

MY HEART FOR A KIDNEY

By Michael Radice © 2000

The Players

TONY BALDIZZI (Baldeetsie), late-fifties
PASSENGER, male in early-thirties

AFRIKA (Affreeka), mid-twenties
NURSE, mid-twenties

The Settings

The settings include: a cab on the streets of Cleveland, Ohio; a nurse's station at St. John's Hospital; and a nurse's station at General Children's Hospital. The stage requirements are minimal. They include a car, which can be represented by nothing but four chairs; tables for the nurses' stations; and two small coolers for the kidneys.

The Time

The present, spring.

TONY

(TONY is leaning against his cab, CS. PASSENGER, dressed in a suit, is standing outside the car. PASSENGER is stoic, silent, and almost motionless throughout the play. Unless indicated, TONY regularly addresses PASSENGER.)

I know what you're thinkin'. Big fat over-the-valley guy drivin' a cab and all. You're thinkin' he must have been laid off from the plant or somethin'. He can't be worth much. Well, let me tell ya. I've been drivin' this cab for 25 years. Me and my wife raised two kids in a split-level in the suburbs. I done okay. (Points) See that BP station? My son works for BP downtown. You know him? Joey. Joey Baldizzi. Everybody knows my Joey. He's the head maintenance guy for the 30th, 31st, AND 32nd floors in that BP skyscraper downtown. Worked his way up he did.

(The cell phone rings. TONY answers it and talks into it.)

TONY Con't

Yeah, what? (Listens) Where? (To PASSENGER) It's so damn hard to hear on these things. (Into phone) General Children's Hospital? (Listens) East Side? University Circle? (Listens) Oh yeah, I know where... (Listens) Sorry. I ain't hardly never go to the East Side. (To PASSENGER) I live on the West Side. Here in Cleveland, people on the West Side stay on the West Side. People on the East Side stay on the East Side. You know your place in Cleveland. You don't cross the river unless your going downtown to a game. On my side of town, we got them mills and the white people. On the East Side, they got them museums, their orchestra, and street names that sound like they was named by that English guy Shakespeare. (More)

TONY Con't

I don't go over there much. (Into phone) Yeah. Okay. Pick up at St. Johns Hospital on the West

Side and drop off at ... (Listens) Yeah. I know it's a mess over there at the Circle. Them roads go round and round and shit. I used to live over there when I was a kid. (Listens) Okay.

(TONY hangs up the phone and moves toward the car. He addresses PASSENGER.)

TONY Con't
This is a hospital pickup. It's right over there. (Points)

(TONY and PASSENGER get in the car. PASSENGER gets in the backseat.)

TONY Con't
We lived there once, in Murray Hill -- over by where I'm taking this pickup. We moved there from Mistretta, a little village in the middle of Sicily. They call old Murray Hill Little Italy now. I don't know why. Ain't no Italians live there no more. Yeah, I know what you're thinkin'. The streets are lined with Italian shops and restaurants and shit. There's even an Italian funeral home over there. But I'm telling you it's like an Italian museum now. The Italians? They stand around in those white aprons with the sauce painted on 'em just for show. I'm tellin' you the truth. I'm an honest guy. All them Italians live in the suburbs now. And the canoli in the bakery? Made in Chinatown on 35th. It's gone now. The way things was. Ain't nothin' but fags live there no more. I don't go there no more, to the East Side, if you know what I mean.

(TONY starts the engine. It turns over on the third try. He addresses the car.)

TONY Con't
That's my baby. Good girl.

(TONY makes the physical motions of driving the stationary car. He addresses PASSENGER)

TONY Con't
My son Joey. He lives on the West Side. He married a Pollock named Marianne. Can you believe that? Said he couldn't find no Italian girl. Liar! Marianne? She ain't so bad, I guess. I live with them now since my wife died two months ago. God rest her soul. She died of cancer. She lost one of 'em.

(TONY crosses his chest. He then sadly and somewhat unawaringly cups his left hand in front of his left chest, to demonstrate holding a breast. He is quiet for a moment, briefly holding the imaginary breast while driving with the other hand. He then becomes aware of what he's doing. He turns the wheel suddenly to stay in his lane.)

