



A *holiday* short story by   
**BETH GREEN** 

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THE STOLEN *STOLLEN* by Beth Green

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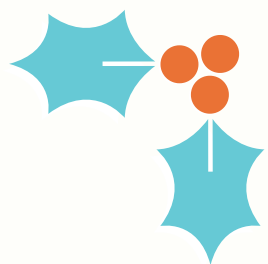
## A NOTE FROM BETH

Thank you so much for reading my Christmas-season short story “The Stolen Stollen.”

The story was inspired by a birthday trip I took to a small Bavarian town just across the border from the Czech Republic. The town’s tiny Christkindlmarkt had just a few booths, a lumpy but festive Christmas tree, a little stage where local musicians caroled and played instruments, and a livestock pen holding two alpacas. It was the picture of peace, so of course I couldn’t help but imagine a little chaos. Several mulled wines later, I had the beginnings of this short story that I’m sharing with you now.

You can follow some of my real-life travel adventures on my new Substack publication, *Bikes and Other Things That Scare me*, at [bethgreen.substack.com](https://bethgreen.substack.com)

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The sheer quantity of sugary treats tempted Patrick: A whole Christmas market booth full of enticing gingerbread hearts. The smell of cloves, ginger, and nutmeg rolled off the baked goods, surrounding him in a cloud of holiday spice.

Some hearts' icing inscriptions declared love, some were fittingly Christmas themed, others just beautifully Bavarian.

He only needed one cookie, right now, to quell the urge.

But which one? He deliberated, blowing on his cold fingers and then slipping them into his gloves. He could wait, he decided.

The urge wasn't yet that strong.

As he strolled through the market, he observed his surroundings. The small town boasted a large central square, much lauded in the guidebook app he'd purchased before his flight from the States. In the weeks before Christmas, the square transformed into a labyrinth

of good cheer, a bustling market of crafts, kitsch, food, and drink.

In addition to the warm aroma from the gingerbread kiosk, the scents of pine and cinnamon and apple punch marked the air. Along with these pleasant smells, he detected base notes of charcoal from the fire where ham rotated on a spit and the twinge of manure from the tiny livestock pen where two skinny alpacas expended their dubious charms on small children.

Patrick browsed the brightly lit booths, breathed in the spices, and relaxed into the chatter of conversations and Christmas music from the live band.

And the urge subsided, even without a dose of sugar to substitute for the endorphin rush his synapses craved.

Patrick had come to Germany as a reward: He finished his treatment—had survived six months without giving into his urge to shoplift even once.

His therapist was against the trip: “Your condition is brought on by stress, like traveling. You’ll have elevated hormones; jet lag can – “

*Bah.* He’d quit listening. He was determined to take the trip.

And now, surrounded by happy holiday-makers, he experienced a full, warm satisfaction. For at least these few moments, there were none of the jangly nerves, none of the buzzing tension at the back of his skull. None of the warning signs he had been battling.

He was ready.

There'd been a couple close calls, sure. The urge had come at the airport duty-free, his whole body alive with the fact he had gotten past the uniformed border guards without breaking down – due to his numerous

arrests, uniforms made him break out in a nervous sweat. His fingers itched to caress the tiny sample bottles that begged travelers to pocket them. But he remembered how to cope and instead rifled through his pockets for a packet of gum. Chewing a stick methodically, he welcomed the pop of sweetness.

Sure, it wasn't the best idea to replace the urge with a dependency on sugar, but a few pounds on the waist was better than another embarrassing arrest, another midnight phone call to his aunt to get him out of jail.

That's what concerned his aunt, when he told her he was coming to Europe for the holidays. Worry shot through her voice like marbling in stracciatella ice cream. "Stay here for Christmas. It's too far away if something happens. If you need to call someone."

*Someone* meaning her. His guardian angel, he sometimes called her.

He'd shut her down, a bit more harshly than he'd meant to: "I'll be fine."

And here he was; he was fine.

He continued through the market, looking for something to eat. Candied almonds, perhaps?

He sidestepped a teenage boy selling raffle tickets from a basket on a tether around his neck and dodged a pack of school-aged girls toting musical instruments in heavy cases.

And then, out of nowhere, two familiar faces.

The pair of Australian women he'd met at the hotel last night. They were video blogging their way around the world, they'd told him. Teaching people how to travel painlessly. But last night wasn't a good example, they'd explained. In fact, Gina had been in

tears. Her wallet was snatched right out of her purse when she walked through the Christmas market. Feeling somehow responsible for the crime – for all his past crimes – Patrick had bought them a drink.

