I can burn the pictures, but not the poems
since I published them in books, which are on shelves
in libraries and in people’s homes. Once my cousin told me
not to write anything down because the words would be there forever
to remind me of the fool I once was. My cousin
was the little dog on the Tarot card, barking at the Fool’s heels
as I headed right toward the cliff.

When James Taylor and Carly Simon
broke up, I was shocked. Taylor’s drug use or not,
couldn’t they work it out? I was in college
and, though I didn’t really believe in marriage,
I believed in them. How could they part
having written those love songs? And how could they go on
singing those love songs after the divorce?

But now, I know.

After time, when they reached for those notes,
there wasn’t really a beloved there anymore,
just a strand of hair each left behind
on the other’s scarf or pillow, a cologne trigger that transcended
into something more real than they were,
the lovers themselves ephemeral muses.

It’s still hard
for me to accept the notion of love outliving the lovers—
a notion so romantic, it’s unromantic. Hard to accept
that those big lumps of affection
would find alternate places to stick,
that Simon and Taylor would be swept away and marry
others. That need is not so much a deficit

as an asset,
like a wallet that keeps manufacturing its own dollar bills
even after it’s been robbed of everything.
Or to say it another way: the plant that will bloom
despite being uprooted. The new seedling that will pop up.
It’s hard to believe when you are down to your last penny,
when the soil is dry and rocky and full of weeds,
when your love
is freeze-dried into a metallic pouch and you are full of snarky rage.
You look back at a love poem you wrote and ask:
did I really feel this way? Even if you no longer remember tenderness,
even if the verse was simply artifice, your idea of love, a subspecies
you made up to tag and define that one poor sap, you read the poem
again, grateful, holding the words in your hands like a bunch of flowers.