Two Poems

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Hourglass, Event Horizon

Grain by grain, the hourglass ticks:
Now, although one tiny grain of sand
overwhelms the after and before,
especially the before.

Remember parties?
I don’t.
I do.
I sort of do.
Crowded streets, parks, classrooms swept away

(suddenly, gradually—it’s hard to say)
and relegated to another time,
an easy era we won’t see again
any time soon,
not for months or years, or maybe never.

The event horizon
on which the hourglass
is perched precariously
has dwindled to a narrow shelf
crammed with family photos.

Those crinkly eyes, that beard;
those two small sisters, one brunette, one blond;
the laughter on that face—
memories for which there’s barely room,
fear takes up so much space.

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Truer Than History

I and a friend who lost our fathers early
both grew up to be poets.
And both of us used poems to record
a phrase each father said.

This is the life
My friend remembers her father saying.
He was carrying her on his shoulders
as they bobbed on a raft in the Florida surf.

My father in a playground in Riverside Park,
watching me climb, swing, slide,
said Be careful.
Four words; two words.

Not that our fathers had no more to say.
But these two lapidary phrases
inscribed themselves on our blank young slates
with proleptic force.

Resonating now after more than half a century,
our fathers’ words sound histrionic,
their very boom of authenticity
making them somehow suspect.

Poetry is truer than history, said Aristotle.
History is only everything that happened;
poetry everything that might have happened
or that might still happen.

I think that’s what he said.
We were in the playground, he and I,
I in my snowsuit, he in his fedora,
or splashing on a raft in an azure sea.