Should he greet them now? Or keep walking?

Before he could choose, Gina called out, “Patrick! Over here. Get your *glühwein* on, mate.”

He nodded to the man at the wine booth, receiving a serving of hot spiced wine in a souvenir glass. He ordered a paper plate of sausages as well, drowning them in ketchup, and then joined the Australians at their standing table. They’d picked one near a propane-powered heater, a tall, warm mushroom. They cleared a space on the table for his plate, moving aside their tourist map, a set of raffle tickets, and their camera equipment.

“Are you filming?” he asked, pointing at the equipment.

“Nah, we’re finished for today,” Gina said. “It’s mulled wine o’clock!”

The women’s table neighbored the animal pen, where the two lonely alpacas stood waiting for attention, snow dusting their fur.

“It’s a crying shame about these animals,” Karina said. Of the three of them, she was the most prepared for winter, wearing a fuzzy hat, overlapping scarves in bright patterns, and a puffy silver jacket.

Gina turned to her. “Karina, you’re wearing alpaca right now! Isn’t that the wool cap we picked up in Peru? It’s a bit much to say you’re worried about the animal when you wear it.”

“That’s unfair. I don’t know what happened to the alpacas before they made my hat, but I can see these ones here have a hard life.”

As the traveling companions bickered, Patrick gazed at the market booths, taking in the way the holiday lights coiled around real pine boughs on the eaves of the booths and sparkled in the twilight. Mixed orange and white and red and yellow lights – all warm, welcoming colors – delineated the booths’ areas of commerce and banished any shadows that might dare to intrude on the Christmas spirit.

Across from the food and drink stalls, the band was taking a break on the tiny raised stage, tucking into snacks and raising plastic beer cups to random people in the crowd.

Was it the alcohol in the sweetly spiced wine or his jet lag that spurred the sudden stab of anxiety? He couldn’t tell. It started, as it always did, in his knees. He ignored it at first. Then, an antsy, niggling sensation crawled up his legs and sat in his belly.

With a start, he realized he’d left it too late. He knew the impulse that would come.

He needed to feed it sugar before the urge took over his reactions and made him choose something to steal.

Patrick stood to buy another round of drinks. As he waited in line, leg bouncing in time with a tinny version of “Do They Know It’s Christmas,” his eyes scanned for something he could swipe to feed the urge. Perhaps a sugar packet? Would an extra helping of napkins satisfy? Those were free items anyway.

*No. I’m not taking anything, he told himself. The wine is sweet enough it should help.*



It didn't.

He pulled out other coping tricks. He imagined the horror on Gina's and Karina's faces if they saw him steal something. Visualized them backing away from the table, melting into the crowd of Christmas shoppers. Leaving him here cold and alone and ashamed.

*There. That worked.*

*Right?*

Finally, after another glass of *glühwein*, he caved. He'd buy something sweet and share it with the women. That would also get rid of this pervasive feeling of guilt he had while sitting with them, as if he were to blame for their stolen wallet last night.

And then he would remove himself from temptation and go back to the hotel.

Murmuring an apology, he left the table. "I'll be back in a moment."

"Watch your wallet," Karina called after him.

He meandered, taking care not to slip on the icy cobblestones, and looked for the perfect something to take the edge off.

The market was large — five rows of booths arranged in curving lines under the spires of the town's Neogothic cathedral. He stopped and turned in a circle, trying to get his bearings. He knew he'd seen a good bakery booth on his way in, but what direction was that?

And which way was his hotel? Behind him? He'd sat with the Australian women longer than he realized. Drank more wine than he expected.

But then a surge of optimism overtook him: he'd figure it out. Because he'd found the stall he wanted. Yellow light spilled over rows of appetizing baked goods. The chill air dampened his sense of smell, but

here the sharp aromas of cinnamon and cloves and the sweetness of honey and caramel teased him.

The woman framed in the booth's red-and-green window stamped her feet in time to the jingling bells of the Christmas music and looked at him expectantly. The loudspeaker announced something in German. A hush fell over the market, then loud, exciting music with accordions and drums boomed behind him.

No other customers were waiting – everyone flocked to the area by the stage – so he didn't rush his selection. He leaned forward to see better but didn't choose his footing well. He slipped on black ice and lost his balance. To stop himself from falling on the cookies, Patrick staggered backward into someone. When he turned to apologize, he saw a thin man, wearing a threadbare sweater over jeans.

