



The Feasting Virgin

Georgia Kolas

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Two women are drawn together through shared, sensuous experiences of Greek food and motherhood in Georgia Kolas's *The Feasting Virgin*, a sexy novel that evokes the turmoil and pleasure of domestic life.

Xeni is thirty-eight, a virgin, and devoted to “subservient” life as a Greek woman. She wants a baby, but she isn't willing to marry or sacrifice her reputation to have one. Callie, who is struggling to adapt to her partner's traditional expectations, has what Xeni wants: a baby, a home, and a deep need for intimacy.

As Xeni teaches Callie to cook, she shares a vision of paradise from her childhood. Her breathtaking descriptions of Greece evoke a world different than Callie's modern one. Feathery olive groves are “grey-green queens, whose fertility and generosity controlled whether there would be enough to feed the family for the whole year.” As Callie and Xeni bond over cooking and coparenting, they discover an emerging sexuality that disrupts both of their lives.

Slow with building tension, the novel alternates between Callie and Xeni's experiences with motherhood, femininity, and desire; it includes insights into Callie's partner's life. Gus, who tried to abandon his Greekness and find a new home in Callie, is also caught between two worlds. Unlike Xeni, he can't reconcile his new life as a father with his family's expectations. The love triangle is satisfying and complex, and the flawed characters result in opportunities for conflict.

The Feasting Virgin is a luscious romance, and it's punctuated by Xeni's recipes. From selecting the perfect bunch of spinach to concealing imperfect layers of filo dough, her asides are an inviting sensory layer. Whether she's squeezing a lemon or testing cheese, Xeni's pleasure is palpable. When she and Callie get cooking, things get hot—and stay delicious. Theirs is a tender, culture-crossing story.

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