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Seconds

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Mark Levine

Seconds

The caption of this photograph is "Man hit by falling ice."
In the chapters that follow, the theory of the cosmic
second-hand unfolds in layman's terms, with reference
to the sand-dollar and DNA.

Is dinner ready yet? How long has dinner been ready?
Despite the sun, it grows warmer here each day.

The question remains: What *hasn't* been lost? Who made off
with the last poem—the one I was saving my all for?

I gave my itemized collection of used things
to the government, on the condition it be returned
with interest when "the need arises." I can't be sure
but I think the need is arising. Signs include: increased

appetite, bus trips to abandoned villages, prophetic
dreams in the third person, the composition of unresolvable
fugues

for cembalo and God.

When will the mailtruck arrive?

I belong to a club that each month gets sent splinters of the
Sphinx

concealed in boxes of Syrian apples. The *real* Sphinx:

a shape with lion body and the head of a man.

Chapter twenty concludes: "In the future

it is theoretically possible that the head will be considered

a body part." Oh prophets of Babylon and Islam and Judea
in your studded necklaces of glass and bone,
hear me: I cannot see a "future"

for myself, or my double, or his double.
Where are you taking us with our written consent?
Will there be painted bars across the windows?
Will there be elections each Tuesday, and time-clocks
surgically implanted in our glands?
I am here at your disposal to second the motion.

Surely this moment has been written by professionals
with much to lose.
Surely it cannot go on much longer, the desert carnival.
"Surely"—Did I say that? I can't remember what I said,
whether I said it, whether all along without my knowing
I have been speaking someone else's lines.
Someone small. Someone perfectly dangerous.