

# Embarkation Point

BY VICTORIA LINCOLN

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN GANNAM

Almost everything was for sale at the bazaar in the old Maine village, but Ginny brought home something that wasn't exactly on the market

THAT summer, vacationing alone at the Knights' farmhouse, Mrs. Calhoun began again to wake early for the first time in years. She would lie in bed, rested and expectant, listening to the conversation of orioles and catbirds outside the window, fully conscious from the first opening of her eyes, and no longer huddling backward from the pressure of morning into the comfortable ambiguities of her dream.

Now, too, she smiled all the time she was dressing. She would spend a comfortable ten or fifteen minutes at the mirror as she had used to do, five years ago, brushing her soft, light hair, noticing happily how her skin, darkening with the sun, made it look blonder. She would take her lipstick and fill the natural outline of her pretty mouth with care, and sit, idly happy, waiting for the color to set before she kissed the blotting tissues and smiled once more at the print she left upon them. Then she would touch her hair again, with the natural grace of a happy woman, a gesture of infinite promise, and go down to breakfast singing. For on the table by her bed was the picture of Captain Sherry Calhoun, now overseas.

Thus, circled in heavy silver, the deliberate charm of his one-sided smile fixed unchanging under glass, Sherry Calhoun fulfilled his husbandly duties as he had never done in the flesh. It had been a bad match.

"Oh, that's Sherry Calhoun's wife," they had said for five years; "that's poor little Mrs. Calhoun." Sitting in a corner through countless gay country week ends, she had been poor little Mrs. Calhoun, colorless, conveniently forgotten much of the time, but still there, to be stumbled over occasionally, embarrassing as an unspoken reproach.

She had been little Ginny Tuckerman, a small-town belle on her first thrilling visit to New York, when she met and married wayward, graceless, philandering, cold-hearted Sherry Calhoun. The marriage was a source of irritated bewilderment to Sherry's friends, and, indeed, after the first few weeks of it, to Sherry himself. She had a small trust fund, certainly not enough to interest a man who lived on his friends as easily as Sherry did. And her soft, inconsequential beauty fed on admiration. You have all known these gentle, pastel women who are so easily quenched.

But even in the simplest creatures the individual life dies hard. In Sherry's world she had been defeated and destroyed daily; but the deathless center of personality that is in all of us had continued to put out its dogged, unknowing shoots, to live unrecognized behind the soft, neglected face, in the chair at the rainy window out of the contract players' way, in the quiet, unending shame.

Indeed, she had grown into a certain distinction. Love and the slow death of love, never put into words or clearly realized, a marriage that had meant the loss of her young girl's narcissistic happiness

and the shame of disappointed womanhood at one blow, these odd and unhappy advantages had carried her, somehow, past her mark. And now, this summer, she was beginning to catch up with herself.

She began to wake early, and with that waking a new quality touched Mrs. Calhoun's manner. It became relaxed and aware at once. There was nothing in it so coarse or simple as invitation, yet, seeing her, a man of experience might have surmised that it could do no harm to throw out a little discreet feeler or so—nothing that could startle or offend her, but an experimental word, a lingering pressure of the hand—on the chance, you know, just on the outside chance.

"I tell you," said Miss Knight to her brother, "I'm glad that picture of her husband shows he's such a handsome feller, or I'd feel that girl needed watching."

"She seems a quiet, well-mannered enough young woman to me," replied her brother, slowly.

As he went out into the cow barn he kept on thinking of Mrs. Calhoun, kindly and seriously. It had been quite clear to him from the minute he helped her into the house with her coats and luggage that she was essentially unattached. The picture in the frame might be as handsome as all get out, but Mrs. Calhoun was quite alone, and he knew it. And with the profound gentleness which was Mr. Knight's peculiar gift and wisdom, he hoped that she was going to be happy.

He watched her now, as she came out into the farmyard after breakfast, a huge striped purse under her arm. Her appearance pleased him impersonally, just as you might be delighted with the feast-day finery of a peasant. It was unfamiliar to him, with the gay clothes, the professionally arranged hair, the painted nails, the delicate, artificial make-up, so citified and different from the appearance of both kinds of country girls—the good ones and the bad ones. But to Mr. Knight the unfamiliar was not, automatically, either suspect or ludicrous. He was by nature a highly civilized person.

"Morning, Mrs. Calhoun," he said. "Headin' for the bus?"

"Good morning, Mr. Knight. Yes, I am."

"Could drive you down to the bus stop, if you want to set on the steps and wait a little spell, maybe five minutes. I'm takin' some eggs over to Wes Parker's."

"Thank you," she said. "I'd like to, Mr. Knight."

THEY rolled down the drive and into the deep-rutted white dust lane, toward the state highway. Sumac and flowering elderberries flanked the road; chicory, Queen Anne's lace and bouncing Bet stood in the ditches. The air above their heads was laced with the bright, bounding passage of goldfinches.

