

## Traces

[paint by numbers]

The work on the page begins a blizzard. You fill in all the spaces and once they are filled, the scene is weightless, lifted up by the wind.

To translate is to betray, to falsify. My paper-skate fountain pen loops over the black ice. I speak every syllable, look out at the birch trees at intervals, as if to mark some place on a compass of the visible against this drift in language.

What I translate or paint adds up to the invisible, the unaccounted for, a dimension falling too fast for pen, voice or brush.

[compass]

I know the vintage paint by numbers my sister wants for Christmas like the things we see in our sleep. The forms are simple, the colors muted, the sky blue-grey.

A word is coming up on a metallic screen so slowly you can't imagine what it will be. It has been etch-a-sketched on her birth certificate. It has made a place for her odd longings inside her baby footprints.

In fist formation she presses her hand into the snow on the top of the mailbox. *Like this*, she says. One fist, then the other; each faces the other. She pokes a finger into the snow crust to make the toes, descending dots on top of each tiny foot. *The next person to mail a letter will think a baby stood there, barefoot in the snow*, she tells me.

And all the while the word I am looking for still has not written itself.

[blizzard]

Unimaginably bestial and too slippery for the fingers of day, the blizzard we dream opens into a room. The snow comes down and we are without compass. And in the deep woods the deer suspect (with the poets) that all we see or seem is here in this moment.

As the wind picks up, erasing all but a white whirling space without direction, we enter another room through its keyhole, a small dying.

A little taste of nothingness gathers in our mouths.

Annie G. Rogers