

♪ upbeat theme music playing ♪

**JONATHAN:** Welcome to Hear/Now: A Season of Audio Theater from Keen Company. We are an award-winning, non-profit theater in New York City. Championing identification and connection through stories about the decisive moments that change us. I'm Jonathan Silverstein, the artistic director, and it's my pleasure to welcome you to "Radio Nowhere" by Kate Cortesi, the fourth production in our Season of Audio Theater. Join us in embracing the virtual off-Broadway experience. Take a moment to find your seat, silence any distractions, and lower your house lights. It's time to settle in for a night at the theater and enjoy....

**BRIAN**

*(radio clicks and static feedback hums)*

Testing, testing, one two—are you hearing a... buzz?

*(He fiddles with the equipment, more feedback then the buzz tone changes but doesn't go away)*

I'm not in the booth today. Believe it or not, I'm broadcasting live from my mom's porch. In Cleveland, **Ohio!** I'll get into that in a sec but I had to—*(sigh)* jerry-rig the set-up and it's a little...

*(Exasperated, he does something; the buzzing stops abruptly.)*

*(Gasp)* There! There's the peace and quiet I like to—*(loud guitar riff)*-ruin! Hi! Hello! And welcome back to Radio Nowhere!

*(techno jingle plays briefly)*

I'm your host, DJ Anonymous. *(dogs bark in the background)* Thank you for joining us.

*Neighbor AMELIA steps out onto the porch next door, maybe 30 feet away. She's upbeat and youthful*

**AMELIA**

Hey! Is it starting?

**BRIAN**

Yeah. Just started.

**AMELIA**

Cool! Lemme go grab uh... *(head inside, calling)* Fredo! Doris's son's thing is starting. Get the chairs and I'll grab—beer?

**ALFREDO**

*(inside)* Okay.

*(sounds of a neighborhood fill the background: sirens, dogs barking, cars driving by, etc)*

**BRIAN**

*(joking)* Did I mention I'm not in the booth. Gotta love that authentic neighborhood ambiance. Today's show is gonna be a little different, hopefully not in a stressful way...

*(pause)*

As our regulars know, *normally* Radio Nowhere is a commercial-free hour of *non-hits*. Anti-hits. We- *hate-* hits! *(recording of a clock ticking, a bell then children cheering plays)* What we play are songs by *you*, our listeners. Anonymous-*(rock chord)*- idiosyncratic-*(rock chord)*-unproduced music.*(rock chord)*“By and for nobodies.” Nobodies, like you and me. *(ding)*We are not competitive or hierarchical. We are not *tastemakers* or gatekeepers. Good, bad, whatever! At Radio Nowhere, the music just *is*. *(techno jingle bursts in then fades)*

To submit a song, go to [radionowhere.com](http://radionowhere.com), upload your track of four minutes or less, send it in and I'll send it out! Over the airwaves, across the Universe. And your little sonic message in a bottle just might find its way to some—existentially marooned stranger.

**AMELIA**

*(back out here with two cans of beer; caught the tail end of that speech)*

I love that.

**BRIAN**

Rad. Send us a song.

**AMELIA**

Uh, *yeah right*. *(chuckling)*

Wait, am I on the radio? Like, right now?*(beer can tab pops)*

**BRIAN**

Yes you are! And syndicated in six continents. From Cleveland, Ohio to the GREAT BEYOND!

ALFREDO *just came outside. He will join Amelia with beach chairs on the yard in front of Brian's porch, maybe fifteen feet from the makeshift soundstage. Alfredo's sweet. Stoner-y. A bit dim? Keanu from Parenthood vibes.*

**ALFREDO**

Cleveland! First lit city baby!

**BRIAN**

First lit city indeed. *(old campy music plays in the background)* Cleveland was the first American city lit by electricity. We children of Cleveland are indoctrinated from birth in our electrical origin story. Thomas Edison is Ohio's own personal Santa Clause. *(jingle bells)*

**AMELIA**

*(cackling)* Yas!

**BRIAN**

*(laughing)* So yeah, uh, today's show's a little different. I will *not* be playing your music, sadly. Instead, I join the time-honored radio tradition of... begging for your money—

*(playful guitar riffs)*

**IN A TELETHON!**

**ALFREDO**

He's good.

**AMELIA**

(Sh.)

**ALFREDO**

Hey, you're really good at guitar, what's your name, man, your real name?

**AMELIA**

He doesn't want people to know, *obviously*, if his stage name is DJ *Anonymous*.

*(to Brian)* Sorry.

