thirteen things to see in a chickadee

By Hannah Muskiewicz

number one

when your dad takes you camping, he points to the chickadee

see him staying up late, stoking the fire, drinking another

whiskey and calling for the bird to come and say hello

*what keeps you awake*

number two

when you lie on your back in the grass of your grandparents

pasture, you hear the song of a chickadee in a nearby tree

you close your eyes and listen

*what keeps you happy*

number three

there is a baby book, the kind made out of board, and it names

all the birds and when you read it with your mama, your little fingers

touched the chickadee and you wouldn’t let your mama turn

the page

*the thing that keeps you coming back for more*

number four

you sit in the garden and listen to the chickadees and wonder

why they make that sound

*the thing that keeps you curious*

number five

he broke your heart and all you could hear for weeks after

was the melancholy song of the chickadee

crying and calling and begging

for someone to answer

*the thing that keeps you hurt*

number six

he broke your heart and so you went on a drive and you pulled off

the road and lay on the hood and stared at the sky and a chickadee

flies by and lands on a nearby branch

*the thing that keeps you healed*

number seven

you couldn’t sleep one night because the thoughts were too loud

and so you opened the window to drown out the silence and

you heard the chickadee

*the thing that keeps you listening*

number eight

you are growing up, and you have forgotten what it feels like to truly be free

so you run, fast, no destination in mind, channeling the chickadee

*the thing that keeps you young*

number nine

you once thought that maybe this world would be better without you in it

but chickadees call for days and days

and eventually someone must come

*the thing that keeps you hopeful*

number ten

you were at a boys house

you were walking down the hallway and you saw

a painting

little bird, black head

is that a chickadee

*the thing that keeps coming back*

number eleven

when the art teacher asked what you wanted to draw, you looked up at her

big child eyes

you want to draw a chickadee

*the thing that keeps you creating*

number twelve

the passenger seat of your mama’s car

passed by something, little and dead on the side of the road

guts painting the pavement, wings broken

it was a goddam chickadee

*the thing that never lasts forever*

number thirteen

i hold a peanut in my palm and stand very still

the chickadee flutters onto my hand and takes the nut

resting, waiting a while before flying away

as if to say

you are not alone

i decided that that was enough

*the thing that keeps you alive*