

# How Nadine and Libby Escaped Destiny

A Short Story by Kali Amanda Browne

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## How Nadine and Libby Escaped Destiny

Partially stuck into the ruddy dirt and surrounded by sparse patches of yellowing grass, a splintered two-by-four held up a chorus line of old dolls and stuffed animals.

It was a bizarre sight: the dolls, old and scratched, were missing arms, chunks of hair, and some had missing eyes. The stuffed animals did not fare any better -- most graying and hardly plush.

The toys leaned against the plank of wood, and those with enough limbs and the required flexibility had a leg resting on the top of it.

A few feet away, a girl of four, stood tapping her left foot and keeping almost perfect time with a small branch at the same time. She wore a pink tutu over tattered jeans and a tee shirt that used to be white but now looked tea stained.

She also wore a plastic tiara, the jewels on it so old the colors had faded and some had fallen off many moons ago. To Libby, it was a bauble of the highest quality, of course; pre-owned by one of the princesses in her storybooks.

An ancient, battery-operated radio sat atop an old milk crate and played Top Twenty hits as the girl instructed her dance students on the correct way to get down.

Her mother watched her from a small window in their trailer and allowed a bittersweet smile to cross her lips.

That was their emergency package radio, for weather reports during tornados and storms. It was not for playing. But she'd made the exception this one time for the girl.

"Listen to the beat, ladies," the girl instructed her dolls and swiveled her little hips as she tapped her foot and kept time with the stick. "Feel the beat!"

Inside the trailer, her mother laughed.

"*Where* does she get that from?!" she asked no one and continued to carefully fold clothes.

On the radio, programming had quickly gone to a news update and commercials and the girl was critiquing her students' technique.

“Annabelle,” she told one of the teddy bears, “You are moving ahead of the music. React! Don’t anticipate!”

Nadine shook her head and let out a small chuckle.

“Seriously, *where* did she learn that?”

“Like this,” the child was saying. “La la la la,” she sang and free danced to some beat only she knew.

A gust of wind surged from the west and, on the clothesline, a sheet billowed and it fluttered as it flapped.

The girl turned and gave it a stern look.

“No, that is a different song!” she told it. She held the branch to her side and with an accusatory finger admonished, “Do not interrupt me when I am giving a lesson.”

Her mother’s right hand came up to her face and covered half her face and, consequently, half her smile just as a tear began to roll down her cheek.

“Oh, Libby,” she said and let the hand drop to her side. She stood there in silence for another minute and watched her child take a heavy metal novelty song, heavy on drums, and march to it with flair and an endearing gusto the song did not deserve.

Nadine covered her mouth with her left hand, an involuntary and subconscious effort to wipe away her own smile.

*Stop it, she told herself. You have things to do!*

She grabbed the clothes she’d folded and placed them inside a garbage bag. She was careful to put them inside a clear bag, one of the recycling ones, to make sure nobody confused it with actual garbage and threw it out by mistake.

She turned away from the window and walked to the small bedroom in the trailer, reached over her head to a small cabinet and retrieved a tattered folder. She opened it and made sure all the documents she’d been saving for years were inside and quickly closed it again.

*No time for reminiscing...*

She placed the whole folder over the clothes and closed the bag with duck tape to make sure the contents would not spill out later.

She leaned out and hung the bag from the handle on the trailer's side door, which lay open. She grabbed at her hair and groaned. She turned and walked to the kitchenette, grabbed her scissors with one hand and her ponytail with the other and cut it off as close to the scalp as she'd dare.

"Might as well let that go," she said, resigned with the decision. She stared at the hair in her hand for a minute before she let it drop inside the small sink.

She had let her hair grow out and stopped dying it when she learned she was pregnant with Libby. Now, almost five years later, a foot and a half of hair lay limply clogging her sink and she did not care. It was now as dead as the hope and love that had fueled her move to this state.

Again she looked out the small window and Libby had her hands over her head, clapping in time to the music and singing at the top of her little lungs.

"This is where I draw the line," she was singing. "No more pain and no more lies. Oh this is where I draw the line, baby!"

At the guitar solo, Libby started spinning and caught her watching at the window.

"Mommy, look!" she called out as she spun and her ruffles moved a beat behind her spins.

"I see you, honey," her mother answered. "Mommy will be with you in a second."

Nadine picked up the phone and for the next few minutes she calmly explained her situation.

"Just tell the sheriff to come over as soon as possible," she said. "Tell him this is the last time. I promise."

Nadine was starting to feel the effect of the ecstasy tablet she'd taken some fifteen minutes before. She stepped over the mess by the door and out of the trailer.

The dirt road ended just a few feet from the trailer, and the main road was half a mile east of it. Beyond a single tree, a plastic pool, a rusty swing set and the mountains in the distance, their trailer was the only visible structure for miles.

It was so desolate that sometimes the only other living thing they'd see were birds of prey flying over the mountains, tiny dots hovering in the air, lurking – a portent of death and destruction.

