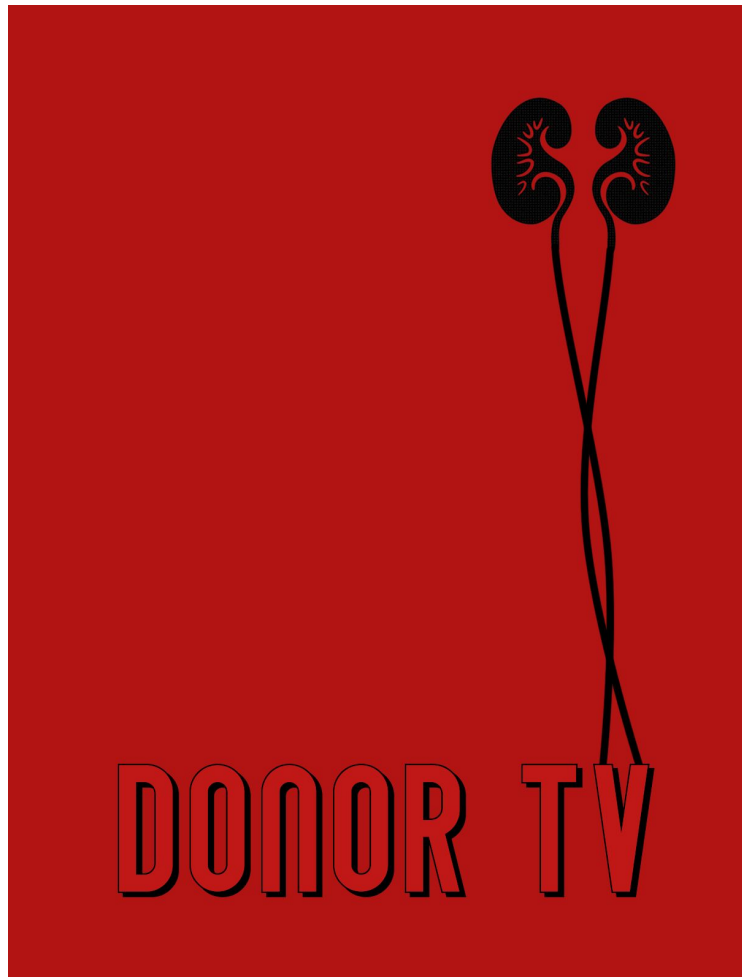


Series bible

By
Dawn Johnston



dawn@dawnjohnston.ca

Donor TV

Donor TV is a one-hour, darkly comic drama that pushes just past reality into a slightly more provocative universe. Reality television hasn't quite found this idea, but you know it will.

Series Logline

On DONOR TV a blackballed TV producer is handed a reality show where ten desperate contestants compete to win an organ transplant.

Overview

The series focuses on the behind-the-scenes power struggles and manipulations of both the show's staff and the contestants. Each week Donor TV will follow parallel stories. One from behind-the-scenes, as producers try to win over religious and political protesters, deal with calculating colleagues and navigate the tricky moral territory of this bizarre world they've created. And one from in front of the cameras as the ten cast members exploit whatever they can to gain audience sympathy: sex appeal, humor, a dubious war record, a disability. All of them desperate to out-wit, out-play and sometimes literally out-last each other.

Producer Petra Cole's story forms the spine of the show as she struggles to steer the crazy ship she's taken on, her lifeline from four years of industry jail. What got her there? She'd love to know. But she can't afford to screw up.

Petra learns very quickly how easy it is to give up your ideals in pursuit of your goals. As the show builds steam, and she regains some clout, she has much farther to fall.

Pilot

Logline

The producer of a controversial new reality show must turn the tide of public opinion when their corporate partner threatens to pull out, ending the show before it even starts.

Summary

When a fringe television network asks Petra to develop the risky new show, they've literally tried everyone else. Desperate to get back in the game, she convinces herself that this show will be the best advertising organ donation ever had, and finds the angle. It will appeal to the same people who rubberneck at accidents, which is to say, almost everyone. They'll be "counting their blessings and looking for blood, every Tuesday at nine."

