

"Going Home"

(Editor's note: The following is a portion of Maggi Blakeney's prize-winning short story which won the Katherine B. Rondthaler Award for creative writing. The story will be completed in future issues.)

This, little ants, is my grandmother's back yard and this is my grandmother's fig tree. She wouldn't like it if she knew you were eating her figs, but I won't tell her, because you are my friends. You may eat all those on the ground, but I am going to eat these on the tree. She wouldn't like it if she knew I was eating her figs either, so don't you tell on me. That's silly. I know you can't anyway.

Do you see all those people milling around her house? Makes it look like your ant hill, doesn't it? Only her house is bigger and has yellow wooden walls, but people are crawling up the steps and down the steps with food in their hands. They have been coming and going there for two days. Mama and Daddy are there talking to those people who come and go. I am going home with them, because my grandfather is dead. People always expect you to be sad when your grandfather dies, but I am happy. I am going home.

It seems like a long time ago that I came to live here. Here with my grandmother and grandfather, that is. I came last January, six months ago, three months after Mama got sick last fall. Mama stayed at home, when she first got sick, but she didn't get any better. At least that's what Daddy said.

Dr. Mack came to see her every other day. One day I stopped him and asked when she would be well so we could read stories together again. "I want to talk to you. Wait for me in the living room"—he sort of snorts when he talks, you know.

I waited and waited, then he came back. "All right, Peggy, let's have that talk," he snorted again through his big red nose.

We pulled the big green chair over to the window. At home all the windows in the living room come down to the floor. I sat on the arm of the chair and he said,

"Peggy, your mother is very sick. She may be sick for a long time, but if she could rest for a while she may be well in a few weeks."

He took one of those things, like a hose, you know, and stuck the two ends in his ears and listened to my heart. "Inside there are your two lungs. Everyone has lungs. You have two very healthy ones, but your mother's lungs are sick. When someone has sick lungs, we call it T. B."

He put his hose thing away then told me my mother wanted to talk to me. After Dr. Mack had left Mama asked me if I would like to live at my grandmother's in Roper. She said she had written to my grandmother. I knew she had gotten a letter from grandma the day before, because I always took her the mail. Usually I didn't stay in her room long, but that day she let me stay and she even read me the letter. She told me grandma wanted me to stay with her the rest of the Winter and all the time until she was well again. Mama said grandma had so much more money than we had.

"You will have such a nice school to go to," she said. She told me about the girls I would have to play with and about how much fun she had when she lived there. She said one day she slipped away from home and went for a ride on the mill pond in a row-boat. The boat got stuck in the sand on the side of the pond and she was almost bitten by a snake, but she said it was fun just the same.

I don't think it has been much fun, though, little ants. My grandmother won't allow me near the mill pond and the only person I can play with is Agnes. Agnes is my best friend here. She lives up the street. It doesn't matter now, because Mama is here, well, and I am going home—going home.

Do you know it takes all day to go from my house on the farm to this house in Roper? Roper is three hundred miles from the farm. Here where we are my grandmother calls "Eastern Carolina", and the farm she says is in the "Piedmont Section".

I like the farm, because I could always do just what I wanted to do there. I could play in the

trees back of the house on the farm when I was not in school, but here I have to practice my piano.

Daddy built me a play house in the trees, with three windows and a front porch. I took all my dolls to live in the play house and used mama's broken dishes there. I don't have any dolls here because I don't have a play house to keep them in. I asked for grandmother's broken dishes, but she said, "I don't want such mess cluttering up my back yard."

I rode the bus here all by myself. People think I should be afraid to ride the bus for three hundred miles alone, but I have made the trip ten times now. That's how old I am, ten. I saw cousin John on the front porch alone today and tried to tell him about my birthday, but he didn't pay any attention to me. My birthday was day before yesterday. I guess he was sad because grandfather had died, but I am not. I am going home—home.

When I first came to live here, my grandmother let me play with the other girls in town, "kids," she calls them. I don't like to be called a "kid", though. I don't think it sounds nice, do you? When I first came she let me play and I was so pleased, but now she won't even let me play with Agnes.

I guess she won't let me play because I got sick one day when I played with Agnes in the Episcopal Church yard, just across the street. It was hot that day and Agnes and I ran all over the yard playing tag, then for some reason I was sick on my stomach that night. I guess grandma thinks every time I play I will get sick, but I won't. At home I can play when I want to.

Grandma made me take piano lessons too. I had to come home every day after school and practice for an hour. I am glad we don't have a piano at home.

