



a political horror story

COOKIES FOR GIO

ANGEL LEIGH MCCOY

Copyright

Cookies for Gio

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"Cookies for Gio"

by Angel Leigh McCoy

I rest a hand on Gio's shoulder, and he looks up from the half-naked pop star writhing on his computer monitor, a smile lingering on his face. That's my hormonal eighteen-year-old. My heart aches on its next beat.

"Hi, Mom," he says, head loose on his neck. He wrangles it under control and pushes his headphones off one ear.

"Hi." I sit on the bed, within reach of him in his electric wheelchair, and I pet its vinyl-covered armrest. Gio doesn't need it all the time. His Muscular Dystrophy hasn't progressed that far. On his good days, he shuffles around with a walker.

I ask, "Whatcha doin'?"

"Soaking up as much Internet as I can," Gio says, his tongue thick, words carefully pronounced. "Before they take it all away. What are...you doing?" He sets his hand on mine. His fingers are cold, soft, and awkward. I hold them, warm them, love them.

"Just taking a break from the computer."

He leans toward me, eyes bright with interest. "Hacking?"

"Shhh." I look over my shoulder, then feel ridiculous—and yet...

He whispers, "You think they're listening?"

I shrug. "I'm baking cookies. Got it?"

Gio tips his head back and chortles. "Got it!" I feel the weak squeeze of his hand in mine. "I love your cookies."

"You hungry?"

"No. When's Dad going to call?"

"Truth?"

"Always."

"I don't know." It's been nine months since Antonio was drafted, and forty-five days since we last talked to him. A portion of his paycheck appears every month, so I know he's alive. Last time I spoke to him, he said something about being transferred to the Templar brigade. He said they might send him to fight in Jordan.

I release Gio's hand and pretend to watch the video with him, following his cues to laugh, hiding the worries that are surging over me. What if I get caught in the deep underground? How will

we pay for Gio's care? What if Antonio is killed in Babylon?

They're calling the war "The Final Crusade." The American attack on Israel and Palestine surprised everyone. They surrendered without a whimper, and U.S. forces installed a provisional government. The evangelists proclaimed a victory for Jesus.

War correspondents showed gleeful American soldiers swimming in the Sea of Galilee. The media crows about battles won, enemies thwarted, and territory gained in Cyprus, Lebanon, and Syria. Damascus broke months ago, and Jordan is on its way to surrender.

The president's press secretary keeps saying, "The president is taking whatever measures are necessary. America has had enough. We tried the olive branch. It didn't work, so now we use the stick. It's time someone lifted Muslims out of their semi-barbarous state. Children under ten will be given new names, new families, and new lives. They will be raised with God's love. All the rest are criminals. Either you're with us, or you're against us."

Gio cries out, jerking me alert. He's pointing a shaky hand at the screen.

"What's the matter?" I ask. I realize my back has hunched under the weight of my thoughts, and I sit up straight.

"Look." Gio unplugs his headphones, and the sound breaks out into the room.

Propaganda. A camera-shot of the Oval Office is zooming in toward the desk where the president of these United States is signing a bill into law.

The narrator says, "In the wake of the Secretary of State's amendment to the Immigration and Nationality Act which added Hebrew groups to the list of Domestic Terrorist Organizations, the president has today signed an executive order requiring the seizure of all assets held by these groups. Warrants are being served to hamstring those who would attack us from within. A hundred and twenty Jewish leaders and rabbis are en route to Guantanamo."

I have friends who are Jewish. Or, I had friends. I haven't heard from them since the Israel invasion.

The music video comes back on, in media res, and I stand up. I don't want Gio to see me cry.

"I better get back to those cookies," I say, heading for the door.

"Go get 'em, Mom."



I go fishing for Jedi_Jock. I've known him since I was a student at M.I.T., though I have no idea where he is, what he looks like, or even if he's truly a man. I don't care. He's the most reliable human being on this planet, from my point of view.

I create a private chat room called BlackWall2019, and I type: *Knock, knock, Jackass*. That's our code. His bots will find it. Now I just have to wait until he shows.

SnubNoseCock wants in... Nope, not him.

PwnYrPolitics... No.

