

A CHANGE OF HEART

A one-act play by

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A CHANGE OF HEART

Characters

(in order of appearance)

HEART*, any gender/age/ethnicity, moves well, good sense of rhythm

DONNA, 35, female, any ethnicity, heart transplant recipient, feeling confusion

ZACH, 19, male, any ethnicity, heart donor

LEVI, 30s-40s, male, any ethnicity, Donna's fiancé

JAMIE*, 25, female, wedding planner, bubbly

*POSSIBLE DOUBLE CASTING:

For a production with four actors, The same actor plays HEART & JAMIE

Casting Flexibility Note: It is permissible to switch genders for any of the already-gendered characters for ease in casting, and make pronoun changes and slight name changes through the script to reflect that change, i.e. Donna and Levi could be a same sex couple, Jamie could be male.

TIME:

The Present

PLACE:

An open space that represents many places

SYNOPSIS:

Is a second chance a lifeline when it doesn't feel like your life anymore? Donna is a heart transplant patient with strange cravings and desires, and seems a stranger to her fiancé and herself. Zach, her donor, was a teenage boy who had barely even begun. A story about the struggle for self-acceptance and moving forward with the hand we're dealt.

Set and Prop Requirements:

A couch or chairs, perhaps a table. A frame drum possibly for HEART. An electronic tablet. Glass of water and pills container. A steering wheel. Something to represent a hospital bed. Food bowls and spoon. A magazine.

Gender/Ethnic Requirements:

Any race or ethnicity for any of the characters.

Author's note:

If having HEART play a live drum is not feasible, sound recordings of heartbeats can be used instead. HEART does not have to be an accomplished musician – using a simple frame drum and mallet is fine. What's important is the tempo of the heart.

(HEART is alone on stage. They take a breath.

They begin to drum, or drum music begins. It is a fast, urgent rhythm. Perhaps some rock music plays.

ZACH enters. He is holding a steering wheel.

ZACH and HEART acknowledge one another. They walk in tandem. The drumbeat amps up in speed and intensity.

ZACH yells out.

A blinding light. Sounds of a crash. ZACH falls to the ground. Perhaps sound of anxious voices or screams.

The Heartbeat intensifies.

ZACH sits up. HEART and ZACH reach for each other)

HEART

Don't go!

ZACH

Don't go!

(ZACH and HEART embrace.

LIGHT SHIFT TO DONNA and LEVI. She is in a hospital bed. LEVI is holding her hand.

SOUND CUE: weak, faint heartbeat)

LEVI

Don't go!

(LIGHT SHIFT. Donna sits up and addresses the audience)

DONNA

Every breath is a struggle. My body is shutting down. I sense Levi near me...touching me... too much effort to reply. The pull of the void. Something delicious there, waiting. Pillowy darkness. Comforting darkness.

LEVI

Donna, please, hang in there with me!

(LIGHT SHIFT. HEART rhythm is getting slower. HEART and ZACH moving away from each other. DONNA sits up with a gasp. HEART and ZACH walk towards DONNA, who gets out of her bed and joins them.

HEART pulls away from ZACH. HEART beat becomes stronger.

Faint heartbeat recording begins to be overpowered by HEART's steady drumming pulse until the faint heartbeat disappears.

ZACH moves to another part of the stage and sits quietly in a chair.

HEART and DONNA face each other)

Do you want me? HEART

Delicious darkness... DONNA

Do you want me? HEART

Don't leave me! LEVI

(DONNA makes her decision and embraces heart. Bright light on them. They meld together. Heartbeat is steady. ZACH stands up)

Whoa! Where you goin'? ZACH

Don't be a stranger. HEART

(ZACH and DONNA stare at one another, perhaps circle each other warily. HEART is in the middle. LEVI is still at Donna's bedside. Steady, strong heartbeat.

LIGHT SHIFT. We leave the hospital space. HEART EXITS)

DONNA
(to the audience)
Don't be a stranger. There's nothing stranger than feeling like another person is inhabiting your body.

(LEVI walks DONNA to a chair and table. ZACH is hanging around)

LEVI
I made oatmeal with berries. Your favorite.

