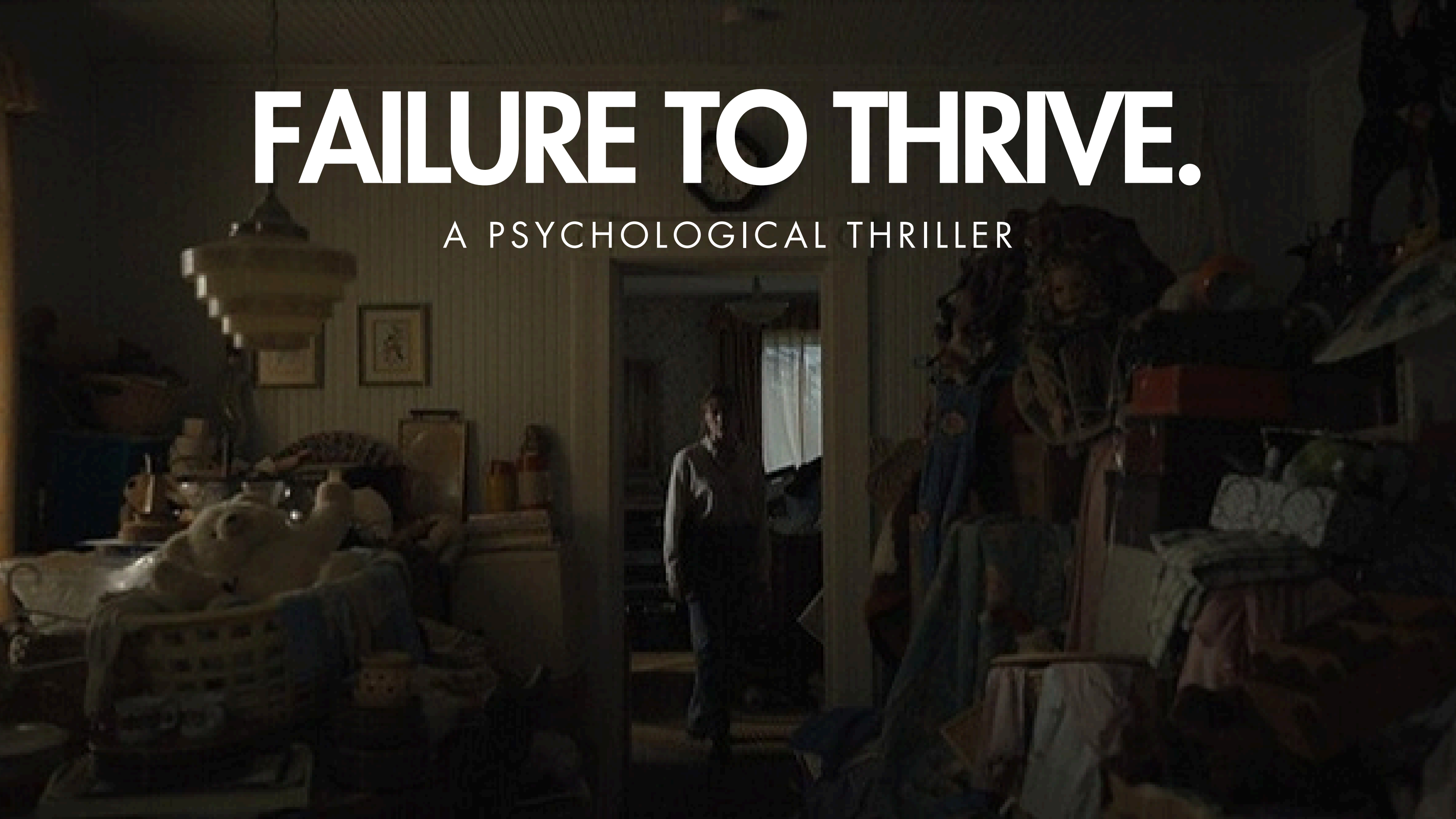


# FAILURE TO THRIVE.

A PSYCHOLOGICAL THRILLER



# LOGLINE

Maria Santoro has been keeping the family's secrets for generations. But isolation and dementia have taken their toll, and as her grasp on reality dwindles ... she begins to spill the beans. Are her graphic confessions manic delusions... or horrifying memories?



