



# Random Family: Love, Drugs, Trouble, and Coming of Age in the Bronx

*Adrian Nicole LeBlanc*

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Random Family tells the American outlaw saga lurking behind the headlines of gangsta glamour, gold-drenched drug dealers, and street-corner society. With an immediacy made possible only after ten years of reporting, Adrian Nicole LeBlanc immerses the reader in the mind-boggling intricacies of the little-known ghetto world. She charts the tumultuous cycle of the generations, as girls become mothers, mothers become grandmothers, boys become criminals, and hope struggles against deprivation. Two romances thread through Random Family: the sexually charismatic nineteen-year-old Jessica's dizzying infatuation with a hugely successful young heroin dealer, Boy George, and fourteen-year-old Coco's first love with Jessica's little brother, Cesar, an aspiring thug. Fleeing from family problems, the young couples try to outrun their destinies. Chauffeurs whisk them to getaways in the Poconos and to nightclubs. They cruise the streets in Lamborghinis and customized James Bond cars. Jessica and Boy George ride the wild adventure between riches and ruin, while Coco and Cesar stick closer to the street, all four caught in a precarious dance between life and death. Friends get murdered; the DEA and FBI investigate Boy George's business activities; Cesar becomes a fugitive; Jessica and Coco endure homelessness, betrayal, the heartbreaking separation of prison, and throughout it all, the insidious damage of poverty. Together, then apart, the teenagers make family where they find it. Girls look for excitement and find trouble; boys, searching for adventure, join crews and prison gangs. Coco moves upstate to dodge the hazards of the Bronx; Jessica seeks solace in romance. Both find that love is the only place to go. A gifted prose stylist and a profoundly compassionate observer, Adrian Nicole LeBlanc has slipped behind the cold statistics and sensationalism surrounding inner-city life and come back with a riveting, haunting, and true urban soap opera that reveals the clenched grip of the streets. Random Family is a compulsive read and an important journalistic achievement, sure to take its place beside the classics of the genre.

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