**BRIAN**

All good. All good. We're live. Let's be live.

**AMELIA**

Woo!

**BRIAN**

Once again, I am *DJ Anonymous*. (*guitar chord*) I have journeyed back to my childhood home from New York City (*applause*) because—

**AMELIA**

Woo!

**BRIAN**

...my mom died.

**ALFREDO**

(*quietly*) Oh shit that's right.

**AMELIA**

I am so sorry for your loss.

**BRIAN**

Nope, nope, It's all good. She passed like six months ago, and—  
(*overlapping each other*)

**AMELIA AND ALFREDO**

Doris was wonderful.

And like super *pretty*. For a woman of her age.

**AMELIA**

(Fredo. Gross.)

**ALFREDO**

(How's that gross?)

**BRIAN**

(*chuckling at their spat*)

She *was* super pretty. Anyway, so, I come back here, I'm going through my mom's stuff, and (*music plays under the talking*) the most valuable thing in the house is this weird *collection* that I happen to *despise*. They stare at me from a *special jar* on the mantle. Meanwhile, I'm getting bills for the, you know, the—yearly *fees* for the *show*. Airwaves, the satellite stuff, renting the booth, the website. And I gotta replace some equipment, so... (*music drags to a stop*)

(*sentimental music swells*) To keep Radio Nowhere going another year, costs about 35,000 dollars, so here we are. I need money and I have something to sell. So I'm gonna try to sell it. To *you*.

What am I selling? It's hard to talk about because it's so fucking weird. (*music stops abruptly*)

It's a collection of 38 tiny little things. I'm selling each one individually for a thousand dollars each. Ideally I leave here today with 38,000 bucks. Too ambitious?(*ca-ching*) Let's see.

(*Cracks up at the thought*) When you find out what I'm selling, you will be *appalled*.

(*recording of someone screaming and creepy music intensifies*) I mean: mortified. So, bear with me, hear me out, and, okay. (*deep breath*) Are you ready?

**AMELIA AND ALFREDO**

(*clapping*)

Woo!                      Fuck yeah!    Come on!

**BRIAN**

I'm selling my father's fingernails.

I'm selling the little moon-shaped fragments of his nails, clipped by my mother and saved in *this* jar since before I was born.

**AMELIA AND ALFREDO**

Ew    What?              Dude. what the fuck?

**BRIAN**

I'm selling the little moon-shaped fragments of his nails, clipped by my mother and saved in *this* jar since before I was born.

**ALFREDO**

*Dude?*

**BRIAN**

Thousand bucks a pop. I know, I hear you, but trust me, the resale value is a lot higher. Because of who-my- father- was. And... *is*. And always will be. (*reverent music plays*)

(*Deep breath.*)My father is a man who has... (*music clicks off*) never acknowledged me, in public. He called me "son" on the phone a few times. I couldn't...I couldn't... tell if he meant son-my-child or son-young man but... I was always gonna know way more about him than he'd know about me.

His story tells like one of his novels you were probably required to read at some point in your--"education." He fought in three wars over four continents in two different centuries. He wrote eleven novels, two novellas, three collections of poetry, and a screenplay about horses. *And* the book and lyrics to a Broadway musical that ran for a

record-setting two weeks. (That record was for the *shortest* run on Broadway.) He was married eight times and *every single wife* except the first one was his mistress during his previous marriage.

He owned forty cats with six toes and that is actually true.

My mom never married him, she didn't want to. She preferred being his mistress on Tuesdays from Memorial Day to Labor Day the summer before Tupac died. That was... '96, when I was conceived. I know-gross.

When I was twelve and starting to make music of my own, I told myself the spirit of Tupac was passed onto me when we crossed mortal planes like ships in the night, but it obviously wasn't. Spirits don't work that way, and even if they did, I don't think Pac wouldn't have chosen me.

Uh, when he died at an unknown age, my father, not Tupac, he called up wife number six, and said, "I can no longer live with what mankind is capable of" and shot himself in the head. With wife number six right there on the line. Wife number eight went to the grave *bitter* that he called number six for his grand exit but it wasn't personal. Wife number six owned a *literal magazine empire*, and I swear to God, that motherfucker was determined to die a famous death. And I'll give it to him. I haven't gotten to the end of a single one of his long ass novels but the man wrote the shit out of his own ending.

My father has no known surviving children and seven *unknown* surviving children. I'm one of them. So. As you've probably figured by now, my illegitimate father was the late, great, but honestly, pretty shitty J.R.R.R. Alexander White. (*drum roll and rim shot*)

### **AMELIA and ALFREDO and ANOTHER?**

[All react - wow, holy shit. That guy.]