ScissorSix66... Reject.

The deep underground is buzzing about the fall of Iran under Soviet expansion. "America's #1 ally," is the second prong in the war on everything non-Christian. Political cartoonists are calling the two countries the two-headed bear.

There. JJPussyGrabber... That's him. His public alias. I let him in, but wait for him to type first. He does: *Hey. What are you wearing?*

My Trump-for-President pajamas. Flannel. You?

A clown suit.

It's definitely him. I type, *We're secure*.

Been awhile. How's the pet?

Good and bad. You know.

I told him about Gio when Antonio got drafted, breaking the first rule of underground engagement, but I couldn't help it. I was at the end of my rope, alone, and I needed someone to talk to. So JJ knows I have a kid with M.D., but that's all he knows.

Cool. They done?

He's talking about the malware I'm programming, the virus meant to burn down firewalls all over the world. It'll free the 'Net, if only for a little while, and it's been one of the hardest tasks I've ever undertaken.

Yes. All done.

K. Sit tight. We're planning a party for any time now. I'll get back to you.

You sure about this?

Having doubts?

I dunno. Maybe. It's just so... (I almost type "extreme," but it's one of the words on Homeland Security's watchlist.) ...big.

JJ types, I wish you could see what I see. It's worth it.

I feel sick. I'm a programmer, not a rebel. I've always stayed within the law.

I type, *OK*

TTYL. And, he's gone.

There's a flash on my monitor. My heart skips a beat. In a panic, I shut it all down and sit there, waiting for the sky to fall, the door to explode inward, and the uzi-toting black ops to close in. I wait all night, sleep like crap, and wake up in the morning feeling head-achy. Exhausted, but not arrested.

I fix Gio's breakfast around nine. I have to remind him to eat. He's never hungry anymore. It's the M.D. If I weren't here, he'd starve.

He's sitting at his computer, like always, typing with frantic deliberation. Focused.

"Mother fucker!" he shouts before he realizes I'm there. I pause in the doorway, watching the images on his screen. It's another anti-gay ad from the series. Gio's mad, but not at the ad. Those are nothing new, not anymore.

Gio has a chat window open, though I can't read what's being said.

"Hey, buddy," I say. "It's time to eat." I move to stand beside him.

"Okay," he replies, distracted, sparing me only a glance. "Leave it there. I'll eat it."

"What's going on? You seem upset."

"I think they shut down Changyin. Her email's bouncing, and Twitter says her account is dead. Mark thinks they're deporting her."

"Oh, honey, I'm sorry." Changyin lived next door to us, back when we could afford a house in the suburbs. Her parents immigrated from China during the dot-com surge. Changyin was born here, in America. She's never known any other home.

"It's not right!" Gio's body shakes. "We have to do something!"

"She'll be okay," I say, lying through my teeth. "She's with her parents."

"There's only her mom and her sister," he says, voice as heavy as funeral bells. "Her dad died in the Ammon siege, fighting for America."

I fiddle with the plate and silverware on the tray, straightening them. "It's time for breakfast."

"Mom..." Gio says, tentative. "The kids at my school are organizing a protest."

As the words unfold in my mind, I'm already shaking my head.

"Just listen, Mom." He turns his chair to face me and looks me square in the eyes, expression earnest. "All this stuff they feed us is bullshit. They're lying to us. For all I know, they're taking people out and shooting them."

"They wouldn't do that," I say, but I don't know that. You hear things in the underground that contradict the images shown on television.

Gio hits himself in the forehead with both hands. "Our world is shrinking. We watch what they want us to watch, do what they want us to do."

"I know. But there's nothing we can change about that." I place my hand on his bony shoulder. "You could get hurt. And for what? We can't stop what's happening. We can't save Changyin."

Gio waves his hands in the air, an awkward imitation of his father's Italian gestures. "We can't sit here and do nothing! If we do, then we're no better than they are." He leans forward, shaking like a baby bird whose head is too heavy. "We have to use our voices. They can't take those

away!"

His breathing has grown strained.

I say, "I'll think about it, okay?" I set the tray on the desk, pushing his keyboard aside. "Do you want some help eating?"