TONY Con't
Oh. I'm sorry. I knows you don't want to hear all this. Well, anyways, Marianne give us two bambinos: Maria and Louie. They call me papa. (Proudly) I'm their papa. They keep my mind off stuff. You know. ... Louie's only two, but already he's got quite an arm. Better than his old

man was at that age. Outa diapers, that Louie. Finally! Maria? She's in the first grade. Teacher says she can't concentrate and won't stay in her seat or somethin'. I think the kid eats too much sugar, that's all, but the psychologist at the school thinks the kid's got a problem or somethin'. The only problem she got is that she don't listen.

(TONY turns the steering wheel hard and lurches.)

TONY Con't

Sorry 'bout that. Almost missed my turn. There's the hospital over there. (Points) A new one. Oh, and I have another son. Sammy. I don't know where he lives no more, though. I had to kick him out two years ago on account of, well, he was doin' it with guys. I told him he weren't my son no more. He weren't no man. It wasn't my fault or nothin'. His mother did it to him. She treated him like a girl. The whole thing's her fault. I wouldn't be missin' him right now if it weren't for her. But, Joey! He lettered all four years in high school football, and we like the same things, ya know, like baseball and bowlin'. Why, he punched a hole in the door when Modell moved the Browns to Baltimore. No shit!

(TONY demonstrates the punch, the car swerves, a horn is heard.)

TONY Con't

Cost \$42 for a new door. Can you believe that? Ripped my shirt tryin' to fix that door. Marianne done buy me a new one. She takes care of me now. My wife died, ya know. (Pause) We're here now. Claudia said to pull up to the emergency entrance. I hope the person ain't too sick. I never help nobody get into the cab.

(TONY stops the car, turns it off, lays on the horn, waits, does it again, and yells out the window.)

TONY Con't

Hey you. I'm here to pickup Afrika. Is that you? (To PASSENGER) She's tellin' me to shut up and come on inside. Hope I don't have to help nobody.

(Lights come up AFRIKA CSR behind a counter. TONY and PASSENGER approach her.)

TONY Con't

I got a call to pick up somebody named Afrika. She ready?

AFRIKA

I'm Afrika. And "she" is these.

(AFRIKA pulls out two containers resembling beer coolers. She sets them on the counter.)

TONY

I'm deliverin' beer across town or somethin'?

AFRIKA

They aren't beers. They're kidneys.

TONY

Fried or baked?

AFRIKA

You don't eat these. These are human kidneys. You're to deliver them to Children's General Hospital in University Circle. Didn't they tell you?

TONY

Shouldn't these be goin' by ambulance or somethin'? I mean, what am I supposed to do with these things?

AFRIKA

The first thing you AREN'T supposed to do with them is eat them. They'll be fine in these containers until you get there.

TONY

You're sure these are real kidney's? Like, for humans or somethin'?

AFRIKA

Look. The hospital's paying triple the normal rate. Do you want this run or not?

TONY

(TONY reaches for the containers and takes them. He speaks resigningly.)

Sure. Why not? Give 'em here.

(Lights go off on AFRIKA. TONY runs trepidly to the car. PASSENGER follows. TONY sets the containers on the front seat and digs for his keys. He addresses PASSENGER as both get in.)

TONY Con't

I gotta get them to the East Side fast. Two kids may die. Can't screw this up.

(TONY fumbles for the keys and drops them on the ground. He retrieves the keys and enters the car. He addresses the car after it doesn't start.)

TONY Con't

Oh c'mon honey. Start. (Tries again) C'mon baby. C'mon now.

(The car starts. TONY begins driving and resumes addressing PASSENGER.)

TONY Con't

Now. The fastest way is to take I-90 east. Yeah. Then pick up Carnegie downtown. Or maybe I should stick with 90 to Martin Luther King. No. No. I'll get lost in the Circle. I'll stick with Carnegie. The Circle is a mess. Roads go all round and round. I'll get lost. I never go to the East Side no more. I gotta be careful, 'cuz they might lose two kids if screw this up. Now, we've made it to Bradley, and we're headin' to 90. Okay. Doin' good.

