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Love & Anger

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The fourth thing the voice ever said to me was *You can call me Science, if you want to. Science is OK, if it's scientific.*

What did the voice mean by that? Isn't that the only way science can be? Scientific? That's what I thought for a long time. But then I thought about it some more the other day, after listening to my shows on the radio, and now I think I understand what it meant.

Here's an example. Somebody used science to invent plastic. You could say that plastic is proof that we know some science. I mean, if aliens looked at our oceans right now with their planetary anomaly detectors, and saw all that plastic floating in the water, they would say, oh, there's some science happening down there. Better keep an eye on that one. I don't know about what aliens might think about what we're up to right now, really.

So plastic is proof that there's some science around. But then, dumping a bunch of plastic into the sea so that it ruins all our habitats everywhere for everybody is not really scientific thinking, right? The math is all wrong. There are conclusions being ignored, and that's not what science does. That's proof that you don't really know

enough about science yet, if you're just waving it around, without knowing how, or why, or when to stop. That's what children do with dangerous things, if you're not paying enough attention to them. Children love getting into trouble when you're not paying attention.

Here's another example. Atoms can be used to make power to run your town's lights. Bam, proof of some science again, lights at night. Awesome. But atoms can also be used to make bombs that cause everybody to die and get angry at each other, and the planet to get worse, instead of better, the way it should be getting. Nothing useful comes from making a bomb. That's my thought on the matter of bombs. That's just unscientific use of atoms, if you ask me. What's the point of science if it ends up blowing up the chance to do more science? That's proof that we're not done understanding how to properly do science yet. Our science isn't OK, really. Not yet.

So, science is OK... as long as it's scientific. The voice wasn't wrong, you can do lots of science like somebody who doesn't know jack about real science. I think that's probably ironic, but I'm not sure.

I first learned about the word ironic from a pop song that Ani used to sing a lot, before we had to sell our turntable and records to get me in music lessons, which I didn't want, and which just didn't take. I don't have a musical bone in my body, and I tried to tell Mother Ani that but she just wouldn't listen. I miss listening to her sing. She wasn't great at it. Maybe she would be better now, I don't know. There was more singing in our family when I was younger, and we hadn't sold our record player for music lessons yet.

There's a lot of irony in the world, I think, but I'm not too sure I could point it all out to you accurately because people tell me that song isn't about irony at all, so now I'm misusing the word all the time, so mostly I just avoid using it so I don't come off like I don't know about

irony. Niall said once that's what makes the song the best song about irony, because the song itself is ironic, and that was the point.

My other favourite songs to hear Mom sing were songs by the group ABBA and some songs by the musician Jeff Lynne, who is her favourite person. I found a lot of letters to the musician Jeff Lynne in the attic back that first year with Bee when I started investigating Mother Ani's past, and I had known she liked the musician Jeff Lynne, but I didn't know she had written him letters and song lyrics. Why hadn't she ever sent them? I asked her later and she told me I shouldn't have read those but then there wasn't anything embarrassing in them, she was just young and really liked the musician Jeff Lynne and wanted him to know that his songs had helped her get through tough times.

Jeff Lynne made a lot of dance music and a lot of not-dance music and sometimes it was the music you didn't expect would get you through tough times that got Ani through tough times, when she didn't expect it. If you think about it, that means Jeff Lynne got me through a lot of tough times too, even when I didn't know it - even before I was born. He probably had no idea any of this was happening.

Maybe Jeff Lynne is one reason I even had the choice to be, in the first place, I don't know. How can a person know something like that? I think I should write to musician Jeff Lynne and let him know that he got Ani and me through some tough times, and maybe other people too, because of that. If my story ever gets somebody through tough times, then that's Jeff Lynne's doing too. He should know that. I mean, I would want to know.

That's why it's hard to tell where a person's story actually stops - because it really doesn't stop. It keeps going, right into other people's

stories. This is why I'm already taking so long telling mine. I don't know who to stop with.

I didn't respond to the voice that time, when it told me I could call it Science if I wanted to. So what? What did I care what it was OK with? I'd call it whatever I damn wanted, it was my voice. I was still mad at it then, because of the third thing the voice ever said to me, which was the shortest thing it ever said to me so far. Sometimes I think it was the meanest thing it ever said too, other times, I'm not sure it was being mean. I'm not going to talk about that until much later in my story though. Right now I'm trying to keep all the sad things from being in my head at the same time.

I just gave the voice the silent treatment that time, and didn't call it Science or God or Magic or anything at all, for a long while. I didn't know what to call it, so I pretended it wasn't there. It took a years to get back to me after that.