Fast forward to day one of Donor TV with Petra producing a show that's now hosted by her ex, Roger, a former soap opera star making a late-career "pivot" to reality show host. Her second in command is Watts, a hard-humored bulldozer. The two must tackle an immediate crisis when Hassan Khan, the new CEO of Tubbs Medical Center, wants to pull out of their

partnership in the face of loudly offended early public opinion. Tubbs Medical doesn't have the money or reputation to lose.

Determined to make this work, Petra convinces Hassan that she can turn things around by tracking down Jack Nolan, an ex-Olympic celebrity athlete who urgently needs a kidney. But when Petra tells Hassan she's got him, after Jack's already refused the offer (he has his own reasons for wanting to keep his life private), he knows she's lying. Hassan pulls out and the network cancels the show.

Petra visits Jack to break the news and they realize they both have something to gain from a partnership. She's convinced that his star power will turn public opinion around and bring back Tubbs Medical. Crossing her first moral line, she guarantees him a spot in the final three if he changes his mind. His health failing, and pressured by his worried teen daughter, he agrees.

To bring in Jack, the show has to get rid of someone. Watts suggests frumpy Dorothy, a harmless (boring) middle-aged housewife. But she surprises everyone with some manipulations of her own when she tricks cranky Stan into breaking a show rule. Stan is the first to go.

At the end of the pilot, Petra's back on the job, Donor TV is trending on social media and Watts is determined to find out how she got Jack. Before she can worry about that she gets disturbing news: Stan is dead.

Characters

Behind the scenes

PETRA COLE, late 40's, is a seasoned TV producer intent on producing a show that, no matter how crass, might actually do some good in the world. At least that's what she tells herself. She acts before thinking, which gets her in trouble. But she's also clever and passionate and expects the same of those around her.

Petra's ambition is very much tied to her previous show, a reality series she created and made a hit, but which she was fired from. She still has no idea why, even four years later. Her drive to succeed is also her weakness and she will reset her shaky moral compass many times in pursuit of her goals.

KEVIN "WATTS" WATERMAN, 30's, is Petra's second in command. He's a big guy, brutally honest, who loves his job. People find him difficult because he says what most people censor. He gets away with it because he knows what he's doing.

HASSAN KHAN (mid-40s) the new CEO of struggling Tubbs Medical Center who's been tasked with turning it around. He inherited the dubious partnership with Donor TV but Petra's charisma pulls him in. Hassan is as methodical as Petra is impulsive but there's something about her that he finds intriguing and hard to resist.

ROGER KANE (50s) the former soap opera heartthrob Dr. MacLaren, he was killed off (twice) years ago but still rides that fame. When he becomes integral to the show's success, Petra

must navigate Roger's meddling and his ego, without permanently damaging their relationship.

MIRA CHOWDHURY (30) is an ambitious woman whose rise in the industry is mainly hampered by her complete unwillingness to actually work. She's a bit of a drama queen who likes to stir the pot. If she spent as much energy working as she does avoiding it she might actually get where she thinks she deserves to be. Amateur psychologists might wonder if she has borderline personality disorder, or if she's just a narcissist.

GEORGIE CHAN (early 20s) is an eager young misfit on her first TV position as an assistant. After escaping a religious sect and now following her dreams, she makes ends meet by secretly eating her colleagues' leftovers, and dealing weed on the side.

DESMOND DUCHESNE(40s) Is the ebullient, socially anxious network executive in charge of reality tv for the obscure RISE Television Network. A wolf in sheep's clothing, and with obvious obsessive-compulsive quirks, his mission is to prove his worth to the only network that would hire him.

The contestants

JACK NOLAN (mid-30s) is a former Olympic superstar turned low-rent hardware store employee. Now a struggling single dad with chronic kidney disease, he's been on the organ transplant list for four years. He's charming but his mood can shift quickly, showing the intensity he turned into rowing success. But Jack does not crave attention, in fact, he's hiding a secret that could destroy him. His daughter, ELLIE (16), pushed him into being on the show unaware of what it might uncover. She just wants a chance to keep her dad around as long as possible.