"You promise you'll think about it? It's really important to me, Mom."

"I'll think about it. When is it?"

"Today, at noon, at the school."

"I'll think about it. You need help?"

"No, I got it."

"Okay." I hesitate, watching as he struggles to pick up his spoon. But ultimately, I leave. He deserves his dignity.



JJPussyGrabber sends me an e-vite to a child's birthday party for the following evening. I R.S.V.P. that I'll be there. I don't know what the plan is or who else is involved. I know that my job is to release my malware. It's ready, waiting in its electronic Petri dish to be unleashed on the world. Desperate times call for desperate measures, someone once said. I doubt their times were as desperate as ours.

At 10:30, Gio starts moving around his room. "Mom! We have to catch the bus in half an hour."

I have no idea whether I'll let him go or not, or how I'll stop him if he insists. He's eighteen. Old enough to make his own choices. Though his body is weak, his mind is sharp. He's my brilliant raggedy boy, becoming a man. His heart may not be strong, but his Heart, capital H, is.

I'm not good at saying "no" to him. Will I have to physically bar him from leaving? Can I bring myself to do that? Am I overreacting? They're high-school kids. In another world, at another time, I'd have applauded this as a healthy Civics lesson. Has our world changed so much?

"Mom! We need to get going."

He rolls into the tiny living room with that look on his face, the stubborn one, and I know I'm in for a fight if I choose it.

"Gio, are you sure you want to do this?"

"Yeah, come on." He goes to the front door. "It'll be okay."

I'm so tired, I give in. "All right, but we're only staying for an hour, and we're sticking to the sidelines. Got it?"

"Sure. Let's go!" He's opening the door, and I have to chase him out into the hall with his coat.



Many of the students are there when we arrive in the school parking lot. A bunch of them swarm Gio, hugging him and patting him.

Gio keeps asking, "Have you see Changyin? Is she here?"

A girl in a cheerleader outfit tells him, "She's gone, G. Her front door's got a USCIS memo about how we should stay out of the house and report any foreign nationals we know about. It's fucking insane." She looks up at me. "Sorry, Mrs. Esposito, but it is."

I just nod.

"Gee-man," says a kid I don't recognize. "Glad you could make it." He picks up one of Gio's hands and winds his own into. They shake, then bump knuckles as if they've done it a thousand times. It always unnerves me when I'm reminded that Gio has a life beyond our little hovel.

A beat later, Gio says, "You too, Mark."

"Look at this crowd, will ya? Damn. I never thought we'd get this many."

At the far end of the parking lot, kids begin to chant. "I am you and you are me! We deny your white supremacy!"

Gio moves his chair toward the edge of the crowd.

"Gio," I warn.

"This is sidelines, Mom. It's okay."

I look at the kids, their earnest faces, their lack of fear, and I feel just how brittle I've become.

The chant changes, "Say it loud! Say it clear! Immigrants are welcome here!"

More bodies press in behind us, more voices, all raised in concert.

I'm filled with pride, and much to my own surprise, I join the chant. Quiet at first, "Immigrants are welcome here." Then louder. "Immigrants are welcome here!"

The chant changes like a wave washing over the crowd. I hear the new one before it hits us, "Compassion is our passion!" It takes no time at all before the people around me, and I, are singing it out with force. I'm emboldened by my emotions.

One voice cuts through all the others, silencing me. It's loud enough that it makes the chant falter.

"Cease and desist! You are in violation of the Public Gatherings Act!" It's a man's voice, authoritative, belted out through a speaker.

The crowd resumes its chant. "Compassion is our passion! Compassion is our passion!"

"This is your second warning. Stop and go home, or face the consequences. You are breaking the law!"

The faces around me look defiant and determined, though some of the kids have the wherewithal to be scared. Gio, in his chair, is unperturbed.

I look around, searching for an avenue out, but the crowd filled in behind us.

"This is your last warning, people! Disperse! Go home!"

I begin to pull Gio's wheelchair backwards, forcing my way between bodies. He's just realized what I'm doing, and I haven't gotten very far, when a gunshot makes everyone jump and cringe.

The chant is interrupted again.

"Get down on the ground. I warned you. Get down on the ground, or we will use force!"

