ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

MYSTERY

Murder of a Séance Guru
Shyam P. Mehta
CreateSpace
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Three Stars (out of Five)

Set in the fall of 1953, this gripping murder mystery tells of the extraordinary life and mysterious death of Rosa Carter, a spiritual leader who also played an important role in World War II events.

At the start of *Murder of a Séance Guru*, Shyam P. Mehta's debut novel, Rosa has been recently diagnosed with breast cancer and her memory is fading. Realizing she has little time left, she holds a séance with her close friends Ann and Ralph Bunting, their daughter and her goddaughter, Carol, and others. Many of the attendees were also present at a séance Rosa conducted two decades earlier in Munich, with Adolf Hitler also in attendance. (They all have personal connections to Hitler, including Ann, who dated him in the 1930s.) When Rosa is murdered at the séance, Chicago Police Chief Frank O'Leary, a seasoned law enforcement officer, and thirty-year-old Charlie Poe take up the case and uncover many secrets among the group.

The narrative toggles between the 1953 crime investigation and Rosa's earlier life, revealing many surprising events—some miraculous, some tragic. It also traces her significant involvement in government affairs while she was in Munich, a brief love affair she experienced en route to India, and the several years she spent in that country, where she was revered for her healing powers.

Rosa is an unusual and remarkable character, and as the author reveals her experiences, a full picture of her life develops. However, the early chapters do not adequately establish how she came to play such a substantial role in the war. Key details are revealed through awkward shifts in dialogue and odd interchanges. For example, while talking to Carol, Rosa randomly blurts out information about Hitler. As a result, the overall premise of the story seems implausible.

That said, Mehta deftly creates suspense around the murder and is able to keep the reader's attention right up through the resolution of the crime. The historical elements, on the

other hand, are based mostly on vague references and rumored relationships, such as Hitler's connection to his half niece. In addition, many typos and typesetting errors in the first chapter, and occasionally later, mar the text and distract from the focus of the story.

Though Rosa's personal experiences are interesting, the attempt to establish her broader role in the war effort is muddled. Hitler's involvement in the story also remains peculiar throughout. The characters' personal connections to him are jarring without broader insights into the infamous man and the war.

Murder of a Séance Guru will appeal to those who primarily enjoy the whodunit aspect of a mystery and are willing to accept the implausible premise upon which the story is based.

Maria Siano