*A \* ching ching! \* type of sound. Digital money. Brian did NOT make this noise happen and it derails him for a moment.*

**BRIAN**

Wait, did you hear that? That's my first sale. One—(*ching ching*) two nails!—were—

**AMELIA**

(Woo!)

**BRIAN**

—sold. To a person in... Singapore. Whoa. (*ching ching*) It's (*ching ching*) working! (*ching ching*) Anyways.

**AMELIA**

Wait a minute. Wait a minute. So Doris is *that* Doris?

**BRIAN**

Uh Yeah.

**AMELIA**

*The Long Black Veil*-Doris.

**BRIAN**

Yeah.

**AMELIA**

That's so crazy, I am *literally* about to read "The Jar of Daisies" at Kiki's wedding.

**ALFREDO**

Yeah, crazy.

**AMELIA**

*(to Alfredo)*

And you had to read uh...

**ALFREDO**

Yeah.

**AMELIA**

*Three Brothers?*

**ALFREDO**

I mean I *didn't* read it but.

**AMELIA**

I think I made it to the end of... *Prudence*. Right? The one where the girl drowns herself?

**BRIAN**

So I've heard.

**ALFREDO**

We saw the movie about him, with Anthony / Hopkins?

**AMELIA**

Oh yeah, Anthony Hopkins! What's it called? The movie?

*Beat.*

**BRIAN**

*The Genius Dilemma.*

**AMELIA AND ALFREDO**

Right, right, right. The Genius Dilemma. What was--the dilemma?

**BRIAN**

You know: would you rather *be* a good person or *make* great art. That old uh...

**AMELIA**

Right.

**BRIAN**

...False binary.

*A pause.*

**ALFREDO**

So Salma Heyek plays... yer mom?

**AMELIA**

Yes! The nails! She clips his nails! Oh my god of course! That scene! *That--awful* scene. And then the poem--what's it called? Don't tell me, I know this.

**BRIAN**

"Grooming."

**AMELIA**

*Grooming!*



**ALFREDO**

Grooming?

**BRIAN**

Grooming.

**AMELIA**

Grooming. It's about taking care of someone in a way that they can't do for themselves.

*These are those nails?*

**Brian**

*These are those nails. Yeah.*

**AMELIA**

As you can see, I went through a " Long Black Veil phase" in college. I know that book *too well*. I wished I'd known that she lived next door.

*(phone chirps with an incoming call)*

**CHERYL**

Beep? What's that beeping? What is....

**ALFREDO**

Hey Cheryl.

**CHERYL**

... do you hear a beeping?

*(phone keeps chirping)*

**ALFREDO**

Oh dude, dude, I think you're telethon's ringing.

**BRIAN**

Oh, shit. You're right! We haven't done live calls before so I --Hello, Radio Nowhere, you're--

*(dial tone)*

Nope. *(Tries again)* This is DJ Anonymous, you're on the air? I think.

**MARION FILLER, SOCIETY TREASURER**

*( Over the phone.)* Mr.—White? Or is it Mr. Mendoza?

**BRIAN**

It's DJ Anonymous.

**MARION FILLER**

Alright. Marion Filler, Treasurer-Secretary of the J.R.R. Alexander White Society. I'm on—the radio?

**BRIAN**

Yes.

**MARION FILLER**

Mm. You believe you are in possession of Doris Mendoza's fingernail collection of Mr. White's?

**BRIAN**

...yes, I—mhm yep.

**MARION FILLER**

*Mmhm.* Doris Mendoza, of *Cleveland*, is your mother.

**BRIAN**

Yes.

**MARION FILLER**

I implore you, Mr.—

**BRIAN**

Anonymous?

**MARION FILLER**

Sir, do *not* sell them off in pieces. Don't scatter the artifacts and dilute their potency.

**BRIAN**

Dilute their...? What sort of magic do you think dead keratin is capable of?

**MARION FILLER**

(*amused*) Drawing tourists to the museum! I'll have to speak to the president, but I'm *quite* sure we would all *love* to display the entire collection of his fingernails alongside a first edition of *The Long Black Veil*. Each year,— (*dial tone*)

*He disconnects. Secretly on purpose.*

**BRIAN**

Oh, shoot, call dropped...

*(stage whisper, to perform a confession of sorts)*

*I don't wanna sell to a museum.* I don't wanna keep glorifying him, the whole point of selling him off, piece by tiny disgusting piece...

