

The Quantum Mechanic, er, Psychic

By
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My hands shook as I tried to unlock the door of my new storefront. I got distracted by the beautiful sign I'd painted on the front window: 'The Quantum Mechanic'.

"Earth to Anna," Marco said. "Are you unlocking the front door or what? I need to get to work."

I turned to him and smiled. "I'm so excited. This is gonna' be so great--my own business. It's gonna' be totally successful!" It had better be totally successful because I'd been unemployed since I'd lost my job at the university.

Marco smiled back at me. "I hope you're right." He waved his coffee-holding hand in the air. "Now, are you going to take this cup of 'good luck coffee' I brought you?"

"Definitely. You know I love the coffee." I plucked a cup out of his hand. "And I'm sure it'll be fortuitous, too." I took a sip. It was just the right temperature to showcase its hearty roasty body. Over the top of the cup, my eyes scanned Marco, he had a roasting-hot body and a lot of heart, too. I grinned.

"What?" he asked. "What's that look?"

I figured Marco might not like being compared to a cup of coffee--again. "Uh, just thanks a lot for the coffee. I'll see you after work?"

After a quick kiss, he was off.

I went inside and got all settled at my desk. I checked my email (there wasn't any). I drank my coffee. I checked my ad in the paper (it was fine). I checked the headlines (there were a bunch, but not any potential cases that I could see). I twiddled my thumbs. Being a quantum mechanic was pretty boring. I didn't understand; where were all the customers? I checked to see if the phone had a dial tone (it did). The morning dragged by with no customers to be found.

I was awakened by a man opening the door. A customer! Quickly, I jumped up out of my chair. "Hello, sir. Welcome! How can I help you? What can I do for you?"

He took a step back. Maybe I'd scared him? Note to future self: don't ambush potential customers.

I sat down at the desk and waved my hand calmly at the other chair. "Sit down--if you like."

The middle-aged man, in jeans and t-shirt looked around the store as he approached my desk. He scratched his head. "I need a mechanic. You all got any mechanics here?" He looked confused.

I smiled. "Me. I'm a quantum mechanic. What can I do for you? Please have a seat."

The man took another step forward. "It's my truck. There's something off with the transmission. Can you fix that?"

Despite my sign, I hadn't actually considered fixing cars or trucks, but I didn't see any reason why I couldn't. "Maybe," I said. "Please sit down and I'll tell you how we work here."

Reluctantly, the man sat.

"I'm actually a quantum mechanic," I said. "Not an auto mechanic."

The man put his hands on his knees and leaned forward. "Isn't a mechanic a mechanic?"

"Not exactly." I smiled in what I hoped was a helpful manner. "I use a branch of physics, quantum mechanics, to collapse the probabilistic wavefunctions and instantiate a particular reality."

The man said, "Huh? Physics? Is that like psychics?"

"No. Physics, not psychics." I tried again. "Quantum mechanics says there are infinite possibilities. The Copenhagen Interpretation says it takes a conscious human mind to collapse the wavefunction and pick one out."

The man's face started getting red. "Look. Do you have a mechanic here who can fix my truck or not?"

I looked at him for several moments. This was going to be harder than I thought. Clearly he was not my demographic. Maybe I should just try to get rid of him? He might be scaring off all the other customers who would understand quantum mechanics. Finally I said, "Yes. We can use our quantum technology to fix your truck for only three thousand dollars."

The man bolted out of the chair. "You're crazy." As he went out the door he added, "That's way too much."

I waited around the office quite a while for more customers before my hunger pains finally forced me to pop out to get some lunch. I couldn't understand why more people hadn't shown up to take advantage of what I was offering. As a quantum mechanic, I could do anything except time-travel.

Or maybe fix trucks.

As I walked back up to my office, with another cup of coffee (despite it's lack of luckiness so far) and half a hot dog in my mouth, I spied a woman peering into the window. It figured! As soon as I'd left, the customers must have started coming. I wondered how many I'd missed. "Yeth," I said to the woman.

"What?" the woman asked, frowning. Her eyes were red and her face was puffy as if she'd been crying recently.

I took the hot dog out of my mouth. Note to future self: don't try to reel in customers with a hot dog in your mouth. "Sorry. I work here. Can I help you with something?"

"I'm not sure." The woman crossed her arms in front of her.

Even I couldn't help noticing the woman was wearing one white shoe and one black shoe. Personally, I hardly ever mismatched my shoes. This woman must be really upset. "Please come on in," I said, gesturing inside. "Please sit down."

The woman sank down onto the chair. "I'm not sure what I'm doing here. But I'm desperate."

"Do you need a quantum mechanic?" I asked, carefully emphasizing the word quantum.

"I don't know," the woman said. "I guess so. My friend Nancy who works over at the university said you might be able to help me. I don't know."

