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Nola: A Memoir of Faith, Art, and Madness

Robin Hemley

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The evidence at hand: an autobiography - complete with their mother's edits - written by his brilliant and disturbingly religious sister; a story featuring actual childhood events, but published as fiction; perjured court documents hidden in a drawer for decades. These are the clues Robin Hemley gathers when he sets out to reconstruct the life of his sister Nola, who died at the age of twenty-five after several years of treatment for schizophrenia. But Hemley, hampered by a "larcenous heart" that covets his sister's story for himself, discovers that finding the truth in any life - even one's own - is a fragmented and complex task. Nola: A Memoir of Faith, Art and Madness is much more than a remembrance of a young woman who was consumed her entire life by a passion for God. It is also a look at what people choose to reveal and conceal, and an examination of the enormous toll mental illness takes on a family. Finally, it is a revelation of the alchemy that creates a writer: confidence in the unknowable, distrust of the proven, tortuous devotion to the fine print in life, and the sacrifice to writing itself as it plays the roles of confessor, scourge, and creator.

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