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Isles & Oceans

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When I was growing up, Mom told me that Sisters Island was called that because when her dad died, he left the island to his sisters. I now know that's not true, because I found a map of the Elders Bay region in the town archive, which is two rooms in the basement of the Elders Falls Public Library. On that map, Sisters Island was still called Sisters Island even then. That map was over 150 years old. So that can't be right.

I once asked Ani why she lied about the island being named after Bee and her sisters, but she pulled a Bee on me and changed the subject by asking if I wanted to order more pizza. Of course I wanted to order more pizza. I love pizza. Who doesn't? I don't think there's anyone.

I call that "pulling a Bee" by the way, because that's what Aunt Bee, who is actually my Great Aunt, used to do too, when I was younger and I asked too many questions all at once, or asked the wrong questions at the worst times. Bee was good at baking, so I got fed all sorts of stuff when I was being curious around her business. Mom can't cook or bake but there's a pizza place right in town and they deliver right to the causeway gate on the Mainland Road, and so that works pretty well too, for everybody involved. Like I said, I like pizza, and people often find my questions more inconvenient than just ordering more pizza.

So, that's a mystery I haven't solved, after, what, eleven years? More than that, now. How old is Bee, really, or who is the island actually named after,

and why am I being lied to about one or more things?

I met Bee when I was about four years old once, but then I didn't see her for years after that, and then Mom brought me to stay with Bee on Sisters Island, just before my thirteenth birthday, when I was eleven. You're going to maybe have to take notes, I don't know. My story has a lot of mysteries in it.

If you were here having tea with me right now, I might just ask you what you'd like to know, about my life, but you aren't, so I'll just keep going. I'll talk about Niall next.

Niall was a friend I had for a few years. I met him in the principal's office in grade six or something. I was in trouble for handing in my homework sideways. This is what I called it when I did homework on time, but not the homework I was asked to do. Niall was in the principal's office because... actually I don't know why. I never asked him why he was there. Niall never really talked about himself very much, and he didn't really ask people much about themselves either. He was just interested in what he found interesting, and that was that. He was interesting. What else am I supposed to say about Niall? He was a good friend, I'm not sure what he's up to now. Probably something interesting. Maybe he'll show up again. I hope he does. I used to drive him nuts, I think. There was one week there somewhere where I thought we'd probably get married someday but I don't know what I was thinking. He never would have gone for that.

Liz is still my best friend - I've known her for as long as I've known Niall. I knew who she was before I met Niall, but I only really became her friend after I met Niall. I kind of met them both around the same time, so it depends on how you look at it. Liz is great. She believes in God and Science at the same time, but she doesn't mind that I just call God Science. I think she understands what I mean anyway.

Liz is helping me repaint Bee's house this month. The house is mine now, which I'm still not sure how to feel about. We just painted the kitchen pale yellow. I wanted to paint it black but Liz said why not yellow and when I thought about it, that seemed to make sense too, so I said sure. This was only five days ago, the day before the voice told me to write my story. I

think when somebody gives me a good idea, I'm pretty good at seeing that it's a good idea. I think that means I'm easy-going.

You might be wondering if I have Aspergers, or something like that, by now. I'm not sure if you are, or if I do. I've been asked that three times in my life, which is why I'm wondering. I asked Ani if she thought I should get tested, and she got upset for some reason. I think she was worried if I had something like that, she'd have to feel guilty about giving it to me. That's kind of dumb and I don't think that's how it works anyway, but I guess I get it. I wouldn't hold it against her, but honestly I don't know if I want to know anyway. This is just how I am. I have something, I know that. Everybody has something, so I'm not sure that it matters, as long as you're kind.

When I saw Bee last, she said, Maevis, you have to promise me something, and I said, Bee, what is it? She said, you have to promise me to take care of Sisters Island, and the houses, and the dock, and Bently's sheds, and the old orchard, and the blueberries, and all of that. Feed the crows sometimes, but not too much, or they'll get lazy and just bother you all the time. Watch out for the cranky bees, and never turn your back on the ocean. Will you promise me you'll do all that? I said, Bee, what are you, dying or something? I was joking. I like joking with Bee. Bee didn't say anything, or tell me pish-posh, and she didn't offer me muffins either, and I said, oh.

