My children, rapt and hysterical each time
I read them the story, demand it tonight
over and over until I relent, knowing
how much at six I too would have loved
that whiskered anarchist, his magic chapeau,
the giggles triggered by his tricks,
by trouble he multiplies with such glitz
and brio, rules shattered freely as
kitchen dishes, restored on the last few
pages so Mother, happily absent, never knows.

As the children, pillowed and warm, settle
on the Big Bed, some rancorous cell squirms
in me to preface the text, to tell the rest
of the story, how sequels can come years later
when at muster each morning in the mirror
above the sink, eyes still try to believe
their fiction that nothing much has changed.

How the story’s window gives out to simple rain,
how years bring new and unpredicted weathers
when there’s nothing to do but sit in a house gone
suddenly strange and silent. How doors
slam, things topple and scatter for good
or ill there’s no picking up. How in time
a man longs to see again his mother, young once
more, come home such long distance through the rain,
home to his rhymeless troubles right on cue
so loss and gainless pain can be recouped.

But that’s not the story my children want
to hear, and though they cannot read, they’re severe
with me for the slightest trace of straying.
So I say the tale anew, recite it as if
I’d been saying it all my life, much like a true lover too pained by infidelity not to repeat the living lie.