All around me, I hear, "Get down! Get down!" The crowd is complying.

I see the militiamen all around us.

The crowd drops in sections. They whisper their questions:

"Are they going to arrest us?"

"Did they shoot someone?"

"What are they doing?"

I drop to the ground with the others and reach up to pull Gio down with me, but the angle isn't right.

"Get down on the ground!" shouts the soldier.

"Gio!" I cry. "Get down here."

But Gio isn't listening. He's staring straight ahead, expression hard as a rock.

"Gio!" I grab his pant-leg and pull one of his feet off a stirrup.

He looks down at me then, and our eyes meet. His face is set. I've never seen it like that.

"Mom. I have to make my stand now, while I still can."

With a monumental effort, he pushes himself up out of his wheelchair.

I don't know why, but I let him. I watch, frozen, hypnotized by his bravery and by the surreal impossibility of the situation. I watch as he gains control of his balance and raises his chin.

He shouts, "Right takes might! Don't give up the fight!"

I see, everyone sees, that he has wet his pants.

"Right takes might!" he cries. "Don't give up the fight!" His voice rings out into history, across the crowd, and is forever etched in my memory.

As is the sound of the second gunshot and the crumple of his body back into his chair.

For one eternal moment, no one breathes. I can't believe...

Then, I'm moving. I crawl up and over him, protecting him from all else that might come. I smell his blood.

"Gio!" I cry. "Gio, no!"

The crowd is silent. Time has stopped.

One shout kicks it forward. "Right takes might!" It's the voice of a girl. "Don't give up the fight!"

Then the crowd is surging upward. Gunshots are ringing out like firecrackers. Screams are echoing off the high school.

Shaking, sobbing, I cling to my Gio, my brave raggedy boy, and I send my wail straight to God.



They took him and all the others away in body bags. One kind soul guided me out of the chaos. He helped me onto the bus and off again at the right stop. He walked me inside and stayed until I fell asleep.

When I woke, he was gone. The apartment was silent but for the sirens outside.

The anonymous man—I don't even remember his face—had left a contraband digital camera and a note that said, "Do with this what you will."

It took everything I had to look at the footage.

I'm now sitting at my desk. The birthday party is about to begin, and I have cookies. So many cookies. Everything's ready, primed. I watch the clock, each passing minute like a lifetime.

When the time comes at last, I whisper, "This is for you, Gio." And I hit "enter".

My malware streaks out across the web, unblocking it, breaking open the channels of communication. And the first thing everyone will see is what they did to my Gio, and how one courageous young man stood up.

I crawl back onto the couch and curl into a ball. I think, "Right takes might. Checkmate, you dumb mother-fuckers."

THE END

Thank You from Angel Leigh McCoy

I'm so grateful you took the time to read "Cookies for Gio." We live in a violent and unstable world, and this story grew out of my own fears and frustration about what our future might hold. It was cathartic for me to write.

It would mean A LOT to me if you took a moment to leave a review at your favorite online shop, such as Amazon USA, Amazon UK, Kobo, or even at Goodreads. The story will be published in those places by April 15, 2019.

I'd also love to hear from you directly, so feel free to contact me any time with your thoughts on this story, and if you don't mind, I'll keep in touch as I make new stories available. At [AngelMcCoy.com](https://www.angelmccoy.com), you can contact me via email or on my social networks, and read my blog.

While you're there, be sure to sign up for my newsletter—so I can notify you of new releases (of which there will be many in the coming months).

In appreciation, I'm giving you a taste of the next story I plan to release. It's a horror story about a man who will go to extreme lengths to protect his family.

Wishing you happiness and health!

Angel Leigh McCoy

<https://www.angelmccoy.com/>

Sneak Preview



Coquette

by Angel Leigh McCoy

The cockatrice clucked its tongue and sniffed at the steam rising off the eviscerated corpse. It narrowed its eyes with pleasure. Gently, it pushed its hands through the coils of intestine and the lumpy organs to savor the dissipating heat.