The ocean was to the left of them, hidden now by the lay of the land, but there, filling the air, making it at one time lively and soft.

Mrs. Calhoun drew a deep breath. "I love it here," she said. "I love being near the ocean."

"Yep," said Mr. Knight. "Good for folks."

He turned down U. S. Route 1. "This street goes all the way to Floridy," he said. "Know that?"

Mrs. Calhoun laughed, nodded her bright head. "When the war's over, Mr. Knight, suppose you drive me the whole length of the street."

"Weather like this, there's nothing I'd like better." He paused and added gallantly, "Or any weather."

She smiled at him, enjoying the comfort of his impersonal male kindness, as she had enjoyed the sun and the feeling of the sea. She did not feel that she had to answer him and there was a long, relaxed silence before he spoke again.

"First Christian Church is having a bazaar this afternoon," he said. "The summer folks always take it in. I'd go if I was you. Nice way to get acquainted."

"I don't care much about seeing people."

"You would, if they was the right kind. Everybody needs friends. You go."

SHE turned in her seat and looked at him with childish directness. His long, plain face was turned straight ahead, his blue eyes on the road, but the smile was meant for her, the encouraging nod.

"You go on," he said again. "You're too young not to be doing more for people than you are, and being more mixed up with them." He paused and grinned suddenly. "And old enough not to make a fool of yourself, I guess."

But it was just of this that Mrs. Calhoun was not at all sure.

"Mr. Knight," she said, abruptly, "I have the funniest feeling about this summer. As if I never noticed how I felt, or even acted like myself, till now. I'm very happy all the time, but I feel sort of queer and new. I've been wanting to tell someone that. Do you think I'm crazy?"

They were approaching the four-corners. Mr. Knight slowed down the machine.

"Well, now," he said, "don't know's I see what you're talking about, to tell you the truth. You don't appear to be crazy, though." He laughed. "Anyways, if I was you, I'd go to that bazaar. Real nice class of folks there, make you real nice friends."

He opened the door and helped her out, smiling at her huge handbag, her pretty hair, fixed up so fancy and citified.

Poor girl, he thought suddenly, if her husband had been a good man, she'd have loved him. She's the kind.

"Now you go," he said again, smiling seriously. The bus was visible down the road, and he got back into the car and drove off, taking the eggs to Wes Parker's.

Mrs. Calhoun got into the bus, oddly flattered and excited.

I guess maybe I will go to that bazaar for a while after the show, she thought. Not that I'm likely to get talking to any people. But it sounds sort of attractive. I should have worn my hat. Out here, though, I guess it won't matter much.

The day, once this decision was taken, became unlike other days, vivid and simple, slanting toward its objective. In the ten-cent store she bought shoe white, nail polish, two sample-sized lipsticks. Then, filled with an unfamiliar longing to communicate with friends, with women, she bought post cards and took them to the post office where she wrote to hostesses she had barely known.

"Dear Lora," she wrote, "I wish you were here to smell this nice salt air, it is



lovely here, best ever, Ginny;" and, "Dear Alice. This is the First Christian Church where I am going to a bazaar this afternoon, best wishes, Ginny Calhoun."

Coming out of the post office, she found herself face to face on the steps with a very young man in Army uniform. He was a big, handsome boy, with a smooth, heavy-featured face, and he looked at her closely, his clear, rather blank eyes widening and then drooping in an admiring calculation



which he lacked either the manner or the self-consciousness to conceal. If she had smiled, if her eyes had shown the least recognition, he would have spoken to her. Unexpectedly, she blushed like a girl and hurried down the steps, studying her wrist watch with an intentness that could have deceived no one.

With a look of surprise, of flattered amusement, the big young soldier swaggered into the building. He looked over

his shoulder as he pushed through the door, but Ginny had hurried out of sight.

The encounter, slight as it was, heightened the feeling of the day, the importance it had assumed with Mr. Knight's repeated, "Now you go."

She ate an early lunch, earlier than she had planned. The movie opened at one, and she had decided, suddenly, that she had better be there right at the start, so that she wouldn't be late, too late, for the

bazaar. Too late to see it all and be back at Knights' early.

It was a good show, and she enjoyed it, but through it all there was a sense of waiting. She was glad when the first title came around again, and she could go to the ladies' room to wash and powder, freshen her lipstick and comb her hair, and then start out toward the First Christian Church.

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Ginny walked over to him and said, "You're Mrs. Polk's nephew, aren't you? I'm Virginia Calhoun. She says you've been good enough to offer to drive me to the Knights'"



Kay stared down at the rubber float. "This is a grim number, isn't it?" she said to Betsy. "It makes you understand a lot of things"

## WAR WEDDING

BY MARGARET CULKIN BANNING

ILLUSTRATED BY WILLIAM ROSE

III

### The Story Thus Far:

**WARD INGRAM**, an influential New Yorker, helps Kay Moore—with whom he is in love—to get a job with Comment, a magazine edited by his friend, Bert Flannery. Kay makes good. But she does not marry Ingram—she marries Jeremy Wing, a young naval lieutenant, whom she has known only a few days!

