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Opening extract from
**All These Things
I've Done**

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I X. i discover an influential friend & then, a foe

MY CONSERVATIVE ESTIMATE for how long I'd been in the Cellar would have been a week though I wouldn't have been surprised to hear it had been a month or even longer.

In reality, it had only been seventy-two hours.

Turned out that a lot had been happening in that time.

The climb up from the basement was far more exhausting than the climb down had been. It seemed strange that being confined to sitting and lying positions could be so physically debilitating, and I felt a newfound empathy for Nana.

The guard, who told me her name was Quistina, led me to a private shower. 'You need to clean yourself up now,' she said. 'There are people waiting to speak to you.'

I nodded. I still felt so unlike myself that I couldn't even be bothered to ask who was waiting for me or how all this had come about.

'Is there a time limit on the shower?' I asked.

‘No,’ said Quistina. ‘Take as long as you need.’

On the way into the shower, I caught sight of myself in the mirror. I looked feral. My hair was matted and filled with knots. My eyes were bloodshot and the dark circles under them were more like bruises. There were actual bruises and marks up and down my arms and legs. (Not to mention that tattoo on my ankle.) My nails were ragged and bloody – I hadn’t even been aware that I had been digging at the ground, but that was the only explanation. I was coated in dirt. Once I was actually in the shower, I became aware of how truly terrible I smelt, too.

As it wasn’t on my dime, I took a very long shower. Possibly the longest shower of my life.

When I got out, my school uniform was on the bathroom counter. Someone had laundered it and even shined my shoes.

Upon putting on my clothing, I realized that I must have lost some weight. The skirt that had fit perfectly a few days earlier was now a couple of inches too big in the waist and rested on my hips.

‘Mrs Cobrawick would like to see you before you go,’ Quistina said.

‘Oh.’ I was not eager to encounter that woman again. ‘Quistina,’ I asked, ‘would you happen to know why I’m being released?’

She shook her head. ‘I don’t really know the specifics or if I’m even supposed to talk about it with you.’

‘That’s OK,’ I said.

‘Although,’ she whispered, ‘on the news, they said people all over town were ending up in the hospital with chocolate poisoning, so . . .’

‘Jesus,’ I said, and then I crossed myself. This news meant that the Fretoxin contamination had been in the supply. It hadn’t just been Gable. He’d likely been the first because my family got our chocolate before everyone else. The question wasn’t whether I had poisoned Gable but who had tainted the entire shipment of Balanchine Special. These kinds of cases could take years to solve.

I’d been using Mrs Cobrawick’s private bathroom and, according to Quistina, she was waiting for me in her sitting room, which was down the hall.

Mrs Cobrawick was wearing a formal black dress as if she were in mourning. She was perched on the edge of an appropriately severe black parsons chair. The only sound in the room was the tapping of her nails against the glass coffee table.

‘Mrs Cobrawick?’

‘Come in, Anya,’ she said in a tone that was markedly different from the one she’d last used with me. ‘Have a seat.’

I told her that I’d rather stand. I was exhausted but relieved to be ambulant again. Besides, I didn’t exactly relish a lengthy visit with Mrs Cobrawick and standing would discourage such a possibility.

‘You look tired, dear. And it’s polite to sit,’ Mrs Cobrawick said.

‘I’ve spent the last three days sitting, ma’am,’ I said.

‘Is that meant to be some sort of dig?’ Mrs Cobrawick asked.

‘No,’ I replied. ‘It’s a statement of fact.’

Mrs Cobrawick smiled at me. She had a very broad smile – all her teeth showed and her lips disappeared. ‘I see how you’re going to play this now,’ she said.

‘Play this?’ I asked.

‘You think you’ve been treated badly here,’ Mrs Cobrawick said.

Hadn’t I? I thought.

‘But I simply wanted to help you, Anya. It looked as if you might be here a very long time – there was so very much evidence against you – and I find that it makes everyone’s time easier if I’m stern with the new arrivals up front. It’s my unofficial policy, really. That way, the girls will know what’s expected of them. Especially those who’ve had as privileged a background as you’ve had—’

I couldn’t listen to this any longer. ‘You keep mentioning my privileged background,’ I said. ‘But you don’t know me, Mrs Cobrawick. Maybe you think you know things about me. What you’ve read in the newspapers about my family and such, but you really don’t know the first thing.’

‘But—’ she said.

