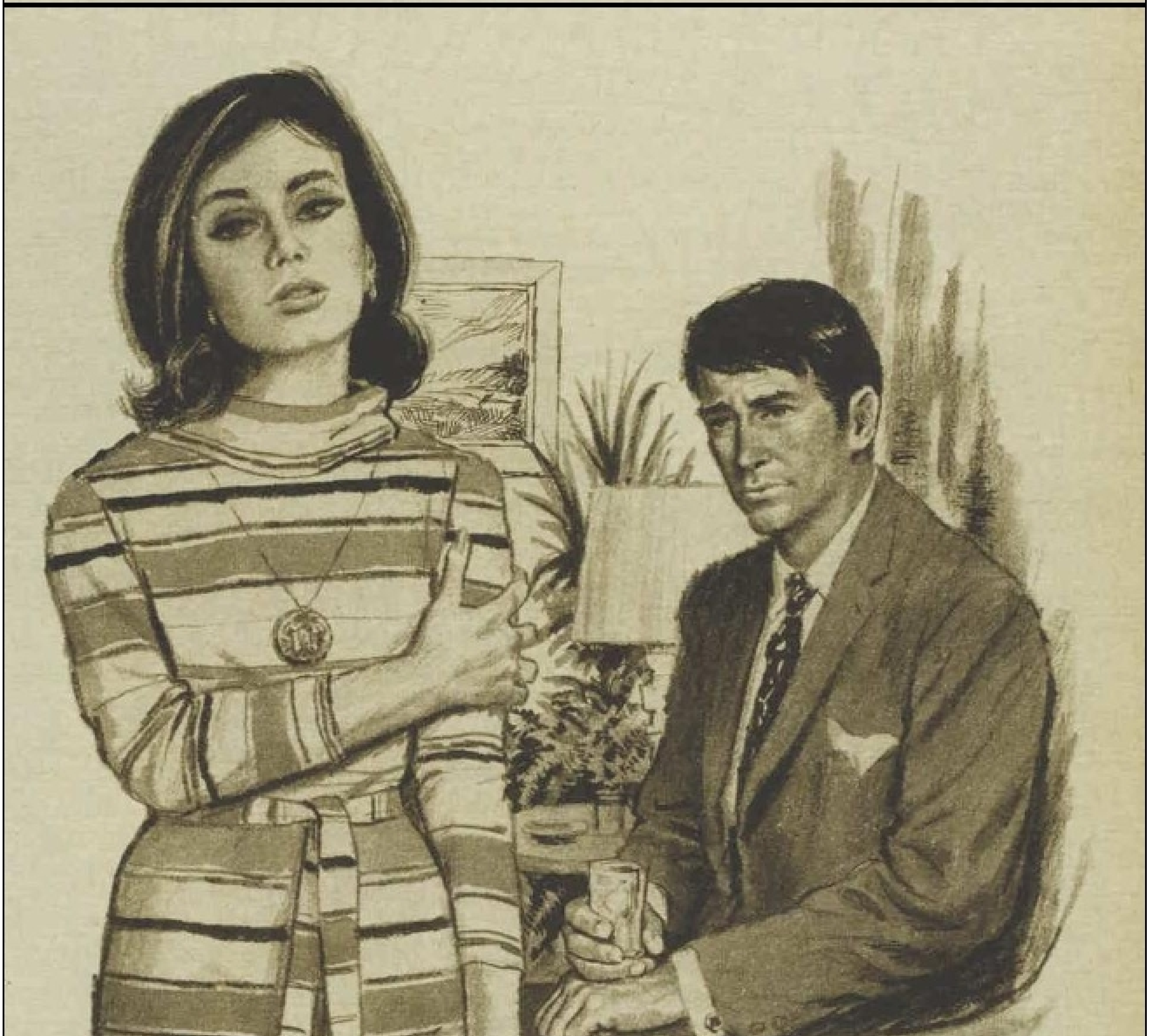
THE MAN FROM PHILADELPHIA

Each time they met he charmed her, although she never knew if or when she would see him again



THE first time she met him she was not yet twenty-one. She had come down from New York to be bridesmaid at her best friend Posie's wedding in Philadelphia and was dressed in a bridesmaid's dress, with a sash that kept creeping up all during the reception.

