

PAT ANTHONY

Coots at Cedar Lake

More chicken than duck—
I learned to identify coots by
sitting quietly with my father
until they'd come dabbling
and shouldering each other
in the lake water where the
cattails seemed to shoot to
the sky from the sky itself,
breaking white clouds into bits
and pieces, leaving fluff to float
around those dull black bodies.

He told me they ate hellgrammites
and I loved such forbidden knowledge,
that word lurking on my lips and slipping
right into feathered bellies. The coots
I imagined to be some kind of bad
angels with their one splash of white bill
and blaze a stark reminder of what
they used to be before turning to
the dark side, condemned to eat the
horrid larvae of dobsonflies that
flittered all around us, those horned
and hooved monsters squirming
now in the bottom of a Folger's can
like the very devil.

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