

The Chickadee

Of all the birds, Stalking Wolf respected the chickadee the most, even more than the hawk or the owl. Every animal had some characteristic to admire and emulate, and Stalking Wolf often used them as examples of what our own skills should be like. We learned to be patient observers like the owl. We learned cleverness from the crow, and courage from the jay, who will attack an owl ten times its size to drive it off its territory. But above all of them ranked the chickadee because of its indomitable spirit.

The exuberance of the chickadee made him our idol. In the coldest weather, when other birds have gone into the brush to wait behind a dome of driven snow for the weather to clear, the chickadee is always out, his *chickadee-dee-dee* ringing off the snow. When the fox has curled himself up under a small tree and let the snow drift him a blanket of insulation, the chickadee is out doing loop-the-loops over the seedless snow, calling louder than playing children that he is there and alive and happy about it!

A chickadee doesn't look like a good bet for survival; you could close your hand with one in the palm almost without hurting him. There are better fliers; swallows have more grace and all the soaring birds are more spectacular. But nobody flies with more reckless abandon than the chickadee, and nobody flies with more delight.

The chickadee lives by joyous faith in living. Whenever everything else curls up and prepares to wait, or die, the chickadee is out in the middle of it. I have heard them even in the middle of a blizzard, chirping with that dancing tone over and over into the cold air, as if it thinks that hiding from a storm is the craziest form of self-denial.

His voice comes out of the cold silence like the last voice in the world, singing that everything which has gone under the snow is neither lost nor dead and that life survives beautifully somewhere else and will return. There is a joy in its song that says that everybody who is hiding from the storm is missing the best part.