



*Paternity Within the Limits of
Reason by Diana George*

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Selected by Ben Marcus, author of *The Age of Wire and String* and *Notable American Women*.

This is an explosive story that achieves intimacy through strangeness, and yet it's also a bravely simple lament on the loss of power, real or perceived, in a family. I love that the images seem real and unreal at once, a contradiction that marks this story as the most resonant mythology. – BM.

1. A sheet covers the father where he lies in the hallway. He has wept brown tears that stain and reek. The father has more than two eyes, and not only on his head, or else he has other weeping-holes.
2. The daughter sows the floor about the sheet with salt, so the liquors that seep produce nothing more than a dark crust. Late at night, when father-fumes are least likely to be noticed, the daughter airs the house out. She sits on the front steps, smoking, partitioned from

the father by a screen door. She shaves the ash of her cigarette against the inside of a coffee can.

3. A father liquescens, a daughter stanches. A father is vanishing substance, a daughter increasing devotion. He leaks, she salts. This second or daughter-fathered life of the father is poor in incident, but not without activity. Such a father still overwhelms. He looms. He enters every breath. He can weep and ooze. He can stink in the heat of day and grow chill in the night. He cannot not weep, ooze, stink, grow chill. A father is weak.
4. The father is that which used to have women. If a woman never came home again, or if a process server came to the door, or if a woman "forced" the father "to stop loving her," the father soon had another. A father was whatever was never without a woman for long. The one woman a father refuses to have is the daughter. Is the daughter a woman? This is the antinomy of the father and the daughter.
5. The father has ceased to draw women to him; his weakened powers of attraction work only on beetles. The daughter has seen them scabbling over the salt ridges on the floor, wriggling their flat brown bodies to get under the sheet, eager to reach him. Unable to sleep, the daughter lies in her bed listening to the intercourse of beetles and father, a sound of husks.

Diana George's writing has appeared in *Nest*, *Alt-x.com*, and *3rd Bed*, as well as the anthology *Politics Without the State: Joy, Terror, and Depression in the Global Corporate Order* (Seattle Research Institute, forthcoming). She is currently translating a selection from the Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt's *Geschichte und Eigensinn*.