

BOOK REVIEW- BETROTHAL AND BETRAYAL

By Lisa Otto

From Janet McGiffin comes a story of two young women who join forces to survive the dangers and power of the Roman Empire of the East, and a city that is very much a man's world.

The series, in total, is about the Byzantine era in 8th century Greece and the woman, Princess Irini, who climbed (clawed, really) her way to power. This first book introduces us to a young teen, Thekla, who becomes a pivotal character throughout the series. She is, at once, impetuous, naïve, and formidable. She has been betrayed by her betrothed twice, and her parents, who, times as they were, needed her to be married off. They make plans to marry her to the old gravedigger in their village after Myri, her betrothed, betrays her for the second time. Horrified, Thekla sees a chance to escape from the city gates in Ikonion where she had been to meet Myri returning from war. She sees a coach heading away from Ikonion and jumps on it. From that moment on, we are swept away on her remarkable journey to Constantinople, where she is certain she will find Myri and marry.

As soon as she is safe inside the coach, she meets Elias, a man of mystery who claims to be a monk. Theirs is a serendipitous encounter as he is also traveling to Constantinople and stays by her side (although she is wary of him) befriending her and protecting her in a time where a young woman, traveling alone on a long journey, is sure to encounter trouble, if not death, from not so kindly men.

It is Elias' kindness and knowledge that lead Thekla to a new life. He guides her to safe places to stay while they travel, and with his help, and her wits, she finds employment and lodging as she makes her way to Constantinople. She is exposed to a world she never could have imagined, and quickly learns what it will take to survive. She

endears herself to nuns and business owners who support her, though some reluctantly so, and her luck seems to hint that Constantinople is her destiny. The most life altering meeting is the one with Empress Irini, a young woman of the same age who draws Thekla into

her world. Where will this unlikely connection lead? We are left waiting for the answer which will be found in book 2 of the series, *Poison is a Woman's Weapon*. It has been released already so you won't have to wait to find out.

I was astonished at the detail that Janet provided. She spent 11 years researching the book in Greece, where she lived at the time and then additional time in NY with the help of her Greek friends in Greece who were stuck at home during the pandemic. We are enmeshed in the culture, food, politics, and relationships of the 8th century and can almost feel what it was like to live back then. I highly recommend the book. It is classified as Young Adult fiction (it's historical fiction) but, just as *Hunger Games* was read widely by all ages, so, too, will this book.

You can find both *Betrothal and Betrayal*, and *Poison is a Woman's Weapon*, on [BarnesandNoble.com](https://www.barnesandnoble.com) and on [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com). You may have to type in her name, Janet McGiffin, to find the right book. It seems betrothal and betrayal are a common themes.