**AMELIA**

Did she ever talk about how it felt to be--*that muse?*

**BRIAN**

Never. I mean, she told me how they met and... She referred to him from time to time, but she never really sounded like she was talking about a boyfriend. It sounded like she was talking about... an author.

**AMELIA**

In the books about him, "Doris of Cleveland" always declines to be interviewed.

**BRIAN**

When anyone called or came to the house, she'd tell me to tell them: "Read the poems! Everything interesting is in the book."

With her friends, my mom was very outgoing and silly, but with academics and reporters, and *biographers*, she was shy. Not shy. Indifferent. Irritated.

She was a real snob. I think--not in a bad way but, she didn't trust people who write about art and artists.

*Poetry is sustenance, like the air.* She used to say. *They're not made to be talked about, they're made to be lived inside of. We should all live inside a poem for a while. And if you insist on talking about it, talk about how it felt to live there.*

She *looooved* to critique a critic. "This book is big and his mind is small." "The play is big and his mind is small." Small or (*In Spanish*) "*Mediocre.*"

*(In Spanish)* Mediocre.

She hurled that word at everyone, basically, who wasn't a Spanish Painter or a Russian novelist or a Chilean poet. Or--my father.

When I told her about Radio Nowhere, not long before she died, she called it, "*tu experimentito de musica mediocre*." My little experiment in musical mediocrity.

\_\_\_\_\_ (*Incoming call Beeping starts ringing again.*)

Uh-oh, I think it's the museum lady again. (*he answers*) Radio Nowhere, you're on the air, but if you're a museum, I'm afraid we're not—

**OLD OSCAR NOMINATED SCREENWRITER**

Not a museum, kid. I wrote the fucking movie.

**BRIAN**

Oh, so you're a—

**OLD OSCAR NOMINATED SCREENWRITER**

Writer. Like your old man.

**BRIAN**

Well, a *screenwriter*—

**OLD OSCAR NOMINATED SCREENWRITER**

I wrote *The Genius Dilemma* starring Anthony Hopkins. Lemme tell ya, Tony drinks like a / *writer*.

**BRIAN**

If readers don't *actually read* / the *words* you write down—

**OLD OSCAR NOMINATED SCREENWRITER**

I just bought three of your old man's fingernails fer shits and giggles. Why the fuck not.

**BRIAN**

Screenwriters are more like movie organizers...

**OLD OSCAR NOMINATED SCREENWRITER**

Gonna keep 'em on my desk, right next to the red swatch of fabric from the Schindler's List coat Steven gifted me for Hannukah. I wanna tell ya two things—what's your name?

**BRIAN**

I'm um—DJ Anonymous—

**OLD OSCAR NOMINATED SCREENWRITER**

Ok, that's dumb. Yer name plus yer art equals a man's one shot at immortality. *Ars Longa Vita Brevis*. That's *Latin*, for Life is Short but Art is Taller than fuckin' *Jiannis*. Make great art, you live forever. But don't take my word for it, ask Aristotle.

**BRIAN**

No! That God complex is exactly the type of colonial masculinity—

**OLD OSCAR NOMINATED SCREENWRITER**

Doesn't matter! Two things, okay? One, it's good yer dad's a dick. You need at least one shit parent if you wanna amount to something. Loved children don't do shit.

**BRIAN**

I do not agree—

**OLD OSCAR NOMINATED SCREENWRITER**

Two. The nail-cutting scene in the movie, where Anthony Hopkins orders Salma Hayek to cut his nails?

**BRIAN**

And when she refuses, he hits her in the mouth? I remember.

**OLD OSCAR NOMINATED SCREENWRITER**

Then she clips his nails, he feels bad, they make up. Yada yada. But the real payoff is, when he calls the next morning, he tells her, "Save the nail pieces, Doris, they'll be worth a lot one day!" And we see, she doesn't see it but we do: he's written about her cutting his nails. And it's a great fuckin' poem. A soon-to-be famous fuckin' poem. You remember?

**BRIAN**

Yeah.

**OLD OSCAR NOMINATED SCREENWRITER**

That scene got me nominated for an Oscar. But kid, I wanted you to hear it from me: that scene--didn't fucking happen. That was a little thing called dramatic license.

**BRIAN**

Oh, I know. My mom was not a battered woman.

**OLD OSCAR NOMINATED SCREENWRITER**

He's the protagonist. He's gotta drive the action.

