

Reading this story in advance will help facilitate a smooth workshop. Many thanks.

**The Appalachian Trail (Bruce Eason, 1991)**

Today she tells me that it is her ambition to walk the Appalachian Trail, from Maine to Georgia. I ask how far it is. She says, "Some two thousand miles."

"No, no," I reply, "you must mean two hundred, not two thousand."

5 "I mean two thousand," she says, "more or less, two thousand miles long. I've done some reading too, about people who've completed the journey. It's amazing."

"Well, you've read the wrong stuff," I say. "You should've read about the ones that didn't make it. Those stories are more important. Why they gave up is probably why you shouldn't be going."

"I don't care about that, I'm going," she says with a determined look. "My mind is made up."

10 "Listen," I say, reaching for words to crush her dream. "Figure it out, figure out the time. How long will it take to walk two thousand miles?" I leap up to get a pen and paper. Her eyes follow me, like a cat that is ready to pounce.

"Here now," I say, pen working, setting numbers deep into the paper. "Let's say you walk, on average, some twenty miles a day. That's twenty in two thousand, right? It goes one hundred times. And  
15 so, one hundred equals exactly one hundred years. It'll take you one hundred years!"

"Don't be stupid, she says. "One hundred *days*, not years."

"Oh, yeah, okay, days," I mumble. I was never good at math. I feel as if someone has suddenly twisted an elastic band around my forehead. I crumple the paper, turn to her and say, "So if it's one hundred days, what is that? How many months?"

20 "A little over three." She calculates so fast that I agree without thinking. "Fine, but call it four months," I say, "because there's bound to be some delay: weather, shopping for supplies, maybe first-aid treatments. You never know, you may have to make allowances."

"Alright, I make allowances, four months."

25 What have I done? It sounds as if all of this nonsense is still in full swing. *Say more about the time.* "Okay," I say, "so where do we get the time to go? What about my job? What about my responsibilities, *your* responsibilities, too? What about - ?"

"What about I send you a postcard when I finish the trip," she says, leaving the room.

I sit there mouthing my pen. I hear her going down the basement steps. Pouting now, I think. Sulking. She knows she's wrong about this one.

30 "Seen my backpack?" she calls from below. God, she's really going to do it. "Next to mine," I say. "On the shelf beside the freezer."

I am angry with myself. She has had her way, won without even trying. "Take mine down too," I blurt out. "You can't expect to walk the Appalachian Trail all alone." I stare at my feet. "Sorry," I say to them both, "I'm really sorry about all this."