I wanted to cry. I wanted to cry, that's how much I wanted to cry, but I didn't. I couldn't. I can't. Bee knew it, I just knew she knew it. She held my hand, but it didn't help. I didn't cry. Bee and I had another month, almost, and we said other things, and there wasn't a big goodbye speech, and she passed away in her sleep. I found her, she was dead. She seemed relaxed. Her forehead didn't have that wrinkle it had always had before, even when she was laughing about something. I never really noticed the wrinkle in her forehead until she was dead, and it wasn't there anymore. She had a beautiful, smooth forehead. It was like Magic, how it went away. And we buried her the next day, on Sister's Island. I'll take you to her sometime. But not now.

Mom and Uncle Norm and Claudette and Liz and even Arthur showed up for the funeral. There were a lot of people from town who parked their cars

all along the Mainland Road, facing the Island, who just stood outside next to their cars and on the road, paying respects. The older men and some of the younger ones and some of the women held their hats in their hands. I counted over a hundred-and-forty people. I didn't know how many people knew Bee, from town. She always never talked about town, except when she asked Uncle Norm to pick her up potato chips or something. That meant she needed groceries. She just called groceries potato chips. Pick me up some potato chips, Normand. Sure thing Bee, what flavour? Oh any kind, I like them all. Except Ketchup. She really did. Then he'd bring her all the groceries he knew she needed.

The funeral was small and it was a sad day, but Bee had thought of that already, and she hadn't wanted it to be too sad, so her lawyer had brought a treasure map to give us right after the funeral was done, and Bee was in the ground. None of us even knew Bee had a lawyer, until the lawyer showed up and showed us a letter which was from Bee, in her handwriting. She signed it "BB", which was meant for me. That won't mean anything to you right now, but it meant enough to me then. The lawyer was legit. Bee knew I would be wondering that. Bee knew me. She knew I loved treasure maps. I haven't shown it to Liz yet, but soon.

I had to take a break from painting for a while, to tell this story properly. It's hard work, trying to decide what to say about yourself. I used to think about other people a lot, but I didn't think about myself as much. I used to have this dream now and then, where I was a floating eyeball, and I would float around and watch other people having their dreams. I was in their dream, but I was an eyeball, and they were the main character in the dream, so I sort of didn't think of me as me, in the dream. It wasn't until I would wake up that I'd think, hey, I think I was the eyeball watching the person who was dreaming, and not the person dreaming. That was somebody else.

I haven't had that dream in a little while - though last year I had a dream where I was the person dreaming, and I noticed there was an eyeball floating around watching me have the dream, but I wasn't the eyeball anymore. I think that means something, but who knows when it comes to dreams. I certainly don't. But I think it meant something.

It's hard to know where to start, when I'm trying to tell my story. I didn't think it would be hard, when I said sure, ok, I'll do that, after the voice told me I should. At the time, I think I imagined starting from the time before I was born, and then moving on to when I was born, and then when I was a baby, which I only remember parts of, and then when I was a tiny kid, and etcetera, until the story would end with me sitting in Bee's kitchen, which is now my kitchen, painting the walls yellow instead of black, and telling you my story. The end. For now.

But that's already not how it's shaking out. I'm jumping all over the place. The timeline is all whack. A promise is a promise, I'll keep going. Eventually all the moments will be strung together, if I just keep going. What else could happen? There are only so many moments to cover. It's just a matter of time. I have to watch this paint dry anyway. I might as well tell my story while I'm watching paint dry.

I'm going to skip over the Gnomes, though, for now. That part's one of the weirder parts, and I think I should save it for a cliffhanger or when I run out of normal things to write about.

Sisters Island is in Elders Bay, which is near Elders Falls, and also near Elders Mountain. That's all that's named after the Elders, around here. Buddy Elders was the last of the Elders. He died about ten years ago now. He was pretty old when I first met him, and he died a few years after that, after leaving me a ball field in his will. He left Liz a little church, and Niall a mineshaft, if you can believe it. The mineshaft was flooded, but Niall didn't mind, he thought that was the best present anybody ever got from anybody, ever. I told him it wasn't really a present, it was a bequeathment and a deathtrap. He asked me if I wanted to go spelunking in his mineshaft, and I said Niall, it's flooded, and he said that's OK, and I said no again.

That was a definite plot twist, partway through my story, the gifts from Buddy Elders. I'm probably giving away all the best spoilers in my story. I also forgot the high school was also named after the Elders, and one of the clothing stores in town. It was called Elders Used Clothing Store, in case that's important.

