



THE *A Novel*
**SECOND
CHANCE
HOTEL**

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BOOK CLUB GUIDE

Thank you for downloading the bookclub guide for The Second Chance Hotel!

The novel is set on the fictional island of Asteri, Greece. Since I lived in Santorini when I was a kid, I based a lot of the book on my memory of my experience there. I imagined Asteri to be a Cycladic island situated near somewhere around Naxos in the Aegean Sea. Its main crops are like those of many islands in the region—olives, pistachios, and grapes. Dramatic cliffs plunge into the sea at the edges, leftover from the ancient volcanic blast of nearby islands, creating little slices of sandy heaven that are only accessible via breathtaking switchback goat trails.

In this guide, you'll find discussion questions, an interview with me, and lots of recipes—including Birgitte's Potato Moussaka, which is in the book but here for you to easily print.

The rest of the recipes are also available as little cards that I am happy to send you. I am also happy to speak to your bookclub. Please contact me at sierra@sierragodfrey.com.

- Sierra



READING GROUP GUIDE

1. Do you think Amelia was right or wrong for ditching Ella's wedding to go to Europe?
2. Have you ever lost your temper at work? What were the repercussions?
3. Are you a person who runs away from your life problems? Or do you confront them head-on?
4. Why do you think Amelia was so reticent to return to her life in San Francisco?
5. During the dinner party, Birgitte proclaims that "everyone is a little broken." What do you think she meant by that? Do you agree with her statement?
6. Amelia realizes that part of why she was holding herself back from her feelings for James was because of what happened between her parents. Did your parents' (or someone else important in your life) relationship ever have an impact on your own relationships?
7. If given the chance, would you run a boutique hotel on a small Greek island?
8. Each of the Yorgoses on Asteri has a distinct job: Blue Tavern Yorgos, Mover Yorgos, Feta Yorgos, Plumber Yorgos, Olive Grove Yorgos, Fisherman Yorgos, Kiln Yorgos, Calamari Yorgos, Oyster Diver Yorgos, Care Rental Yorgos, Photography Enthusiast Yorgos, Handyman Yorgos, and Shepherd Yorgos. If you went to live on a Greek island, which Yorgos would you be?
9. If you had a second chance at a completely different life than the one you're living today, would you take it? Or would you keep your old life?



A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR

How did the idea for this book come about?

Several years ago, I was sitting in my car in traffic on highway 80 in Berkeley and I heard a story on the radio about a couple who had gone to a remote island for their honeymoon. They made great friends with the hotel owners and ended up buying the hotel from them after one very drunken evening. This real-life couple stayed and made a go of running the hotel—business was bolstered by the news story. What a life change! I couldn't stop thinking about this idea. I have also always loved marriage of convenience tropes— it's one of my very favorites, so when I put a sudden, accidental marriage together with accidentally acquiring a hotel, this story was born.

Tell us about your connection to Greece and why you set this novel there.

My mother and I moved to Santorini when I was almost ten. We stayed there for a few years, off and on. I learned some Greek, enough to get by, and we lived in a villa overlooking the caldera in Thira. It was the 80's so the music was great and the island far less developed and touristy the way it is today. Then, you had to visit a telephone office to make a phone call and if someone had a VCR, that was special. There were a lot of wonderful things about that experience as well as challenges. It was unorthodox and it was great, but I'm ultimately grateful to have lived abroad and in on one of the most beautiful islands in the world where I got to know the secret nooks and crannies. As a result, I wanted to set a novel in Greece using what I knew of it. A Greek island is the perfect setting for drama.

What was the most fun scene to write?

One of my favorites is the scene with Ella towards the end when Amelia is trying to make amends. She woos Ella with char siu bao (BBQ pork buns) from a real bakery in Chinatown—AA on Stockton and Jackson streets, which indeed has delicious buns on offer. My wonderful mother-in-law, Theresa, confirms it is the best, and she grew up in Chinatown. Personally, I would be susceptible to apologies made with pork buns.

A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR

I also enjoyed writing the trials Amelia has trying to make her way back to Greece. I had a lot of fun throwing every obstacle at her all the while knowing she was going to make her way back to James.

What do you think is next for Amelia and James?

Amelia and James are going to face some challenges as they dedicate themselves to the hotel. There will be a lot of visitors and new characters to get to know. It won't be easy to live on a small, relatively isolated island most of the year. Maybe they'll do a lot of traveling, or maybe they'll face a natural disaster and have to rebuild. The Aegean is a hotbed of volcanic activity, after all.

