

# The winter I was going to meetings

by Brendan Garbee

Greg honks twice. It was raining all day, but it stopped for a little while. Now everything is silent.

Meetings are at the old strip mall. I never noticed the building before I started. Still don't know what's on the first floor. Meetings on the second. The cement stairwell on the side of the building is enclosed by a cinder block wall, no ceiling.

On the second step Greg stops, asks, You hear that?

The gap between each step opens to empty space under the stairwell. He gets on his knees and looks through. Just a baby, he says. Mama didn't come home.

After the meeting, we get milk from my place. We leave a bowl by the step and wait. The thing is tiny and dull-colored, like dust. Walks lopsided, its leg mangled.

Greg tries to grab it, quick. The thing hisses and almost gets him in the hand. He looks at me and we look at each other. Then we let it be.

It'll die in there and the stairwell'll stink for weeks, Greg says in the car. We're quiet, considering that.

All that week, rain. They start up with Christmas songs on the radio. On the way to work the fog hangs low on the hills, like smoke when it's in the trees. The stairwell stinks for weeks, exactly like

Greg said. It stinks so bad, it gets in your clothes, in your coffee, in your mouth.

One night I have a dream where I crawl through and get my hands around the baby raccoon, even though it's thrashing and clawing me and everything. I clutch it in my hands and with my eyes I make it be still. With my eyes, I tell it, Be still.