"Pardon," the man said. He spoke in English. – *Am I that obviously a tourist?* Patrick wondered – "I want to get past and help my wife." The skinny man indicated the woman in the booth and they both grinned at him. The man handed the woman a small paper bag and she stowed it under the counter.

Patrick smiled and continued perusing the cookies, but the man wanted to talk.

"Tourist? Business?"

Patrick indicated the former.

"Where do you stay?" the man asked. "The Grand Bavaria Hotel?" He pointed at the brightly lit facade of the town's largest hotel, visible over the market stalls.

Patrick shook his head and again looked around. He still wasn't sure from which direction he'd come; the cheery lanes of the Christmas market had multiplied

somehow in the twilight hours. He shook his head, foggy with *glüwein*. Inside his gloves, his fingers tingled.

“I’m not sure where my hotel is, actually.”

The admission seemed to alarm the man, so Patrick hurried to explain.

“It’s the Faust Hotel. It’s nearby, right?”

When the man pursed his lips, Patrick continued, “But I’m meeting some friends, and they’ll help me find it.” Small talk with people who didn’t speak English well was even more awkward than Patrick usually found it. The man only asked about the hotel to be nice. He didn’t really care. Patrick could see the man’s interest fading on his face.

His heart sank.

Predictably, the urge increased along with his negative feelings. He noted the textbook signs: His knee knocked the inside of his jeans and the tingly-jangly impulse to swipe something became unbearable.

*Sweets*, he thought. *Sugar*.

“I’m looking for something sweet to share with my friends. What do you recommend?”

“Christmas cookies!” the woman exclaimed.

“Here’s a box, take the ones you like.” He accepted the ornamented tin she gave him and added cookies to it, delighting in the choice. Small shapes uniform but not perfect — clearly handmade. There were beautiful Linzer cookies with cutouts of a red jam – lingonberry? cranberry? – shining like ruby jewels set in gold. Silver foil protected chocolate nuggets, and more he couldn’t identify.

When he finished his selection, he handed her the box and she weighed it and then placed it in a red paper bag. “Anything else?”

He hesitated. The hours of standing outside were getting to him. The cold had edged under his jacket, sending icy fingers up his shoulder blades. He felt a sudden longing for the gas heater and the Australian women's banter. He'd deliberated too long over the cookies. What if they had gotten bored and left? He'd have to find his way back to the hotel by himself –

He sent a wistful glance at the rest of the booth's display. Breads and fruitcakes, fudges and candies, chocolate-covered sweetmeats. A third of the table was devoted to sugar-dusted *stollen*, the traditional raisin-studded, marzipan-filled loaves of Christmas bread. Nearest him, a wooden tray held cellophane-wrapped white-iced gingerbread cookies in the shapes of angels blowing horns. He ached to put one in his pocket. He'd better go.

“No, no thank you.”

She handed him his bag and smiled. “At least try the *stollen*,” she said, indicating a tiny basket of cut samples.

Obligingly, he selected a piece and bit into it, a fall of powdered sugar instantly catching on the stubble of his upper lip and drifting down onto the belly of his jacket. When he began brushing the sugar away, the saleswoman's lips twitched at the sight he made, and then she looked away, as if realizing he was embarrassed. He sensed a set-up somehow, which made him angry, and the urge came back, stronger than before. The electric nerves, the twitching of his fingers – before he knew it, he had reached out and snatched one of the little angel cookies and inserted it in his wide jacket pocket.

And with the cookie, he pocketed shame. The cellophane was cold, but his pocket glowed red-hot in his imagination. His shoulders knotted as he berated himself for his weakness.

As he walked away, he thought about grinding the cookie to dust. Only two days into his trip, and he had failed.

“Hey! Tourist!”

He turned. Behind him, the man with the sweater.

His theft had been seen. After all that treatment, all those promises. And for a worthless cookie. *I’m sorry, auntie*, he thought. *I’ll be calling you from German jail too.*

Harsh, cold air grated the back of his throat as he realized the seller wasn’t the only person who could see his theft. Just a few stalls away, in front of a booth selling paper stars, two policewomen in navy-blue uniforms chatted with the aproned shopkeeper. Patrick visualized the officers shoving his arms behind his back, marching him away.