**BRIAN**

You know my mom *rejected* him. He was only allowed to come over one night a week. He stayed in Cleveland all summer for her. And she only let him in the house on Tuesdays. But you made her a survivor of domestic violence like what the—

**OLD OSCAR NOMINATED SCREENWRITER**

Lemme give you a tip: bad in life equals good on screen. Good in life equals bad on screen. We need heroes who seize destiny by the balls. The protagonist's gotta be destiny's *parent*, not destiny's child. Ha!

You can't have that.

Good luck, kid. Your dad's an asshole but not like in the movie. But hold onto your anger though. Hold on tight and never let go. And when you make something great with it, for fuck's sake, put your fucking name on it.

*(phone hangs up)*

**AMELIA**

"Well, I don't know about you, but I could go for a paradigm shift right about now."

**ALFREDO**

I think that guy just ruined *every single movie* I've ever seen, except for like—

**BRIAN**

Blue is the Warmest Color.

**ALFREDO**

Yeah.

**BRIAN**

Totally. That was literally stunning.

**ALFREDO**

I need another beer.

*Incoming call.*

**BRIAN**

Radio Nowhere, you're on the air.

**HILARIOUS FEMINIST**

Oh my FUCKING GOD. First of all DJ Anonymous. Your show? Radio Nowhere? Listen.

**BRIAN**

Yeah?

**HILARIOUS FEMINIST**

That shit is hilarious. Those songs suck ass and I *live. I live.*

**BRIAN**

What? No!

**HILARIOUS FEMINIST**

Me and my friends, right? Sometimes we'll light a J and listen and just laaaaaugh.

**BRIAN**

I'm not—we're not like, *mocking* or

**HILARIOUS FEMINIST**

Sure sure sure. It's cute. But it's also like: *c'mon. (she inhales her weed vape pen)* This is just THC by the way. It doesn't get you high. It just helps with my--migraines (*exhales*) Yo, so I'm not buying your dad's nails, that's fuckin' sick. But Mr. Oscar Nominated can't have the last word, okay?

**BRIAN**

Amen. (o be clear, I'm really not making fun of the—

**HILARIOUS FEMINIST**

So the way I see it, right? The Whole Entire Literary Canon of White Males can suck a dick. Suck a dick and choke on that shit I'm ready. I'm done.

**AMELIA**

Woo!

**ALFREDO**

(choke on that shit oh my gosh)

**HILARIOUS FEMINIST**

Burn it all down. Pour the gas on that shit, light a match, flip your hair, and walk the other away.

**BRIAN**

Yassss, I'm adding The Genius Dilemma to the Bonfire.

**HILARIOUS FEMINIST**

Oh. Yes. Absolutely.

**AMELIA**

Okay but not Anthony Hopkins. Please let me keep Anthony Hopkins.

**HILARIOUS FEMINIST**

Fair. You can keep Anthony Hopkins—for NOW.  
But yo, can I tell you a story real quick?

**BRIAN**

Sure.

**HILARIOUS FEMINIST**

Cool cool cool. So. Last month, I go to see *Measure for Measure* with my theater studies class, right? And, okay, caveat: I was kinda high, but, I had this idea. It's like a thought exercise. Okay so like, picture this. You're watching a Shakespeare play. (It doesn't have to be *Measure for Measure*.) And at any point in the play, I call FREEZE. The actors freeze. No one talks. And we ask the audience a question. *One question*.

**BRIAN**

Okay.

**HILARIOUS FEMINIST**



It's like a *poll*. Everyone answers one single poll question. And the question is:

*Pause.*

**BRIAN**

What?

**HILARIOUS FEMINIST**

"What did he just say." What did he just say. The guy on stage. Or the girl. Whoever had the last line. What did they say? Like on some reading comprehension shit. "*In your own words, what did he say?*"

**BRIAN**

Okay.

**HILARIOUS FEMINIST**

Between 97 and a 100 percent of the audience will get the answer wrong. Nobody understands what the fuck anyone in Shakespeare is saying! So I say: that shit can go!

**HILARIOUS FEMINIST**

By the way, poll results will not be racially skewed. White folks will not outperform.

*The little crowd out here is loving this chick. Cheer. Applause. Reactions.*

**RON**

*(yelling from a distance)*

Great! Let's ban books! Ban Shakespeare. What's next, firing squads? Re-education camps?

**HILARIOUS FEMINIST**

*(killing with kindness)* Hello sir, how are you today?

I'm not saying ban. You ain't gotta ban it, just make it *compete*! Let Measure for Measure go up against Scandal and see what happens. 'Cause you know what? Olivia Pope gon' be *good*. She gon' be like, "did someone say something? No? Okay."

