

Naked Ink: Diary of a Smalltown Boy

Tobias Maxwell

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Naked Ink is an unfiltered memoir about the adventures and mishaps of a young Canadian actor in 1970s New York City.

Tobias Maxwell's memoir *Naked Ink* is about being a bisexual actor who's struggled to make it abroad.

After a troubled youth, multiple stalled relationships, and years of fighting to get acting work in Canada, Maxwell made the life-changing decision to try his luck in New York City. With high hopes and the bare bones of a plan, he slipped into the US to make a fresh start. He recorded his experiences in diaries and journals, sharing his fears and dreams for his professional and personal future over a two-year period.

Naked Ink picks up from where a prior book left off. Crucial context is provided in its prologue and in commentary throughout the book. The story is told through daily diary entries and journal entries that chronicle relationship difficulties, sexual exploits, auditions and jobs, and health crises. The diary entries' brief sentences and jumps between topics capture the hustle and uncertainty of the acting life, as well as the frenetic pace at which people came and went from Maxwell's inner circle. Other figures are not developed much because of this format; aside from a few people who appear often, most other individuals are disembodied and indistinguishable. The journal entries are often more detailed and fluid, elaborating on the specifics of the book's events.

Maxwell's voice is clear and strong, but also marked by bravado and some penchant for melodrama. At times, the entries become more vulnerable, given to wondering if Maxwell would ever get his big break—or even another acting job. He writes about finding it difficult to let go of Monsieur, his former paramour, even though he knew that they were not right for each other. He writes about longing for a new lover. In total, he comes across as a restless spirit who struggled to control his impulsive, self-destructive habits.

The narrative follows a strange rhythm at first; the writing style in the entries is somewhat perfunctory. And the book's after-the-fact commentary is given over to present-set marveling at the risks that Maxwell took, as well as to acknowledgements of his naïveté at the time. They suggest that trauma forced Maxwell to grow up too fast, prompting his drug use and decisions to enter into adult relationships while he was still a teenager. Previous unhealthy behaviors are recognized for what they were, though one entry's graphic description of sleeping with a teenager is not made less uncomfortable by the book's retrospective attempts to justify the encounter. Still, the book works toward a satisfying ending that shows just how far a person can go in two years.

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EILEEN GONZALEZ (August 17, 2021)

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