Buddy Elders left all the kids at Elders High some part of the County actually, which we found out he had inherited. Every kid who graduated that year got some part of the town. A field, half of a three-car garage, the top of a water tower, a strip of beach, a gazebo, a wood lot, a warehouse, a cool park bench, an old tree, the bottom of a water tower, even shares in a radio station. The list went on. It was pretty random.

Any kid who hadn't graduated was given an I.O.U. for something, redeemable when they graduated. That year, everybody graduated, even the ones who had already decided earlier year that graduating high school wasn't going to be part of their story. There was a lawyer running around doing all the verifying and handing out of prizes. Buddy was a weird, clever old guy.

I hadn't thought that counties were things people could inherit, but I guess Elders County was, if you were Buddy Elders. By the time Buddy was done getting fully, legally dead, most of the town was owned by people who had just graduated from high school, and a lot of them started small businesses, because why not, or sold their inheritances to go travelling or learn a valuable life lesson by blowing it on something dumb. A few joined city council, after they learned what they could and couldn't do with their land or phone booth or telephone poles or whatever, and three of those eventually ran for mayor, and one of them won and is a good mayor, if you ask me. Their name is Laurel. I think they spell it with an extra a, but I don't know. I'm not really into politics.

I had forgotten that the Elders called the county Elders County too. I've probably forgotten other things named Elders around here. I lied to you earlier, there's definitely more than three. You get the idea, let's move on.

Sisters Island is in Elders Bay. It's not far from the Mainland Road, which is pinched between the Bay and Elders Mountain. The town is not far away either - you can either walk the causeway at low, low tide, or you can leave the Island by boat when the Bay's calm, and row across to the dock off the Mainland Road, and moor the thing so it doesn't float off somewhere. Either way, you can ride a bike into town, and get there in about a half hour, or walk and get there in over an hour. If you hitchhike, you can get there in about ten minutes, but I don't recommend hitchhiking unless you know

whose car you're getting into, and you trust them also. Why do I need to say this, I don't know - I just think it's important to say. Maybe that's the reason I'm telling my story, for the safety tips. You never know. Maybe it's a kid reading this. Kids, don't hitchhike. That's for when you're a lot older and know more life skills.

Also, you really have to watch the road, when you're mooring your boat, if you're doing that. And wear something reflective when you're on the side of the road at dusk, or dawn, or at night. Just be safe, and think about safety more often. I wish I knew that when I was younger. That's why I'm telling you, in case you're younger, and on the side of the road, like I was.

Elders Falls is a really good town. It's got a grocery store and a Thom Thorntons, and a mechanics shop, and a car dealership, and two taprooms, which were called bars once, and a library and a town hall, and a bunch of other buildings and businesses. I'm not going to name them all. I might draw you a map later. There's an arcade and comic shop that are attached together too, I forgot that. That's my favourite place in town, I think. It's across the street from Too-Toonies and the Garden Centre. That's my favourite street. It's called Elders Avenue. The avenue part means it connects two longer streets. Those are Main Street and Queen Street. Every town and city in the country has a Main Street and a Queen street, I think. Elders Avenue is on a steep hill, because a lot of the town is on a steep hill. The hill is not named after the Elders, it's just called the Hill, around here. The Mountain is named Elders, though. Taller, I guess. It gets its own name.

I'm not really doing a good job describing Elders Falls. I went to the Elders Falls Public Library yesterday to use the Internet, and I looked up some facts about Elders Falls so I could describe it better. The list of facts is interesting but maybe not important to include in my story. I actually can't decide. I'll tell you a couple of facts. Elders Falls, as of this writing, has over seven thousand, seven hundred people in it. That sounds like a lot of people, but when you wander around town you really couldn't tell there were seven thousand and seven hundred of us. A lot of those people live in the surrounding area. There's a fishing settlement across the Bay from the town, which is called the Settlements, and some of the seven thousand seven hundred people live there. Not that many, but a good some of them.

Elders Falls was founded in eighteen-sixty-four, according to Elders Falls official website. There were people here before that, and after that there were a lot more people, who came by train. There were controversies and the land here was stolen, although how that story goes depends what you're reading or who you're talking to about it. The land has never been given back, and people owe apologies to other people, but the mayor had promised to talk about that idea of giving things back, back when they were trying to get elected, and they got elected anyway, so you never know what might happen. I hope the future from now on is always better than the past, that's all.