IZZY MUIR (19), a tough but artistic goth girl who doesn't suffer fools lightly. Under her goth exterior she's revealed to be quite vulnerable and is devastated when she finds out that Dorothy, who seems so nice, has been manipulating her. Over the course of the season, Izzy sheds her goth look and becomes a strong contender, one who is cynical about the trappings of fame but sees the show as the literal lifeline it is, warts and all.

DOROTHY ITO (60s) an older woman whom everyone dismisses, turns out to be more than adept at pulling everyone's strings. But Dorothy's desperation and guile spring from a more altruistic place: she wants to win so she can look after her husband who has Alzheimers.

VINCENT SINGLETON (40's) is a lonely, dogmatic and hardened ex-soldier. Or so he seems. His military record is a little more dubious than he portrays. He hates weakness in himself and others and he sees his kidney disease as a personal failure.

EDUARDO MORALES (30s) is a quiet sycophant, desperate to be liked by the stronger contestants. He follows Vincent like a puppy, though he's not even a blip on Vincent's radar. He was paralyzed in his 20s when he fell from an apartment window while rescuing his young niece. Though quiet, Eduardo uses his disability to manipulate others. We later learn how he really became paralyzed.

STAN KACHINSKI (late 40s) is impatient and unreasonable, the kind of guy who points out problems wherever they hide. He isn't that sharp but his ego hasn't filled him in on that fact. Stan won't last long.

BERNADETTE DIETRICH (early 40s) is honest to a fault, though some would call her blunt. She's cheerful and mostly positive, but she's also preoccupied with death which doesn't sit well with the others. Bernadette is a lonely woman whom we later learn cares for a lifelike "reborn doll", which she treats almost like a real baby.

AHMAD "KYLE" HOSSEINI (early 20s) is a child of Irani immigrants, the youngest in a family of overachievers. He plays in a rock band with "tons of lasers."

AGATHA DERYCK (30s) is a friendly, seemingly down-to-earth potter with paralyzing anxiety, who is secretly hooked on xanax.

AXL WOLFE (40s) is a giant, soft-spoken biker dude. He's a good Christian, who's maybe a little spiteful. He's arranging his funeral to be invitation-only.

Show within a show format

The contestants' stories play out on the Donor TV reality show. They live in a house built on a studio lot, filled with cameras, lights, and two way mirrors through which they film.

How does the show work? Host Roger explains it to the cast:

ROGER

So, how do we choose? You'll live in this house together for ten weeks. We'll give you tasks. And sometimes we'll present you with dilemmas. Moral dilemmas. We'll learn about you, your lives. America wants to know, who are you?

DTV cameras show the Contestants' reactions. Izzy stone-faced, shrunk down in her seat. Stan smirking, like what a cakewalk. Dorothy and Eduardo gazing at Roger, star-struck.

ROGER

At the end of each week we'll ask you one thing. Which two of your fellow residents should leave? Then it's up to America to decide who of those two stays. The person not chosen will be discharged from the house. Their journey with us will be done.

Roger gives his best "delivering bad news" look.

They're not completely isolated. Their lives mix with the producers, when necessary, with medical personnel for dialysis treatments, and even occasionally with loved ones back home.

Season 1

Over the course of the season, Donor TV's late-night fan base turns it into a cult favorite with 18-24 year olds.

On the contestant side, ten determined people battle each other and their own issues:

Agatha, who has been off her Xanax too long, turns moody and panicky so Petra goes behind Watts' back and finds her a supply.

Watts convinces Vincent, who has mild OCD, to play it up as Asperger's syndrome to gain badly needed sympathy.

Eduardo skips his dialysis on purpose to appear more ill on camera, then collapses during an escape room-style task.