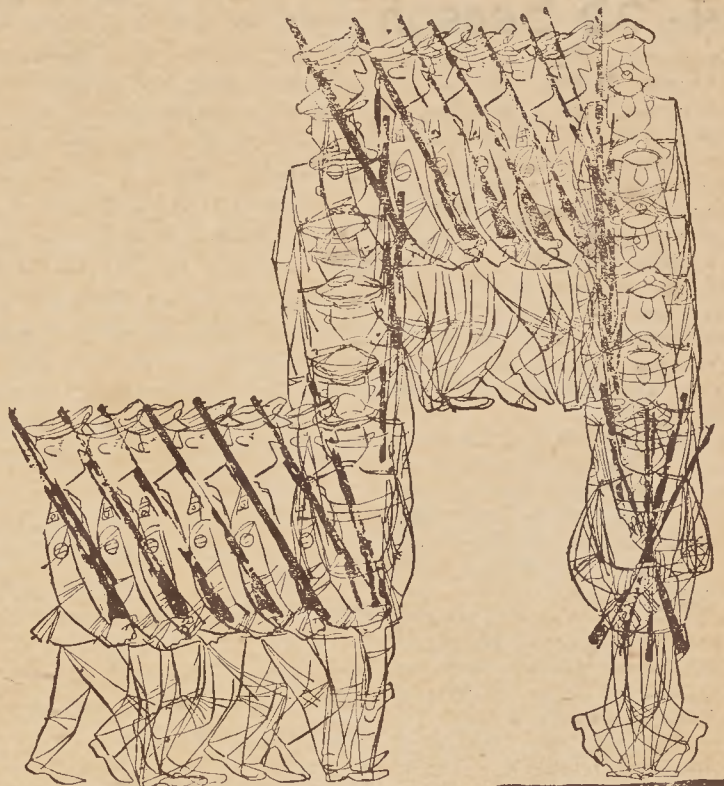
I have tried very hard to do the things my grandmother wants me to do, but I always make mistakes. The other day I showed some of my grandmother's visitors my new music. Grandmother called me into the dining room that night before I went to bed. She started in her usual way—"I don't mean to criticize, but—" and she went on and said there was no need of my showing them my music.

We wish to thank Dr. Sandresky and Mr. Medlin for their outstanding performance on the television program observing the 101st anniversary of

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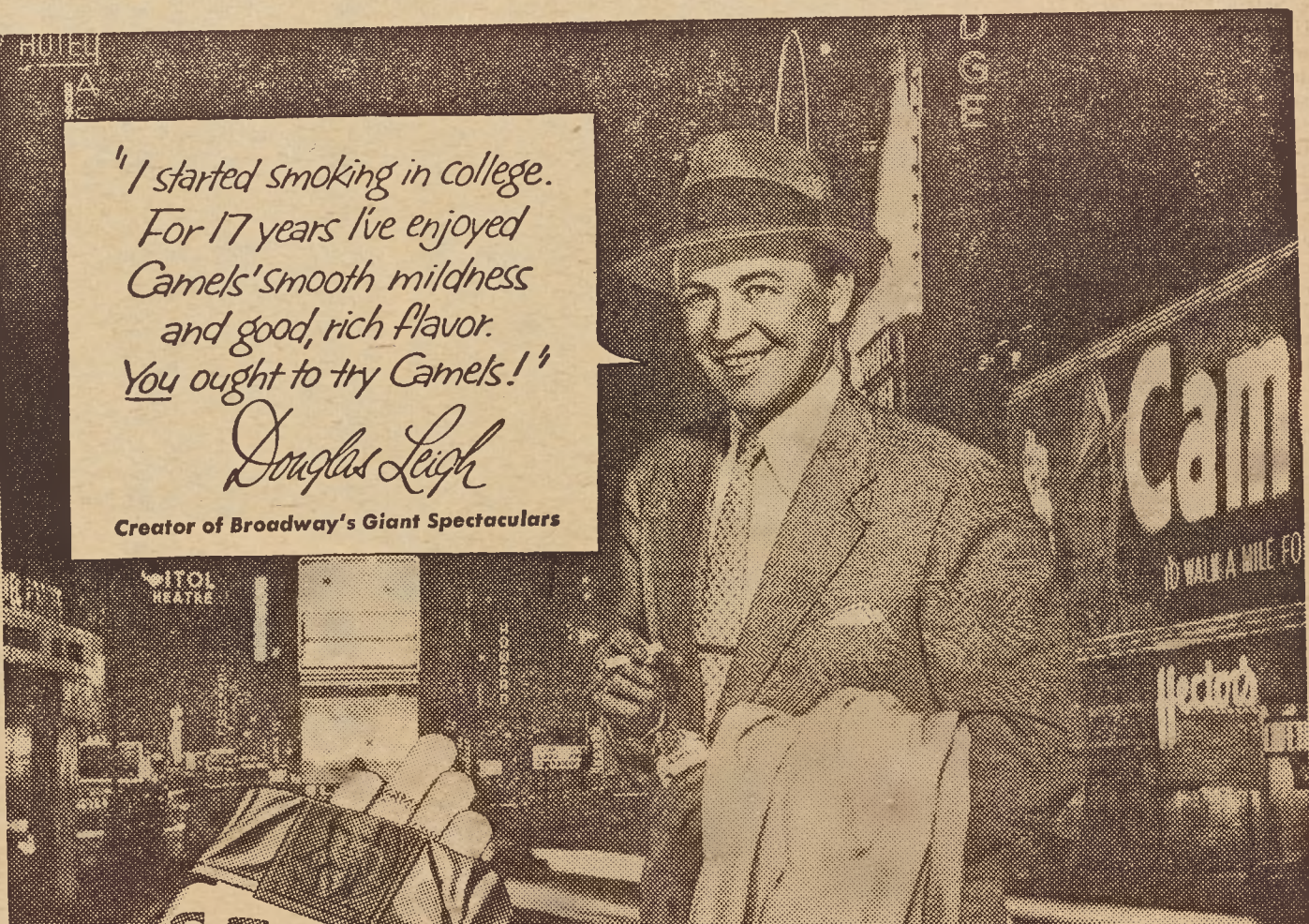
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