

Booklist

May 1, 2014

A Replacement Life.

Fishman, Boris (Author)

Jun 2014. 336 p. Harper, hardcover, \$25.99. (9780062287878).

Critic and short-story writer Fishman's first novel concerns the risks and the rewards of fiction, but it isn't as postmodern as that sounds. Instead, it's a straight-ahead story about committing fraud for all the right reasons—love, family, and Holocaust restitution. Slava Gelman, lapsed Jew from a former Soviet republic, is a blocked writer who works at Century, a venerable magazine headquartered in Manhattan. Slava's grandfather, Yevgeny, a notorious fixer and thug with a heart of gold, is always on the take. When it turns out that Slava's recently deceased grandmother would have been eligible for reparations from the German government, Slava decides to forge the claim, grafting the scanty details of her terrible wartime experiences onto his grandfather's. Soon, in part because of Slava's burning desire to write, he is forging dozens of restitution claims. Though saccharinity and righteousness taint this tale, Fishman has talent galore, and an attractive love interest, funny set-pieces, a brochure-beautiful Big Apple, and spectacular, acutely self-conscious prose are all most enjoyable.