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**ORPHANS**

Aswirl in the air like snowflakes,  
family stories melt before they reach  
our ears. We lipread what we can  
around the dinner table and in cars,  
connecting the dots of laughs and looks  
to an imaginary sky of constellations  
waiting to be explained and pointed out,  
filling the missing gaps in plot twists  
unfolding before our eyes. Their lives  
braid and unbraid like a knitted scarf  
flapping in fierce gusts of wind  
while we hang on to our scarves  
and stare deep into the darkening sky.

Each decibel of their laughs adds slowly  
to our tinderbox that no one notices  
by the fireplace. When we burst  
at last into flames, they act shocked,  
disbelieving that we'd count the years  
of "I'll explain later" against "I'm busy  
right now, can this wait till later?"  
against "That's nonsense—of course,  
you're family!" against "Oh, please"  
against "Hearing people don't hear  
everything" against "Not everything  
we say is important." They never explain  
when we demand, "Why say anything at all?"

When we finally stumble and find each other,  
usually in the dark of night becoming  
day spilling onto our shivering palms,  
we gather around tables in well-lit places  
and tell each other the same old stories  
of how they never took time to explain  
to us the spaghetti messes of their lives  
all night long until we become family  
deeper than blood throbbing in our hands.  
Our hugs of understanding grow tighter.  
Later does come, and when it does,  
our laughter is a tender scrapbook  
that not even they can torch.