What's your advice for new writers?

Keep going. The writing process can feel overwhelming at first. Many writers are tempted to delete the words they have because they're not perfect. But writing is an iterative process and it takes time and lots and lots of editing. Every published author has gone through years of trial and error. You won't get anywhere if you quit.

Do you ever get stuck while writing? How do you work your way out of it?

If I'm having problems with a scene, I picture it like reversing out of a dead end in a maze—that direction didn't work, so you back out to the main path and take another one. Sometimes it requires other perspectives, like trusted beta readers. The scene in which Takis dies and leaves Amelia and James the Ria Hotel was a hard one to write because dying and leaving strangers a hotel when they've just gotten married is a tall order to pull off. For that scene, I tried a bunch of different paths. Ultimately, the path is the one that feels the best to the characters and the story.



BIRGITTE'S POTATO MOUSSAKA

Once you make this delicious dish, you will wonder how anyone in their right mind would ever use eggplant instead of potatoes. Typically, potatoes are part of this anyway, but here we just omit the offensive eggplant.

- 3 tbsp unsalted butter
- 3 tbsp all-purpose flour

FOR THE MEAT SAUCE:

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 4.5 lbs potatoes
- 1 lb ground lamb
- 1 lb ground beef
- 1/2 cup red wine
- 5 ripe tomatoes skinned and finely chopped, or use a 28 oz can of San Marzano canned skinned tomatoes
- 1 tbsp oregano
- 3 tbsp tomato paste
- Salt and pepper
- 2–3 cloves of garlic, chopped
- 1 tbsp ground cinnamon

FOR THE BÉCHAMEL SAUCE:

- 3 tbsp unsalted butter
- 3 tbsp all-purpose flour
- 3 cups milk (whole milk is best)
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- 1–2 tsp nutmeg
- 2–3 egg yolks (optional; this makes it creamier but isn't strictly necessary)
- 1 cup grated kefalotyri cheese (substitute Pecorino or Parmigiano Reggiano if you can't find kefalotyri)

STEP 1: PREPARE THE POTATOES.

1. Peel the potatoes and cut into thin coins. Fry them in a little oil until lightly browned, or parboil in boiling water for 5 minutes. If parboiling, drain and set them aside.

STEP 2: PREPARE THE MEAT SAUCE.

1. Heat 2 tbsp of olive oil over medium heat, and sauté the onions until translucent, 10–12 minutes.
2. Add both ground meats and continue to sauté until lightly browned.
3. Add the wine, tomatoes, oregano, tomato paste, salt, and pepper, and bring to a boil. Cook until as much liquid as possible is absorbed; avoiding too much moisture will make for an easier bake. Stir in the garlic and cinnamon. Mix well. Let the mixture simmer lightly.

BIRGITTE'S POTATO MOUSSAKA, CONTINUED

STEP 3: MAKE THE BÉCHAMEL SAUCE.

While the meat sauce is simmering, make the béchamel.

1. In a large saucepan, melt the butter over medium heat. Once melted, add the flour and stir until there are no lumps. You may opt to heat the milk while the butter melts to make the stirring easier, but the milk can also be added cold.
2. Increase the heat to medium. Add the milk in small batches, stirring constantly with a whisk so it absorbs fully before adding more.
3. Stir until the sauce begins to thicken; it should be creamy but not too thick. Remove from heat and stir in salt, pepper, and nutmeg.
4. If using egg yolks, beat and stir into the sauce. Remove from the heat and set aside until ready to use.

STEP 4: ASSEMBLE THE MOUSSAKA.

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F (180°C). Lightly oil a 5 qt baking dish.
2. Layer the potato slices on the bottom of the dish. If you want to layer them in a scallop pattern like Birgitte told Amelia to, you can, but this will quickly become pointless.
3. Spread the meat mixture evenly on top of the potatoes. Add the cheese.
4. Cover with the remaining potato slices and pour the béchamel sauce evenly over the top.
5. Bake for 40–50 minutes. Let rest 10–15 minutes before cutting. The dish is best if served warm, not hot.



AVGOLEMONO

This bright Greek lemon soup is perfect to use with leftover chicken. It's fast, easy to use whatever you have on hand, and good for all seasons.

