

Lorraine Feather "Cowbirds"

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I wake up to the sound of the cowbirds,
Their burbling, beautiful cry.
You can see them all day at the cherrywood feeder.
They started appearing in early July.

They are stocky and glossy,
Certainly bossy,
But no more than the jays.
As they finish their feeding,
I begin reading
Of their curious ways.

They gather no moss,
They carry no leaves,
To fashion fine homes
In the trees or the eaves.
A cowbird roams the woods until
She finds a nest that fills the bill,
Snug in a tower of green.
She stays awhile but doesn't brood.
She won't return to offer food,
But simply flees the scene.

Her young one hatches quickly,
And does what he's wired to do.
With a purposeful thrust of his juvenile legs,
He starts to dispose of the resident eggs,
Make short work of the slumbering finches or phoebes,
Who drop to the ground without any sound,

Or, he leaves them quite alone!
Soon a stranger arrives to fill his gaping beak,
As if he were one of her own.
The tale will be told in the course of a week.
The latecomers, fragile and small,
Will get little or nothing at all.

The dusk is alive with the call of the cowbirds,
The striking display of their wings.
I watch them hold court by the cherrywood feeder,
And quietly ponder the nature of things,

How stars that have died can collide in the night,
Make such a grand show as they spatter,
How sunsets that bring up a groan of delight
Are filled with particulate matter,

How it hardly seems fair
That some birds get the boot,
So others can live and grow fat.
Thereâ€™s a metaphor there,
But itâ€™s low-hanging fruit,
So maybe Iâ€™ll leave it at that,

As a stout baby cowbird falls asleep
To the piteous cheep of a ghost,
And the sound of his mamaâ€™s mantra:
â€œMay we ever outnumber our host.â€

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