

Winter Solstice

BY DANIELLE LATTUGA

My mother claimed it was the longest day of her life.
Of course I don't remember
taking my first breath,
sliding from the dark on the darkest day of the year.

But I do know it was raining,
when it should have been snowing.

I have since learned
that cardinals
are buoys,
having swallowed
the sun

and they carry her
in their small bodies,
all sparks and embers,
no matter
the turn of the earth

—whistling merrily
like rain on prayer bells, first words,
broken glass.

I have since learned that
should
is merely
human invention

but
hope
is a red bird
against
white snow

scattering light
on dark days,
on birth days,
no matter
the turn of my mind.



Writer's note: Cardinals are far more common in my childhood home of Vermont, but they do make the occasional appearance in Montana—which, for this writer, makes them an even more remarkable embodiment of hope.

Danielle Lattuga is a writer, editor, and Master Naturalist who lives happily in Missoula, Montana. You can read more of her work at letterstomontana.com.