



The Face of a Naked Lady: An Omaha Family Mystery

Michael Rips

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Nick Rips's son had always known him as a conservative midwesterner, dedicated, affable, bland to the point of invisibility. Upon his father's death, however, Michael Rips returned to his Omaha family home to discover a hidden portfolio of paintings — all done by his father, all of a naked black woman. So begins Michael Rips's exquisitely humane second work of memoir, a gloriously funny yet deeply serious gem of a book that offers more than a little redemption in our cynical times.

Rips is a magical storyteller, with a keen eye for the absurd, even in a place like Omaha, which, like his father, is not what it first appears to be. His solid Republican father, he discovers, had been raised in one of Omaha's most famous brothels, had insisted on hiring a collection of social misfits to work in his eyeglass factory, and had once showed up in his son's high school principal's office in pajamas. As Rips searches for the woman of the paintings, he meets, among others, an African American detective who swears by the clairvoyant powers of a Mind Machine, a homeless man with five million dollars in the bank, an underwear auctioneer, and a dying trapeze artist on her last sublime ride. Ultimately, Rips finds the woman, a father he never knew, and a profound sense that all around us the miraculous permeates the everyday.

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