Some Brighter Other [1]

March 30, 2015 Flash Nonfiction [2]
Nature [3]

Flash Nonfiction by Marie Chambers

When Life and Death Last Forever

On one of those animals-in-the-wild-caught-being-themselves shows, I glimpse the death of a baby water buffalo. A crocodile has slithered unnoticed across the shallow waters and caught the calf in its jaws. The river is dark as cola, gleaming in the midday heat. A very slight breeze snakes through the trees in the background, and Africa seems greener than paradise. Were it not for the *sotto voce* announcer, offering grim details about the life expectancy of each species, no one would suspect anything calamitous has occurred.

But it has.

Perhaps the rest of the herd can tell the calf is headed to its death. There is no group reaction. But the mother stays with her little one, licks its nose, leans her head close to its muzzle as the crocodile devours its body.

The commentator reports it takes an hour and a half for the calf to be eaten. The other water buffalos amble farther

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down the slow-moving stream. Only when the baby's head is submerged in the water, its long slide to death complete, does the mother turn to rejoin the herd. The crocodile slithers away and disappears.

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I suppose this video will be accessible for years to come. Life will be conjured and destroyed every time it plays. All of us who happen upon this vista, this child, this mother, this predator, will choose a name for this narrative. We'll take sides. We'll shrug our shoulders or shake our heads to chase away the grief of bearing witness.

But no matter how we may wish for the baby water buffalo to reappear in a kinder, gentler body of water, to live again on some alternative earth—an earth adjacent to the one he splashed through moments before—the calf remains lost. My wish for some brighter other world is not reasonable. The world is the world is the world, I tell myself. Fantasy provides little balm for the powerless.

I retrieve the morning paper and move toward breakfast, acknowledging the sunlight that floods my kitchen table. But an ache trails me through the pages of the *New York Times*—children's corpses rot amid sunflowers or crumple on white sand beaches; rocket smoke veils the moon and stars.

I can't help myself. I stir cold coffee and dream of a galaxy where there is no word for explosion.

Art Information

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Marie Chambers is a Southerner by birth and an Angelino by choice. She recently received an MFA in poetry from the Professional Writing Seminars at Bennington College in Bennington, Vermont. Her work has appeared in numerous art publications as well as the *Quotable, Atlanta Review,* and *Printer's Devil Review* (forthcoming).

She's the 2014 winner of the Tallahassee Writers Association annual creative nonfiction prize, published in the *Seven Hills Literary Review* (March 2015). Chambers is also a winner of the 2015 ARTlines2 Ekphrastic Poetry Contest for work inspired by a piece of art at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston.

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