**RON**

Ah no, that's apples and oranges!

**HILARIOUS FEMINIST**

The musty old shit *needs* prestige. It *needs* scholarship. It *needs* teacher to put it on the syllabus, because if you don't *require* us to read it, ain't no way we're reading that shit! That's some Dead White Male affirmative action right there. You wanna fight me? Fight! Take it off the fuckin' syllabus and see what happens.

**BRIAN**

Literally, my father's novels are *so hard to read* and that is definitely like, "proof" of his genius. Like he's so smart no one can understand him.

**HILARIOUS FEMINIST**

Get free man. Call it what it boring, and go get a snack. DJ Anonymous. Good luck, man. Make a lot of money liquidating that motherfucker and do something nice for yourself. Peace!

*She hangs up. Hilarious Feminist is out.*

**BRIAN**

Peace.

*Pause. "Don't Ban Shakespeare" might come back from the old guy.*

**AMELIA**

Okay sure yes. She's Shakespeare is... yes. And. Also. like I'm reading *The Jar of Daisies* at my cousin's wedding. It's really beautiful. I do understand it. It makes me feel connected to the like... endless cycle of human beings falling in love.

**BRIAN**

My mom is the smartest woman you will ever know. But she's going to go down in history as the brown village girl who became the mistress of a white genius. As if his attraction to her is what makes her interesting.

**AMELIA**

Ok I hear you. I just like the poems. And I don't see the woman in them as a poor little brown girl. I just—want to be loved like that.

**ALFREDO**

What the fuck?

**BRIAN**

But he *didn't* love her like he did in the poems. That's bullshit. Their life was nothing like that. *(ch-ching)*

**AMELIA**

That's why it's a poem. It's better than life.

**BRIAN**

You sound like my mom. She said stuff like that... all the time. *(ch-ching)*

**ALFREDO**

*(incoming call, maybe combined with cha-ching! noise)*

People are buying these things.*(ch-ching)* Dude, you're over halfway sold.*(ch-ching)*

*(incoming call)*

**BRIAN**

No shit. *(picking up.)* Radio Nowhere you're on the air.

**BROADWAY ACTRESS HATTIE LARUE**

Hello, this is Hattie LaRue, with whom am I speaking?

**BRIAN**

Um, I'm DJ Anonymous but who cares because you're Hattie LaRue! You're a legend! My mom *loved* you. We watched all your movies and she'd—wow. This would—she was hard to impress but this might have impressed her. How did you hear about the Radio Nowhere telethon?

**BROADWAY HATTIE**

JRRR Twitter is Tweeting!

**BRIAN**

No kidding!

**BROADWAY HATTIE**

You're famous, which you're entirely wasting by having *Anonymous* for a stage name. I'll never understand it. Anyway, I'm calling because of course I knew your father well, as the lead in—how should we put it?

**BRIAN**

Yeah...

**BROADWAY HATTIE**

The one unequivocal failure of his career. Up The River, on Broadway. I sang a two and a half hour show to an empty house for sixteen shows in a row.

**BRIAN**

Wow.

**BROADWAY HATTIE**

We were the laughing stock of Broadway. Hate him if you want. We all have our wounds we like to nurse but the man faced the page, again and again. And he risked failure every time he did. And you know what? He failed. Publicly. It was documented in the New York Times! You'll never fail like that, hiding behind this "*DJ Anonymous*" like you do.

**BRIAN**

But his failures don't count against him. Their just "seeds" or "*lesser works*"—

**BROADWAY HATTIE**

Have you ever sung to an empty theater? Have *you* ever been mocked in the New York Times? It doesn't feel like "lesser" anything, it feels like death. Death you're forced to live through.

Switching subjects: I hear you. You're a musician. Maybe a very good one but you'll never reach your potential without an *audience*. And you'll never have an audience if no one knows who you are.

**BRIAN**

But isn't everyone who chases an audience kind of an asshole?

**BROADWAY HATTIE**

Ha! He really was an asshole, wasn't he, but honestly so am I. It's actually delightful to have a worthy opponent at rehearsal.

Speaking of rehearsal, I'm on a 5, but I'll say one more thing. His musical was a flop because it deserved to be. And it was his fault.

**BRIAN**

Now we're talking.

**BROADWAY HATTIE**

JR understood words on the page. For the reader he understood the private dialogue of the mind, he *was* a very great poet, and I don't care how white and male and all the rest of it he was.