(TONY fans his hand in front of his mouth, as if to fan in air.)

TONY Con't

Breathe. Breathe. I saw this on Marianne's Shirley MacLaine video once. You should try it. Really calms you down.

(TONY dials the cellphone. He speaks into it angrily.)

TONY Con't

You didn't tell me I was pickin' up two kidneys. Why didn't you tell me? (Listens) You're damn right I wouldn't have done it! What about Carl? The way he drinks, you'd think he'd want to be around two workin' kidneys. (To Passenger) Damn that Sammy. I keep loosin' him. He was only five years old and he run off. He just wouldn't do what I told him. I gotta get back to drivin'. I see 90. Damn. A red light. (Pause) Ever since that shoppin' center went in, the wait for a light has been as long as a meter maid trying to get into heaven. (Pause) Finally. I90. I90. There's the... It's fuckin' closed! The damn ramp is closed. How'm I goin' to get on 90? Ah, forget it. I'll go down the ramp anyway. I'll just go around this police barrier. The ramp is nothin' but dirt, but I'll make it. I don't see no cops. If they stop me, I'll explain everything. I'll just drive around this....

(TONY's body moves to indicate a bumpy ride. He puts his arm on the kidney containers to keep them safe.)

TONY Con't

Oh shit. I'm such an idiot. Can't I do nothin' right?

(TONY's body moves to indicate a smoother ride.)

TONY Con't

Okay. I made it. Do ya think I should stop and take a look at 'em? No. No time. The hospital knows what it's doing. I'm sure they're packed fine.

(TONY turns on his dashboard speedtrap radar detector and taps it lovingly. He lunges back in his seat as he floors the engine. The engine sound is heard.)

TONY Con't

Don't wanna get caught by no cops. Ever been caught by the cops? Them tickets is expensive. A pig took my cab once. Had too many tickets. Took me days to get this baby back.

(He floors the engine. The engine sound can be heard.)

TONY Con't

This is important, thought. Gotta do it. Maybe they'll leave me be this time. ... Open road. On a roll here. Not a lot of traffic. That's good. You know, I gotta get these kidneys to the Hospital. Two kids is waitin' for 'em. They're probably all sick and stuff, and their moms is pacing the floor with their dads. When my Sammy was five, he was in the hospital, and let me tell you, that corridor has a median strip 'cuz a me. I paced it back and forth. Back and forth. You know, it wasn't my fault. A five-year-old kid is too young to go through that kinda shit. Sammy's mother stayed in the room with him, reading him Doctor Seuss. Red Eggs and Bacon, or somethin' like that. His favorite story. But he just lay there. Tubes in and shit. He was barely breathin'. His little eyes open, starin' up at me expectin' me to do somethin'. (Louder) I just couldn't stay in there. There weren't no air in there. There was nothin' I could do. It weren't my fault. He shouldn't 'a took off like that. I told him a hundred times not to run off like that. He never listens.

(TONY swerves the wheel with one hand and grabs the kidney cases with the other. Squealing tires can be heard. He yells out the window.)

TONY Con't

You piece of shit. Watch where you're goin'.

(TONY releases the kidney cases, blows the horn, and pounds the dash.)

TONY Con't

Idiot. We got the worst drivers here in Cleveland. Geez. (Pause) Oh. Cuz you might never been to Cleveland before, there's downtown (Points). That's the Terminal Tower, and that's the new baseball stadium. Indians play there, you know. They ain't so bad these days. I used to take the boys down to old Municipal Stadium when they was growin' up. Joey loved them games, but Sammy hated 'em. I used to have to make Sammy go. I figured he'd come around eventually. Boys do. He just needed a push, I figured. But he was some little push. Every time I turned around, he was missin' from my side. He'd just take off without sayin' nothin'. I'd find him down in the stadium somewhere -- usually where they sell them T-shirts. One time, I found him with one of them big foam "we're number one" things on his head. You know, like one of these. (Demonstrates) I guess he thought it was a hat or somethin'. That's how he was. Never quite right that one. Well, at the next game, I put Joey in charge of him. He and Joey were close, you know. Well, it didn't seem to matter. Sammy took off anyway, and Joey went lookin' for him. I was too pissed at the little shit to do it myself. Joey come back after a long time. Said he couldn't find his brother. I told him to go look again. Next time he come back, he just stood there. I asked him where was Sammy, and he just stood there and stared at me. He just stared at me, his mouth half open. He didn't look right. I had to shake it outa him. He said (Chokes up) "Sammy. It's Sammy. He's ..."

