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The Electrician's Daughter: A Meditation on Love in 13 Chapters

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Nonfiction

THE ELECTRICIAN'S DAUGHTER: A MEDITATION ON LOVE IN 13 CHAPTERS

HANNAH FAIR

1. Throughout my lifetime, I have interpreted the world around me in light of my father and his career. Much of who he is can be explained through his occupation. Growing up, I came to view my father as a sort of Zeus. The same man who wired Philadelphia's skyscrapers and harnessed the energy of the universe took the time to have tea (read: tap water) parties with my young princess dress draped self.

2. An American flag lace keeper on each of his worn chestnut colored work boots, he is a product of the protestant work ethic. A teetotaler with a non-beer, beer-belly: Keith Fair is not the kind of half-bald man who one would suppose works in the rough parts of Philadelphia. From wiring massive, jelly-fish-like chandeliers in five star hotels to installing security systems in impoverished half-way houses, he has seen a lot of wires in his 57 years of life. I have always cherished being co-pilot in his white work van, driving down the streets of the city of Brotherly Love, while he points out every building he has worked at.

3. My father has lovingly informed me all about electricity. Electricity is a charge that can manifest in sparks and thunderbolts, it's

absence results in danger and utter chaos, yet it has been cheapened to an overrated wedding dance. The Law of conservation of electric charge states that a net electric charge cannot be created. Instead, only existing charge can move from one place to another. Another reason why electricity is the most versatile energy source on the planet. However, humanity has depended on it for only the last century or so.

4. "Cutnies," that's what my dad called wires as a child. My Nana, much to her bewilderment, walked in on my dad taking apart outlets at five years old to show his younger brothers these magical tubules. To him, they were marvelous; the red and blue wires seemed endless. Even from early childhood, his future occupation captivated his curiosity. It's his first love. As much as he dreads the people politics of his job, he is the happiest person on the planet while talking on the phone with my mother during his lunch break.

5. He has taught me about love and death and life and how to stay alive as long as possible. During accidental electrocution, the

electrical current surging through the body causes muscles to contract so much so that the individual is unable to let go of the source of electricity (yet another metaphor for love). On the bright side, a person's brain can conduct 200 watts of electricity which equates to that of an average light bulb. Whether that makes humanity bright or particularly dull is subjective.

6. Many of our "father-daughter" dates consisted of my trying to gaze intently on nearby power lines while he converts amperes to volts to explain how much power is needed to run the house that catty corners Owowcow, my favorite ice cream shop. He explains the difference between copper, gold, and aluminum wires (gold wires are the best for conducting, due to their corrosion resistance).

7. When I was in fourth grade, he visited my class as a guest speaker to talk about electricity. He beamed when he looked at his daughter. He talked about electrical safety and how he has been at a job site where a young apprentice made a mistake and was electrocuted. He refused to describe what the body looked like,

despite my classmates' promptings, sparing us the pain of knowing the gruesome reality of such a death.

8. A mixture of unease and pride: that is what I felt when he would pick me up from school in his work van, the epitome of a stranger danger vehicle, a large marshmallow-looking metal on wheels, his extra safe, special, circular van locks glistening. He enjoys the notion of embarrassing me; he tilts his head back, and the light reflects off of his bald head—the light just cannot stay away from him.

9. For my physics course in tenth grade, I had to draw a schematic to accompany my laboratory report. I showed my creation to my father: perplexed, he advised that my art was not, in fact, a schematic yet allowed me to carry on, letting me make my own mistakes, providing me with the freedom to “crash and burn” as he and my mother liked to say. This is one of the most important veins through which my dad showed me love. I learned through the shock of failure. To me, the schematics were always too orderly, angular, and pristine for my liking. I’d

prefer free flowing, jumbled, ambiguous treasure maps of my mind, so that is what I turned in. My teacher expressed—through my grade—that she agreed with my dad.

10. This expert on power and electricity helped my brother construct a miniature scale traffic light with switches that would dictate various traffic scenarios. Traffic lights: a place for tardy employees to curse, a place for lovers to kiss. There’s a reason love is described as electrifying. Electricity has the potential to enlighten on several levels and/or kill, which I presume is the best metaphor for falling in love.

11. I fell in love the summer before my first year of college. My dad worried that Jake was too much of a wallflower, ironically overlooking that he himself is but a *wallwire*. However, both Jake and my dad tend to be the life of the party in the right context: at group parties with his close friends for the former and in any space where Elvis is played for the latter.

12. After 33 years of service, his company recently gifted him a Superbowl-esque diamond ring to commemorate his 30 years of

employment. To me, it is an ironic representation of his marital commitment to his work. His dedication does not make him any less committed to my mom—it charges him to be his most fulfilled self.

13. When we finish our ice cream, my father casually remarks that he likes electricity but that it must be respected. He has taught me how important respect is to admiration. This would explain my annoyance when people yank cords out of outlets instead of walking over to directly pull the plug.