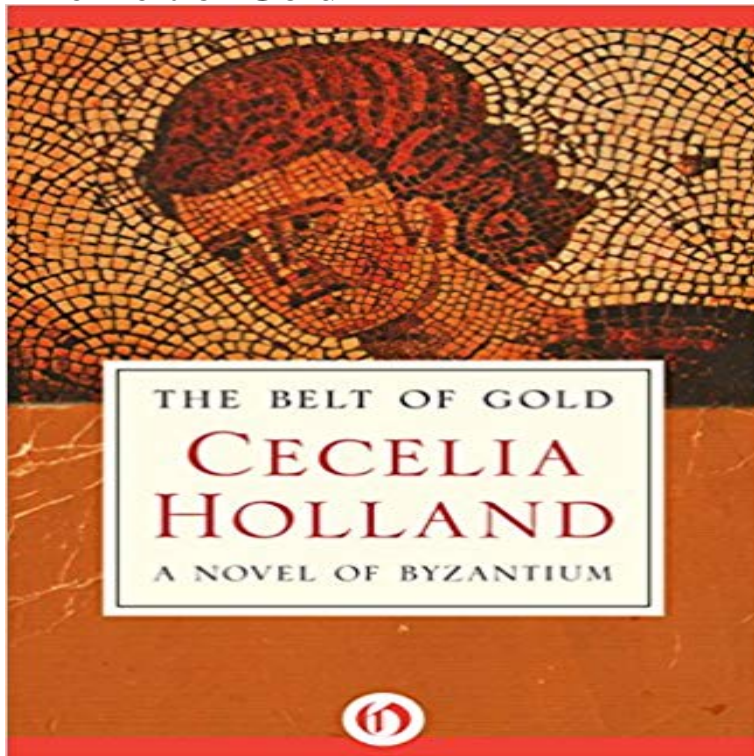


The Belt of Gold



In an exotic ancient land, a foreign stranger's sworn mission of vengeance leads him into the perilous circle of a ruthless Byzantine empress. In the early years of the ninth century, the road home from Jerusalem winds through Constantinople for two Frankish noblemen-warriors. But when an encounter with a young woman running for her life results in the murder of Hagen the Whites brother, he vows to find the perpetrators, no matter how highborn or powerful, and take his revenge. His hunt will carry him into the royal circle of the Basileus Irene, a ruthless despot who blinded her own son to force him off the throne. The beautiful and calculating empress is fascinated by this supposed barbarian who has sworn allegiance to the great Charlemagne, and she welcomes him into the imperial court and into the dangerous fires of countless royal conspiracies. Suddenly Hagen must tread carefully through a viper's nest of plots, lies, and bloodthirsty power plays, for if the stranger trusts the wrong serpent, he will certainly die. One of the world's premier purveyors of historical fiction, acclaimed novelist Cecelia Holland ushers the reader into a thrilling, exotic, and colorful world ruled by one of history's most complex and fascinating women. *The Belt of Gold* is a stunning tale of power and vengeance set against a breathtaking backdrop of Byzantine opulence, from the conspiracies of the empress's court and the intrigues of the bedchamber to the heart-racing clashes of champions in the public arenas where famed charioteers seek ultimate glory before the eyes of an adoring populace.

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