ForeWord Reviews

GENERAL

Mephisto Aria
Justine Saracen
Bold Strokes Books
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Florian, forgive me. An aging father's last written words would haunt his daughter forever. Against the backdrop of 1982 Berlin and a Berlioz recording, a loved and respected physician kills himself.

Justine Saracen explores the annals of World War II from the unique perspective of Katherina Marow, a sensitive opera singer who discovers a secret side to her dad in the pages of his diary. After his unexpected suicide, Katherina learns the truth about this gifted doctor's cloudy past. Steeped in tragedy and mayhem in war-ravaged Europe, his brokenhearted, gritty descriptions of a world gone mad under Hitler's threatening regime and Stalin's frightening iron hand allow her to see his private hell for the first time.

Dr. Sergei Marow had fought in the Red Army as Sergei Marovsky, playing a dual role that remained undisclosed to his family. Marovsky survived the famous Battle of Stalingrad and helped bring down the German army, reversing the outcome of the war. His most astounding disclosure is his romantic affection for a gentle young man, a wounded soldier he left in the care of a colleague while on military assignment. Sergei Marovsky never saw his lover again.

As Katherina reads her father's deepest thoughts and the revelations of his hidden desires, she recognizes pieces of herself. Only the final entries of his diary will expose the facts and set her mind at ease. While she is investigating her father's death, and managing her thriving opera career, she meets the love of her own life-a beautiful woman named Anastasia, a Russian singer and defector on the run from her own demons. When Katherina's life is threatened, she must endure a nightmarish ordeal.Saracen's touching novel reveals a talented woman unleashing her sexuality. Katherina feels genuine compatibility in the arms of a friend destined to be her soul mate. The author's attention to 1940s historical detail in Sergei Marovsky's journal is outstanding. Her book required not only intensive research, but perceptive and empathetic comprehension of this volatile period, and the time-consuming effort required to present two love stories.

Mephisto Aria could well stand as a classic among gay and lesbian readers. Saracen was

a Ann Bannon Reader’s Choice finalist for The 100th Generation. The same novel was a finalist in the Queerlit Competition. Mephisto Aria is her own “queer Faust story” set in Berlin. With passion and forgiveness and a few shocking twists, her latest release may be another award-winner on the literary horizon. (January) Julia Ann Charpentier

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