Last Winter was shorter than I had hoped. I'm not always a fan of Winter but I wanted this last one to last forever. I did everything I could think of to get Bee out on the ice but she never liked skating after that time she fell through and I suppose you can't blame somebody for not wanting to skate after something like that. It was just her legs that fell through and she had only just stepped onto the ice, but it was technically the ocean so I can imagine her imagination got a good scare.

She said it was so cold and it happened so fast. I said yeah but we're on the pond now, and we'd only do a couple of laps and she just said look Maevis, I'm too old now, I can't keep my balance, I'm afraid of falling, and it's just not fun for me anymore. My skating days are done, for now. I'll watch you. Go on, it's ok.

She had brought hot chocolate and she had her self-heating cushion and extra scarves and I could tell she had come to stay, and stay warm. Just not skate. I got it. I skated around a bit while Bee watched and I waved at her and I couldn't cry. I just wanted that Winter to last forever. Ever since I saw how good she was at being an old lady, which was about the second day I knew her, I had always wanted us both to be old ladies together someday. But I knew that couldn't happen. Time travel is not possible.

I have a .22 caliber rifle in the tea cabinet and I know how to clean it and shoot it and I've shot it in anger twice, but not criminally. The first time was when I was younger, and the second time was this past Spring.

Officer Hope Flowers had to show up that first time - when I was a kid, and I shot the .22 in anger - because when you shoot a .22 on Sisters Island, the sound carries across the water, all the way into town, to Water Street at least, depending on the wind. I didn't know anything about that when I was doing shooting practice that first Summer I stayed with Bee. On days when I needed to practice my aim, I waited until she went down for her nap and then I'd grab that thing out of the cabinet and go to the orchard and set up cans and practice my aim. I shot loads of cans. Not bottles, I didn't want glass everywhere that the scritters might cut themselves on. But cans and cereal boxes were fair game.

I'll save the story of why first I shot in anger for later. After it happened though, Officer Flowers called the house and asked could he come over for a visit so I said sure, Bee was sleeping but he could come over and he said he'd be over the next low tide which was the next morning, kind of early. We didn't have a lot of visitors but most of them would just walk across the causeway when the tide was still going out, once it was above water again. Then they had the least risk of getting stuck on the island, or swept out to sea.

Sometimes visitors stay too long and have to sleep over but Bee tended to shoo them out early so that wouldn't happen and I tend to stick with that tradition too. People might think it's rude when I say, you have to go now, but really I just don't want them getting swept out to sea, or having to sleep in the guest room when I don't feel like making people breakfast early the next morning. I like sleeping in sometimes.

When Officer Flowers came over the next morning, he and Bee talked for a bit and then he asked to talk to me and that's when I learned the whole town of Elders Falls and the people in the Settlements across the Bay and a few drivers on the Mainland Road and a couple of hikers on Elders Mountain had all been listening to my target practice. They had even talked about it on the radio, wondering about who was doing all the shooting, and if everything was OK, and if some of them could start hunting season early, too. Some of the town's dogs were getting all wound up, even.

That's when I decided I need to fix old Bently's radio, because I was missing out on important community news, like occasional reports of gunfire. I guess most people figured out it was coming from the island eventually. It wasn't that hard to triangulate. Sound really carries across water, did you know that? I promised not to shoot the .22 anymore and after that I only took it out when there was a big storm and the water was all choppy and people would be inside and not expecting to hear gunshots, or maybe they would mistake them for lightning somewhere. It was during a lightning storm when I shot the .22 in anger for the first time. But like I said, I'll make that a cliffhanger for later, rather than a spoiler, and tell you about that some other time. I'm trying something new with my storytelling.

The second time I fired the .22 in anger though was after Bee's funeral just this Winter. I shot a tree, a bunch of times. I just picked a nice one and I unloaded on it until there was a big piece of bark

missing. It wasn't during the storm, and I bet the whole Bay heard that gunfire. I felt a bit bad afterward. It's a good tree, it hadn't deserved to be shot up like that. Trees are tough, and .22 caliber rounds are pretty small, really. I wouldn't want to get shot by one, but if I were a tree, I might not mind, I don't know. Maybe I would. It wasn't anything personal.

It took a half box of ammo that day, before I wasn't angry anymore. I didn't hear any news about the gunfire on the radio that week. I kept finding boxes of food and flowers left at the Mainland Road shoulder near the causeway gate, all that week though. Bee was gone, so they weren't for her. The town had left those things for me. That's what Liz told me. Even though they probably heard me shooting in anger, they still brought me cookies and flour and flowers. That's being neighbourly.

