

Making Something Out of Nothing

Hey there loyal listeners. Welcome to round the clock radio shock. Where we play music all day, and all night, with no repeats, and no top ten singles. Just smooth and awesome sounds of every shape and size... It's 7 o'clock, and you know what that means! It's story time. So gather round boys n' girls, and I'll tell you a funny one about a guy I once knew: his name was Daniel Hyde.

It was a lovely spring morning, and Daniel Hyde hadn't slept. As the sun came up over the horizon and the light shone through his window, he realized it wasn't going to happen, and decided to get up and face the day with a sense of bravery. After all, he had been able to do almost anything he wanted to when he put his mind to it, and his determination and sheer force of will had gotten him through those tougher times.

He rose from bed, rubbed his eyes, planted his feet on the ground, and yawned. Yes, he could get through it alone. He always had. But today, he didn't want to. So he walked across the room to that same pair of jeans he wore every day, the ones with the belt he never removed, and the pockets all properly filled; but never emptied. He reached into the right pocket where he always kept his smartphone, and removed it to dial a number.

On the other end of the line was his long time friend and comrade, Vincent Marks.

“What’s up dickface?”

Vincent had a tendency to answer the phone with a joke. He was several years older than Daniel, and had learned to have a sense of humor about life in general.

“Not much, just having a rough day, want to hang?”

“Of course. I just need to pick up my mother’s heart medicine from the pharmacy first... Whadd’ya say we meet in front of the deli around the corner from your house in about an hour? Grab a cup of coffee; catch up.”

“Yeah. Sounds good.”

“Great, and one more thing.”

“What’s that?”

“Do you still have that gigantic jar of loose change gathering dust on top of your kitchen counter?”

“Uhhh... It’s mostly dimes, nickels, and pennies. I picked all the quarters out to buy cigarettes... But, yeah; why do you ask?”

“Because, I want you to bring it.”

“Why?”

“Don’t ask questions. Just do what I say.”

“Ok. Fine.”

Daniel hung up the phone, pulled up his pants, and walked downstairs to the kitchen where he found the light leaking through the window drapes and washing over the countertop. He pushed the big red blender out of the way, reached towards the back wall, and found the clear apothecary jar containing fractions of dollars: the light was striking it in such a way that it glowed with a sense of promise.

He didn't feel like waiting around in his dark den. So he wrapped his arms around the jar, hugged it tight, and left his lonely apartment early, to go meet his friend.

On his way up the block, Daniel suddenly had an urge to check his smartphone for messages. He wanted to know if anyone had called, or left a text message, or an email. But he also wanted to ignore his phone for the same reason. Perhaps he could justify reading it as a combined effort with his need to call Vincent and confirm that he was going to be at the deli on time.

It was at that moment Daniel remembered that Vincent didn't own a mobile telephone. He'd either be at the time and place specified earlier, or he wouldn't, and if not, then Daniel would simply wait a few minutes, or just do something else.

There was something about this notion that Daniel felt was not only intriguing, but also quite calming. It was what it was. And he'd just have to go with it.

He arrived at the deli fifteen minutes early and sat down on the wooden bench out front. Shifting the giant jar of change from underneath his arm onto his lap, he spread his legs open and leaned back, allowing himself a moment to bask in the sunlight with his eyes closed.

"Hey dickface, wake up... I brought you a cookie."

Daniel opened his eyes and saw a silhouetted man standing before him with a bright sun piercing from behind his head:

"Why do you insist on calling me that?"

"Jeez man, learn to have a sense of humor why don'tcha."

"It's not funny."

“Well, I thought it was.”

“Yeah, but you’re an asshole.”

“And I suppose being such a nice guy has made you’re life so fucking wonderful has it?”

“Shut up.”

“Thought so.”

“So, you gonna tell me why I brought this huge jar of change? Or where the hell we’re going?”

“You going to tell me why you called me today in such a sourpuss mood?”

“Yeah, but on the way to the subway.”

“Sounds good. But first thing’s first: I got this cookie; do you have a cigarette?”