"Why don't you tell me what the problem is for starters," I said.

"It's my daughter! She's gone!" The woman bit back a sob.

"Oh, my God," I said. "That's horrible. I'm so sorry." I dropped my hot dog on the desk and barely even noticed. "I might be able to help. But, did you go to the police?"

The woman nodded. "Yes. They're looking for her."

"Why don't we start from the beginning," I said. "I'm Dr. Anna Martinez. What's your name?"

The woman took a deep breath. "I'm Trish, Trisha, Rivas."

"And your daughter?"

"My daughter's name is Maria. She's only three-and-a-half, no, three-and-nine-months. She's almost four-years-old."

"And? What happened?"

"She was on a field trip yesterday with her daycare and they ...lost her." Trish started the waterworks, but I couldn't blame her. The poor woman. And her poor daughter; I wondered where she was and I hoped she was okay.

"I would be happy to try and help you find her," I said gently.

Trish nodded. "Thanks. Good. What do we need to do?"

"The way it works is I focus on Maria and collapse the wavefunction to instantiate the reality in which I'm with her."

"Huh?" Trish said. "You focus on her?"

"I need to learn all about her," I said. "Maybe you could show me some home movies? That type of stuff. And then I choose among all the quantum possibilities to be with her."

"I'm not sure I understand," Trish said. "Is it like a psychic?"

I looked at Trish. I wasn't sure she understood either. I was beginning to wonder if anyone without a Ph.D. in physics would understand.

Trish wiped her face with a tissue. She was a real customer and I thought I could help her. I couldn't let her get away.

"Uh, yeah," I finally said. "It's like a psychic."

"So, you need to come to our house and see her things and stuff?" Trish asked.

I nodded. "Yep." I stood. "Let's go." I was going to find this little girl or die trying. Er, that didn't sound so good. How about I was going to find this little girl or become pretty seriously injured trying.

I spent the next hour looking at Maria's bedroom, her clothes, her dolls, her general cute-little-girl-things, pictures of her and movies of her. I thought she had a good understanding of who Maria was (adorable, among other things). Any more research would just be wasting time. I squared my shoulders. "Okay. I'm ready."

Trish had been sitting on the couch and she stood up. "Okay. What do we do now?"

"You get ready to answer the phone," I said. I took a breath and started concentrating on Maria. The room filled with a white mist until the walls and ceiling and even the furniture disappeared.

I had been quantum limbo before; I knew I was surrounded by a fog of possibilities. I focused on Maria, cute little Maria. "Come on, Maria. Where are you?" I concentrated.

Gradually, the mist started clearing, and I found myself in an actual clearing filled with weeds and miscellaneous trash. "Maria!" I yelled, scanning the surroundings.

A little head popped up from behind an old tire.

Thank God. "Maria?" I sprinted over to the girl. "Are you okay? You're Maria Rivas aren't you?"

The little girl, face covered with dirt, nodded.

"I'm calling help right now." I already had my cell and my dialing finger out.

Soon, a police car zoomed up, siren blazing, and Trish jumped out before it even stopped moving. "Maria!!" She ran across the field, arms outstretched.

Maria ran for her mom. They crashed into one another in a collision of hugs and both burst into tears.

I got a little teary myself, truth be told. This business rocked!

The police officer ambled over to me. "So, you just happened to be out here and found a little girl?" He scrutinized me.

"Uh," I said cleverly. Did he suspect me of something? Maybe there were some details I still needed to work out with this new business.

Trish, clutching Maria to her, came over to us. "This is Dr. Martinez. She helped. I hired her. She's a quan-something--some kind of psychic."

"You're a psychic?" the officer asked.

People didn't seem to get the quantum thing. Why fight it? I shrugged. "Okay."

I was scraping 'Mechanic' off the window in preparation for painting 'Psychic' on it, when Marco arrived.

"So, mi amor, how was the first day?" he asked.

"Mi amor? That's nice." I snuggled into his arms for a kiss, or two, or who-the-heck-knows-how-many. When we came up for air, I said, "My day was excellent. I had a case. I found a lost girl!"

"That's great!" Marco said. He hugged me again. Once we extricated ourselves, he continued, "And how much did you get paid for this excellent case?"

"Uh," I said intelligently. Yes, there were definitely some kinks to work out with the business.

"And what are you doing to your pretty sign?"

Just then a patrol car rolled up and an officer got out.

Marco looked surprised, and I probably looked nervous as the officer approached me.

"You the psychic?" the officer asked.

After a moment, I nodded.

"Here." The officer handed me an envelope. "There was a reward for the girl."

"Awesome!" I said. "I knew it!"

Marco looked proud.

I may have jumped up and down a little--but some occasions really call for it, don't they? "I am psychic!"