- 2 lemons
- 2 chicken breasts, cooked
- 1/2 onion, chopped
- 2 eggs
- Fresh dill, fronds picked, stems tossed 1 1/2 cup cooked rice
- Baby spinach
- Salt and pepper
- Extra virgin olive oil

1. Beat the eggs in a medium bowl. Set aside. In a separate bowl, juice the lemons.
2. In a large pot over medium-high heat, warm 1 tablespoon olive oil. Add the onion and a pinch of salt and sauté until soft, about 7 minutes. Add the chicken broth and cooked rice, and stir to break up any clumps of rice. Add the chicken and simmer to warm through, 3 minutes. Scrape the bottom of the pot occasionally. Turn down the heat to low.
3. Slowly stream 1 cup of the hot broth into the beaten eggs and whisk until smooth. Whisk the mixture back into the soup, and stir until thickened, but don't let it boil, 1 minute. Remove from the heat, add the lemon juice and about 4 cups of the spinach, and stir until wilted, 1 minute. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Top with dill and serve warm.



GREEK CHICKPEAS

This recipe is based on Trader Joe's Greek Chickpeas. They're great to put on salads or serve with eggs sunny-side up!

- 1 can of chickpeas/garbanzo beans 1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- Fresh bunch of parsley, chopped fine Fresh pinch of dill, chopped fine
- 1-2 tablespoons ground cumin
- Salt and pepper

1. Drain and rinse the chickpeas well. Pour them into a jar or container.
2. Add the olive oil and lemon juice. Mix.
3. Add the garlic, herbs, and cumin. Add salt and freshly ground pepper. Stir. Taste to see if you like a bit more garlic or cumin.
4. Add 1-2 tablespoons of water. Mix again. Keeps a week in the fridge.



SANTORINI SALAD

This simple but incredible appetizer is traditionally made with Greek cucumbers, Santorini tomatos, island-grown capers, oregano, and Anthotyro cheese. You can substitute mizithra or feta for the cheese.

- 1-2 thick cucumbers
 - Cherry tomatoes,
 - or any kind of thick roma style
 - Fresh feta (also try Mizithra, Anthotyro, or even burrata)
 - Capers
 - Oregano (fresh or dried) Pepper
1. Peel the cucumbers and slice lengthwise. Scoop the seeds out with a spoon. The cucumbers should resemble boats.
 2. Pack the cucumbers boats with the cheese. Drain a teaspoon or so of the capers and pack them into the cheese.
 3. Slice the tomatoes in half, if using cherry, or chop into chunks if using another type. Place these on the feta, arranged so they show the cheese.
 4. Sprinkle the cucumbers liberally with pepper and oregano.



TZATZIKI

Tzatziki is a common cucumber yogurt sauce and very easy to make. Avoid using lowfat yogurt in this dish. This dip can be high in garlic, so adjust the amount you put in if you don't want to go around breathing dragon breath on everyone.

- Plain whole milk Greek yogurt
 - 1 long English hothouse cucumber
 - Extra virgin olive oil
 - 2-4 cloves of garlic
 - Juice from half a lemon
 - Fresh dill
 - Salt and pepper
1. Peel and slice the cucumber lengthwise. If it has seeds, scrape them out from the center with a spoon. Grate or finely chop the cucumber (grating is better). Layer several paper towels together, or use a dish towel, to squeeze the cucumber to remove as much of the water as possible. You may need to do this a few times. Drier is best.
 2. Finely chop 2-4 cloves of garlic (or less if you don't want stink breath). Chop the dill.
 3. In a bowl, combine the cucumber, garlic, and dill. Add the yogurt, lemon, and 2 tablespoons olive oil, season with salt and pepper, and stir to combine.



YOGURT MARINADE

This simple marinade is perfect for chicken or lamb, with Greek yogurt adding a delicious tang.

- 2/3 cup whole milk Greek yogurt
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tbsp lemon juice + 1 tsp lemon zest
- 1 tbsp minced garlic
- 1 tbsp minced fresh ginger
- 1 tsp each ground cumin, ground coriander, and paprika
- 1/4 tsp each cayenne pepper and cinnamon
- 1 tsp salt and freshly ground black pepper (adjust to taste) 1/2 cup chopped cilantro
- Optional: fresh oregano, dill, and mint

Mix all ingredients together in a glass baking dish. Add chicken or meat and cover. Marinate for at least 2-5 hours or overnight in the refrigerator.

Chicken: Use any type of chicken you prefer, but this goes great with boneless skinless chicken thighs.

Bake the chicken:

Bake for 18-22 minutes at 350F. When done, the thickest part of the meat should reach an internal temperature of 165 degrees F.

