

BASILIKÉ PAPPÁ

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PORTUGUESE WIRES

FIRST LETTER

Do but think, my love, two atoms that are free to turn, but not to move far from each other; for love, more powerful than any piece of iron, has united them forever. So there they are, like fish in the lake, enchanted with it all, trapped.

All these violent emotions I try so hard to shut up in a little box chase each other around in cycles. Suppose I could travel far to perhaps find more beauty elsewhere. Alas! You would make finer adjustments in your loops, and spark-set me still more. Good-bye. Love me always to a deep red, heating the wire as you go.

SECOND LETTER

Why did you let me fall into the sorrows of which you are the nucleus? Such a void can make the magnet stronger. Why are you not willing to pass your whole life at my side? An electron always likes to be close to a proton.

You write me letters cold; the current becomes gradually less.

I well know that I love you so fast and so carelessly that I start, rush ahead, stop, rush back, stop, and do it all over again and again. I know not what I am, or what I do, or what I wish for. How dear you are to me, and yet how cruel! Good-bye!

THIRD LETTER

What will become of me, my dear receiver, and what would you have me do? Say this again in different words, with a greater strength of signal?

Did you ever howl down into a long pipe or hallway and hear the sound? If you make it louder and louder, a condition will be reached where it won't do any good to call any louder. Repeating your name a thousand times each day gradually gets an extra coating of tinfoil.

Why must it be that I shall possibly never see you again? Do as you please; even in cooking you put covers over the vessels to make a mystery of it.

#### FOURTH LETTER

Methinks I do a wrong as large as the moon and the earth to the streams of my heart in trying to make them known to you in writing. Whatever this transmitter sends out goes along the wires to the distant receiver but doesn't affect the receiver.

Sometimes we speak of the vacuum in the same words we would use in describing evaporation of a supreme delight. It means more than that. So many wakeful nights, the improbability of your return represented by an arrow head; the coldness of your love, and your last good-byes, the characteristic curve of your departure. Yet you told me once that I was very beautiful. I dare not now pray you to love me. I only wish that you do not box my letters up in a cabinet in cold blood. Good-bye.

#### FIFTH LETTER

I am writing to you for the last time, so we can move back to some point where the pulls are equal.

You betrayed me every time you told me the names of the tiny planets sand is made up of; every time you gave me your tears on a silver plate; every time you said long waves needn't be lonely any more. Yes, I understand now that I allowed myself to be enchanted by very mediocre transports and just water.

The most desired game is that played by a single proton and a single electron. But the more it is played the smaller it becomes until finally it is reduced to a dot. I have at last touched the end of the wire. I have freed my heart from this circuit. I might as well go back to a city where all the streets are at right angles.

I care not to know the result of this letter.

## ABOUT THE POEM & AUTHOR

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“PORTUGUESE WIRES” was created from words and phrases found in *Letters of a Radio-Engineer to His Son* by John Mills (1922) and *The Letters of a Portuguese Nun* by Marianna Alcoforado (1669), translated by Edgar Prestage (1893). About the poem and the process of composing it, Basiliké Pappa writes:

I have never before written a found poem with a certain theme in mind. But the moment I saw that John Mills’ *Letters of a Radio-Engineer to His Son* was a suggested source, I knew exactly what I wanted to do: mix them up with *Letters of a Portuguese Nun* and speak of love in terms of electricity.

Defining the structure of my prose poem was easy: there would be five parts, as many as Marianna Alcoforado’s letters to Chevalier de Chamilly, each ideally starting with her opening lines—remixed, of course, with lines by Mills—and each reflecting the emotional state expressed in her original letters.

I moved into my usual procedure of dividing a sheet of paper into two columns and writing down lines from both sources. After combining my first choices, I started reading through the books for phrases to add and words to replace. I also kept some of the original lines from both books intact—they were perfect as they were.

In the introduction to Marianna’s letters, it is mentioned that “the title of ‘Portuguese Letters’ became a generic name applying [...] to every kind of correspondence where passion was shown *toute nue*.” With that in mind, I kept “Portuguese” in the title, substituting the word “Letters” with the “Wires” that so often appear in the letters of John Mills.

My aim was to add a surreal touch to the intensity of love and heartbreak, playing a great game as I go.

Basiliké Pappa’s work has appeared in *Punk Noir Magazine*, *Glitchwords*, *Sledgehammer Lit*, *11 Mag Berlin*, *Bones*, and elsewhere. She lives in Greece.

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