ZACH
Ugh.

DONNA
Ugh.

LEVI
Ugh??

DONNA
I want bacon. Sausage.

ZACH
Yes!

LEVI
Very funny.

DONNA
I mean it.

LEVI
Donna. We're vegetarians!

ZACH
(fake gags)

DONNA
Bacon! Sausage!

LEVI
I can go to the store and get the fake veggie kind...

DONNA/ZACH
Bleech!

LEVI
Maybe it's the anti-rejection drugs you're on...

DONNA
I don't think so.

LEVI

What's going on? It's been weeks of this.

DONNA

It's this feeling...someone else is inside me...

LEVI

The doctor said...

DONNA

They're not in my body!

LEVI

The doctor said it's your imagination.

DONNA

It would be nice if my own fiancé believed me.

LEVI

I believe you believe it.

DONNA

Cop out.

LEVI

You didn't sleep well last night.

DONNA

Weird dreams. A red car...a crash...flying...

(ZACH reacts)

ZACH

Flying!

LEVI

Please. Eat the oatmeal and we can talk about this later.

(Donna takes a spoonful or two then pushes the bowl away)

DONNA

No!

ZACH

Atta girl.

It doesn't taste good anymore.

DONNA

Donna...I am really trying here.

LEVI

I know.

DONNA

The wedding planner is coming over at noon.

LEVI

Woah, what?

ZACH

Today?

DONNA

Eww. You're engaged to him?

ZACH

I told you about this.

LEVI

(touches him) I'm sorry.

DONNA

(DONNA kisses LEVI)

Ugh! I'm straight, dude.

ZACH

Maybe we should cancel.

DONNA

(ZACH circles LEVI)

Not exactly my type, but...

ZACH

(ZACH touches Levi's hair)

Nice hair.

We waited months for this appointment.

LEVI

DONNA

Why don't we take a hike instead? It's a beautiful day.

LEVI

Bacon? A hike? Who ARE you?

DONNA

I don't know! That's what I'm trying to tell you!

(LEVI furiously gathers the breakfast things together)

LEVI

How about a nap?

(LEVI EXITS. LIGHT SHIFT. DONNA is sleeping. Music in. HEART ENTERS. A slow dance between ZACH, HEART, and DONNA. They break out in turn to speak to the audience)

HEART

It's different here. Smaller. Cozy. Clean. All the parts are new to me. We're still getting used to each other.

ZACH

I can't believe I'm in this old woman. I've got to get her on the program. I wonder if she can ski. Motorbike. Smoke pot?

DONNA

You know what it feels like? Like two people sharing the same body. Try to imagine that. Like having an alien inside you.

ZACH

Best movie ever.

HEART

Have you two officially met?

(MUSIC stops. HEART brings ZACH and DONNA together. They take each other's measure, and are now able to converse with each other directly while in the dream state. DONNA gasps)

DONNA

You.

ZACH

Am I asleep?

HEART

The long sleep.

DONNA

You're in...in... (*points to heart then herself*) me!

ZACH

It's not like I asked for it. My parents agreed to donate stuff. (*beat*) I thought it would be my clothes. Guitar. Not my heart.

DONNA

They did a good thing. You did a good thing.

ZACH

(*to heart*)

How long do I have to stay here?

HEART

It's up to her.

DONNA

It is?

ZACH

There was so much I was going to do.

DONNA

Like what?

ZACH

Drive the entire country and stop at every greasy food joint.

DONNA

Ah ha!

ZACH

Bacon, baby. Ooh, and some chili dogs!

DONNA

I'm vegetarian.

ZACH

Not. Any. More.

DONNA

What else?

I wanted to hike up Mount Shasta. ZACH

Not my thing. DONNA

Maybe it is. I'm you now. ZACH

Forever? DONNA

(shrugs) ZACH

How old were you? DONNA

Nineteen. ZACH

Nineteen! I have a teenage boy inside me? DONNA

You're like my mom's age. ZACH

I'm 35. DONNA

They give hearts to people that ancient? ZACH

Hey! DONNA

Just kidding. ZACH

Tell her about the girl. HEART

(JAMIE ENTERS the dream)

DONNA

There was a girl?

