

**Daisy (Year 8, James Allen's Girls' School)**  
**DLF 2017 Winter Short Story Competition entry**

**Hot Gingerbread**

"Gingerbread! Sweet, hot gingerbread! One reichmark per slice!"

Every winter day, when I walked home from school, the old man would be sitting under the snow-sugared silver birch tree on the Unter den Linden, his gingerbread steaming invitingly from a little trolley. He was only there in winter – a bit like Father Christmas.

The old man was something of a grandfather figure to the children living on the Unter den Linden. He never wore gloves; he baked and handed us the gingerbread in frail, liver-spotted hands. "Don't you get cold?" I would sometimes ask him. "Never, meine liebste," he always replied, "Winter's my friend. So I'm never cold."

We'd settle down around him in an ardent, crumb-mouthed circle. He'd begin telling us stories of a wondrous, wintry land beyond the moon and stars, where you could go ice-skating and have snowball fights every day. "There's no war there. Because war's terrible, dark, ugly. Remember that. Gingerbread! Sweet, hot gingerbread!"

Once, Eva asked the old man whether we would go to wintry land beyond the moon and stars. He smiled sadly. "One day. Not yet. Not for years." He laid a gnarled hand on his chest. "I'll go sooner." "Gingerbread! Sweet, hot gingerbread!"

After a while, I noticed only we children bought the old man's gingerbread anymore. Others would trudge by as if he was invisible. I found out why on a bitterly cold day around Christmas. As we turned onto Unter den Linden we saw countless posters fluttering on trees and lampposts, each bearing the demonic, mad-eyed face of Adolf Hitler. We noticed three Gestapo officers lingering near the old man.

"Hello, Opa!" I greeted him. He'd become our grandfather.

"Hello, my ducklings! Some gingerbread?"

Before we could answer, a soldier butted in. "Identification, please. Show us your papers."

He had chapped, red-raw hands. I could tell that these men were not Winter's friends.

My heartbeat quickened as Opa brought out some papers. The soldier snatched them and scanned them suspiciously. Please, Winter, I pleaded silently. Protect your friend. The soldier spoke. "Anshel Ruben. You're Jewish," he snapped. "Where's your star?"

Very slowly, Opa crunched forward in the snow and stopped in front of the soldiers. Although he was small and hunched with age, he seemed so much taller. He brought his face up so that it was level with the soldier's, and whispered softly, "What star?" Before I knew it, the soldiers had kicked over Opa's gingerbread trolley, spilling the hot gingerbread into the snow, and were seizing him by the arms and dragging him away.

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The kitchen is warm with the scents of cinnamon and sugar. "Where's Opa now?" asks my daughter, biting into a gingerbread man. "He's in the wintry land beyond the moon and stars, where you can go ice-skating and have snowball fights every day. And sometimes, if I listen hard enough, I can still hear his voice. Gingerbread! Sweet, hot gingerbread!"