

## KIRKUS REVIEWS

Italy-born Ben Pastor (aka Maria Verbena Volpi-Pastor) worked for decades as a university professor in Vermont before returning to her birthplace. In 1999 she brought crime-fiction fans *Lumen*, her intelligently crafted novel set in German-occupied Poland during World War II and introducing Martin-Heinz von Bora, an aristocratic Wehrmacht officer inspired by the real-life Claus von Stauffenberg, who helped lead a 1944 assassination attempt on Adolf Hitler. That was followed by *Liar Moon* (2001), in which Bora—injured on the Russian front, but still alive, and aware of how carefully he must step in order to perform his duties without forsaking his humanity—investigates the killing of a prominent fascist in northern Italy. *A Dark Song of Blood* finds him in Rome in 1944. As Allied forces encroach on that “open city,” Bora must come to terms with his wife's decision to leave him, at the same time as he and an Italian inspector try to unravel three murders, including that of a German embassy secretary who “accidentally” tumbled to her death. The historical milieu of these books is grim, but Pastor's character examinations are precise and engrossing.