“I’m sorry,” Patrick said to the man, his eyes bulging out at his own stupidity. Beads of sweat popped up under his hat; his scarf threatened to strangle him.

“No sorry!” The man laughed.

“What?”

“My wife wants to give you a *stollen*,” the man pushed another red sack into his hands, smiling. “It’s Christmas, and you are all alone and a visitor. Please, take it.”

Patrick looked down dumbly at the paper sack.

“Thank you,” he said, even guiltier about the angel. “I should pay you – “

“Think nothing of it,” the man said. He walked away, whistling.

Patrick poked the paper-wrapped *stollen* with a finger. The bag was heavy — there must be much more marzipan inside this loaf than in the one he’d sampled. His shoulders slumped. What a nice gift. And after he’d lifted something from them.

*Patrick, you shit*, he thought. He could sense the cycle of thoughts beginning, the venomous accusations caused by the urge that also brought on the urge. He looked around at the booths, full of tiny objects that would fit inside his voluminous jacket pockets. *I could just* –

No. He needed sugar. That would help. He would go share the cookies with the Australians, then go back to the hotel and sleep till the urge passed.

When Patrick looked up from the bag, he nearly dropped it. The two policewomen were closer now, both staring at him in the same instant, then looking away.

Had they seen him take the angel? *No*, he told himself. *Be logical*.

He scurried back to the crowded center of the market and found Gina and Karina bubbling with excitement.

“Sorry I took so long,” he mumbled.

“Patrick!” Gina shouted. “I won something in the raffle!”

Karina waved two pairs of socks in the air. “After we were just talking about alpaca wool, too!”

The two women preened over the prize, taking photos. Karina stepped over to the alpaca pen and started a live video for their social media followers.

“I brought cookies,” Patrick said to Gina. But cookies weren’t so interesting after a raffle win. He set the tin on the table between them.

Gina dipped one of the almond-flour cookies in her *glüwein*, nibbled, then grimaced. “Better with coffee, maybe. Thanks for sharing, though.”

Patrick selected a sugar-dusted orb that smelled like orange peel and bit. With his other hand, he traced the outline of the angel in his pocket. The dough was sweet. The urge subsided.

Now that night had truly fallen, the market was packed. On the stage, the raffle paused before they announced the grand prizes. In the interim, a small group of children, aged about eight or nine, sang. They wore white dresses with tiny tinsel halos on their heads. A full angel choir.

Patrick watched the children sing and stuffed cookies in his mouth.

“Wow, you must like these biscuits. Do you have this same kind in the US?” Gina asked, as he took the last cookie out of the tin. The powdered sugar now crusted his lips like a rime of ice on a pond. Hot shame rushed through him, but he knew his embarrassment for being a glutton was nothing compared to what he would feel if Gina knew about the angel in his pocket.

Patrick opened his mouth, searching for some sort of excuse other than “if I don’t eat sugar I steal things,” but then Gina’s attention was pulled behind him, to Karina.

“Are you still doing that, love?”

Karina was even closer to the alpacas, face rosy, still filming. Gina excused herself and went to join the video.

Patrick stared at the empty tin on the table. He shouldn't have eaten the cookies so quickly. They sat in his stomach, hot and heavy as coal.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the dark blue shapes of the policewomen making another round. They stopped, faces in his direction. He swallowed rising panic.

*The cops aren't looking at you*, he told himself. *It's just your fear of uniforms.*

But the logic did nothing to assuage his shame. He'd sacrificed all those months of hard work battling his urges for the tiny satisfaction of stealing a cookie worth a dollar.

*They're not looking at you*, he repeated. His chest swelled with relief. But at the next thought, he gasped.

*Are they looking at Gina and Karina?*

What were his friends doing, anyway? Behind him, Karina held the camera while Gina tried to pick the tiny padlock securing the alpaca pen gate.

"Don't do that!" he hissed, leaving his paper sacks on the table and running over. "The cops will see!"

They ignored him.

"Watch as we make sure these alpacas have happy feet," Gina commanded the camera as she held up the two pairs of socks. "We're going to get some stockings on the poor darlings."

Fear dry and ashy in his mouth, Patrick spun in a circle, looking for the blue blur of police rushing to make an arrest.

But no one had yet noticed the women by the pen. Not the policewomen, not the people around them. Everyone's attention was fixed on the stage, where the raffle had resumed. The grand prizes were being



announced. A little girl in an angel costume pulled numbers out of a basket to a cacophony of drum rolls and stamping feet.