Vincent extended his hand, offering the gift of a cookie, in trade.

“Always.”

Daniel accepted the cookie from Vincent. And then he reached into his jackets breast pocket and pulled out a pack of cigarettes, removing one for Vincent, and one for himself. He then reached into his front pant pocket and removed a lighter: lighting Vincent’s cigarette first, then his own.

They both took a moment to practice deep breathing meditation exercises with their cigarettes: inhaling in and out, in and out. Very calming.

“Let’s move,” said Vincent.

“Werd.”

As they began walking down the street, Daniel removed the wax paper surrounding the cookie Vincent had given him. And took a bite. To his surprise, he rather enjoyed it. It

was one of those big chocolate chip cookies you can find at most bakeries, except it was delicious. Daniel hadn't eaten a chocolate chip cookie in a while. When he was a kid, he used to love soft cookies; they were so easy to eat. He had never been a fan of the hard or crunchy cookies. But this cookie was neither, it was some sort of delicious hybrid cookie: slightly burnt, but not so much that it lost its flavor, or its chew-ability; but just burnt enough that it had a unique flavor, and perhaps even a special charm. Daniel took another couple of bites, chewed, and a few blocks of silence later, he had worked up the courage to speak his mind:

"So, I've been having some trouble, y'know, it's just..."

"Girl trouble?"

"How'd you know?"

"I know things."

"Prick."

"Hey, it's not my fault you're screwing things up again. And it's not like I haven't bungled the job a few times in my life... Why do you think I know about this sort of thing? I am older than you after all... If you want, I can teach you a few things, let you benefit from the wisdom of my life experience, maybe avoid a few potholes I couldn't. But in the end, it's your choice, take it or leave it. I won't force you."

By this point Daniel and Vincent had reached the subway entrance. As Daniel began to walk towards the staircase, Vincent stopped him:

"Not yet."

"Huh?"

"We're not getting on the subway yet. First we need to go to the bank."

“Why?”

“There you go asking questions again.”

“Prick.”

As they walked up the block towards the bank Daniel shifted his grip on the clear glass apothecary jar full of change. Lifting the lid, which he grasped in his right hand, and moving the jar from its position in the front of his body, where he was supporting it like a basket, towards his left hand, where he gripped it from the rim and let it hang down by his legs: allowing the contents to shake and rattle in a sea of moving metal.

Once they arrived at the bank, Vincent walked ahead, and opened the glass door for Daniel to walk through.

Inside the bank, Daniel began walking towards an ATM machine under the assumption that it was the reason they were there.

“Wrong machine,” Vincent said in a deadpan tone, “We want that one, over there.”

Vincent pointed towards a large metal contraption in the corner of the grand marble bank lobby.

After a moment or two, Daniel recognized what it was, he had seen something similar in grocery stores and supermarkets: it was one of those machines designed to count loose change and convert it into paper currency.

Daniel smiled.

The two of them began traversing the marble floor towards the machine and along the way Daniel finally spoke up:

“The thing is, it’s just, well... Dakota cheated on me.”

“Fuck that fat bitch,” Vincent responded in a clear and matter of fact tone.

“Hey, don’t call her that!”

“Jeez, a gentleman to the end, you are.”

“No, I’m just a doormat.”

“Ahhhh, so you have learned something!”

“Prick.”

“And don’t you forget it!” Vincent was now tapping on the computer screen attached to the large change machine, “Now, raise that jar high, and start pouring out that change!”

Daniel let out a short chuckle, smiled, and raised the jar high above his head, tipped it over, and began pouring a river of change into the cheese-grater shaped contraption of the counting device.

“Yeah! That’s what I’m talking about, let it flow!” cheered Vincent.

Daniel laughed a good hearty laugh.

“Check me out!”

A river of change flowed downward.

Once the jar had completely emptied, Daniel placed it on the side, and watched the loose change wash over the sorting device, and sink away, down the cheese-grater-shaped drain. Once it had finished, a bright flashing message appeared on the computer screen above the machine. The bank seemed to be offering a special promotional bonus: guess how much money had just been dropped into the machine within a two dollar margin, and win double your money.