**BRIAN**

Straight.

**BROADWAY HATTIE**

Boy, *was* he. You ain't kiddin'. *But* He was a very great poet and an interesting novelist. BUT. The man couldn't write for actors to save his life. He did not understand live **performance!**

The lights, the choreography, the *music*, the strings and the percussion...

He drowned all of us in words words words. He didn't know how to write for *us* and he didn't care to learn. In that sense, yes, his arrogance hurt all of us.

The great writers for the stage leave *space* for *my* genius. *They leave space for the audience.* But. Your father hoarded all the poetry for himself.

**BRIAN**

A poetry hoarder, I love it.

**BROADWAY HATTIE**

At least he tried. Which is more than you can say.

I'd rather flop for an empty house than never get on stage.

*(beat)*

Oh, and please stop feeling sorry for your mother. She didn't have to let him into her house, she didn't have to cut his nails, and she didn't have to let him into her bed!

He could be a lot of fun. Oh ha-ha! Believe it or not, some of us like having fun! And.

*And.* Some of us turned him down! T'was possible. So. I guess I wanted to say that.

Good luck, kiddo.

**BRIAN**

Bye, Ms. LaRue, I'm—

*She's hung up.*

Honored to meet you. Thanks for calling and, rejecting him. What a... possibility.

*(pause.)*

### AMELIA

So how did your parents meet? Where did they meet?

J.R.R.R. Alexander White came to Cleveland in May 1996. Our city lured him out to the middlebrow Midwest with our world class orchestra. His poetry was being set to music, a massive composition for a choir and orchestra.

His arrival was an *event*. The city rolled out the red carpet. Flowers were planted.

As the story goes JR was reading under an apple tree in Cuyahoga National Park when an apple fell on his head. He looked up and saw my mom sitting on a big rock, also reading.

She was wearing a *long black shawl*.

He walks over and asks what she's reading, and before she finishes saying the title of the book, they've started to make love.

My mom, the reclusive Cleveland mistress has sadly and somewhat disgustingly verified the facts of this account.

She was reading *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* by T.S. Elliot, translated by Pedro Serrano. JR falls under her spell, misses his flight back to London, and surprises the history of literature by spending the summer in Ohio. He only sees her on Tuesdays. She forbade him to come more than that. She said that's how she kept him hooked.

By rejecting him six days a week. She said, if she learned anything from poetry, it's that people love those that reject them the most. Sounds manipulative but, she *is* the sole subject of an entire poetry collection, his most famous work.

The Berlin Philharmonic did the chorale last year.

*(ch-ching, ch-ching, ch-ching,)*

Wow. There's only two nails left.

*(solemn)* I made thirty six thousand dollars. Radio Nowhere can definitely survive another year.

*Cheers from Amelia and Alfredo, and Cheryl and Ron.*

Thank you. Thanks guys. Thanks for hanging in.

*Incoming call.*

Hello, this is DJ Anonymous—

**TIO OCTAVIO**

*(loving, firm, speaks English with a heavy Ecuadorian accent.)*

Sobrino. Es your Tio. Octavio.

**BRIAN**

Hey! Tio!

**TIO OCTAVIO**

Como estas.

**BRIAN**

Good, good. Muy bien. Where are you?

**TIO OCTAVIO**

Quito. Did you know that I submitted a song? In April?

**BRIAN**

No. Did I play it?

**TIO OCTAVIO**

Yes you did.

**BRIAN**

How did it feel.

**TIO OCTAVIO**

Como “reading a poem you wrote in someone else’s handwriting.” That’s how your mother would say.

But I call you today, because I listening, I am listening to your show today

And you sound Angry.

You don’t have to be angry. Don’t be angry! She would not like that.

**BRIAN**

Who?

**TIO OCTAVIO**

Your mother! Doris. That woman do what she want. She refuse to have interview. She did not talk about JR—whatever the fuck his name is. She—personally—I don't think she like him very much. I don't think she like him.

Once a week he come inside the house? That's it? You tell me. Is that a woman who loves a man? His body? His—eh

Company? I don't think so. But, sobrino, she really love his poetry.

She love his poems so much, she put herself inside them. On purpose.

You understand? Everything she did, she did on purpose. Including you.

She don't want a baby, she no have a baby. But she did.

You don't have to pity her. You don't have to rescue her.

Doris do what she want. Doris live how she want.

*Can you say the same for you?*

**BRIAN**

I hear you, Tio.

**TIO OCTAVIO**

Don't put this money for Radio Nowhere. How much you have?