ZACH

...Nothing to tell. I liked her, she didn't like me.

(JAMIE pats ZACH on the head affectionately)

DONNA

Being a teenager is hard.

ZACH

She wasn't one.

DONNA

Older woman!

ZACH

She's twenty-five. Beautiful. Smart. Funny.

HEART

He loved her since he was seven years old.

ZACH

Tattletale.

HEART

She was his babysitter.

ZACH

When I was little! She'd put on Motown and we'd dance around the living room.

(JAMIE and ZACH re-enact this. HEART claps along)

She'd swing me around and around in the air and I flew. *(he remembers his death)* Just like when I –

(the dancing and swinging stop)

DONNA

Red car...

ZACH

I loved that car. Worked on it myself for two years.

HEART
Broke me to see it smashed up like that.

ZACH
Flew through the air. Then...darkness.

(JAMIE EXITS)

DONNA
The pillowy darkness...

ZACH
Then...this.

DONNA
Now what?

(They both look at HEART)

HEART
We dance.

(they dance.

LIGHT SHIFT. Music stops. DONNA is still napping. LEVI ENTERS with pills and a class of water. HEART EXITS. ZACH thumbs through a magazine)

LEVI
Donna, wake up!

DONNA
How long was I out?

LEVI
An hour or so.

DONNA
Are you still mad at me?

LEVI
Take your meds.

(DONNA swallows the pills and drinks the water)

The wedding planner is here. You okay to...

DONNA
Give me a minute.

LEVI
Donna. Are we –

DONNA
I don't know who I am anymore.

LEVI
Then I'll keep reminding you till you do.

DONNA
Have I ever thanked you...

LEVI
Not really. *(lovingly)* Fix your hair.

(JAMIE enters)

JAMIE
Knock, knock! Am I disturbing...

LEVI
No, it's fine. I'll go prepare some snacks.

(LEVI EXITS. ZACH stands up in shock)

ZACH
Jamie! It's you! *(To DONNA)* It's her!

DONNA
Have we...met before?

JAMIE
I don't think so.

ZACH
Kiss her!

DONNA
I could swear that I...never mind.

(JAMIE holds out her hand for handshake, but ZACH propels DONNA into a hug with JAMIE, so it's a Donna 'sandwich')

ZACH

You smell so good.

JAMIE

Oh, my. Hugging. Okay! I do like to be on a friends basis with my clients. Shall we...?

DONNA

Yes. Of course. I'm sorry. Please, sit.

JAMIE

Levi and I got a lot done while you were recuperating...how are you feeling?

DONNA

Weird. Definitely weird. I was just having this dream...I think that you...never mind.

JAMIE

Planning a wedding is so stressful. That's why I'm here to help!

(JAMIE scrolls through her tablet, showing Donna images)

JAMIE

Tell me which ones you like the best.

ZACH

Tell her you love her.

DONNA

I love the ideas you came up with.

(ZACH moves close to JAMIE)

JAMIE

I like to make people happy. It's your special day. Now, about the music –

DONNA, ZACH

Motown.

JAMIE

Really? Wow. That's my favorite too.

ZACH

Bingo!

DONNA

Are you sure we haven't –

JAMIE

It's so strange. I feel like I know you too, but how?

ZACH

You're even more beautiful than I remember.

JAMIE

Did you decide on your gown?

ZACH

No! Don't talk about clothes!

DONNA

I had...before...but now with this gigantic scar down my chest...

JAMIE

You're a walking miracle.

DONNA

Sometimes.

JAMIE

Do you know who the donor...

DONNA

We're not allowed to know. Strict rules. But I've been having these dreams...feeling someone...I recognize them in my dream, but when I wake up...gone. *(beat)* I'm sorry. I'm sure you're not interested in this at all.

(JAMIE grabs DONNA's hand)

ZACH

Yes! Now we're getting somewhere!

