

2013

Baking Cookies

Hannah Chiodo
Denison University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.denison.edu/exile>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Chiodo, Hannah (2013) "Baking Cookies," *Exile*: Vol. 59 : No. 1 , Article 16.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.denison.edu/exile/vol59/iss1/16>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English at Denison Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Exile by an authorized editor of Denison Digital Commons.

Baking Cookies

By Hannah Chiodo

The light was fading on the residents of apartment 224 as they sat in front of the muted television. George was fidgeting with a fold in his khakis, thinking about that night weeks ago when Amelie had appeared before him. Brushing against the borders of sleep, he'd felt rather than seen her presence as she slipped through his door and moved over to his bed.

Realizing that she had entered George's room rather than Kevin's, she'd whispered, "Oh!" and her presence had faded out, leaving a sweetness, like the last glow of weed in a spent bowl.

"Oh, God, man, last night was great," Dominick was saying. He slapped George on the shoulder. "Hey, what is it?"

"The girl," said Harry, grinning. "Yeah, what's up with her? What'd she slip in your drink?"

"Man, I don't know." George seemed serious, unsettling his roommates. "I can't predict the future, but...." He shrugged, thoughtful. Harry and Dominick glanced at each other.

"She's a crazy one and you know it," Dominick said, leaning back in his chair. "She's hot."

"She's a little freshman whore," Harry said. He compulsively glanced at the nearest door, as though Amelie might still be lurking in the vacated fourth bedroom. George ran his fingers through his hair, tugging at the ends.

"I know," he said. His eyes were fixed on the Budweiser ad on the wall, but he was thinking about the soft sigh of Amelie's exhale.

"Hello, boys, I'm here!" Amelie talked like she was singing. She threw open the door and skipped into the apartment. Her dress filled with air with each leap, just revealing the quiet curves of her thighs. Three other honey-toned freshmen followed her in, wearing tentative smiles.

"Drinks, anyone?" Harry poured red cups full of vodka and Crystal Light.

"Pink lemonade! Oh, Harry, thank you," Amelie said as she took hers. Her cheeks were already rosy. George marveled at how clean and girlish she was, flushed like she had just gone on a jog. The other girls faded beside her.

“How’s it going,” he said, inflecting it as a statement rather than a question.

“It’s going,” she replied, flicking the switch between brazen and coy like he had seen her do so often in her conversations with Kevin. She smoothed her hair, flattening it across her collarbone. “How’s lacrosse? Still got Harry chasing after you?” George glanced over at Harry, but he was deep in conversation with Amelie’s friend. “It’s got to be better now, that Kevin—” George’s shoulder jerked involuntarily at the mention of his absent fourth roommate, and Amelie stopped. She watched him with her big blue eyes, then said, “Econ is kicking my ass.”

How could she just toss his name out like that? They had a thing for months, before Kevin got kicked out. Because of another girl. George took a gulp from his beer. “Yeah, it really depends on the professor, though. You got to get Levides. He’s really chill.”

Amelie used to ask him for help with her homework, back when she was with Kevin. She would listen to George’s explanations, nodding silently, but she’d perk up to ask a question whenever his lectures got too obscure for a student of Intro to Macro. He loved the way she looked when she did that, eager, her lips pursed. When Kevin had gone home she’d stopped coming by, until he’d messaged her about tonight.

“See you at 10,” was all she’d written back.

Sometime later they were alone in the narrow living room.

“Hey,” George leaned in and whispered into Amelie’s ear. “You good?”

Amelie smiled. He thought she was a living doll, all blinking eyes and even limbs formed around the curves of the couch.

“Do you ever think about space?” she said. The question caught George off guard.

“No, not really.” Was she high? He could only smell her perfume.

“Oh. More drinks?” She got up and followed a meandering path towards the kitchen. Heaving himself up from the couch, he followed and caught her focusing intently on the last few drops of pink cocktail as they dripped from the pitcher.

“I can make more,” George said, but she ignored him. He moved in closer. There was a small pink mole just at the edge of her mouth. “Amelie.”

“This isn’t even strong, you know.” The last word was muffled as George pressed his mouth to her still vibrating lips. They kissed for a long moment before Amelie pulled away. Harry had entered the kitchen and wasn’t bothering to hide the grin that rounded out his already full cheeks.

“Just getting beers.” Harry removed the tops with two pops in quick succession and pressed a cold bottle into George’s hand. “My boy.” George couldn’t suppress a low laugh. Harry could throw all the verbal jabs he wanted tomorrow, but now he was being a true bro. And Amelie was as soft as he’d imagined. Beneath the floral notes of her scent, there was something earthy and sexual, the way the lacrosse field smelled after it rained.

Harry turned, knowing it was time for him to leave, then spun back around. “Hey, George.” Amelie had grabbed her half-filled cup and was taking big sips. Chugging ever so daintily. “I put a little Xanax in there,” he murmured from the side of his mouth. George stiffened. “Just a tiny, tiny bit.”

“Shit, man, really?” He ran his hand through his hair, but Amelie seemed all right. Besides, he had heard she was into stuff like that.

