

Things We Demand to Know

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The local customs. Those we don't know
could be lethal. A misunderstanding and we might be killed
in the worst way.

Also, the point of it all.
But that's obvious. Who took the last slice. Well, that's
obvious too.

The full extent
of the law—all the little nooks and crannies
in that big old scroll. For instance, if it's true what they say
about the prison term for giving a horse a fedora.

How much time we each have
with those we love. Sometimes we already know that, though.
And still it gets squandered. Like eating the last
slice even though you're not
hungry anymore. It could be saved.

How thick
the pavement is. We've heard ten feet. We've heard
only inches. We've heard a hammer strike to the right point
on a road in Wyoming would cause
a chain reaction that could shatter every road
in America. If that's true.

If earthworms
are really used in hot dogs for protein. If we would stop
eating them if that were true.

The exact dimensions of an atom.

If the rumor is true that a scientist looking through an electron microscope saw a face in an atom. And whose face that was.

How many strangers have fantasized about us the evening after passing us. How many friends have fantasized about us and then felt guilty when we next met. The weight

of all the paper our names have been written on.

When the tower topples.

Who gave up our names to the cops. Who is the real killer. The names of the survivors. Their home addresses. Their children's home addresses.

If the people we used to love think about us and feel pain as we do. If that knowledge would take some of the poison from our air. If there is a blanket that could protect us from all suffering.

When the bridge crumbles. When the heart gives out. The physical one. The one best connected.