He was seated next to her at one of those round dinner tables and he looked tired. "Do you always eat parsley?" she said, her first words to him.

"I'll eat anything but turnips. Under no circumstances will I eat turnips."

"I won't, either," she said.

"And I don't like stewed tomatoes," he said.

"I don't, either," she said.

He said, "Let's dance."

The moment they got to the dance floor he began to talk. He talked about his younger days in Penn Valley with his cousin Paul (the groom), and his older days in the Yale regatta. He talked about tennis, the stock market, Stonehenge, and Rudolf Bing. He talked through a waltz

and two foxtrots; she stared hard into his tie, which consisted of small octagons running around each other, and she listened. She was fascinated.

"I don't even know your name," she finally said. "I'm Dorothy Fanning."

"I'm Ted Riker," he said.

They danced another waltz. He talked about unidentified flying objects, yoga, and Sammy Davis. "I've never met anyone who talks as much as you talk," she said.

He said, "When I'm in the mood I talk more than any man alive."

She said, "I like it."

The band began to play "Sophisticated Lady." It reminded him of a story and he told it. When the dance was over the story wasn't. They walked back to the table holding hands and he continued. He talked all through the moulded ice-cream and the coffee.

Suddenly his tone changed and his eyes grew very dark. He told her that he'd just been divorced. He'd been married nearly a year to a girl who'd seemed mature but suddenly couldn't get along without her parents. "She seemed to be getting better, but then I woke up one morning and found a goodbye note instead of a bride," he said, then added something about marriage putting a strain on love. He turned silent.

"Do you ever come to New York?" she said.

"Occasionally," he said.

She looked at him. He had a craggy.

She looked at him. He had a craggy, American Indian look. His eyes were dark as coffee and his eyebrows were darker. Everything about him looked good.

The music stopped and the band began packing instruments into suitcases. Waiters came to clear the tables; women in fur wraps stood in the doorways saying good-night to each other.

Dorothy pulled nervously at her sash. "I have to leave very early tomorrow morning. I'm driving up with friends —" It pained her to think about leaving Philadelphia. He would not come to New York just to see her again and she knew it.

He saw her to the hotel. In the lobby, he wrote her address on a matchbook cover. She watched as he tucked it into his handkerchief pocket. "It's been a great evening," he said. He was holding her hand.

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By MARLENE FANTA SHYER

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"I've had a wonderful time," she said.

They said good night. She didn't see him again for three years.

On a Sunday morning in April, she drove her father to

April, she drove her father to Kennedy Airport. She pulled up at the terminal, kissed his cheek, and watched him carry his bag into the terminal. A familiar face suddenly appeared in the frame of her windshield. She'd already started the car; now she stepped on the brake and fought to remember his name. She leaned over and opened the car door near him.

"Ted!"

He turned, recognised her after a few seconds. "For Pete's sakes! Dorothy!"

"Can I give you a lift . . . ?"

He climbed into her car. "I'm just in town for a few days. For the convention," he said.

"What convention?"

"Aluminium fishing equipment."

"Is that what you do?" she asked.

"Sure." He launched into an intricate history of his career that included short biographical sketches of his firm's founders.

Dorothy smiled. He hadn't changed. "Have you married?" she asked.

He shook his head. His mouth had a funny look. "I almost drowned the first time," he said.

drowned the first time," he said.

She'd planned to spend the day at her sister's, in Plainview. Instead, she drove him to his hotel. "You wouldn't like to come in and stick around for a few hours, would you, Dorothy? I've got to spend the afternoon getting the display booth ready . . ."