JAMIE

I love metaphysics. Past lives. I'm fascinated with that stuff. Where we go when we die.

ZACH

Have I got news for you.

DONNA

Not my thing... but there is definitely something...someone else in here.

ZACH

Duh.

JAMIE

Wow!

DONNA

Whoever gave me this heart, a part of them is still imprinted in it – inhabiting me.

JAMIE

Fascinating. You said you dream about him?

DONNA

I think so. He's [tall/short], [color] hair, [color] eyes, really athletic...

JAMIE

No name?

DONNA

Not yet. Oh! There was a red car, I think. And something about...Mount Shasta?

JAMIE

Red car??

DONNA

Yes, why?

JAMIE

And about this tall?

ZACH

Put it together, Jamie...

DONNA

You know how dreams are. Something about a... babysitter? Flying?

JAMIE

Oh my god.

ZACH

Ding ding ding! We have a winner.

JAMIE

I know who your donor was.

DONNA

What?

JAMIE

I shouldn't say anything. Should I?

DONNA

Yes. No. I don't know. Yes.

JAMIE

Look, I can't be 100% sure, but there was a death in my town. This boy I used to babysit when he was little. He was driving his red car and there was a terrible accident-

DONNA

How old was he?

JAMIE

Nineteen.

DONNA

What was his name?

JAMIE

Zach.

ZACH

I love how you say my name.

DONNA

Zach.

JAMIE

I was devastated for his parents. Their only son.

ZACH

Don't talk about that stuff.

JAMIE

They told my parents they donated his heart and some other organs.

ZACH

Thanks a lot, mom and dad.

DONNA

I'm so sorry for the loss of your friend.

JAMIE

I always looked forward to bumping into him. He was such a sweet boy. And grew up into a very handsome -

ZACH

Wait, what? Talk about that.

JAMIE

I was always kind of hoping that, now that we were adults...but he never...and I was older, so I didn't think that...

ZACH

You're killing me.

DONNA

In my dream, he said...

JAMIE

What??

DONNA

...I wish you had asked him out.

JAMIE

So do I.

ZACH

I can't believe I died a virgin.

JAMIE

In the dream, did he...

DONNA

He loved you.

JAMIE

He did?

ZACH

Uh, yeah.

(JAMIE indicates DONNA's chest area)

JAMIE

Would it be okay if...would you mind if I...

DONNA

Please.

(JAMIE puts her hand on DONNA's chest. ZACH is overcome. ALL three feel the physical attraction. ZACH is physically close with them as well. DONNA runs her hand through JAMIE's hair)

DONNA

May I...I think he wants me to...or maybe it's me...I...

JAMIE

(nods assent)

(JAMIE and DONNA pull in to kiss. LEVI enters with a tray of goodies.*

*(*based on actor comfort level, the kiss can happen, or LEVI can enter right before it does)*

LEVI

What the hell?

(JAMIE and DONNA break apart. ZACH falls to the floor in frustration)

ZACH

Dude!!!

JAMIE

I'm so sorry.

LEVI

Does somebody want to explain this?

DONNA

I don't think I can.

JAMIE

It's my fault. I thought she was...somebody else.

LEVI

You're supposed to plan the wedding, not steal the bride.

JAMIE

This was so unprofessional of me.

LEVI

Ya think??

DONNA

Levi! It was totally my fault. There was an attraction...I can't explain it...

Are you a lesbian? Bi?

LEVI

No!

DONNA

What happened was...

JAMIE

I don't want to hear it. Your services are no longer needed.

LEVI

Of course. I'm so sorry. Donna, I –

JAMIE

It's okay.

DONNA

No it's not!

ZACH

Please don't leave me a bad review.

JAMIE

Why are you still here?

LEVI

(JAMIE gathers her things)

Sorry. So sorry.

JAMIE

No!

ZACH

(JAMIE EXITS. LEVI and DONNA look at each other)

What the hell, Donna? Have you been cheating on me?

LEVI

No! I'm not myself.

DONNA

LEVI

No shit. It's been weeks of this now. It's like you came home from the hospital a different person.

DONNA

That's what I've been trying to tell you.