Barefoot and wearing nothing but a soggy blue shirt with carmine stains smudged across the front – a pair of pink wings from Libby's last Halloween costume pinned to its back – Nadine walked to their backyard and joined her baby girl.

She grabbed the radio and manually turned the dial until she found the oldies station. For a good half an hour they danced with abandon and giggled. Occasionally, she'd try to pick the girl up but either her coordination was off or the girl was slippery and escaped the embrace.

"Somebody help me!" Libby would scream, "The tickling angel is after me!"

Her squeals would then travel across the desert until the last note reverberated into nothingness, disturbing nothing but the occasional sunning lizard atop a rock that'd cock its head towards the commotion, assess it was in no particular or immediate danger, and soon go back to its business.

Nadine would chase Libby and after a minute, they'd both stop breathless and gasping for air in between fits of laughter. Soon, they would start dancing again or just spinning into a state of euphoric dizziness. As long as she had her mother near her, Libby giggled delighted by each moment.

The sun was low in the sky, its shine stronger than its heat. Across the horizon, gray mountains watched sternly and Nadine could feel their scorn from miles away. She saw the small clouds of dust as the police car sped towards them. Surely the ones within were messengers of the mountain gods come to tell her of their displeasure.

*All good things must come to an end.*

As the car came to a full stop, the deputy on the passenger side immediately noticed the pool of blood spilling down the retractable metal steps. Inside the door, the slumped body stared out, immobile and lifeless.

"Sir," the deputy said and pointed at the scene. He was too shocked to speak beyond this.

The sheriff did not respond. A glance told him all he needed to know. Tom Wolf's throat had been slashed and his tee shirt was tattered by multiple stab wounds across the chest and abdomen. Even as the light dimmed inside the trailer, this much was clear to see.

He stopped the car, exited and put a hand over his gun as he approached the woman and child. He watched them dance and for a moment considered how to proceed.

The decision was made for him when the woman leaned over, kissed the child and spoke a few words to her, then came forward with her hands over her head, her fingers interlaced, sashaying to the beat of a popular song.

A few feet away, Libby sang along, sometimes making up the lyrics where she did not understand the innuendo intended; behind him, one hand against the trailer, his deputy wretched.

"Nadine," the sheriff said. "What have you done?"

She shrugged, turned her head around and took one final look at her daughter.

Libby continued to play dance instructor with her old dolls.

Nadine was now standing inches away from the sheriff and smiling, a glazed look in her eyes.

"I did it for her," she said. "She deserves better parents. I could have run, but I have nowhere to run. I figured a crapshoot with the state authorities is better than what she had here."

"Nadine, you realize that she has lost both parents now," he told her. "You'll get the chair for this."

"As it should be," Nadine answered.

The sheriff closed his eyes for a moment as he felt a stabbing pain across his gut from deep within. Sadly, she was probably right.

He took her hand ever so gently and cuffed her, led her to the back of the car, called his office with instructions, and finally came back and leaned on the side the trailer and watched Libby play.

There was nothing to be done for Tom and Nadine had sealed her fate. Only Libby mattered now.

“Hi, Sheriff!” the girl called out and waved at him.

“Hi, Miss Libby,” he called back.

It had been six years since Tom and Nadine had come to their little town. Tom had just been released from a stint in prison. Nadine had just graduated community college. They moved into their tiny trailer at the edge of the desert with grand ideas about the future.

“We can start anew here,” Tom said.

“We can escape destiny,” Nadine added.

What followed was a drunken, drug-fueled, violent nightmare interrupted briefly only by the bliss that Libby afforded them. How Nadine managed to keep the child innocent and unaware of the misery in which she was born, the sheriff would never understand.

This would be his last visit to the trailer and the last time he would respond to a domestic situation here.

He wondered if this was indeed an escape to their collective destiny as he watched Libby, now sitting on the dirt in her pink tutu singing softly to her dolls.

Years later, the sheriff still could not shake the memory of that eerie scene both for its brutality and the sweet child earnestly covering Christina Aguilera’s “Beautiful.”

*“Don’t you bring me down today...”*

**###**

### **About the Author:**

Kali Amanda Browne was born in New York City, came of age in Puerto Rico and has lived her entire adult life in Brooklyn, NY – writer, food enthusiast, devoted daughter, marketing specialist, technology analyst, big mouth with a daemon tongue, and super geek with pagan tendencies.

You can follow all my writing projects from my online portal at <http://kalamanda.weebly.com> – from fiction, short stories, and cookbooks, to online articles, blogs and social media.

Other titles include:

- Justified
- Putting May to Rest
- One Night with B.B./Una Noche con B.B.
- Life, Dreams and Magical Landscapes/Recuerdos de Antes y Entonces
- Kali: The Food Goddess, A Compilation of Delightful Recipes and Memories of Food
- Kali: The Food Goddess, Fruits of the Family Tree