‘You know some of the girls here are innocent. Or even if they’re not innocent, whatever they’ve done is in their past and they’re just trying to do their best to move on. So maybe you could treat people based on your own experiences with them. Maybe that might make a good unofficial policy.’ I turned to leave.

‘Anya,’ she called. ‘Anya Balanchine!’

I didn’t turn back around but I heard her coming after me. A couple of seconds later, I felt her claw-like hand on my arm.

‘What?’

Mrs Cobrawick clutched my hand. ‘Please don’t tell your friends at the DA’s office that you were treated badly here. I

don't need any trouble. I was . . . I was foolish not to consider how well connected your family still is.'

'I don't have any friends at the DA's office,' I said. 'Even if I did, getting you in trouble is pretty much at the bottom of my list of things to take care of. What I'd most like is to never see you or this place again in my life.'

'What about Charles Delacroix?'

Win's father? 'I've never met him,' I said.

'Well, he's waiting for you outside. He's come to personally escort you back to Manhattan. You really are a very fortunate girl, Anya. To have such powerful friends and not even know it.'

Win's father was to meet me in the Exit Room, an area that was reserved for those leaving Liberty. The Exit Room was more elaborately decorated than any other place in the facility, with the possible exception of Mrs Cobrawick's quarters. There were overstuffed couches, brass lamps and framed black-and-white photographs of immigrants arriving at Ellis Island. Mrs Cobrawick waited with me. I would have very much preferred to wait alone.

Though I might have expected such a powerful man to have an entourage, Charles Delacroix had arrived alone. He looked like a superhero without the cape. He was taller than Win, and his jaw was broader, as if he spent his days eating trees or rocks. His hands were large and powerful but much softer than Win's. No farming for Charles Delacroix.

'You must be Anya Balanchine,' he said cheerfully. 'I'm Charles Delacroix. Let's ride on the ferry together, shall we?'

His manner was such that it seemed as if there was nothing he'd rather be doing than taking some mafiya daughter on a boat ride back to Manhattan.

Mrs Cobrawick piped up. 'We are so very honoured to have you visiting our facility, Mr Delacroix. I am Evelyn Cobrawick, the principal here.'

Charles Delacroix offered her his hand. 'Yes. How rude of me. Pleasure to meet you, Mrs Cobrawick.'

'Perhaps you'd like a tour of the facility while you're here?'

'No time for that today, I'm afraid,' Charles Delacroix said. 'But we really must reschedule.'

'Please do,' said Mrs Cobrawick. 'I'd love for you to see Liberty. We are very proud of our humble institution. Truth be told, we think of it more like a home.' Mrs Cobrawick punctuated this comment with a modest laugh.

'Home?' Charles Delacroix repeated. 'Is that what you call it?'

'Yes,' said Mrs Cobrawick. 'It might seem silly to you, but I do think of it that way.'

'Not silly, Mrs Cobrawick, but perhaps a tad disingenuous. You see, I was raised in an institution like this one. Not a reformatory, but an orphanage. And trust me, those confined to the walls of such a place do not think of it as a home.' Charles Delacroix turned his gaze to me. 'But you're in luck. For I have Miss Balanchine as a travelling companion and I imagine she will be able to attest to the qualities of Liberty on the boat ride back.'

I nodded, but said nothing. I would not give Mrs Cobrawick any more fodder. I crossed my arms, which made Charles Delacroix notice that one of the injection sites was inflamed

and oozing pus. 'Did this happen to you here?' he asked me in a gentle tone.

'Yes.' I pulled the sleeve of my dress shirt down. 'But it doesn't hurt much.'

His eyes moved down my arm to my hand and to the raw and worried skin of my fingertips. 'And this I presume.'

I said nothing.

'I wonder, Mrs Cobrawick, if these are the kinds of injuries that children sustain in a home.' Charles Delacroix took my arm in his. 'Let's do schedule that tour, Mrs Cobrawick. On second thoughts, perhaps I'll drop in unannounced.'

'Your predecessor never had any problem with the way I ran Liberty,' Mrs Cobrawick called.

'I am not my predecessor,' Charles Delacroix replied.

Once we were on the boat back to Manhattan, Charles Delacroix said to me, 'Dreadful place. I'm glad to be out of there. I imagine you are, too.'

I nodded.

'Dreadful woman, too,' he continued. 'I've known Mrs Cobrawicks all my life. Small-minded bureaucrats in love with their tiny bit of power.' Charles Delacroix shook his head.

'Why don't you do something about Liberty then?' I asked.

