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Gene Twaronite
CONVERSATIONS

I don't mean to eavesdrop.

It's just someone's
always talking.

Did you hear about Marty?

He wasn't doin' nothin' —

just minding his own

business and they ...

I won't do it —

not this time.

I'm going to make

that bastard wish he ...

I try to ignore them,

but the words are like

open windows into

secret living rooms.

Sitting in the last row

on the Broadway bus,

I tell myself,

don't listen.

When someone nearby

starts up, I talk instead

to the person in my head.

Talk about what I plan to do

that night or where I'd go

if I had a zillion dollars.

Talk about great times

I've had or all the women

loved and gone,

which doesn't take long.

Talk about crimes

I didn't commit,

or those I didn't confess.

This is *my* life,

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not someone else's.
Trouble is, I always want
to go through that window,
sit in a cozy chair
in the living room,
listen to someone new,
not my tired old self,
letting the words fall softly
on my ear as I nod knowingly,
holding out my glass
for another splash of wine.

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ANSWER MAN

You have an answer for everything,
my dad would say, with a wry stare
at his smartass son.

He never tired of the mantra,
invoking it as a shield
against my college boy erudition.

All he had to do was name
an issue and an answer
would pop from my head

like Athena, fully formed
out of the skull of Zeus,
invincible in her armor.

I wish we could talk again,
to tell him the armor has rusted
and the answer man is gone

along with his
glib solutions
to all life's problems.

All I have left is a river of data
flowing like Lethe through
an underworld of unknowing.

Dipping my net into dark waters,
I capture some slower-moving bits
and examine them under a microscope

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to see if there's any pattern
or philosophy to them,
some way to grab hold.

And just when I think I've found
a plausible interpretation
for their behavior,

a storm surge of new data
sweeps away all my hypotheses
and grand theories,

leaving me right back
where I started, skimming
the waters of my ignorance.