

The Marsh

By Lorraine Barber

Purple-rimmed cotton clouds float softly across the gray, milky sky. White egrets pose with legs built upon cement-column toothpicks as green-eyed marbles watch life above the murky water. The prehistoric tail-slapping on the surface of the murky bog echoes of orchestral cymbals. Waves erupt as the massive gymnast shows her gnarly brown teeth and stumpy legs, alerting the inhabitants. The pregnant alligator grabs the unaware Round-tailed muskrat and submerges it underwater. Water fills the muskrat's lungs as life is pushed out and becomes nonexistent. Laying exhausted on the embankment of the bog, she dines feverishly, as any mother would to survive and give birth to her offspring.

Spanish moss hangs transcendently from lanky tree branches twisted like tangled ribbons as the mother slowly searches for a sandy embankment to build a nest to lay her hatchlings. Her back legs push the sticky sand for hours until the morning dew lays scattered upon her thick, scaly back. The exhausted mother works nonstop to give birth to her precious offspring. Over the next several months, leathery eggs begin to hatch, and fifty alligator hatchlings depend on her for survival. Baby alligators scramble for safe havens but become appetizers for the muskrat's youngsters and the marsh's inhabitants. Several hatchlings survive to celebrate their birthday, as Darwin's Theory of Evolution continues in the green, murky marsh.