

Two for A Nickel

BY

IRVING GAYNOR NEIMAN

They were the two most disenchanted people in the city. But at 3 A.M. there is magic almost anywhere, even in the subway

THE uptown local rattled slowly to the subway platform and yawned open its doors. Mark watched a tired workman shuffle aboard, blinking his eyes, but he made no move to follow. The doors slid closed; the local sighed and rolled away.

He felt annoyed that he hadn't taken the train. Locals don't come along very often at 3 A.M. He stood on the deserted platform while an express roared through the station, beating his ears and body with repeated waves of shock. He stood until the train disappeared down the dark tunnel, and the sound eddied and died in its wake.

Mark turned and slowly climbed the stairs. He pushed through the turnstile and stood beside the change booth while he lighted a cigarette. A late party from one of the night clubs passed through from the street, and the women's shrill laughter echoed bleakly from the white tile walls.

Mark approached the change booth, and put his mouth close to the circular opening in the glass. "You sure you can't tell me anything about the regular man?" he said.

The man in the booth shook his head. "Look, Mac," he said. "I told you. I don't even know who the guy is. All I know is he didn't show up for work, so they sent me down. That's all."

"I just thought you might know."

"I'll tell you something," the man said. "This is my home town, and it's a wonderful place, and I wouldn't live no place else. Only it ain't like some other places. Everybody don't know everybody else around here."

"I know."

"It's like this. You sneeze in New York and everybody in the street turns around and says 'God bless you.' Okay. Fine. Only you can drop dead in Times Square and nobody will even look at you."

"I just thought you might know about the regular man here."

"That's what I'm telling you. Whatsamatter? He a friend of yours?"

"Sure," Mark said. "I guess so." He moved off, and leaned against the white tile wall. It would be some time before another local came along.

You didn't care about anyone else in town, and nobody cared about you. It was a good deal, Mark thought. Perfect. The whole town could drop dead, and it wouldn't touch him. The town returned the compliment, and that was fine.

He felt a return of his sense of annoyance. He shouldn't have let the uptown local go by. The fact that the regular Change Maker wasn't there was surprising, but no more than that. Whatever might have happened to the Change Maker, it was no skin off his nose. The guy was just a habit, a gag that grew into a habit.

Missing the train meant that Marilyn would come along, on her way home from her job at La Rhumba, and it would be awkward. That was a habit, too, and he'd let it go too far, but it was all right now. Just stay out of the way. That's all there was to it.



Maybe he never would have met her if it hadn't been for the corny gag they both had pulled on the Change Maker

ILLUSTRATED BY MARIO COOPER

She was no different from the rest of the people he knew, and held at arm's length. That's the way to know people. The less they mean to you, the less they hurt you, and that puts you way ahead of the game.

Maybe he never even would have met her, if it hadn't been for that corny gag. "Two dimes for a nickel." He used it as sort of a running thing with the regular Change Maker. The guy always thought it was funny, but then he was probably too old to know any better.

Marylin had pulled the gag, too, and the Change Maker had thought it was a wonderful coincidence, and had insisted on introducing them.

"My friend, Mr. Forrest, works on the New York Globe," he said, and Mark wondered how he knew. "My friend, Miss Morrow, is a dancer. It gives me pleasure to introduce you."

Marylin was a dish, a dancer, with a wonderful dancer's body, and smooth, coal-black hair she wore down to her shoulders, and clipped straight across her forehead. She worked in a night club, hoofing in the line, but she didn't look like a hooper. She looked like a dancer who was serious about it.

They rode uptown together that night, and found that they got off at the same station. Mark had his guard up, but it wasn't necessary. On the train, she only answered his questions, and kept her dark eyes to herself.

They got to talking over a cup of coffee in a joint outside the subway stop.

"In case you're wondering," she said, "I don't make friends. I found out it doesn't pay. I just go my way, and let other people go their way. It works out fine."

He'd been a little shocked to hear it from her. He had no right to be, because it was his own angle. It didn't sound right coming from her, though. Like seeing a movie of Greer Garson and having the sound track play Donald Duck.

"You're right, only you probably don't know why," he told her. "I know. You get all wrapped up in somebody, and then it goes sour, and you're beat. You didn't do anything. You're just beat, because it didn't work out."