Daniel groaned, “Aw shit man, if I had known that, I would have counted the change ahead of time.”

Vincent laughed, “God, you really know how to suck the fun out of anything, don’t you?”

“Shut up – So, what do we do now?”

“I don’t know, guess, maybe?”

Daniel took a moment to visualize the jar of change as he had seen it on his kitchen countertop: as he did this, his tongue slipped out between his lips and his eyebrows scrunched together in a very serious looking concentration face. Added to this were a few hand gestures and some finger counting. And then he took a deep breath, and typed in the first number that came to his head: forty-seven dollars and seventy-seven cents.

“You sure?” inquired Vincent

“Nope,” said Daniel with a grin... He took a moment to remember to breath... And then he jammed the enter button with a sense of great confidence.

DING-A-LING-A-DING-DING-DING !!!

Daniel Hyde had just won forty-seven dollars.

Daniel and Vincent emerged from the subway with a pep in their step and began walking up the block towards the local Salvation Army.

“So, you sure Dakota actually cheated on you?” inquired Vincent, “You sure you’re not just neurotically freaking out about nothing again?”

“I’m sure,” replied Daniel.

As the two men reached the crosswalk, the traffic light switched from green to red, and they stood and waited for the light to switch back.

Vincent took this opportunity to turn to Daniel and in a serious tone he said:

“Remember the time you convinced yourself that a celebrity was finding clever secretive ways to respond to you on Twitter with her public tweets? Remember how you had convinced yourself that her celebrity status meant she couldn’t respond directly, and that all those posts, and links, and references, and retweets she put up, two minutes after you sent your message, was her way of responding to you indirectly?”

“Yeah.”

“Remember when you found out that ‘private tweet’ doesn’t mean private correspondence, that it actually means the only person who sees the tweet is you?”

“Yeah, I remember.”

“So, is this another case of Daniel talking to himself? Or is something else going on here?”

“Look! I get it. I’m a narcissist.”

“No – you hate yourself way too much to be a narcissist... Way too much guilt, way too much self-critique... If I had to guess: I’d say you’re more of an egocentric.”

“What’s the difference?”

“Look it up... You’ll probably feel better.”

The traffic signal switched from red back to green, the pedestrian light followed suit, and the two men continued walking forward towards the Salvation Army. A few hundred feet up the block, they reached their destination, and as Vincent held the door open, Daniel noticed a female manikin on display in the front window that was dressed in one of those classic pink Chanel suits: he had always found powerful and bossy business ladies to be quite sexy. Maybe it had something to do with his mother.

They walked into the Salvation Army, past the female manikin dressed in the pink Chanel suit, and took the escalator upstairs towards the section of used men's suits.

"Ready for a new set of clothes?" Vincent said with a smirk.

"Hell yeah."

They reached the top of the escalator and made their way to the clothing racks in the back of the store. Vincent pushed back a few coat hangers and removed a three-piece pinstripe suit:

"Here ya go. This is definitely you."

Daniel chuckled as he took the suit from Vincent, "You think so? I was worried that it might be too classic a look."

"Oh no, classic is your middle name."

Daniel disappeared into the dressing room. When he reappeared a few minutes later, he was dressed from head-to-toe in charcoal pinstripes that demanded to be taken seriously. Vincent had used his time alone to select his own style: a white seersucker suit with blue pinstripes wrapped around a pale pink button down shirt. Vincent had always been a trendsetter.

Daniel stuck his left hand in his pocket, and put his right foot forward to strike a pose:

"What'd'ya think?"

"I think you're ready for the ball."

As Vincent answered, he unbuttoned his jacket and flared out the sides while placing his hands on his hips, "How 'bout me? What do you think?"

Daniel placed his hand on his chin in a stereotypical pose of deep contemplation:

“I think Seersucker is a very difficult look to pull off. Not many can. But you seem to do it with ease.”

“Why thank you! Now, are you going to tell me about Dakota, or not?”