'I suppose I'll have to some day. But the city has so many serious problems and I frankly don't have the resources to deal with everything at once. Liberty is a fiasco. That woman is a fiasco. But they are, at the very least and for the time being, contained fiascos.' Mr Delacroix stared over the railing of the ferry. 'It's called triage, my dear.'

Triage was something I understood very well. It was the organizing principle of my entire life.

‘I want to apologize for the fact that you were sent to Liberty at all. This was a mistake. People in my office got overexcited at the idea of a teenage poisoner, and they became positively histrionic at the idea of that criminal being the daughter of Leonyd Balanchine. They mean well, but they’re . . . It took a couple of days, but you’ve been completely cleared, of course. Your attorney, Mr Green, was remarkably vocal in your defence. Incidentally, the young man . . . Gable is it?’

I nodded.

‘He’s taken a turn for the better. He’ll have a long recovery ahead of him, but he’s definitely going to make it.’

‘I’m glad to hear that,’ I said weakly. I felt anaesthetized, unlike myself.

‘You go to school with my boy?’ Charles Delacroix asked.

‘Yes,’ I said.

‘Win thinks very highly of you,’ he said.

‘I like him, too,’ I replied.

‘Yes. I was afraid of that.’ Charles Delacroix turned to look me in the eyes. ‘Listen, Anya – do you mind if I call you Anya?’

‘No.’

‘So, Anya, I can tell you’re a very level-headed young lady. How do I know this? Back at Liberty, you could have taken the opportunity to destroy Mrs Cobrawick in front of me. You didn’t. You were thinking about your next move. Getting out of that place. I admire that. Street smarts, I guess you’d call it, something my son lacks. And I can see why Win would like you.’

You're very attractive and your background is exciting to say the least. But you can never be my son's girlfriend.'

'Come again?'

'I can't have you dating Win. We're both practical people, Anya. We're both realists. So I know you'll understand me. My job is very difficult. The truth is, no matter how hard I try to clean up this city, I still may fail.' Charles Delacroix lowered his head, as if the weight of his responsibilities was too much to bear.

'Let me begin again. Do you know what they called my predecessor, Anya? The Cookie-Jar Prosecutor, a moniker she received because she had her crooked hands in so many people's pockets, including – I would be remiss not to mention it – Balanchine Chocolate.'

'I don't know anything about that.'

'Of course not, Anya. Why would you? You have the last name; you don't write the cheques. And my predecessor's *interests*, to put it politely, were broad. Here's how it works. Rationing and well-meaning – if pointless – bannings beget black markets, and black markets beget poverty, pollution and, of course, organized crime, and organized crime begets corruption, and all this has turned our government into a place where cookie-jar bureaucrats of every stripe can thrive. It is my personal mission to root these bureaucrats out. I will not be known as a cookie-jar prosecutor. But if my son begins dating the daughter of Leonyd Balanchine, the notorious chocolate boss, it will have the appearance of impropriety. It will be a hit to my credibility. I can't afford to take such a hit. This once-magnificent city can't afford for me to take such a hit. It isn't

your fault, and I very much wish the world were a different place. The people – they're prejudiced, Anya. They rush to judgement. I'm sure you know this better than anyone.'

'Mr Delacroix, I'm afraid you've misunderstood. Win and I are just friends.'

'Good. I was hoping you'd say that,' Win's father replied.

'Besides, if you don't want me to date Win, why don't you forbid him?' I asked. 'You're his father, not mine.'

'Because if I forbid him, he'll only want you more. My son is a good boy, but he's contrary, romantic and idealistic. His life has been too easy. He's not practical like you and me.'

The ship horn sounded. We were about to dock.

'So, do we have an agreement?' Charles Delacroix asked me. He held out his hand for me to shake.

'My father always said that you shouldn't make an agreement unless you know exactly what you're going to get out of it,' I said.

'Good girl,' Charles Delacroix said. 'I admire your spirit.'

The boat arrived at the dock. I could see Simon Green waiting for me on the shore. With what energy I had left, I ran to him and away from Charles Delacroix.

Someone I didn't know called out, 'It's her! It's Anya Balanchine!'

I turned towards the voice and was temporarily blinded by a lightning storm of camera flashes. Once my vision returned, I could see a blue police barricade to the right of where Simon Green stood. Behind the barricade were at least fifty reporters and paparazzi, all shouting questions at once.

'Anya, look over here!'

Despite myself, I did.

‘Anya, how was Liberty?’

‘A vacation,’ I replied.

‘Any plans to sue the city for wrongful imprisonment?’