“Oh my god!” she said suddenly, raising her hands like she had forgotten something. Her eyes scanned the cabinets before settling on what she wanted. Shaking, she put on bare foot on the countertop, just catching the hem of her seersucker dress as it threatened to fall back, and then more surely she pulled herself up, sidestepping to catch her balance. George and Harry watched, beers in hand. “Careful there,” George muttered, too quiet for Amelie to hear. His eyes lingered on her hair as it slid over her bare shoulders. It was the color of Nantucket sand through shallow water.

Amelie grabbed a bag of flour and froze in a half-turn, eyes wide. She brought the flour to her chest, clutching it with both hands like a child clinging to a teddy bear. Then she sprung into motion, making a catlike leap to the floor, and landed with a bang. Along with the way her knees threatened to buckle when she touched down, the noise almost ruined her gracefulness but then she caught herself with a dancer’s skill and spun and pulled open the fridge with a raucous clinking. Flour still dangling from one hand, she searched the fridge, shoving aside bottles.

“There’s no milk. There’s no eggs,” she murmured. She turned to look at the owners of the apartment. “There’s only alcohol.” There

was no accusation in her tone, just regret. Harry was still grinning but the owner of those big seashore eyes confused George. Her mood had changed so quickly.

"It's okay," he said. "We'll get some later." But even as he spoke Amelie was preheating the oven, buttons beeping in response to the urgent motions of her fingers. George wrapped an arm around her waist and gently pulled her out of the kitchen. Her feet slid and stumbled over the tiles. "I'm baking cookies," she whispered. "Shh," he said, and laid her down on the couch. He watched as her lashes dipped once, twice. On the third time they stayed down. He wondered if he could do it. Really, Kevin had just been dumb to get caught. Then he remembered the next morning, the crying girl and the smashed lamp, Kevin's uneasy laugh. No, he thought. Not tonight. Her eyes are closed.

Sometime later Amelie stirred, letting out a little moan. "It's late," she said, blinking her eyes. "I should be going." She kissed George lightly, rose, and disappeared into the four a.m. haze.

* * *

Someone had sent him flowers. He carried the bouquet up from his mailbox and set them on the folding table in the corner of the living room. There was a note stuck inside the foil, spelling "George" in dignified calligraphy. He stuck his thumb under the corner of the envelope, tugged the card out. "Dear George," it read. "We're so glad we got to see you play in the game this weekend. We are so proud of you. Love, Mom and Dad." He put the card down on the table, found a tall mug for a vase, and in his room shoved aside his textbooks to allow for the bouquet on his desk. His cheeks were burning; he was glad he was alone in the apartment. When he retrieved the card from the table, some of the paper tore off, stuck in beer residue. George frowned, but the table wouldn't be worth cleaning before tonight.

* * *

George and Dominick seemed to run into half the senior class at the Giant Eagle. While Dominick marshaled underclassmen lacrosse players lugging cases of Natural Light, George hovered over the wine racks. He preferred beer, thick, fuzzy, and cold on his tongue, but girls loved wine. He picked up a bottle, dark liquid swirling like blood inside. Made in California. No, he thought. Amelie had spent the summer in Paris. She'll want something French. He picked up another bottle. It was forty-five dollars.

"Let me help you." A blonde girl was laughing at him.

“Hey, Lisa.” George nodded at her, but she was already pulling another bottle from the racks.

“Where have you been lately? We’ve missed Georgie.” He and Lisa had been close since freshman year. “You should maybe leave your room sometime?”

“Hey, I’ve been busy,” George replied. He had doubled up on econ classes in his final semester, and wanted to make up for the bad grades he gotten during Kevin’s trial. Too many weekday nights had been spent drinking in the apartment Kevin had no longer been allowed to leave.

Lisa waved the bottle of wine she had selected.

“This. This is good.” He tried to take it from her, but her small fingers refused to let go. “Who’s this for? Your mom, I hope.” George blinked at her. “Seriously, what’s it with you boys and freshman?” She shook out her hair, and then laughed again. “See you at the bar later.”

“I don’t know if I’m going,” replied George.

“Come. Please,” said Lisa, and she pressed the bottle into the center of George’s button down. She shook her head once, and then turned back to the wine racks. George frowned. Sometimes the older girls could get so jealous of the freshmen.

His phone buzzed in his pocket. Looking around the market, Dominick and the rest of the team were nowhere to be seen. He rushed to the counter to pay.

* * *

Three hours later George and Harry stood behind a makeshift bar, talking into each other’s ears over the methodically pounding bass.

“Look, Jude’s dancing with that ugly girl again,” Harry said, nodding at one of their teammates. “I told him to be careful with the 151 shots. But am I gonna save him?” Harry’s laughter disappeared between rap lyrics. George handed beers to a cluster of girls waiting in front of the counter, then glanced towards the door, only to be shouldered by Harry. “You idiot. Stop waiting for her. Get that one.” He nodded towards one of the girls.

“She said she’s coming. I texted her,” George said.

“Yeah, I got you. Go! Have fun!” Harry goosed George as he was squeezing his way out onto the dance floor.

