

**THE  
MARSH; A POEM**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649193332

The marsh; a poem by Bayard Boyesen

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**BAYARD BOYESEN**

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MARSH; A POEM**



# THE MARSH

A Poem by  
BAYARD BOYESEN



BOSTON  
RICHARD G. BADGER  
The Gorham Press  
1905

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Printed at  
**THE GORHAM PRESS**  
Boston, U. S. A.

THE MARSH

① 4-9-64

141286

## PERSONS

Luxander.

His Father.

His Mother.

Nyassa.

Father Lamion, a priest.



# THE MARSH

## ACT I

Scene.— *A Hall in the Castle of Nyarva. There is an old-world air of sadness in the room; for though the dull green upholstery of the high-backed oaken chairs, the pale tapestries, the heavy curtains, colored like dead foliage and drawn in flowing lines from the long leaded windows, harmonize; the harmony is superficial, is in things only, and the spirit of the place seems not graciously to dwell here, but to be closed in.*

*It is night, and the tall candles, set in brackets wrought of brass, cast their light among heavy shadows, suggesting dimly a touch of the churchly life amid the sad riches of the castle hall.*

*The Mother, a tall gaunt woman, robed in lace and stiff crimson cloth, is pacing the room. When she raises her head, the light of the candles looks yellow upon the taut skin drawn over the violent features of a face that is grand in its commanding strength; when she presses the sharp chin upon the backs of her interlocked fingers, the shadows soften the face so that one wonders whether it is sorrow or power that has so indelibly marked this face.*

The Mother. Luxander, O Luxander, what of him?

O son, where art thou and where hast thou been?  
Two days are gone, two days and nights, and still  
Sorrow, huge workman, wielder of world-anvils,  
Strikes off the hours from the block of time.

*(The windows at the back are slowly opened from without: a marble stairway is dimly seen and a balcony upon which the Father is standing. He is a very old man; his long white beard flows down over a loose dark blue garment. There is a strange look of youth on his wrinkled face.)*

*(The Mother runs to him and leads him into the room and closes the windows.)*

The Mother. Luxander, what of him?

The Father. Be seated. Listen.

I followed till I found him where the great  
Cathedral walls shut off the marsh. His face  
Was pale (O pitifully pale!) and on  
His lips a strange unrestful shadow played,  
Like a white wind upon an instrument  
Touching to song. He smiled: I felt as though  
A silver ripple had passed over me.

The Mother. You spoke to him?

The Father. 'Twas he who spoke: *I hear  
The strange uneasy surging of the sea  
Where far beyond the marshes huge waves lunge  
Upon a sun-fed sand. And then he smiled  
On me again as who should say, O Father,  
Dost thou hear nothing?*

The Mother. And you heard the—

The Father. Only

The low susurras of an amorous wind  
Whose pale lips kissed the green of summer leaves  
To hectic red.

The Mother. What does he now?

The Father. I know not.

I sought to cry, *Come to me*, and my voice  
Fell like a bird shot through with his swift glance.

I tried to take him by the wrist, and hard  
 Cold fingers as of fear held back my hands.  
 Then, smiling, suddenly, he moved away.  
*'Tis only from the steeples of the church,*  
 He said, *that we behold the marshy plains*  
*And in the thick sweet marshland odors find*  
*The salt tang of the distant sea.* And more  
 He said—I know not what—but in my soul  
 I felt as though some wild thing cried for life.  
 The Mother. Oh, you were ever weak! When  
     you were but  
     A child, I think an avalanche of years  
     Fell on your shoulders, crushed and smothered  
     manhood  
     Ere it had time to sprout. I love my son,  
     And joy that he can find some happiness  
     In this wan twilight country of our home;  
     But I would rather strike him dead before  
     Mine eyes than see the marshland fever wet  
     With scum of her hot yellow-dripping tongue  
     And swollen lips the sweet flesh of my boy!  
 The Father. Would God it were the fever of the  
     marsh!  
 The Mother. Be plain.  
 The Father.                   It is the fever of the soul  
     When the sharp teeth of strange desire are fixed  
     In the throat of youth.  
 The Mother.                   Nyassa, where is she?  
 The Father. The sad Nyassa sits alone and mourns,  
     Weeping for wane of love.  
 The Mother.                   O men  
     Who in the white communion kneel, and drink  
     The wine of girlhood from a heart, and leave