She laughed. It was a good laugh, but a little puzzled. She had a way of moving her head so that her smooth black hair swayed like a hula dancer's skirt.

"There are plenty of other girls," she said. "Maybe you just stopped looking too soon."

"You suggesting somebody?" he said.

She hesitated a minute. "Nobody," she said.

They walked together to the corner of Broadway and Eighty-eighth, and he didn't offer to walk her home. Before they parted, he told her.

"You're not such a hot guesser. Maybe you're just out of touch with people."

"What do you mean?"

"It wasn't a girl. It was a guy I knew."

THE next night, the Change Maker asked him how he liked Miss Morrow.

"Okay," Mark said.

"A lovely girl," the Change Maker said, and he shook his gray head. "I think she must have had a disappointment. She isn't happy."

"What are you running there, Change Maker? A booth for advice to the lovelorn?"

There was always time for a few words with the Change Maker. He was a character. A philosopher. It doesn't take much to make a man a philosopher if he's up at 3 A.M., just sitting.

"I think it must be a disappointment in a man," the Change Maker said, screwing up his wrinkled eyes. "Don't you think that could be the case?"

"I wouldn't know."

"Well," the old man sighed, "I always say it's all for the best."

"That's not original with you," Mark told him.

She came along then, moving down the stairs with her flowing dancer's grace.

"Waiting for somebody?" she asked Mark. She wasn't being coy. She was throwing it up to him.

"Miss Morrow, please," said the Change Maker. "Mr. Forrest is a friend of mine, and not a fresh guy. He always talks to me for a few minutes."

"Thanks, Change Maker," Mark said. "I hate to see young girls getting the wrong idea."

They rode uptown together again, because there didn't seem to be any way out of it. It went better, though. She told him something about her dancing, when he asked. She wasn't doing too well, but she knew she could make it come out all right.

"You've got to steer clear of entangling alliances, and make contacts," she said. "It's a simple system."

"I'm on the city desk, nowhere near the drama section," he said. "You're wasting your time on me."

"You never know," she said. "I have to ride uptown, anyway."

Mark thought about her, and it didn't make sense. It was all right for him. He'd had it, and he wasn't having any more. But it was vaguely annoying to have this kid tell him all about it. It sounded false and unnatural, the way she said it.

At the corner of Broadway and Eighty-eighth, where they took different directions, she asked him:

"Look, I'm not getting nose. But what was that you said about you and a man, instead of a girl?"

"Don't be nosey," he said.

"Don't be silly."

"Okay," he said. "Good night."

THE late edition of Mark's paper was socked away to bed about the same time her show did its final turn. When they didn't arrive at the change booth at the same time, the Change Maker would tell him if she'd gone down to the platform or if she hadn't showed up yet.

"Maybe her show went on a little late," the Change Maker would say. "Wait, she'll be here in a minute."

"Look, Change Maker," Mark said. "Nobody asked you about anybody. Don't sprout any cupid wings in there. You'll crowd the booth."

"What cupid wings?" the old man said. "Is it Cupid to ride uptown with a young girl, so she shouldn't be bothered with fresh guys?"

"She can take care of herself."

"She tells me the same thing, but I know better."

"She's not my headache," Mark said. "I don't want her. You ought to get smart and forget about her troubles, too."

"Listen. Everybody has to be interested in other people. It's human nature."

"It's one man's theory."

"You don't like people, is that it?"

"Crazy about them. At a distance. Like you and me, Change Maker. With bars between us."

The old man shook his head, and sighed. "Well, you know what I say. Maybe this also is for the best."

The night Mark came down with Calvin Willard, from the paper, he shoved his dime under the wicket, and said, "Two dimes for a nickel," as usual.

The old man laughed, as usual, and said, "Some day you will catch me, and get two dimes."

"That'll be the day," Mark said. "Where's the heart throb?"

"Miss Morrow? You're asking?"

"Relax. I have a contact for her, that's all."

The old man squinted his eyes. "That's nice," he said. "She just this minute went down on the platform."

He introduced Marylin to Willard, editor of the Globe theatrical page. Willard was going uptown, too.

"Don't tell me you've been hiding this girl down in the subway all this time, Mark," Willard said.

Marylin laughed, and showed her even white teeth. She kept smiling, and it was the first time Mark had seen her smiling for any length of time.

