Only One Can Walk the Path

Robert Morgan*
stuck tight. The stalks were high. Sweat rolled into his eyes, and he stopped to wipe it off, then trudged on. The end of the row seemed never to come, and then it was there. He got a drink of luke-warm water from the big five-gallon milk can.

He rested a few minutes till the foreman assigned him to a new row. The sun beat down on him as he started again, pulling tassel after tassel...

Only One Can Walk the Path

Robert Morgan

Sci. '40

John Weber carefully counted his change as the agent pushed it under the bars on the window. He looked to see if Sarah was in sight, then stuffed the return trip ticket in his worn billfold, and counted his change; yes, exactly sixty-three cents—and the ticket.

He smiled absently at the agent who had already turned back to his telegraph. The agent should have seen that smile—it was the kind a photographer would pay for.

John walked very straight, just enough to make his shoulders hurt, as he stepped out of the door. He wanted to swallow something huge and indefinite that was inside him somewhere. He didn’t know where, because it made his legs weak and yet it was in his throat when he tried to swallow. It made it even harder than ever to say anything—particularly what he wanted to say.

John stopped on the platform by the grey airplane suitcase with the Hotel Greystone marker on it. He thought he heard the whistle, and reached in his coat again for the ticket, then decided he only imagined the train was coming.

John looked at the girl on the other side of the suitcase. She wasn’t really very tall when he took particular notice, he thought; come to think of it the top of her head did just fit under his own lean chin when they danced or when—oh, well, why remember that now; it was all past.

"I—I." That lump was tied to his throat with two hot, taut cords that hurt him.

December, 1940
SHE turned to him and almost smiled. She wasn't really beau-
tiful to most people, he supposed, but she had been the
sympathetic rest his nerves, ripped by the piercing, shredding
tear of a steel car sheared almost in two, had needed. She had
been more than that; John had molded an exotic red Chinese
doll just as a present for Sarah, and she had made him exhibit
it at the Artists' Centre—the prizes had come easily then. Then,
too, there had been Sarah's music—the music she played so laugh-
ingly while he sat on the stool, too, and drummed entirely out of
time; the music she played so that notes lost their identity, and
became indistinguishable in the woven pattern of song that car-
ried him above and beyond himself.

He remembered the afternoon he had met Sarah on the raft;
He had particularly noticed her long slender fingers and her
plain, undecorated nails. They seemed to be the sort of neat effi-
cient hands that knitted nick nacks or whatever they were. Two
weeks later he heard those same fingers play his favorite "Medita-
tion" from Thais, and only then he learned who she was. It
hadn't really mattered, though, or had it? Sarah Butterfield—
about to make her European tour.

"John, I know it's like talking about the weather, but I'll never
forget the red and brown of these hills. And if I ever do have a
cabin—I think you know."

He found his voice and loosened the tight bands around it.
"If I could only . . . well, you see it's a part of me—the lake and
the hills." When he climbed those hills he always wanted to see
more—rolling, stretching in all directions. It almost hurt him
when they suddenly ended to the south and became a level
coastal plain.

"It does reach underneath things, doesn't it?" her voice was
lower than John had heard it before. "I can feel it now just the
way I've seen you watch the lake from the cabin porch; but, John,
Golden Bridge isn't as far away as London nor—". He looked
over her head as her voice trailed off.

HE HAD built the cabin himself, just as he had made every-
thing else that mattered to him—even dreams. There was
always the intangible being of the forest about the place. It had
been their shroud from reality those weeks while each worked in

Sketch
the day and shared the longing of years of rush and struggle in the 
rustling silence of the pine-wooded night.

“Did you pack everything for sure?” He shook himself inside.
and almost wondered why he said it.

“Oh, yes, I had to; it would be hard catching up with me—
I’m afraid.” She said the last two words as if they were the only
apology she could offer for her actions.

“I have the re - -”—the low wail of the locomotive broke in on
him. “Well, I guess that sounds like your train, doesn’t it?”

Sarah looked at him to see if she could see what he had really
wanted to say. That hadn’t seemed like John to mention the
luggage—he would have forgotten even to take any if he were
going some place. He had said so little the past few days—mostly
he had rambled on about the hills and how they were a part of
him and the art he was creating. He hadn’t been able to talk
about that very well, either, she had noticed. Sarah almost reached
out to touch his arm; maybe she could feel what he meant—they
had understood in silence before, when it was hard to find the
right words.

She bent to pick up the suitcase, but John already had it, and
stood watching as the train rushed up to them. Sarah was about
to speak, but the noise of the train was too much. As he handed
her the suitcase, he wanted to lean—lean over and at least kiss
her hair. No, that couldn’t have been enough. He wanted to
hold her, to shield her from this steel monster that was claiming
her, but he couldn’t. He fumbled with his coat.

“Here’s your ticket, Sarah . . . well . . . good luck is about what
I mean, isn’t it?”

Sarah held out her hand, and he took it lightly, almost afraid.
Such a denying gesture. The tears that should have been in her
eyes just hurt and refused to come.

“John.”

He really didn’t hear her; he only saw her turn and climb the
steps of the car. She should have turned to wave, but the train
lurched to a start even before she walked in the car. The three
cars jerked back and forth as they picked up speed and passed
him. He wouldn’t just stand and look at the train as it followed
the curve of the lake. He turned and walked over to his car, and
took hold of the door knob to turn it. He felt a piece of paper in his hand for the first time since Sarah had turned and climbed on the train.

John held the red paper in his two hands and very slowly read the words printed on it. ‘Return trip, New York to Golden Bridge.’ For a moment he turned his head and watched the smoke of the train as it disappeared around the lower end of the lake. With the thumb and first finger of each hand he slowly tore the piece of red paper into small bits and let them sift through his fingers. The wind caught the pieces of paper and blew them against a pile of brown leaves where they lay, quite still.

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**Appreciation**

*Joan Watt*

Sci. So.

I have held
A fuller, sweeter cup than this—
This thought often catches at my mind
Although the cup be moon-silver.

Yet there have been swift moments—
Watching ragged copper mountains
Cut into a morning sky
Streaked with night-purple and sun-gold,
With desert tawny-red—
When the cup was full to overflowing,
It spilled upon my memory
And seared its image there.