ZACH

You're not a very good listener.

LEVI

I can't deal with this.

DONNA

She thinks she knew the donor...it was a boy she liked...something came over us, like he was pushing us...

LEVI

This is such crap.

DONNA

I know it sounds crazy, but -

LEVI

So are you going to sleep around with everyone this mystical donor knew? Hooking up with random strangers? With women??

DONNA

Levi!!

LEVI

Don't! I've been patient. Taking care of you through your illness, the hospital stay, rehab, and this is how..??!!

DONNA

Please don't be mad.

LEVI

How can I trust you?

DONNA

I don't know!

LEVI

That's not an answer! Tell me. Right now. Do you still want to get married?

Oh, shit.

(beat)

The person I was...did. Very much.

...And the person you are now?

That's the thing. I don't know who that is yet.

It's just a stupid pump.

(HEART ENTERS)

Hey!

You didn't magically become the donor. They're dead. You're alive.

Please try to understand what it's like.

I can never understand that, because I don't have your experience. But I do understand when someone doesn't love me anymore. *(beat)* Tell me I'm wrong. Tell me to stay.

I ---

Perfect.

(DONNA takes off her engagement ring and gives it to LEVI)

Levi. Thank you.

You broke my heart.

(HEART reacts. LEVI exits. DONNA touches her heart area)

DONNA

Zach. I feel you here. I'm wide awake. Please, let me see you.

ZACH

(to HEART) Can I?

HEART

Do you want to?

ZACH

I kinda messed up her life.

(LIGHT SHIFT. ZACH reveals himself to DONNA)

DONNA

Hello.

ZACH

Hi.

DONNA

You're real.

ZACH

Really dead.

DONNA

But not.

HEART

Humans know so little.

ZACH

I feel bad. What happened with your guy.

DONNA

Don't.

HEART

He deserves love too.

DONNA

This isn't the time for me to give to others.

ZACH

I don't get it.

DONNA

I need to integrate. The best parts of you with the best parts of me.

HEART

I'll keep them all here. Tell her your best parts.

ZACH

I don't know what they are.

HEART

Yes, you do.

(beat)

ZACH

I like to travel. Try new things. I get afraid but I do stuff anyway. I love dogs. I'm not mean. I care about the little things. I love my mom and dad and my little sister.

(beat)

I want to go home.

HEART

You're breaking me.

DONNA

Me too. You should have had a long, full life. You should have climbed a million mountains, eaten all the greasy foods, driven the country in your car...married Jamie.

ZACH

Are you trying to make me feel worse?

DONNA

No.

ZACH

Feels like it.

DONNA

I'm trying to say goodbye. You gave me life again, but it can't be your life. It has to be mine. Whatever 'mine' means now.

ZACH

But...where do I go?

DONNA

I don't know. But I bet it's peaceful. And this isn't. For you or me.

ZACH

I don't want to be dead.

DONNA

I know. You and your parents did such a beautiful thing here, Zach. You gave me another chance to live. I don't want to blow it. I won't.

ZACH

Everyone's going to forget about me.

DONNA

No. You'll live on. In my better choices. I have you to thank for that.

ZACH

I don't know what to do.

DONNA

Come here.

(They embrace. HEART beats loudly. DONNA points somewhere. LIGHT grows brighter)

DONNA

Look.

ZACH

It's light.

DONNA

Go there. I'll take good care of your Heart, I promise.

(ZACH turns to HEART)

ZACH

Dude...

HEART

(makes the heart gesture with their fingers)

ZACH

Bye, Donna.

See ya, Zach. DONNA

(ZACH walks into the light and EXITS)

I ache. HEART

I feel it. DONNA

Now what? HEART

I want to sit and breathe for a while. Just – be. Get to know you. DONNA

Are you really going to be good to me? HEART

Yes. DONNA

We're all alone. HEART

But not lonely. *(beat)* I'm not who I was. DONNA

You're someone new. HEART

Someone new. Let's find out who. DONNA

(DONNA and HEART integrate and start walking. Heartbeat is strong and steady)

END OF PLAY