A sound at the end of the alley alerted the cockatrice to the intruder. It lifted its head and peered through the darkness with black-amber eyes. Those eyes tracked the man as he fronted a wall and opened his clothing to piss upon the brick. The cockatrice stood slowly, unfolding its long, lean body. It swayed there seductively. Its bare skin reflected what little luminescence lingered in the twilight of the man's life.

Even intoxicated, the man sensed something. In mid-stream, member in hand, he turned sharply toward the cockatrice. He looked confused, shocked even, and the cockatrice smiled. In a heartbeat, his last, the cockatrice struck.



There was no warning, that morning, in the subtle shift of nebulae across the sky. I entered the bus, as usual, riding the same line to the same stop. The same dull faces shared my commute. The same inane conversations grumbled at the periphery of my consciousness.

And then, “Hi,” she said, “Mind if I sit here?” It was such a simple opening to such a complex story. At the time, I didn’t hear the weight in her request. Remembering back, I don’t see how I could have missed it. Her smile alone, so sweet, should have made me wary.

I looked her over: high breasts, flat stomach, jeans tight enough to camel-toe in her fleshy crotch, long legs, pretty face and that smile.

Momentarily, “Sure,” I replied and moved my books off the seat, holding them in my lap with the spines facing her so she could see the titles.

She looked.

“Oh. You’re a doctor?” They all asked that once they’d seen the clues and always with that same feminine squeak of interest in their voices.

I gave my customary chuckle and response, “Soon. I start my internship this fall.” Offer the hand. Smile. “Name’s William. What’s yours?” Tip the head with interest and look straight into the eyes. My choreography worked every time.

“Tiffani.” She turned toward me and slid her hand into mine. I noticed how soft it was, how frail and light. The kind of hand a man loves to have stroking him.

I got her phone number and called her after my last class. I asked her out. She agreed. Readily. Dinner and a walk along the river led us back to my place.

I rubbed my fingertips in lazy circles at the base of her spine, naked with her upon the stain of

our union. Her hand languidly coaxed me up from the languor into which I had drifted.

“What are you doing?” I asked dreamily.

“Playing.”

“Playing? Are you having fun?”

“Oh, yes.”

“Good. Me too.”

“Good.”

I realized that this was a woman I could love.



The German shepherd growled and bared its teeth, so the cockatrice twisted its head off. Afterward, the monster looked up at the house, holding the decapitation by an ear. Blood and other fluids drained from the dog’s neck onto the lawn. Stepping over the twitching body, the cockatrice rounded the corner of the house and peered through a window. It purred deep in its throat at what it saw. It cut through the screen with one, sharp claw and crawled inside. Television noise came from another room. The cockatrice quietly shut the nursery door. It walked to the crib and held up the dog’s head for approval, bobbing it above the railing like a puppet with a ribbon tongue and blank, button eyes. The child giggled. For several minutes, the cockatrice amused itself, making the baby laugh. Predatory peek-a-boo pleased it for awhile, but not forever. The sour-sweet aroma of infant-meat made its mouth water.



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About the Author

Angel Leigh McCoy writes horror, suspense, and dark fantasy in various lengths. Much of her work has undertones of erotica—as do so many things in life. She gave up a longtime video game career in 2017 to finally turn her full attention to publishing her own writing.

She has stories in publications such as *Strange Aeons*, *Necrotic Tissue*, and *Pseudopod*. Her story “Crack O’Doom” earned her a mention in Ellen Datlow’s *Best Horror of the Year*, volume 4, 2012. She wears many other hats as well, including editor and audiobook narrator.



She is the creative force behind the [Dire Multiverse](https://dremultiverse.com) (<https://dremultiverse.com>) world, including the “[Dire Multiverse](https://dremultiverse.com/the-podcast/)” [audio drama](https://dremultiverse.com/the-podcast/) (<https://dremultiverse.com/the-podcast/>), the [Danika Dire video game](https://gamesomniverse.com) (<https://gamesomniverse.com>) (in production), and works of fiction to come. You might know her from her ten years as a narrative designer for the online fantasy game *Guild Wars 2* or through her work on many original World of Darkness roleplaying game supplements.

You can keep an eye on her whirlwind at AngelMcCoy.com and @angelmccoy on Twitter and Facebook.

Also by this Author

As Short Fiction Writer

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