

# Crosscurrent

By M. L. Smoker  
(1975 – )

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For James Welch

The first harvest of wheat in flatlands  
10 along the Milk startled me into thoughts of you  
and this place we both remember and also forget as home.  
Maybe it was the familiarity or maybe it was my own  
need to ask if you have ever regretted leaving.  
What bends, what gives?  
15 And have you ever missed this wind? – it has not  
grown warm with late summer, but soon  
it will be as dangerous as the bobcat stalking calves  
and pets just south of the river.  
Men take out their dogs, a case of beer and wait  
20 In their pickups for dawn, for a chance with their rifles.  
They don't understand that she isn't going to make  
any mistakes. With winter my need for an answer  
grows more desperate and there are only four roads out.  
One is the same the cat hunters drive with mannish glory  
25 and return along, gun still oil-shined and unshot.  
Another goes deeper into Assiniboine territory:  
This is the one I should talk myself into taking next.  
I haven't much traveled the third except to visit  
a hospital where, after the first time,  
30 my mother had refused chemotherapy.  
And the last road you know as well as I do –  
past the coral-painted Catholic church, its doors  
long ago sealed shut to the mouth of Mission Canyon,  
then south just a ways, to where the Rockies cut open  
35 and forgive. There you and I are on the ascent.  
After that, the arrival is what matters most.