* * *

Amelie didn’t show up until two a.m. She appeared in George’s open door, silent and glowing, like raindrops on a windowpane. The

girl that George had been talking to looked at Amelie, then back to him, and got up and left without a word. Amelie took her place on George's bed with a light bounce. Her eyes were like the shallow end of a swimming pool.

"I got wine," George said, pulling the bottle out from behind his bed. There were two wine glasses on his desk, mismatched ones he'd found in the back of the cupboard. One was clouded acrylic and the other was a gold-rimmed goblet emblazoned with the Chi Zeta crest.

"Really?" said Amelie when she saw the glasses. "I should have brought my own." But she picked up the fraternity glass and blew on it. She smiled as she examined the gold trim.

George poured Amelie's glass half full of red, and then filled his own. They sipped together, and George was surprised by how bitter it tasted. He put his glass down, but Amelie kept hers hovering close to her lips.

"Are you having fun?" George placed a hand on her bare shoulder. Her dress was green and orange, a small, intricate diamond pattern.

"Yeah. I was just hanging with your friend Harry."

"You've been here for a while?" George felt a slight stabbing in his chest, like he had just missed a game-winning goal. Amelie's hair, twisted into a bun, listed to the left. One strand had worked its way out and stuck around her neck.

"You have cool friends. I like them." She stretched the syllables, her voice cracking a little like it was early in the morning.

"I was beginning to think you weren't gonna show up." He slid his fingers under the thin straps of her dress, tracing a line across her collarbone.

"I'm a busy girl. Are those begonias?" She was looking at the flowers George's parents had sent him. "In a beer mug? Of course." George blushed, but she smiled and leaned her head towards his hand, blinking slowly. "Begonias are my favorite." She was whispering. Her breath was cherry Koolaid and Everclear.

And their mouths were together, they were falling over, sealed in and breathing each other's air, like miners trapped in a subterranean cavern.

"Wait," she said, turning her face to the side. "I really should go."

“No. Don’t go.” George shook his head. “Please stay here.” He held her between his arms until he felt her muscles relax. Her head fell back on his pillow, and he leaned in to smell her soft neck.

Amelie was motionless beneath him, her inhaled breath tickling his ear. He traced his fingers down her arm and grabbed a hand, but her cool fingers didn’t curl into his. Her dark eyelids were awnings threatening to drop. “Oh,” was all she said, when he pulled his face away from her. “Oh.”

“No, no, keep those open.” George pulled at the skin around her eyes. It was damp. “Look at me.” She couldn’t meet his gaze but her dress was falling off her shoulders and her eyes were still open. “Amelie.”

* * *

When George was younger, his family had spent every summer at their beach house. The year he was eight he had been playing in one of the neighbor’s yards with the other boys when they found a fox at the edge of the woods. It must have gotten hit by a car, because its back legs were mangled and matted with shining blood, but the front was still a soft pretty red. There was a faint dark trail where the fox had dragged itself through the grass.

He had seen the fox before, darting through his backyard. “It eats the baby bunnies,” an older boy had told him. His sister had cried.

The boys stared, unsure of what to make of their sudden discovery. One of the neighbors reached over and picked up a stone they had collected from the beach. He wound up, like he was pitching a baseball, and released. The fox recoiled from the blow, but made no move. Why didn’t it try to run away? Its black eyes were looking right at George, and he, frozen in place, met their gaze. More stones were flying through the air; all the other boys were throwing them now. George was aware that he was turning a rock over and over in his fingers. It was still clear in his mind how marble smooth that rock was, how its weight was light yet satisfying in his hand as he drew back and then threw it.

George had snuck back over to look at the fox later. Its corpse was bruised and swollen, with eyes red with blood. In a panic, George had bent over, grabbed it, and thrown it in the gully, where he could no longer see it.

* * *

Though it was late at night, the stacks in the library were still bright. George flipped another page in his textbook and stared at the

notes he had written in the margins. He sipped from his mug, forcing himself to swallow the cold coffee, and realized he'd lost his place again.

Approaching footsteps gave George an excuse to lift his eyes from the desk. He glimpsed the floating hem of a dress between rows of books and then she was there in the central aisle, not five feet away from him.

"Amelie." She'd hesitated when she'd seen George, then made as if to keep walking, but now she stopped. He pictured the way she'd looked that night, when black lines had appeared on her face and he had realized she was crying. How she had moaned quietly, like she was deep in a fever. She left the next morning without even a kiss, and it wasn't until then that he understood what he'd done to her.

"I've been wanting to talk to you, but I haven't seen you around." He stood up and leaned against the side of the desk. Her downcast eyes seemed like the deep ocean, murky and impenetrable. "I've thought a lot about what happened, and I really hope you're not upset about it." He couldn't look at her. "I'm sorry."

Amelie stood there, books tucked under her arm. George was examining the holes in the sides of the shelves. When she left, he didn't look up. Her boots clicked on the tile, echoed, and faded away. She had been so still beneath him that night. Why couldn't she have just walked away then?

George sank back into his chair. Graduation was in two weeks, and he would never see her again.