“What do you mean?” Daniel said in a tone of surprise indicating that he’d been caught off guard.

Vincent leaned forward, and in a joking, but secretly serious tone, said, “Well you told me the headlines; but you skipped over the details... Let’s be real: she may have cheated on you; but what did you do to provoke that?”

“Nothing!”

“Really?”

There was no longer any hint of humor in Vincent’s tone.

“Can I tell you on the way to wherever we’re going next?”

“If you want. Or don’t tell me at all. Whatever.”

“Cool.”

The two men turned towards the mirror and took a moment to admire the secondhand suits they had picked out. Then they went back downstairs. And after insisting that they intended to wear the clothes out of the store: they paid for the used suits with less than half of the money they had gotten from the change machine. So far, they were still coming out ahead. They hadn’t even dipped into their actual funds yet. They’d just been spending winnings.

Filled with a new sense of promise, Daniel followed Vincent out the front door, onward, towards their next destination.

Swipe, Beep, “Please swipe card again at this turnstile.” Sigh, Swipe, Beep,

“Please swipe card again at this turnstile.” Groan, Sigh, Swipe, Click, Light: and the brothers in arms were off to the races.

Vincent was the first to emerge from the subway. When he reached the top step he did a little slide in his dress shoes, extended his arms, bent his knees, snapped his fingers, and did a little twist: the clap of his shoes hitting the pavement and the snap of his fingers came together in a stylish rhythm.

He turned back and looked down the subway stairs: Daniel was still catching up.

“I look great, don’t I?” Vincent said with a smile.

“Yeah, you do.” Said Daniel through heavy breaths. He was now stretching his legs and stepping up two flights of stairs at a time in an effort to catch up. “Where are we going?”

“Get up here and have a look for yourself.”

Daniel reached the top of the stairs and immediately knew where he was. Vincent had brought him to the racetrack.

“You’re shitting me.”

“Nope.”

“Alright, let’s do it.”

Vincent smiled, “Ok, so here’s the plan. We don’t spend any money of our own. We just spend what we have left from the change machine. Got it?”

“Got it.”

Once inside the stadium-shaped racetrack the two men went immediately to the ticket window:

“What’s the sure thing?” inquired Vincent.

The boy in the ticket window was a freckle-faced teenager that couldn't have been old enough to buy his own ticket; but was apparently old enough to be selling them. Vincent assumed that he must be the nephew of the track owner or something of that sort, and dismissed it.

“Colin Farrell.”

“What?”

“Colin Farrell.”

“Yeah, I like his movies too. What about him?”

“No, the dog.”

“Huh?”

“The dog. His name. It's Colin Farrell”

“You gotta be shitting me. You have a dog named Colin Farrell?”

“Yes sir.” Replied the ginger-haired boy in a deadpan tone. He had a name tag on that read “Charlie” and a bit of an attitude. Apparently dogs named after movie stars was either common place, or the boy had simply grown tired with comments like these.

“Great, I'll take 2 to win... And my friend here will have—”

As Vincent turned back, he noticed that Daniel was no longer behind him. Instead he was several hundred feet up the stadium tunnel in front of a hot dog stand, staring at beer selections. Whether he had wandered off during Vincent's conversation with the ticket boy, or had simply never made it that far: Vincent didn't know. He had stopped paying attention some time ago.

“HEY DANIEL!!!” Vincent shouted up the tunnel, “WHO YOU BETTING ON?!”

The decibel level of Vincent's inquiry broke Daniel out of his trance and he shouted back down the tunnel:

"Uhhmm... I don't know... Who's the long-shot?"

Vincent turned to the ticket window and spoke words that Daniel couldn't make out from this distance. Then he turned back and screamed, "SOME DOG NAMED CRESCENTIA!"

"Crescentia? Is that even a real word?" Inquired Daniel.

Vincent conferred once again with the ticket boy, who must have been annoyed by this point.

"YES! APPARENTLY IT IS. THE GUY AT THE WINDOW SAYS IT MEANS, 'CHANGE'. HE SAYS IT'S A FEMALE NAME!"