Months pass. Jeremy—wounded, when his ship is torpedoed, and finally discharged from a hospital—finds himself back in New York. Kay gives him an ecstatic greeting. Then she tells him that Flannery has asked her to go to Chicago and gather material for a very important article on the effect of the war on the Middle West. She says that the assignment means a great deal to her (three hundred dollars and a by-line in Comment) but that, since Jeremy has only a two-weeks leave, she will not think of leaving New York.

A few hours later (after she has notified Flannery of her decision) Jeremy receives orders to report in two weeks to a Captain Lepp in Philadelphia. Wondering what the orders mean, he telephones Commander Dixon ("Chip" Dixon, whose wife, Roxane, is Kay's stepsister); and Dixon investigates, learns that Lepp is a public relations officer who is doing a morale-building job in the East!

Feeling certain that Jeremy will be kept in the New York area indefinitely, Kay is delighted. Now (so she thinks) she is free to go to Chicago and write the article. Unfortunately, when she telephones Flannery to tell him the good news, he informs her coldly that he has given the assignment to another woman!

Jeremy reports to Lepp, who does the ex-

pected—sends him hither and yon (near New York) on speechmaking tours. And soon Kay observes that Jeremy is restless, moody. He longs to return to a fighting sector; he does not want to stay at home, even with the woman he loves.

Once by chance Kay meets Ingram on the street, as he is preparing to leave for Europe on an important civilian mission. He makes it obvious that he still loves her, still wants her.

And Brenda Brown? That clever young woman (who earns a large salary as a "wedding consultant" at a great department store) is still in love with Jeremy. Sensing that he is not as happy as he might be, she gives a dinner party at her apartment. Ingram is a guest (Brenda seats him beside Kay); and all evening—during the dinner and, later, at two night clubs—Brenda makes a pointed drive for Jeremy.

Kay is not blind to what is going on (once, while she watches, Brenda somehow induces Jeremy to smooth her hair—or does Jeremy do it because he enjoys doing it?); and her jealousy and anger are aroused.

When the party finally breaks up, Kay, Jeremy, Ingram and Brenda take a cab together. They drop Brenda at her apartment house, and Jeremy kisses her goodnight (as he had always done in the past). . . . Alone, at last, with Jeremy in their apartment, Kay is on the verge of tears. From the pocket of his coat, Jeremy draws out the fragile candy boxes he and Kay had bought earlier to give to Roxane's little girls; they are crushed badly—smashed when Jeremy embraced Brenda. Kay can no longer contain herself. "Why," she bursts out, "did you have to ruin everything?"

**T**ELL me about Kay," Betsy asked her mother. "I haven't heard a word from her lately. Is she still working on Comment? And how about Jeremy? Where's he?"

Mrs. Totten was glad to turn the conversation to Kay. She had wanted very much to have Betsy come home because it was better for her daughter to be comfortable and well cared for during these months, instead of living among the confusions and excitements of a Navy base. But Betsy, married and soon to be a mother, seemed more of a stranger to Mrs. Totten than she ever had been. They looked so differently on marriage.

Betsy McClure, in eight months of married life, had picked up no ironies and no disillusionments. There could not have been even a disappointment. She was more in love than she had been when she turned from the improvised altar in this very drawing room. Her mother could not quite follow that experience. Men, in her own life, had been just as stimulating and indispensable as Grant was to Betsy, but no man had made life so flawless. As often before, when the girls were growing up, Mrs. Totten felt that Kay was more understandable.

"Yes, Kay's kept on with her job. I know, because I gave her a ring at the

Comment office to tell her you were coming. She said that she'd drop in at the very first chance."

"Is she awfully happy?"

"Why I don't know about that," said Mrs. Totten. "You can't expect every marriage to be like yours."

"What do you mean? She and Jeremy were madly in love."

"I know, but everyone can't just put on a marriage and wear it without alterations, like you and Grant. Of course, the whole thing didn't work out as Kay thought it would. She was in a grand rush to get married because Jeremy had to go off and be a hero and might never come back. And then he came back and now he seems to be ordered to be a hero right around here. It must dim the glamor a little."

"I don't think so for a minute," protested Betsy. "It's a wonderful break for them. And Jerry's had a lot of combat duty. Look at his citations. Grant says he showed what was in him."

"He apparently wants to go right on showing it—in foreign waters," said Mrs. Totten. "When I last had a glimpse of him, he seemed repressed. Maybe slightly sour. I should imagine he might be rather hard to live with. But Kay is getting a chance to find out what her husband is like,

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