"I'd planned on going to my sister's," Dorothy said.

"Well, I guess it wouldn't be much of a day just hanging fish from a fishnet."

"I'll come in for a while," Dorothy said.

They strung up the fishnet and he opened a carton of silver fish and gold fish and sparkled fish. They hung these on the net with little hooks and Ted talked. He talked about the aluminium-fishing-equipment business and he talked about politics. He talked about scuba diving and the draft. He talked about inflation, his aunts and uncles, Pennsylvania, his mother's cooking and his crepe-soled shoes.

They had lunch together and coffee together and dinner together. After dinner they came back to look at the exhibit again.

He led her away from the glimmering booth, and to the fire exit. Behind the steel door he kissed

Behind the steel door he kissed her. It was a wild kiss; Dorothy closed her eyes and fish glistened behind her eyelids. He kept holding her.

When she put her cheek against his tie his hand touched her hair; he was much taller and had to lean over. Dorothy opened her eyes and the madras tie blurred and bled.

She thought about Alan, a boy she'd been seeing for eight months, Saturday night after Saturday night, and couldn't remember what he looked like.

Ted called her at work the following day. "The convention's over at six tonight. Wish you were here," he said.

She looked down at the typewriter on her desk. Silver fish superimposed themselves over the letters, the carbons, the telephone. "I'll make you dinner tonight," she said. She'd already assembled the menu that morning in case he called.

"What time?" he said.

"Seven?"

"I'll be there," he said. She hung up.

He arrived at seven with a huge bakery box. She brought a knife from the kitchen and they cut the string. In the box was a

mammoth white cake, top-heavy with whipped-cream flowerlets. It said, "Dorothy," in slender, chocolate script.

THEY sat very close together and drank white wine on the rocks and ate black olives. He talked about real estate values, genealogy, and sailfishing. While she prepared the chops he talked about the New Jersey shore. She stood over the chops in her dusky-pink dress and turned the pepper mill and she was so happy her throat hurt and she couldn't stop smiling.

She listened while he talked about American art, and let his voice wash right over her; everything he said was as fascinating as secrets.

He came and stood in the doorway; she had turned on the phonograph earlier. Music sailed into the kitchen at them. She dropped the salad spoons and they kissed and she knew that was the end of Alan; he was irrevocably finished, a Saturday-night nonentity from the past.

Ted took the train back to Philadelphia and she waited. She didn't hear from him. Not the following day, or week, or month.

following day, or week, or month. He didn't write. He didn't call.

To Dorothy, Philadephia began to fade across some exotic, far-fetched border. She began to see a man named Ralph. Ralph knew all the latest dance steps. He held Dorothy very close when they danced and Dorothy took her own responses for love. Ralph and Dorothy became engaged.

A week later, Dorothy's telephone rang. She picked it up casually, expecting a call from her sister, "Dorothy, it's Ted," the strange-familiar voice said. His voice was smooth as silver.

"Could I see you tomorrow?" he asked.

She hesitated. "I'm engaged, Ted," she said.

"Just for a few minutes tomorrow. I'm on my way to Tokyo," he said.

She thought about Ted and Tokyo. He would be that far away that soon. An hour tomorrow couldn't hurt.

They made a date to meet in the lobby of the Americana at

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six. It rained and she was late,

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six. It rained and she was late, but only by a few minutes. He was already there waiting. When she saw him the palms of her hands went cold and she could feel her heart beating under her raincoat.

He took her to a quiet corner and they sat down. He began talking about Japan. Dorothy fought her impulse to ask him if he was free for dinner.

Then he was asking her to have dinner with him.

They went to Iago's, a dark, torchlit place on the West side. Ted talked about Oriental languages, Far Eastern Economics, and ju-jitsu. Dorothy listened, up to her neck in love.

"It's getting late," she finally said, timidly. She wanted this to alert him to the beginning of the long, painful end — the next separation. Ted got up without noticing the lines around her mouth and the way her eyelids were reddening.