Daniel liked the sound of the explanation. He paid for the beers and asked Vincent to purchase his ticket for him:

"Meet me in row 21, towards the middle."

When Daniel arrived Vincent was already sitting in a blue foldout stadium chair with his feet on top of the seat in front of him. Daniel sat down next to him and placed a cardboard tray on his lap: in it were two pints of beer and some classic peanuts (with the shells).

"Here, this one is for you." Daniel said as he handed one of the beers to his friend.

"Oh, thank you – you didn't have to do that."

"Course I did. You'd do the same for me. Besides, I bought it with our winnings. Don't worry, we're still in the green."

"Oh, I'm not worried." Vincent said with a smile. Taking several gulps of his beer.

“Cool.”

Daniel took a sip of his own beer and then began cracking open peanut shells and eating the contents. He looked over at Vincent’s feet on top of the seatback in front of him and decided to emulate his style: lifting his own legs, stretching them out, and placing his feet over the seat in front. Daniel smiled. As he ate the peanuts and drank the beer he began throwing the empty and broken shells down the rows and stairs before him. For a moment, life felt good.

“So, you over that bitch yet?”

Daniel sighed, “You know, I had almost completely forgotten about her until you reminded me just now.”

“Sorry.”

“It’s ok. I think I’ll be fine.”

“You think you’ll be fine? No, no, no... That simply won’t do. We might have to get proactive about this one. Find you a lady that can help you forget.”

“I don’t want to get fixed up with anyone. That never works out. It’s a horrible way to begin a relationship.”

“Who said anything about a relationship?”

“Oh god, what now?”

“Look man, I’m just saying: the best way to get over old pussy is to find new pussy.”

“I don’t know how you find any women, with language like that.”

“It’s easy. I don’t talk to them like that.”

“Them? – You speak about women as if they’re a separate species. You make it sound like clandestine warfare with a foreign country. Plotting. Secrets. Moves and counter-moves.”

“Because that’s exactly what it is.”

“No, that’s just disrespectful. What about equality?”

“It’s thinking like that which got you into this mess in the first place, remember? Look, I’m not trying to put women down, or actively support the patriarchal structure of societal misogyny. I’m just saying: women are different than men. Pretending otherwise is foolish... I’m all for equality. They can be—and already are—equally different, as far as I’m concerned. Besides, half the women I’ve met are better at, well, everything. If anything, we’re living in a time of the double-standard reversal. Bitches be in college n’ shit. Frankly I’m surprised that we don’t already live in a matriarchal society. Hillary for president. Welcome to the future.”

“Are you for real?”

“I’m not going to dignify that with a response.”

“Fair enough.”

“So, want to go to a strip club?”

“Are you fucking serious? No.”

“Why not?”

“All other reasons why it’s a bad idea, aside. It’s expensive. A waste of money.”

“Ohhhh... Ok. So what are you, more of a whorehouse kind of guy?”

“What the hell is wrong with you!?”

“You’re the one that said it was expensive! I’m just trying to cheer you up. If we find you a pro, you get more for less. Isn’t that what you wanted?”

“No. It wasn’t.”

“Come on dude, you need to forget this girl. And this will help. I promise.”

“You’re not going to convince me.”

“Would it help if I told you what it was like?”

“No.”

“Well, one time I went down south to this Mexican Whorehouse... Oh wait, you don’t want to go. Well, you sure you wouldn’t rather hear this story, anyway?”

“No.”

Vincent laughed, “Ok. So yeah, this one time: me and my boy went down to Mexico to on vacation. It was awesome . . .”

Vincent kept talking; Daniel decided to listen.

A red light blinked twice, a finger flicked a switch, and a familiar voice returned:

Well ladies and gentleman. That’s all for tonight. Thank you for listening. Tune in next time when I’ll be telling you all about the lovelorn adventure of Charlie Rosen. Don’t forget to call in and vote for your favorites. If you harass me hard enough: I might even tell you the secret bonus backstory of a special girl named Madison. But I probably won’t... This is your host, signing off.