

*Entanglement*

One universe and many years earlier, when Laurel and Eli were in high school, their English teacher, Ms. Galasso, began class with a writing prompt.

When Laurel entered the room, the blackboard read: *Define love.*

Some of the boys rolled their eyes as they arrived. An overzealous girl named Amy Wagner, who always raised her hand before it seemed possible to consider the question, was taking rapid notes. The other students, including Laurel, stared at their notebooks, united in mortification.

Ms. Galasso, a former rugby star, was frank, flinty, and impossible to embarrass. She hoisted her desk chair into the center of the room, turned it around, and sat on it backward.

‘All right,’ she said. ‘Who wants to kick us off?’

Amy raised her hand. ‘Love is putting someone else before yourself.’

Ms. Galasso nodded noncommittally. ‘Let’s keep the ball rolling. What else?’

No one spoke. Laurel looked down at her notebook. She had only managed three words: *It’s a feeling.*

Then Noah Takahashi said, ‘You know you love someone when you’re afraid to lose them.’

‘Yeah, like: the stakes are higher,’ said Maisie.

‘Love is really just a bunch of chemical signaling,’ volunteered Tim Wiggins, who was on the debate team.

‘Love is dead,’ said a girl in silver eyeliner.

Mikey Schneider – a spiky-haired boy with a puka shell necklace – said, in a mocking falsetto, ‘Love is never having to say you’re sorry.’

‘That is *definitely* not love,’ said Amy.

Ms. Galasso cut in. ‘Eli, you were writing for a while. Care to share your thoughts?’

Eli froze, as though he’d been caught. He hesitated, and the silence gathered charge.

‘There’s this physics concept,’ he said. ‘Called entanglement?’

A hockey player named Donald Brock-Medley mimed masturbation. Eli flushed. The previous year, when Eli transferred, Donald had nicknamed him Schnoz.

‘If that is your level of maturity, Mr. Brock-Medley,’ said Ms. Galasso, ‘then maybe you need to take a recess.’

Donald snorted, but he stopped. Laurel could see his piece of paper from her desk. In response to the prompt, he had written: *MY DOG*.

Ms. Galasso faced Eli again. He looked truly reluctant, and Laurel felt bad for him then, with thirty sets of teen antennae turned in his direction.

‘Entanglement happens when two particles become connected,’ he said. ‘You can do it in a lab: scientists entangle two photons, for example, and then separate them. After that, the photons influence each other. It’s like they lose their independence.’

‘How so?’ asked Ms. Galasso.

‘Particles exist in an uncertain state,’ said Eli haltingly. ‘Their properties aren’t fixed until you measure them. But if you measure one entangled particle, you also fix the other. It happens instantly, and distance doesn’t matter: they could be billions of light years apart. Einstein called it “spooky action at a distance.”’

At the mention of spooky action, Donald Brock-Medley grinned broadly. Ms. Galasso cast him a warning glance.

‘I guess that’s what I thought of,’ Eli said. ‘When you love

someone, you're attached, no matter what. You couldn't separate yourself if you wanted to.'