"Mark is the shy type," she said. "He's never even come to see me dance."

It was the first time she'd ever used his first name. He felt a rising sense of irritation.

"Where are you dancing, Miss Morrow?" Willard asked. He sounded interested. Marylin told him all about herself. She had a smooth, provocative line of chatter that Mark hadn't heard before. The platform trembled under their feet as the local pulled into the station. Marylin took Willard's arm as they got on.

Mark fought a growing core of anger. He sat beside Marylin, with Willard on her other side, and read the bright-colored ads above the opposite windows.

Marylin laughed at something Willard had said, and turned to him. "Mark, this man's wonderful!" she said.

"Wonderful," he said.

He studied the six-word text of the black-and-yellow ad. The local jolted along, and its wheels shrieked as the track forced them in a turn. It was an irritating sound.

"But, darling . . ." Marylin was saying. ("Darling" doesn't mean anything in the theatrical business. It's the same as "mister" in the hardware business.)

Mark wanted to say, "Feed it to him, chippie. He's got what you want, and you might work an exchange." Willard whispered in her ear.

"Oh, now, really," she said, and laughed again. Her black hair shone in the uncertain light. "Mark, I'm afraid your friend is a wolf."

"I'll bet that scares you to death," Mark said, and shut his mouth to keep from saying more.

It was all right. She was just doing what she said she would, and that was all right. It was nothing to him. Mark felt his temper swell, and he couldn't reason it down.

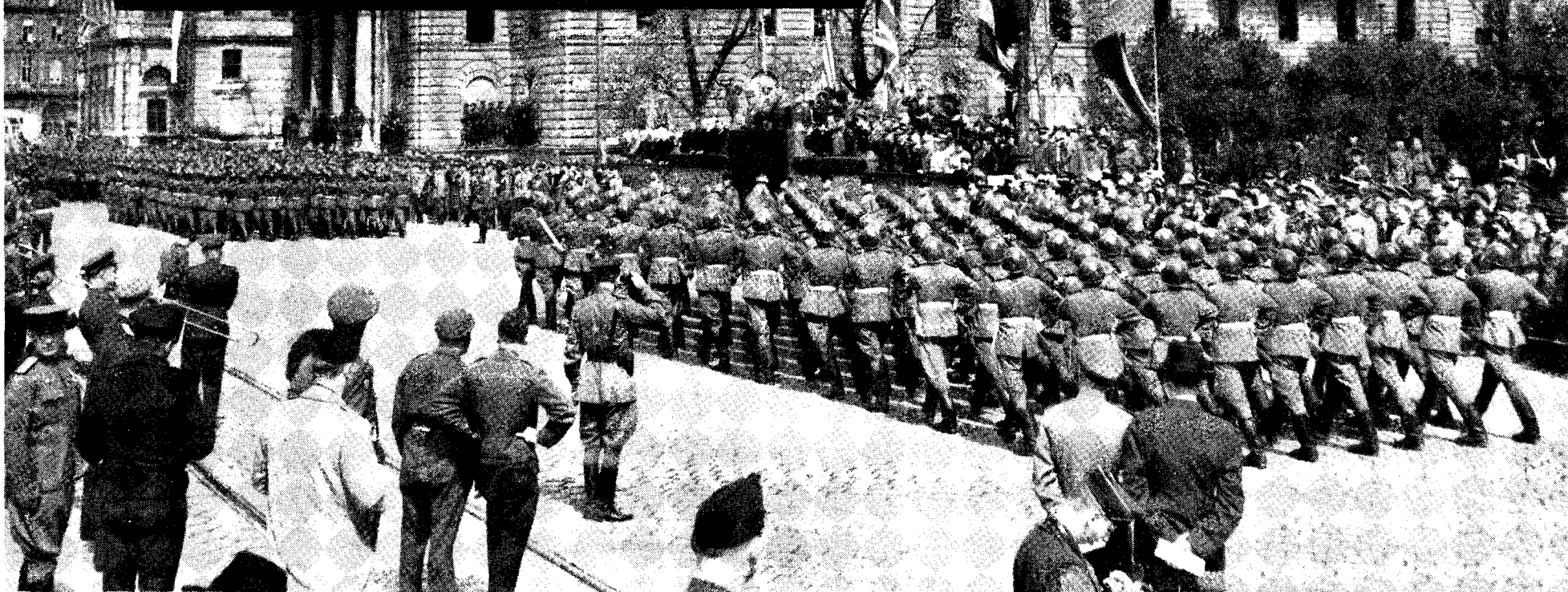
Maybe her arm's-length business was a gag. She was approachable from the right angle. Maybe he was just a jerk.