Everybody is mad at me today. Do you ever have one of those weeks where everybody you know is mad at you, or mad at each other, and it's all for different reasons, but you feel it's all about something you did? I've been curled up under a blanket in the sewing room upstairs, where there's a cot I keep in case I need to curl up under a blanket in the second-smallest room in the house, not counting the half-bathroom off the mudroom on the first floor. I've got a brace on my foot because I twisted my ankle really bad, because I couldn't find the air pump to fix the wheelbarrow, so I couldn't move Norm's giant-ass ladder from the driveway, where he left it, so I had to fix my broken ladder with masking tape, and that didn't work. Everybody is mad at me today.

Not counting that half-bathroom off the mudroom on the first floor, the next smallest room in the house is the pantry, which is off the kitchen. But not counting the half-bathroom, the second-smallest room in the

house is the sewing room upstairs, where I am right now, under a blanket, with a giant ankle that hurts a whole lot. Everybody is mad at me.

I started calling the sewing room the Curling Room that first Fall I stayed with Bee, when Mother Ani was supposed to have picked me up already, but had decided to stay Out West or Up North or whatever instead.

Whatever. I like small rooms for curling up under blankets in. The Curling Room is where I curl up when I need all the thoughts in my head to stop moving around so much. I can see them sometimes, it's distracting. Everybody is mad at me today. I can see it clearly, even when my eyes are closed. I'm closing my eyes right now, under a blanket, in a small room, all alone on an island. I can see everybody mad at me.

All the madness started when I fell off the roof, because I used masking tape to fix my old ladder, because I couldn't move Norm's giant-ass new one, because I couldn't use the wheelbarrow to move it, because I couldn't find the air pump to fix the flat on the wheelbarrow. I used the masking tape instead, which I should have known wasn't going to work. Actually, I knew for sure it wasn't going to work. I'm not sure why I tried fixing a ladder with masking tape anyway. I'm not that bad at using tape, usually. I've gotten pretty good at fixing things, ever since I had to fix the radio that time when I was younger. From that point on, I started fixing all kinds of stuff. Bee's island was full of broken things that needed fixing.

I should have known the masking tape wasn't going to work. Even if I used almost two whole rolls, which was all I could find. Masking tape isn't for structural repairs, period. Neither is Duct tape, really, but everybody knows duct tape can fix things that it was never legally meant to fix. But masking tape on a ladder, that's just a dumb idea.

So the first person who got mad at me was myself, after I was done falling off the roof. I started it. My ankle got twisted and it really hurt but what hurt more was that I tried to fix a ladder with masking tape, and then I hurt myself, and then I got angry at myself. Normand should have been there. He should have brought me duct tape, or at least a ladder I could lift by myself. He should have been there. I should have waited for him.

So right after I fell off the roof and crawled around for a while looking for my cell phone, which I keep turned off and usually lose somewhere, I called Normand to yell at him because I was mad that he left me with that giant ladder, and he forgot I wasn't huge like he was, so how was I supposed to move it? But then he got mad at me, because Claudette got mad at him right then too, because I guess he had told me he'd help me with the shingles on the weekend, and I was just supposed to leave the ladder on the ground where he left it, until he came back on the weekend. But he hadn't told Claudette that, and I wasn't about to tell her that I had forgot that he had told me that part, about waiting until the weekend. I just wanted the shingles fixed so I could feed Liz muffins and tell her she was like my sister. Love makes you forget things, and sometimes even put yourself in danger.

Claudette got so angry at Normand when she overheard us yelling at each other on the phone and figured out Norm had left the ladder in the driveway and didn't stay to help with the shingles, and I tried to fix the shingles by myself, and then nearly broke my leg or my neck. Normand's angry with me now for throwing him under the bus. I get it. He wanted me to remember our deal about me waiting, so Claudette wouldn't be mad at just him, but I was too mad at him because I was mad at myself for using masking tape to do a duct tape job, so Claudette had to stay angry with Normand, and Normand had to stay angry with me.

But that's not all. After Claudette and Norm had come over and set me up in the living room with blankets and pillows and ice cream, and then argued more upstairs when they thought I couldn't hear, and then left because I told them a thousand times I was OK and I just wanted to be alone, then Liz showed up the next day, which was a day early, with Harry and not Peotr. I think Claudette called Liz and told her to come over early and check on me. Claudette's always doing things like that because she cares about everybody she meets and she acts like everybody's mother.

Liz and little Harry had walked the causeway to get to the island. I should probably just say, so you know from now on, that usually when we have visitors to the island they just wait for the low, low tide and walk across the causeway. It's not that dangerous on a really calm day. There are lifejackets hanging on posts at either end, so people can put those on for the walk across, if it makes them feel safer. Sometimes we use the rowboat but there's only one rowboat so it's usually on the island where I am. Only Normand drives across the causeway, and never when Claudette is with him. She'll tell him she's walking and he can drive if he wants. He's not allowed to do it with anybody else in the van, either. She says he can drive himself into the ocean if he wants - but he's not allowed to take anybody with him. I think he likes driving on the causeway because he likes mild adventures.

