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Home

BY HALLIE HOLLAND

I'm standing in front of the call box shaking, jet-lagged in spite of the two days I've already been in the country. I know these words, I know these words, I repeat to myself. You've been learning this language for 13 years; you're fine. No you're not! You'll mess up. Trust me, they won't understand you! My thoughts tangle, contradicting each other, inspiring no confidence. I hesitate again, reach out toward the brass button labeled with her name, rest my finger there without depressing it, breathe. "Disculpa." "Excuse me." I pivot to see a couple, stroller in tow, keys in hand. I let them pass, then do the cowardly thing and follow them inside.

A young mother died December 30th at the hands of her 2-year-old son. He accidentally fired a loaded pistol at her during a family outing to Wal-Mart in Hayden, Idaho. She had been carrying the weapon in her purse, which she carelessly placed next to her toddler in a shopping cart child seat. Veronica Ruteledge also had several other small children with her. Ironically, the woman had firearm training and was a nuclear research scientist. The tragic accident comes at the heels of two similar incidents, one in Washington State, the other in Pennsylvania, which occurred earlier in the year.

After a snow, a great, white, uniform sheet of flakes clothes the Earth; a billion icy fragments become one cohesive mass that belies the unique nature of each of its components. Every tiny flake a staggering 10¹⁹ water droplets, condensing and coalescing to form complex crystals, each different from the next.

Digging our heel points into the ice, we perched on the knife ridge, looking south. From the east, the sun crept lazily up from the jagged horizon line. We hadn't been able to see anything further than a few feet from our faces since midnight. The difference that rotating our bodies 180 degrees made was stunning, laying the whole of Oregon, bathed in pinkish light, beneath us. We breathed in the view. On the way home, we stopped in front of the Sandy police station. Exhausted and happy, we slept in the sun-drenched front seat of the car.

More tragedy in Idaho on January 10th as a 29-year-old man killed three beloved community members and critically wounded a fourth in Moscow: John Lee murdered his adoptive mother at home before moving on to Northwestern Mutual Bank where he shot two men, one his landlord, who died. He then traveled to a local Arby's where he attacked the manager. She died later. He fled to nearby Pullman, Washington, where he was caught and is now fighting extradition.

Vibrant yellows, reds and oranges flare between pointed green leaves. The bright fruits are vigil candles beneath the vaulted ceiling of the plant. Evenly spaced, uniform and silent: a perfect row of pew-seated parishioners. Each tiny tomato awaits its turn to be plucked from the fuzzy vine, some of them splitting in the process, spilling myriad golden seeds through their wounded flesh. The acidic juice smells of summer.