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AUSTRIA'S IN THE MIDDLE

BY EDWARD P. MORGAN



PRESS ASSOCIATION, INC.

Caught between Russia's ambitions and the West's affection for the status quo, Austria is chastened, bedraggled — afraid even to joke about its liberators

OVER the reviewing stand in Vienna's broad and sunny Schwarzenbergplatz, the flags of the Big Four snapped smartly in the spring breeze. It was April 13, 1946, and the occasion was a large and gusty if somewhat synthetic celebration of the first anniversary of the Red Army's capture of the city from the Germans. American, British and French troops joined in the parade but the Russians, of course, carried the day. (The name of Schwarzenbergplatz, incidentally, would soon be changed, according to the newspapers, to Stalin Square.)

Above one end of the reviewing stand, set apart from the four other flags, the streaming red-and-white banner of Austria was raised too, but it was so long that it kept reaching out and flicking the hats of officials on the platform. Finally a Red Army soldier seized it and with a bulging knot tied it down securely to the pole.

"There's Austria for you," a cynical bystander remarked; "lashed to the mast."

Back in the good old days when Hitler was acquiring European real estate with the ease of a Florida speculator, hundreds of thousands of Austrians exulted

in the *Anschluss* achieved by their native son. But the Allies decided the nation had sinned less than it had been sinned against, and the Moscow conference of Foreign Ministers in 1943 pledged to work for a free, democratic and independent Austria. The country was not to be conquered, but "liberated."

Today six and a half million Austrians are tasting the full bitterness of disillusionment. In what few of their cafés are open, the forlorn Viennese, trying to savor the memory of coffee, sip a witch's brew of soybeans and barley and observe wryly that they might be able to stand another war but never another liberation.

Instead of being free, Austria, which is only a little larger than the state of South Carolina, is cracked up into four parts controlled by the Russians, Americans, British and French. The government is beholden to the Allied Council and until very recently had been saddled with an occupation cost of some 350 million schillings (35 million dollars) a month. In May, following a Russian concession, the Council reportedly agreed to cut this figure 75 per cent. But the resulting one billion schillings a year, of which the Soviets are expected to collect about half, represents nearly 35 per cent of the Austrian national budget and is a backbreaking burden because the nation faces the loss of a tremendous amount of resources in reparations.

The Austrians will tell you that the occupying powers are more preoccupied with watching one another than with the welfare of Austria and that the nation has become a battleground of power politics between Russia and the West.

Convinced that Austria will become a "nation of beggars" if things go on as they are, President Karl Renner recently suggested that a force from the United Nations organization take over the occupation from the four Allies so the dispute on reparations could be resolved, zonal boundaries erased and the country united for recovery.

With a black cigar stump set against the white foliage of his broad mustache and trim spade beard, the seventy-five-year-old socialist conceded in an interview that Austria now was in a ticklish position, caught "between the interests of London, Paris, Washington and Moscow." For Austria to look exclusively one way or the other would make somebody angry, Renner said delicately. "We must be careful about our friendships. What we want is direct relations with the United Nations."

The Americans and British and, less bluntly, the French accuse the Russians of trying to pull Austria completely into the Soviet orbit under the guise of collecting reparations. According to Doctor Karl Gruber, blond and handsome young Austrian Foreign Minister, if the Russians get all they claim, they will wind up with control of nearly 75 per cent of the nation's industrial wealth.

Here in all its dynamism is posed all over again the \$64 question of "What are the Russkies up to?" With devastating simplicity, the Russians repeat they want only security and friends—which they are not so sure they have here. With candor, their Western allies counter with the question: How far from home must you push your lines of defense

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Red Army troops march through Vienna's Schwarzenbergplatz to mark capture of the city from the Germans. Note Austrian flag (right) lashed to pole

Dr. Karl Renner, head of Austria's provisional government, says Austria wants direct relations with the U.N.

PRESS ASSOCIATION, INC.



Collier's for July 13, 1946