Officer Hope Flowers also had hid a zodiac in the trees just up the Mainland Road that the town's police and fire department and ambulance service all know about in case there's an emergency, and they need to get over here, but I'm not supposed to know about that. Once, some scientists from a secret science organization visited the island by helicopter, which was really quiet, but that only happened once. Most of the time, when I tell you somebody came to visit the island, I mean they waited for low tide and walked the causeway. That's the normal way to get to and from here, so I'll save time and

stop telling you that's how people got to and from here, if that's how it happened.

When Liz and Harry the Light Bright got here, Liz had wet eyes when I answered the door, and I thought she was upset that I had fallen off the roof, but that turned out not to be the reason. I told her I was OK and then she gave me a look that has taken me literally years to understand. I used to never ever understand how people could say things without coming out and just saying them. But Liz taught me. I knew she had been crying, and when she gave me that look that Liz has, I knew it wasn't because I fell off the roof. I don't take that sort of stuff personally. I knew she would have cried if I had died from falling off the roof. That's enough for me to know that.

Liz and Harry had brought a pizza but it was cold but I said that's OK, and I put it in the fridge and then I came back and told Harry to go catch a Gnome in the backyard and he already Gnew where I kept the Gnome Gnets and so off he went. I was pretty sure he wouldn't catch one because they're really fast, and I'm faster than Harry, who's only six, and I've never caught one yet. Liz doesn't believe in Gnomes, she thinks it's just a thing I made up to keep Harry running around the house until he gets tired. She calls me a genius sometimes. That's nice of her, but I'm not lying about the Gnomes.

Then I sat down on the couch with her and gave her a tea and was about to say her tummy looked bigger and had she felt the baby kick yet, and that's when she started crying for real. I have never seen Liz cry like that - like, really cry. That's what sobbing is. When you're crying so hard it causes your whole body to shake, like you're trying to throw up your sadness, but you can't. That's sobbing. I've never done that, so I don't know what it feels like. I was worried it might hurt, that's what it looked like - like it would hurt. I asked Liz if it hurt, and that just seemed to make it worse. Now she was really sobbing.

I don't do hugs well, I think I've mentioned that already. I'm bad at starting them and usually it's a side-hug, and not too long, but I don't know why I did it, I just did it. I opened my arms up, which is how you start a hug, and then Liz just glommed onto me and I just closed my arms up around her and let it all happen. I hugged her with my arms while she sobbed. My sister whom I never had was hurt. Liz Brighter, who is my hero, who is the mother of Bubba Pancakes, who is my Favourite Boy. My first best friend Liz was hurt. For the first time in my life, I knew what it must feel like to really cry, because she was holding me so tight while she was doing it, and my body felt like it was crying too, and then our hearts felt like they were touching, and I felt her baby kick for the first time, and then I had tears all over my face and they weren't Liz's, and I didn't know how they were getting there, because I had thought my eyes couldn't do that, and I don't know how long we both did that. I just don't know. I didn't even know what we were crying about. I was thinking about the baby inside Liz, and thinking about Bee and how I wished Bee were there to hug Liz and her baby with me and make it all better, because Bee wasn't great at hugs either, but she was sure better than I was. I miss Bee so damn much.

After a while of hugging and crying I said her tea was getting cold and Liz laughed and she had snot all over her face and I really don't like looking at that sort of thing so I hobbled out to get a paper towel in the kitchen and both my legs were all wobbly now, not just my twisted one, but my body felt really light. I felt like I was half the weight I was before Liz came over. I must have stood at the sink, leaning on the counter and looking out the kitchen window for a long time, because Liz came in after a while and stood next to me and put her head on my shoulder, and I just felt light. I didn't know sobbing could make you feel so much better. Why hadn't anybody told me that? That's a stupid thing not to tell somebody. I'm almost twenty-four years old. I should have known.

Harry was running around like a madman out there, swinging the Gnome Gnet at everything he could see and at nothing at all, and tripping over nothing and getting back up like kids do - like it's no big deal when you fall down - and I thought, he's never going to catch a Gnome that way, and I stood there feeling light and feeling Liz's head on my shoulder and then feeling my head on her head, and the island felt like *Sisters Island* to me, for the first time ever, and my eyes closed, and the world stopped for one moment. For one, full moment. I was about to say something scary and important and so full of power.

And then Liz told me that Peotr had left her - and I told her that didn't surprise me, because he tried to kiss me once.

I'm in the Curling Room, beneath an old blanket that still smells like Bee. Everybody is mad at me today.