I saw Elders Falls the first time when I was eleven. Mom drove me and Turtle Norm and Dooley to go stay with Great Aunt Bee for that Summer, and she ended up leaving us there for a whole year. She didn't plan to do it that way, that's just what happened. She had a good reason. I don't remember what it was, exactly. Mother Ani always has her reasons. It's been a long time since I was mad at her for that year. I think we needed a break from each other anyway. I liked staying with Bee. Not every day, but mostly I really liked it. I'm really lucky.

When we first got to the outskirts of Elders Falls, we passed a sign that said **Elders Fall**. The S had fallen off, and that was funny, but what was also funny was that the sign was saying that elders fall, which they do, you have to admit. That's not always funny, because falls when you're elderly can be serious business. I'm not making fun of people getting hurt. Maybe you had to be there. I needed a laugh right then and there, and then we passed this sign, and it had at least two different, accidental jokes in it, and I definitely didn't laugh on the outside, because I was not having a good day right then. But seeing that sign made me feel better. I couldn't help it. I felt better. Because Elders Fall.

Nobody fixed that sign the whole year I was staying with Bee. The next time I saw it, on the way back out of Elders Falls with Claudette, the S was still gone, and the Elders were still falling. That time, I chuckled out loud, and Claudette guessed it was because of the sign. I was sad to be leaving Elders Falls, but not sad enough that I couldn't have a laugh at that stupid sign.

You might be wondering if there is a waterfall in Elders Falls. That would make sense. There is one, if you're wondering that. The people in the town of Elders Falls call the waterfall outside of town Bently Morgan Falls. Bently was the name of Bee's ex-husband or whatever, but the waterfall and Bently were both named after Bently's grandfather, the original Bently Morgan. Bee told me she had met the first one before he died, and that he had really thick spectacles, and impressive sideburns. She told me she married the second one, but I don't know about that.

I found the following information out in the Archive in the basement of the Elders Falls Public Library, during my second time staying with Bee. The original Bently spelled his name Bentlii, with two i's, which somebody told me was probably Dutch or something. I don't know about that either. I was visiting the library on my fourteenth birthday, because I was hiding from everybody and they didn't know I knew how to leave the island during high tide. I almost fell out of the rowboat that time, and I walked to town after that, and the library was open and that's how I found out about older-four-eyed-Bentli-with-two-i's.

I want to tell you more about Bee, but not right now. I'm watching paint dry.

I know more people than just the ones I've mentioned already, of course. There's all the people back in the City, but none of them are my friends or family really, and if I start telling all the stories about my all my old neighbours and everybody else I've ever met, then we'll be here too long. I don't know how many of those other people matter. That doesn't sound like the right way to say that. I think you know what I mean to say though. Where does a person's story stop? When do you go from being the main character, to a floating eye watching some other main character? I'm trying something different with my storytelling here.

There was Officer Hopewell Flowers. He died five weeks ago. That funeral was pretty big. I couldn't cry about him either. I've just lost a lot of people in my life. I'm not sure my life is a happy story all the time. I'm happy some days, but I'd be happier if people and dogs didn't die so often. I'll be dead someday too. Not to be dark about it, that's just what happens. The voice told me to get on with telling my story. I think it meant, while I'm still kicking. I'm telling other people's stories too, while I'm at it. Some of them are still

kicking and some aren't. I had to stop and think for a while whether that was the reason I said yes to this. Some storytelling needs to happen, before this storyteller buys the farm, or kicks the bucket. I think that might have been the reason. I wish I could remember.

Officer Hopewell Flowers was already pretty damn old when I met him. He's the oldest person to ever live in Elders Falls, according to Elders Falls Radio, CFGH-FM, 101.01, *The Falls*, yesterday morning. I listen to *The Falls* most every day, while I'm doing whatever I'm doing that doesn't involve listening to something else. Old Hope was a good person. A real war hero too, and I miss him. I think he missed Bee, and that's why he didn't waste much time after she died. Suddenly, he had somewhere else to be.

I'm not sure why the voice asked me to tell you my story right this particular Summer though. It was bad timing, in my opinion. I'll talk about Hope later, maybe.