# tone



# PILOT SYNOPSIS

\*Huge Spoilers Ahead\*

## **New Jersey: Present Day**

We find Maria in the middle of a full blown dementia episode. She is manically cleaning her hoarder house, when Jena arrives to check on her mother. But Maria is lost in time; she thinks it's 1982 and Jena is her sister, Karen. Jena plays along with her mother's delusion, so as not to upset her.

Maria finally tells "Karen" that their mother died in the house last night, but she is unable to locate any details in her fractured mind. As Jena presses her mother for more information, Maria's grasp on reality splits, and we flash back to the REAL 1982 with Maria and *her* bed-bound mother, Mona. Mona was an Alzheimer's riddled religious fanatic and a tyrant, who banished Karen for being gay, and mocked Maria for being the only one pathetic enough to stay behind to take care of her.

After enduring all the abuse she could stomach, Maria buys her mother the new McRib sandwich from McDonald's... knowing full well she can't eat solid food. When Mona begins to choke in front of her, Maria does nothing to save her... she calmly watches her mother die.

Jena shakes Maria back to reality, and in her first moment of lucidity, Maria recognizes her daughter. Jena informs Maria that she's been telling some wild stories, including one about killing grandma and putting her body in the freezer! Maria shrugs off the tale, blaming her "confusion". Jena tries to convince Maria to leave the house, but Maria refuses... the darkness is coming for her... she can never leave... not after everything she did! We cut to the old freezer in the basement... reliably humming away.

# SEASON 1

We follow Maria's descent into dementia across 3 generations, in 3 distinct time periods – watching as neglect, religious indoctrination, patriarchal limitations on women and generational trauma compound when left unattended.

In intertwining time periods in Maria's fractured mind: it's 1954, and her mother Mona is a young housewife. By every modern measure; Mona should be happy. She has a successful husband, 2 beautiful daughters, and a lovely house in suburban New Jersey. But something is wrong. When her husband and his mistress mysteriously go missing (Mona always insisted that they *must* have run away together)... Mona sinks deeper into the embrace of religious fanaticism and "Mommy's Little Helper" ... setting Maria and her sister on a dark course for the rest of their lives.

It's also 1982, and as Maria and her sister try to spread their wings, Mona clings even more tightly to what little control she has left. Karen flees to rendezvous with her girlfriend in NYC, leaving Maria behind to care for their aging mother. Mona's Alzheimer's, dementia and decades of pain boil over into hostility and abuse toward her remaining daughter. Maria tries to have a normal life, even entertaining a man for one thrilling night under Mona's judgmental eye. Maria discovers she is pregnant (a sin) and as Mona grows more and more violent and detached from reality, Maria grows more and more desperate to be relieved from the shackles of her mother's prison. When Mona dies in the house, Maria calls Oscar for help. Together, they move Mona's body to the freezer in the basement, before Maria tells Oscar he's going to be a father! He feigns elation, and assures Maria he'll come back for her and their child! He just needs a few days to get his affairs in order.

But it's 2024, and Oscar never came back. When Maria realized that she had been abandoned, she also realized that she'd have to stay in this house for the rest of her life. To raise her daughter, and to conceal her crime.

A woman with glasses, wearing a dark jacket over a light-colored collared shirt, sits at a round wooden table in a dimly lit room. The room features a chandelier with three lit, patterned shades hanging above her. In the background, there is a dark wooden cabinet with a lit lamp on a shelf. To the right, a doorway leads to another room with a chandelier and a red lampshade. The overall atmosphere is dark and moody.

# THE CAST



# MONA SANTORO

## June Cleaver meets Norma Bates

Mona was the quintessential "50s Housewife"—dutiful and accommodating to a fault. After her husband cheated on her and then mysteriously disappeared... something in her snapped. She turned her devotion toward Jesus... and "Mommy's Little Helper". She raised her daughters as best she could, but after decades of piety and fealty, she has little to show for playing by society's rules. Isolated, battling dementia and Alzheimer's, Mona has been reduced to a 90 pound cyclone in bedsheets. Her refusal to take her meds, and her obsession with McDonald's and their new McRib sandwich will prove to be her downfall...



# MARIA SANTORO

## Carmela Soprano meets Miss Havisham

Under different circumstances, Maria might have lived a beautiful life. She had a brilliant spark when she was younger, but that was extinguished by decades of religious subjugation and the stifling burden of being her mother's sole caregiver. She had dreams of becoming a writer and traveling the world, but all of that was shattered when she became pregnant and was abandoned by the baby's father. Instead of escaping her dark childhood, she was sucked deeper into the lies, paranoia, mental illness and isolation that ruined her mother. And there's something about that house that seems to bring out the worst in Maria. By refusing to leave, perhaps she can contain the secrets that threaten to ruin her own daughter's life.



