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## Survey Chief at Bigfork

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## SURVEY CHIEF AT BIGFORK

The Missions close down like a wall  
hiding the backcountry. There must be secret  
passages up there leading to peaks that stare blindly  
at one another. Snow covers tamarack and bearberry  
on the shaded north face and even bright days  
freeze bare fingers to the transit.  
Six hundred feet of backbone to run  
and the ravens sail by like side-armed coins.

No town in Montana could ease this wind.  
It blows all the way from Canada,  
rounding snow into the soft curves  
and bellies of winter. Pulling chain  
down the line, it all comes clear: how you impose  
order on a life where lovers walk out,  
how you narrow the world to a few bald colors,  
geometric lines, and a lasting desire to keep warm.

On the bay, storms polish the inner ice  
mirror-smooth, til it shines back the midday moon.  
Every boundary runs six feet above mean high water.  
I've measured more than corners here.  
I've measured the way my life backs up  
when things go wrong, and I reach for simple  
puzzles the brain can solve—the long leg  
of a right triangle, the exact location  
of original stones. Flathead Lake  
shelters you from nothing at all.  
In light this bitter, you can't hide your mistakes—  
minutes missing in a full circle,  
cold nights, the drifted footprints leading in.