Carol turns out to be an American Idol reject with two healthy kidneys who conned her way onto the show hoping the exposure would score her a recording deal.

Izzy begins a secret relationship with assistant Georgie, and it threatens her place on the show if anyone finds out.

A desperate man who wasn't accepted for the show breaks in and holds the contestants hostage, demanding to be allowed to stay and compete.

On the production side, Petra must stave off fallout from the deal she made with Jack by keeping her (illegal) tactics from Watts and the others. But Jack's strategy is to ride out the show in the background, refusing to engage. Impressing no one, he's immediately voted off. However, a deal's a deal and Petra has to get him back on via a new rule where "fate" can intervene. Jack finally realizes he might actually have to try so he turns on the charm and improves his position.

Petra complicates her own life (one of her specialties) when she begins a relationship with Hassan Khan, the CEO of the show's medical sponsor. And she grows to really like him. If she's honest, she may even love him. So it's heartbreaking when, mid-season, he discovers what she's done and the terrible position she's put him and his hospital in. He leaves her.

Dorothy and Izzy emerge as fan favorites and even become odd couple friends, teaming up against some of the more extreme contestants. But when Izzy finally learns that Dorothy's been manipulating everyone, herself included, she's shattered. For the first time, Dorothy and Eduardo end up on the chopping block but fact-checking ruins him. Eduardo wasn't paralyzed saving his niece, he shot himself cleaning his gun. He's voted off we're down to Izzy, Jack and Dorothy.

On the final show, we get a deeper glimpse into the finalist's lives with family member interviews.

Jack's daughter, Ellie, explains how much he means to her and how she finally understands how much he inspires others. Hearing this, he finally comes clean. During the Olympic trials, he and his brother Griff sabotaged his main opponent's boat. That boat crashed into his,

shattering his leg. Yes, he made a miraculous comeback, but he's not America's hero. Or hers. He's a cheater. Social media quickly turns on him. His chances are done.

Dorothy's husband is next, speaking from their home where it becomes clear very quickly there's something wrong. Dorothy reveals he has early-onset Alzheimer's and that, though she hated to do it, all her scheming was for one goal: so that she can be well enough to look after him. If she dies he has no one.

Izzy knows it's down to just her and Dorothy, and she's astounded and moved by Dorothy's confession. So, instead of having her mother speak on her behalf, she abruptly confesses her rule-breaking relationship with Georgie, thereby disqualifying herself.

Dorothy wins.

Show over, Hassan pulls his medical center's support. Donor TV may be no more.

Season 2 and beyond

The reality show Donor TV takes a roller coaster ride through the ratings. Initially, the late-night rabid fan base rallies behind it causing Tubbs Medical Centre board to ignore Hassan's protests and vote to renew their support. After riding high with 18-24 year olds in season one, DTV breaks into the mainstream in season 2. New contestants are introduced and several fan favorites stay on as consultants, happy to extend their minor fame.

Later, protesters, vloggers and op-ed pieces begin to loudly question the shows' morality and taste. Petra manages to have a mocking youTuber blacklisted but her manipulations backfire as she can't control her brand any longer. Cracks begin to show as ratings slip. Eventually Watts, who has stuck with her through everything, leaves her.

Down the road, Donor TV ratings crash and the show is universally derided, though it enjoys a small ratings blip as people watch ironically. When a contestant dies live on air and Petra doesn't do anything to take it off, production is shut down.

Themes

Donor TV takes place in a world where passing snap judgements on our fellow humans has become sport. The contestants battle for a kidney but who really deserves it? Should it be the most popular? The most tragic? The person who rallies the most votes? The youngest, cutest, most clever? Most devious?

And how far will people go to get what they want? Petra's compromises start early, and once she tastes the power of a popular, though controversial show, how far will she go to keep it there? And with what justifications? On the contestant side, life and death desperation tinges their decisions. This chance will push many over the line they previously would not have crossed and they must grapple with the people they are becoming.

Donor TV throws desperate characters into a high stakes cauldron and asks: how far will you go?