Patrick had to persuade his friends to stop. What to say? The first thing that came to mind: “You can’t get alpacas to wear socks!”

“Sure I can.” Gina replied. She hiccupped.

The lock finally gave, and Gina popped open the latch, beckoning to the alpacas. She waved the socks in her hands, crooning: “Come here, sweethearts.”

“Be careful, don’t they spit?” Karina warned, “Or is that llamas?”

The alpacas sniffed the air, ears twirling like robot antennae. They approached Gina cautiously, sniffing the air for treats.

Gina knelt in the straw of the pen, stretching one of the socks open.

The lead alpaca bent one leg as if to allow her to pull the wool tube over its hoof –

“It’s a Christmas miracle,” Karina whispered to the camera.

Patrick held his breath.

– and then bolted, hind legs jackrabbiting, catching Gina full in the face and knocking her on her ass. The other alpaca followed; both animals leapt forward on high alert, instinct replacing the lull of overstimulation.

They dashed out of the pen between Karina and Patrick, bowling over the table and scattering Patrick’s belongings, and rushed pell-mell into the crowd, upsetting three kiosk tables laden with Christmas ornaments in their wake.

The alpaca minder, a teenage boy still clutching his paper raffle tickets, stood with his mouth agape for a full second before starting to chase the alpacas while calling for assistance.

But hearing his cries made the alpacas more frantic to escape their human captors. They darted left, then right.

Shoppers screamed in frustration as their Christmas purchases were trampled by alpaca hooves. To escape, one woman climbed on the steeped roof of a booth, then slid backward, bringing lights and pine boughs down in a crash with her.

Finding no way out of the market, the alpacas' wild eyes lit on the bright stage lights, interpreting it as a clearing in the forest. They barreled straight for the little girl in the angel costume still standing on the stage.

As she shrieked into the microphone, two men from a table beside the stage attempted to intercept the animals before they flattened her. Throwing themselves sideways like goalies blocking a soccer ball, their cups of *glühwein* sloshed blood-red liquid over the child's white robes.

At the last second, the lead alpaca veered off and the second bucked on two legs, stymied.

Their eight-legged romp finally ended when two elderly women from a booth selling textiles hemmed the alpacas in by brandishing fine lace tablecloths.

The end of the two-beast stampede was celebrated with shouts and clapping, and then a group chanted a song. On the stage, the little girl sobbed.

People began to clean up the dropped packages and broken glass.

Patrick finally drew a breath.

“Excuse me. You speak English, sir?” Even in the fray, the police had found him. “Did you do this?”

“No, I tried to stop them, but – “

“Where can we find the guilty party?”

“They’re right – “ but no. Gina and Karina had melted into the shadows. Gone.

He edged the officers back to the table by the heater and pulled it upright. All of Gina and Karina’s things were missing. They must have grabbed them and vanished while he stood riveted by the alpacas destroying the market.

He gathered his belongings. His souvenir cup was now chipped and the empty tin of cookies dented, but at least he –

The surprise must have registered on his face.

“What’s wrong?” one of the officers demanded.

“My – well, it’s silly – “

“What is it?”

“I had a bag here with some baked goods in it and it’s either gone – ”

He stopped. He didn’t care about the bread. He just wanted the officers to leave him alone.

“Was something stolen?” The shorter officer interrupted.

“I had one of those Christmas breads. It’s okay, though, I guess.” He wiped sweat off his face. He needed to get away from the uniforms. He put his hand in his pocket and brushed the cellophane wrapper of the angel cookie. Shame flooded through him again.

“Your *stollen* was stolen?” The officer’s mouth twitched.

“It doesn’t matter – ”

“Of course it matters,” the younger woman said. “We’ve a terrible problem with theft at this year’s market.”

Over by the stage, the little angel with the blood-red wine-stains still cried. He thought about the angel cookie in his pocket.

*There’s no escaping myself,* Patrick realized. *I just have to do better.*

“Do you want to buy another *stollen*?” the brunette officer said. She checked her watch. “The kiosks close in a few minutes. You should do it now.”

“I don’t care,” Patrick said. “I don’t feel well. Can I go?”

“You may return to your accommodation. But we will come talk to you later about this” – she groped for a word – “alpaca incident.”

After they noted down his name and hotel, Patrick hurried out of the market. While searching for a landmark in the dark streets, he wondered what happened to the *stollen*. Had someone really taken it in the chaos of the alpaca escape?