"When I get back from Tokyo we've got to do this more often," he said.

"Yes," she said. He was scanning the bill and didn't notice her voice, which sounded like shivering glass.

She did see him when he got back from Tokyo. He called from

back from Tokyo. He called from

the airport and they had dinner at the Golden Door. She told him she'd broken her engagement and he reached over across the table. and took her hand. He said, "I'll try to get to town once a week," Dorothy smiled and she really hoped.

For eight months there was no word, no letter, no call from him. By the time she heard from him again, Dorothy had a new job in an office and a boss named Mr. Ward. Mr. Ward had begun taking Dorothy seriously, asking her advice on certain business matters, principally at dinner.

Mr. Ward was a recent widower and had two houses, one of which was in Ridgefield, Connecticut.

He and Dorothy made plans to visit the Ridgefield house on Sunday afternoon and Mr. Ward was due to pick Dorothy up at her apartment at eleven. At ten-thirty the telephone rang. It was Ted. "It's convention time again —," he said.

Dorothy smiled into the receiver. "How nice to hear from you."

Ted said, "Feel like stringing up some silver fish today?" and Dorothy said, "I'm sorry, I've got other plans. How have you been?"

other plans. How have you been?"

There was a short silence and Ted said, "Perhaps you could come down later tonight—" and

Dorothy said that she was terribly sorry, but she couldn't, definitely.

He said he would call her the next time he was in New York.

When Dorothy came back from Ridgefield that evening, the telephone in her apartment was ringing. It was Ted. He asked if he could come to see her the following evening. She said that she wasn't sure when she'd be home from work as Mr. Ward was in the midst of heavy correspondence and liked her to stay late. Ted said it didn't matter; he'd wait.

He was already there when she got home from work after six. He followed her into the apartment and sat down on the sofa.

While she made drinks she was overcome by a compulsion. She talked. She talked about her job, her future, and Mr. Ward. From that subject she got into the subject of divorce laws, the government, and Vietnam.

She brought in the drinks and talked about high food costs, advertising, and Lincoln Centre.

Ted seemed transfixed. He stared into his glass and cleared his throat. "What's happening

his throat. "What's happening to you?" he said.

Dorothy stopped. Her face and ears turned red. She got up and began walking around the room. "All right," she said, " all right. You've made it clear. You don't like to commute." She ran her fingers through her hair, "So please. Please, just stay in Philadelphia where you belong, right?"

He didn't look up.

"This time I'm serious about a wonderful man. Very serious. Is that clear?"

TED stood up. He was so tall, it seemed to take him a long time. He leaned over to set down his glass. "I'll be going," he said. He didn't look at Dorothy.

Dorothy felt her throat burn. "I'm twenty-seven," she said.

Ted nodded.

Dorothy brought him his raincoat. He slid it on.

"Goodbye then," he said, at the door. "Goodbye," she said. He turned and walked down the hall to the elevator.

Three days later he was back, carrying a huge bakery box.

carrying a huge bakery box.

Dorothy's heart felt liquid; she turned weak. "Come in," she said.

Then Ted stared at the suitcases in the living-room. "You can't marry him," he said. "I love you!"

She closed her eyes. "Only when we're together. And how often are we together?"

"Perhaps I was afraid to come to New York; I always knew you'd be there. Listening," he said.

He leaned over and snapped the cord on the bakery box. The cake said, "Marry me," in chocolate script.

"It's beautiful," she said.

Ted gestured toward the suitcases. "So now let's unpack your stuff," Ted said.

Dorothy shook her head. "I took another apartment," she said. Her face reddened into her hairline. "After I broke up with . . ."

"What? Where?"

"Philadelphia," she said. "Day before yesterday."

They sat together on the couch with the cake and coffee. They talked about joint tax returns and nylon carpeting. They talked about rings and antiques and her sister in Plainview. They had quite a bit to discuss.

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