**Theories of Entanglement**

Beth Sherman

I lift the tent flap and the officer points his flashlight beam at three teenagers, two boys and a girl, their heads drooping, eyelids fluttering, lost in vacant dreams. They’re breathing. The girl is wearing a T-shirt from Taylor Swift’s Eras tour; her mascara blotting her cheeks like dirty tears, the needle still clutched in her hand.

“It’s not her,” I sputter. My voice hasn’t stopped shaking since we started tonight’s search, about 20 tents ago. There are dozens of them scattered throughout the downtown area, blocking sidewalks. Garbage blows in the wind. To ward off the chilly night air, someone has lit a fire in a trash can and the flames illuminate bodies sprawled on the ground or huddled in cardboard boxes.

I see four-year-old Kaylee pirouetting across the kitchen, her pink tutu swirling. Seventeen-year-old Kaylee on stage in Swan Lake, leaping into the arms of the boy who played the prince. All those nights she lay with her head in my lap, talking about arabesques and ronde de jambes, whether her toes were turned out enough. I massaged her feet, thinking of all the things she’d lost—playing in the park, class birthday parties, vacations, a best friend. Because there wasn’t time for anything except practice. The sound of her voice sparkly as sequins on tulle.

“She’s a ballet dancer,” I tell the cop. “She has a scholarship to the San Francisco Ballet School.” I keep repeating it as though these words are going to save her.

The pills reminded me of Sweet Tarts in pastel shades of purple and green. Once I discovered them, we tried rehab, therapy, drugs to get her off the drugs, more therapy.

*Nobody said this was going to be easy*, my ex declared, before making things simpler by moving to Hoboken.

So much pressure to be thin, practice hard, attain perfection. I would have been happy if she became a dentist. I took out a loan on the house, sold my car. The lessons were expensive. Costumes, too. I would have done anything to keep her smiling.

Last June, I helped her study for the state physics exam. Most of it I couldn’t understand but there was something called entanglement that we both gravitated to. A link between faraway objects so intertwined that it’s no longer accurate to think of them separately. When Kaylee read in her textbook that Einstein called it *spooky action at a distance*, we cracked up. Here was something that puzzled a genius. Scientists are still hashing it out.

Now the cop wants to call it a day. Start fresh tomorrow. She could have gone home to Long Island. Or south to Mexico. She could be two blocks over, on Market Street. She could be anywhere.

I printed up 500 flyers with her picture underneath the word *MISSING*. Taped them to lampposts, to bulletin boards, to windows of delis and vape shops, anywhere the owner let me, like Kaylee is a lost labradoodle. She’s been gone for 19 days.

“Aren’t you going to call an ambulance?” I say, gesturing towards the kids in the tent.

He cocks an eyebrow and sweeps his arms out to indicate the whole homeless encampment. “For all of them?”

I step over a pile of feces. Above the blaze of the trash can fire, I see a flock of seagulls gliding beneath the stars. How do they fly without getting separated? How do they know which way to go? I thank the cop—a young man named Brian, with a paycheck and a sympathetic manner—who’s heading home to sleep in his own bed. Fumble with my phone, pretend to call an Uber. After he’s gone, I dial 911. When the operator asks me to describe my emergency, I start laughing hysterically and can’t make myself stop even while I’m explaining about the three unconscious teenagers. Remembering how Kaylee twirls her hair when she’s nervous. How she hates the taste of vanilla. How her hair smells of lemons and hope. How embarrassed she looks when she says how much she loves me. She’s gone. If she were dead, I’d know it. We’re photons, her and I, two particles of light connected in some weird, theoretical way. Separated by vast distances yet completely intertwined.

It's the laws of quantum physics that help me get up every morning, throw on my clothes, drink coffee, put up the posters, without flying apart. Without giving in to gravity.

I lift the tent flap again. It reeks of urine and bug spray. There isn’t much room. As I crouch next to the nodding girl I feel helpless, adrift. When I slide the needle out of her fingers and set it gently on the ground, she doesn’t stir, and we sit for a while in silence, waiting, her pale hand laced in mine.