(The cellphone rings. TONY answers it.)

TONY Con't

Yeah, I'm here. What d'ya want? (Listens) Almost there. About seven minutes. I'm comin' up on University Circle. I just passed the playhouse.

(TONY hangs up, addresses PASSENGER, and points out the car window to DSL.)

TONY Con't

This is where they took Sammy. The Cleveland Clinic. See. It's right over there. All them buildings. It was that one. The red one. He was there a frickin' month. You see, Sammy wandered into the stadium parking lot and got hit by (Chokes up), well. Damn that asshole They should'a let me kill him for what he did to my son. The kid was only five fuckin' years old. (Gathers himself) Here's the Circle I told you about. (To himself) Okay, now stay straight through here. (Turns wheel) Keep Severance Hall to the left, and turn on Euclid. Okay. Now go through this light. (Turns wheel) Done. Turn right on... Shit! A fuckin' roadblock. (To PASSENGER) There's the hospital over there. (Points) Damn! Those kidneys'll melt by the time I get there. I'll go 'round the block.

(TONY lays on the horn and yells out the car window.)

TONY Con't

Get outa my way you faggot! (To PASSENGER) Okay, now we'll turn right. Turning. (Turns wheel) Okay. Now, go straight. Oh shit. A one-way street. There's the hospital. (Points) It's just right there. I could almost walk, but I don't want to do it with these kidneys. Well, to hell with the one-way street. No cops or cars around. I can make it.

(TONY looks around for the police, continuously beeping the horn as he proceeds.)

TONY Con't

Made it!

(The lights come up on CSR. NURSE is visible behind a counter. A small table is to her right. TONY and PASSENGER get out of the car. TONY carries the kidneys and sets them on the counter. PASSENGER follows but hangs back. TONY addresses NURSE.)

TONY Con't

Here they are.

NURSE

(She casually points to the nearby table.)

Great. Just put them over there. Thank you.

TONY

Don't you need these things right away? I mean, ain't the kids diein'? Shouldn't these be put somewhere where they's cold or somethin'?

NURSE

Nobody's going to die. Somebody will be over here to pick up them up soon.

TONY

(Upset)

What kind'a attitude's that? My kid ain't gonna make it if ya don't hurry. He needs these. It's my fault!

NURSE

(Sarcastically)

Your kid? You fit the description of the kidney cabbie, and those look like they could be kidneys.

TONY

(TONY picks up the cases)

I'll take 'em in myself. Them kids have to have these. They're parents must be...

NURSE

(NURSE steps in front of the forward-moving TONY.)

Slow down Mister. You aren't going anywhere with those. Those are research kidneys. They're just gonna cut them apart. They aren't for anybody's body. Now, you give those to me before I call security.

(TONY hands the cases to NURSE. NURSE picks up the money and shoves it toward TONY. TONY looks at the money and pauses. TONY exits without the money and runs toward the car. PASSENGER follows. PASSENGER stands next to the car as TONY opens the door and begins to get in. TONY addresses PASSENGER.)

TONY

(To PASSENGER)

I gotta find Sammy. I gotta find my baby. It's my fault. He got away from me.

(PASSENGER smiles and nods his head approvingly. He mildly waves his hand to tell TONY to go on.)

TONY Con't

Ain't you gettin' in? We gotta go.

(PASSENGER smiles, turns to exit. Lights dim on passenger as he exits. TONY gets into the car.)

END OF PLAY