I felt Charles Delacroix put his arm around me. Another wave of flashbulbs.

‘Please, people. Miss Balanchine has been very brave and helpful, and I imagine she’d just like to get home to be with her family. You can talk to me all you want, of course,’ Charles Delacroix said.

‘Mr Delacroix, any leads on how the chocolate supply was contaminated?’

‘The investigation is still active. That’s all I can say for now,’ Mr Delacroix said. ‘What I can tell you is that Miss Balanchine is one hundred per cent innocent.’

‘Mr Delacroix, regarding District Attorney Silverstein’s health. No one’s seen him in public for weeks.’

‘I don’t make it a practice to comment on my boss’s health,’ Mr Delacroix replied.

‘Should you be considered the acting district attorney?’

Mr Delacroix laughed. ‘When I’ve got an announcement to make, you’ll be the first to know.’

While Mr Delacroix continued to talk to the press, I was able to slip away.

Simon Green had a private car waiting for me. This was a real luxury back then – most everyone took public transportation or walked – and I appreciated the gesture. The last time I had ridden in a private car had been when Gable and I went to prom and, before that, for my father’s funeral. ‘I thought you’d

want some privacy,' Simon Green said as he held the door open for me.

I nodded.

'I'm sorry. I wasn't counting on that circus. On that level of interest in you.'

'Charles Delacroix probably wanted the photo op,' I said, as I slipped into the leather seat.

'Yes, you're probably right,' Simon Green agreed. 'Though he seemed like a very nice man when I was arranging the details of your release on the phone this morning. Once I was able to get through to him myself, that is.'

'He was about what you'd expect,' I said.

The car had started moving. I rested my head on the window.

'Mr Kipling told me to return this to you.' Simon Green placed my cross into my palm.

'Oh, thank you,' I said. I put the chain around my neck, but when I went to clasp it, my fingers were too tired to work the tiny mechanism.

'Here! Let me,' Simon Green said. He lifted my hair, his fingertips grazing the back of my neck. 'There,' he said. 'You must be exhausted, Anya. I brought food if you're hungry.'

I shook my head. 'Maybe some water?'

Simon Green handed me a Thermos with water. I drank it down in one gulp. Some of it spilt out the side of my mouth, and I felt bad at the waste.

'You were thirsty,' Simon Green commented.

'Yes, I—' Suddenly, I knew I was going to throw up. I pressed the button that rolled down the window, and I managed to aim

most of it outside the car. ‘I’m sorry,’ I said. ‘I shouldn’t have had so much to drink at once. I’m kind of dehydrated.’

Simon Green nodded. ‘Don’t apologize. Once all of this is settled, I’m going to personally file a complaint about your treatment at Liberty.’

I couldn’t think about any of that, so I changed the subject. ‘How did this come about?’ I asked. ‘My release, I mean.’

‘Over the weekend, more and more cases of Fretoxin poisoning started appearing at city hospitals. I think the number ended up being in the low hundreds, and so it became clear the contamination was in the supply.’

I nodded.

‘Still, I wasn’t able to get anyone at the DA’s office to listen to me. Mr Kipling is the one with the friends – both in your family and in law enforcement. People were mistrustful of me. And despite the fact that you’re Leonyd Balanchine’s daughter, no one in the Balanchine organization was willing to help either. Not that they wouldn’t have helped eventually, but the timing was most unfortunate. The Balanchines had a five-alarm fire of their own to deal with – the poison was in their chocolate.’

‘You must have been very persistent,’ I said. ‘Thank you.’

‘Well, actually, Anya, I can’t take all the credit. There was one stroke of good luck. You go to school with a boy named Goodwin Delacroix, I believe?’

‘Win.’

‘Several times, I had spoken to your friend Scarlet Barber about your situation. And it was Scarlet, I believe, who went to Win, who—’

‘Went to his father. Yes, that makes sense.’

‘And from that point on, the ball started rolling. The problem had been your name, you see. Though you’re, of course, unconnected to a supply-wide poisoning, you still carry the Balanchine name and I think the DA’s office was reluctant to release a Balanchine in the middle of this circus. It took a personal connection—’

I yawned. ‘Excuse me.’

‘Perfectly fine, Anya. You’re tired. I’ve never understood what’s so rude about yawning anyway.’

‘I’m not that tired,’ I insisted. ‘I’m just . . .’ My eyelids were fluttering shut. ‘I’ll have to thank Scarlet when I go back to school . . . And Win, too . . .’ I yawned again and then I fell asleep.