**BRIAN**

Uh...

I have 36,000 dollars.

**TIO OCTAVIO**

Why you don't record *your* music, eh?

When you was—when you were little and I speak on the phone to Doris, if you were playing, practicing? We would listen. No talking. Only listen.

Sometimes for like—too long. It was too long. But.

*(Brian laughing)*

I really like to hear that.

Why you don't take this money and record music. Or have a concert. With your name? Your nombre de familia. And your handsome face just like Tio Octavio, eh? Why not.

**BRIAN**



“Why not.” Yeah.

TIO OCTAVIO

What’s the problem? What’s the problem.  
I would like that so much. So much.

BRIAN

Yeah? *(sniffs)*

OCTAVIO

Absolutely. I love you.

BRIAN

Bye Tio. I love you too.

BRIAN

Mom used to say all the time

*(Doris’s voice: Todo lo que importa es imaginario.)*

Everything that matters is imaginary.

When I was little, I thought she was being *fun*, just playing with me. She was a wonderful mother, to play with and pretend with, she had a wild imagination. It was easy to make her laugh.

Then I got older and meaner. *Sadder*. And her imagination was embarrassing.

“Everything that matters is imaginary.” Gah, How babyish, how ridiculous.

*(Doris’s voice: Todo lo que importa es imaginario.)*

*(Brian adopts a teen voice and attitude.)*

*Money’s* not imaginary.

*War* is not imaginary.

*Being late for school* is not imaginary, okay? I’m in *trouble*. (We were always late.)

But then, when I started uh writing songs, in college—I would think about her alone in our house, reading, always reading, and I thought, oh! I get it, she means:

Stories are bigger than life. Stories are *better* than life.

The *realm* of the imagination is so much more alive and real than reality. Right? Like, a song about a broken heart is truer than a real, actual broken heart. Right? The real thing is so *much*—*clumsier* than the songs.

And, okay, yeah, I kinda—resented her worship of literature, because, well... yeah, but this made sense to me. That stories was more real for her. I accepted that, however else it made me feel.

But now.

Now I think I was wrong about that too. I think she was being literal. About reality.

Everything that matters is imaginary. She doesn't mean fiction. She means, reality is made from our collective imagination. We build reality by collectively imagining it.

Money *is* imaginary. A hundred-dollar bill is just a piece of paper we've all *agreed* is worth something. We're pretending it's worth what it's worth, so we can... function.

Eight o'clock is imaginary. It's a thing the whole world pretends together, so we can make plans and organize our lives. The twelve hour day is a collective fantasy that helps us.

Cleveland is imaginary. The buildings and the people are real, but its Clevelandness is a story.

And what is war but the imagination of two sides fighting with real bombs.

Todo lo que importa es imaginario.

Yeah. I think what she meant is, imaginary things aren't fake, they're something we participate in. My mom was *deliberate* with her imagination. Yeah. She was really deliberate.

I'm sitting here, looking at these nails. They're ugly and old. They're decaying. They're so... small.

*(guitar drops into a tender, folky lullaby)*

Everything that matters is imaginary,  
All that matters is imaginary,  
For something else to matter, just imagine something else  
For someone else to matter, just imagine someone else.

*(Speaking shifts to singing, softly.)*

♪~♪

All that matters is imaginary  
All that matters is imaginary  
To make someone else matter just imagine someone else  
Like you  
Like you

Like you  
Don't forget to imagine you, too.

Todo lo que importa es imaginario  
Todo lo que importa es imaginario  
Para cambiar lo que quieres  
Solo imaginalo

All that matters is imaginary  
All that matters is imaginary  
To make someone else matter  
Just imagine someone else  
Like you  
Like you  
Like you

Don't forget to imagine you, too.  
Don't forget to imagine you, too.

*(When the song is over...)*

**BRIAN**

Thank you for all your contributions to the Radio Nowhere telethon. My name is-- Brian Elias Mendoza White.

(radio static intensifies and then clicks off)

*End of play.*

♪ *upbeat theme music playing* ♪

**JONATHAN:** Thank you for listening to this performance of Hear/Now, Keen Company's Season of Audio Theater. If you've enjoyed what you have heard so far, hit the subscribe button in your podcast app and please take a moment to rate us and leave a review. This will help Keen connect to more audio play lovers like you. You've just listened to "Radio Nowhere" by Kate Cortesi, directed by Taylor Reynolds. Starring Alfredo Narciso as Cleveland neighbors and callers from around the world. George Salazar as DJ Anonymous. Amelia

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