He had never had something stolen from him before. It was an odd sensation.

Before his treatment, he’d taken things from so many people – rings from his grandmother, loose change and money from his aunt. He’d stolen from school, from employers, from every shop he came to. But he’d never had someone steal something from him.

He felt slightly indignant. Then again ashamed.

He turned into a cobblestone-paved alleyway he thought led to the entrance of the Hotel Faust.

*Tomorrow,* he resolved. He would go back to the booth where he stole the angel and pay for it. He’d find

out who that little girl was with the wine-stains on her dress and buy her a Christmas present. And he'd get a huge bag of candy and carry it with him everywhere. He'd never let the urge overpower him again.

Ahead, the hotel's sign glowed in the alley's shadows. The optimism from earlier in the afternoon returned. He found it!

He'd skip dinner and call his aunt to wish her an early Merry Christmas. He knew she was worried –

Were those footsteps behind him?

As he turned, still thinking about his aunt, someone tackled him from behind, a full-body block that reminded him of his worst PE classes as a child. He lost his footing and fell, his attacker's wiry arms pinning him face-down on the salted ice.

"Help!" he shouted. Maybe the receptionist would –

"Where is it?" his assailant growled in English.

Patrick recognized the voice. The man from the booth. The man who had given him the *stollen*. He wanted to laugh. Targeted by thieves twice in one evening? This was clearly cosmic retribution coming back around.

*Fine.* The guy could take whatever he wanted.

"My wallet is in my back jeans pocket," Patrick said, enunciating clearly.

The man hissed a curse. "No. The bag from the market."

"What?"

"I gave you the wrong bag. I need it back."

Patrick couldn't help it; he laughed out loud. "Someone stole it, dude."

The man pressed Patrick's cheek harder into the cobblestones. "You lie!"

Suddenly from around the corner, more footsteps.

Gina and Karina's voices pealed in the air above him as they charged the man holding him down. Patrick couldn't see what was going on, but moments later their heavy camera tripod clattered on the pavers next to him and his attacker rolled away, holding his head.

"I'll ask the receptionist to call the cops," Karina shouted. She ran inside while Gina sat on Patrick's mugger.

Patrick stood up, dazed. The cold from the stone had seeped through his jeans.

Soon, the policewomen from the market jogged up. He rubbed the outline of the angel in his pocket as the two officers took the attacker into custody.

Gina approached him. "You all right?"

"I didn't tell them you let the alpacas go," Patrick whispered. "But when they check the security footage, they'll see it."

She handed him a red paper bag. "No worries," she said. "I know it was stupid of us. We'll take the next train out. We came back to grab our stuff and give you back your *stollen*. Karina took it by accident."

"That's what the guy wanted," Patrick said.

"Your Christmas bread? This dry shit with marzipan?"

"Yeah." He hefted the bag. It was still oddly heavy.

"Why would he want it?" he asked. But Gina had already gone into the hotel.

He took the *stollen* out of the bag as one of the officers came to explain he should wait for an EMT to evaluate his injuries.

“Sure,” he said, staring at the pastry in his hands.

“So you did get another *stollen*,” the officer said. “Enjoy it. They’re best with coffee.” She turned to go.

“Hold on, officer.”

While she watched, he unwrapped the paper from the loaf. A gold watch fell out. Her eyes grew wide.

“*Was ist das?*”

“You have trouble with thieves in the market? I think I know how they move the stolen items.”

She took the loaf from him and tore away the bread, revealing several rings, a gold money clip and a woman’s wallet.

She grinned. “Did you see us in the market earlier? We watched that booth for days. We saw you take that cookie, by the way.”

Patrick's cheeks got hot. “I shouldn’t – “

She shrugged. “We were after something bigger. The guy and his wife have been pickpocketing people all season but we couldn't prove it. Every time we checked, they had nothing in the booth. He threatened us; said we were harassing him. But why give you the *stollen*?”

Patrick rubbed his face where it hit the pavement. “Well, he said he gave it to me by accident. Must have switched the bags.”

“His bad luck,” the policewoman said. “You need to make a statement. Come to the police station tomorrow morning, *ja?*”

He hesitated. So many bad memories at police stations.

But this was the first time he had thought of one and not been engulfed by shame.

“I will,” he said. “But can you recommend a good bakery for breakfast? I’ve got a terrible sweet tooth.”

THE END