# JENA SANTORO

**Ophelia meets Katniss Everdeen**



Jena's childhood was marred by depression and multiple suicide attempts. She desperately loves her mother, but she just as desperately longs to break the cycle of codependence and change her family's legacy. It pains her to leave her mother alone in that house... but she had to save herself. Plagued with guilt, but clinging to the support she gets from therapy, Jena questions Maria about her childhood. What *really* happened to her grandparents? And why was she never allowed to go into the basement?

# KAREN SANTORO

**Jo March meets Arya Stark**

The one true rebel in the Santoro family, Karen is the only one to ever escape that house. From a young age, she seemed to have her finger on the pulse of the true source of evil... the control of men. She rejects the authority of religion, she rejects the duties of being a caregiver, she rejects the societal expectation of marriage and children; choosing happiness in a Bohemian life with her girlfriend Lucy, instead.



# SERIES GOALS

Women have been conditioned to suffer in silence for thousands of years. To sacrifice ourselves for others, to accept extreme amounts of discomfort and pain as "normal". We are taught to suppress our own desires and ignore the yearning in our hearts.

It is the goal of this series to examine the damage that these societal expectations have had on generations of women, and to find ways for women to navigate through their depression, their seclusion and their heartbreak... to find community with each other.

One of the biggest victories of the patriarchy has been to isolate women. To redefine reality by making women feel like an abusive existence is normal. The patriarchy does not want women comparing notes.

*Failure to Thrive* encourages women to open the lines of communication. To explore (through a twisty psychological thriller) the guilt and grief, shame and regret that often gets passed down from mother to daughter through silence. To find peace in the understanding eyes of a woman who has gone through something similar, and can lead the way.

After all, girls just wanna have fun.

# CREATOR STATEMENT

**Why this Idea?** Born out of my love for psychological thrillers with a moral (*Get Out*, *Mulholland Drive*), I wanted to find a sordid way to tell the tale of a multigenerational group of women who have a lot to learn from each other... if only they'd open up. With so many Millennials beginning to experience their parents' aging, I thought that a mother quite literally lost in her own mind might be a good conduit to finally uncovering the truth in a group of women who have been conditioned to remain silent.

**Why me?** The expectation that women should sacrifice themselves for their families has always troubled me. I watched my own mother work 2 full time jobs, bear more children than she wanted, live in a house she despised, and lose herself in my father's idea of "the perfect family". She felt trapped in many ways, by a life she didn't actively choose. As a child I felt her sadness... but she never confided in me. I am a victim of generational trauma, I was conditioned to be a wife and a mother, and I escaped a highly religious and patriarchal upbringing. My father's favorite phrase was "Because I'm the Dad around here". I wish I'd had someone in my life to tell me that things didn't have to be that way, and I wish I'd had the strength to be that person for my own mother.

**Why now?** As a woman in her (ahem) 40's, who wasted entirely too much of her youth in unhealthy relationships, it has become my mission to serve as a sounding board for young women who don't want to repeat the same mistake. With the proliferation of social media, I believe it's easier now than ever for women to finally find each other... to reach out from their own solitude and find another woman who can offer some support.

# KEY CREATIVES

Deborah was an actor first, moving into writing and directing after noticing a lack of female representation in positions of authority on film and tv sets. She writes through a distinctly feminist lens; focusing on stories that center women and their experiences in a patriarchal world. Her script, *Flawless: A Feminist Fairytale* has won several screenwriting competitions and awards for its contemporary look at "Happily Ever After". Her script *Kingmaker* is the true story of Marion Keisker; the WOMAN who discovered Elvis Presley and changed the world.



**WRITER/DIRECTOR  
DEBORAH RAYNE**

Kerri Lynn is an award winning producer and actress under the banner of Ollie Blue Productions. She just completed her first feature film, *TOX*, which she wrote, produced, directed and starred in. Her short films *The Luckiest Man Alive*, *Etymology* and *Awaken Her* have received countless nominations and awards. She looks forward to working with Deborah on her next project, *The Initiative*; a political thriller exploring the disastrous Women's Health Initiative findings about the supposed dangers of hormone replacement therapy.



**EXECUTIVE PRODUCER  
KERRI LYNN MILLER**



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