits and pieces you offered your *Te Deum*.

To disappear was your “natural condition,”
but what to keep (guard, record) against the infinite,
when love, it seems, when all is said and done,

(so utter, complete) so obliterates someone?
Your “Five Keys to Anonymity,” the ball & chain habits?
In bits and pieces you offered your *Te Deum*.

I still say “you,” a mistake I see, for the third person
holds you (faithful, spellbound now) separate—
Love it seems, when all is said and done,

Need not answer back, or get a word in
Edgewise, or feel at all compelled to speculate
In bits and pieces. You offered your *Te Deum*,

and what remains? What space along what margin,
what wisp in a rented room, what scrap, however delicate?
Love, it seems, when all is said and done.
In bits and pieces, you offered your *Te Deum*. 