There are two ways to get onto Sisters Island, the boat, and the causeway, like I mentioned. The causeway is a bit dangerous. It's almost all underwater at high tide. This means it's really dumb to get used to using the causeway to get to and from the island, except at low, low tide on a really calm day, and so most of the time, we just don't use it. Except for Normand, but there's no reasoning with Normand about some things. There's a gate at the mainland side, and only Bee has the key. Had it. I've got it now. Now it's my gate, I guess. That's a very weird feeling. You'd have to have been there, the whole time, to understand how weird a feeling it is that this house and that gate and the whole island are mine, but I think you can imagine. They're not actually mine, I'm just caretaking them. But the lawyers like to say I own things. Somebody's name needs to be on this stuff, that's what I'm told. This is where I live, so I guess it has to be my name on these things, right now. It's my home.

The causeway isn't straight either, it's curved. I don't really know what the person was thinking, who built it. Or even how they did it. Nobody seems to find it all that weird, but I've always found it pretty weird, that there's a causeway at all. Bee said the island has a weird history, and that I didn't know the half of it. I remember not believing her at first, but then I started

exploring the island and I stopped not-believing everything she told be about things. I'm still not done not-believing all the things she's told me, and then believing a lot of them later. I probably won't be done with all that, until I'm old and dead too.

The Gnomes give me the willies sometimes, I have to admit. I've Grown about them for a few years now, but I've never really gotten really used to them being there. I think I'll tell you that part sooner or later.

When I first arrived at my Great Aunt Bee's house, I had already seen the sign that said Elders Fall, and then I saw Elders Mountain, and the train, and the train bridge and ravine, and then Bently Morgan Falls from a distance, and I saw an eagle for the first time, and we stopped at a gas station that had a seashell on it and the guy there told Mom that Sisters Island was haunted, and after that we saw the town as the sun was starting to set, but we weren't going there. We hung a left and followed the Mainland Road, and the Mountain was right there, very close, and steep, and it gave me vertigo to be so close to it, even though we weren't up high, it was the mountain that was. On the other side of the road from the mountain, the ocean was right there, and I worried we might just drive into the ocean, and splash, the whole carload of Morgans would sink to the bottom of the sea, just like that. I think I had a panic attack - nothing was flat and safe, it was all cliffs and falls into the ocean. The lights coming on in the town across the water is what kept me from having a panic attack. The lights on the water from the town were beautiful. So I just kept looking at the town, across the Bay.

It wasn't long before we crossed under the train bridge and then went up a crazy zig-zag part of the road and I was really trying not to throw up during that. Dooley kept barking at trees and the ocean. I didn't know it was called a Bay. There was a lighthouse far off, and its light came on and the town's lights kept coming on, and then the sunset happened and the sky behind turned all these shades of pink and orange and I remembered why people believe in God or Magic, even though light and trees and water and towns and sunsets are all just Science. Science is enough. I was, well. I didn't know where to look. Everything was just beautiful. I had only seen the City, my whole life.

My whole life, I had never seen any of these things, all like that. I'd seen them on TV and in pictures and in my imagination, but I hadn't seen any of these things. Not like that.

All that stuff happened to me before I ever saw Sisters Island, and then we went around another crazy corner and there it was - right out in the water, closer to the Mountain than it was to the town. I thought it would be way out in the water, but it was close. Not close enough to get a baseball to, unless you were a major leaguer, and only a really, really top-notch one, and only in some spots. I don't know how many meters that is. I saw all of that other stuff, and then I saw Sisters Island, and it was closer and bigger than I thought.

I had thought the island would be small, and we'd have to row and row out to it. Mom never mentioned there was a causeway. I had never seen a causeway. When I saw the causeway, it was already half underwater, because the tide was coming in. I didn't know about tides. I had read about tides and been told about tides in school, but I didn't know about them. By the time we had parked our car near the causeway gate, which is right on the side of Mainland Road, right at a bend, even less of the causeway was above water. By the time we got our stuff into the boat, the sun was down and the moon was out and we were starting to use the moonlight to see what we were doing, and I never knew moonlight could be that bright, and I had forgotten what it felt like to be so terrified and sick and excited that I couldn't stop spinning around in one spot, so that's what I did, I just got out of the car and started spinning, until Mom told me to cut it out and help her with the groceries.

She meant, help her put them into the rowboat, because we were about to row a rowboat across a bay, to an island, in the moonlight. Like pirates do.

I loved my Great Aunt Bee before I ever met her. I have never not loved my Great Aunt Bee, ever since.