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Living with the Elk

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Carmen Hoover

Living with the Elk

I forget, and the waitress at the Silver Dollar Bar doesn't remind me: *don't drink the water in Butte.*

I order a tall glass with ice and lemon and take it with me. Across the street, I break windows out of the old whorehouse.

I'm not interested in whores. I like noises—especially the sound that follows a really good noise. A car covered with mirror-squares pulls up. The driver warns me that the corner I'm standing on is not safe.

I lean my 2x4 against a parking meter.

I start taking pictures and walking in circles.

Someone who looks like me is trying on a \$10 fur coat at Saint Vincent du Paul's.

She rinses with diet Coke after she brushes her teeth.

She walks to the end of a long tunnel with tiny lightbulbs and stands at the edge of the mining pit.

She pushes a button that says *information.*

The recorded voice explains things, including the happiness of tourists.

She pushes the button again.

I am busy. Nobody can talk to me.

I walk toward the bar. The pigeon resting in the doorway died while I was gone.

The band is too loud.

I meet a nice man

with fingers in his ears. He's nudging

the pigeon with the toe of his boot.
We take turns dancing on the narrow sidewalk.
We stand by the window, press
one finger each along the crack in the glass.
We hold hands and listen for the sirens.

We are hungry. We sit behind
a paper curtain in an orange booth
and talk about the night I slept on a waterbed.
We eat fried rice and hamburgers.
The waitress hasn't come back with the money,
so we stay.
I want him to come to my room and teach me how
to fold paper airplanes but he seems to think I already know.
I'm afraid to ask.
The Continental Divide is out there, but I've lost interest.