

Title Slide

My name is Jessi Cassullo, I am a student at Emerson College. For the project I chose the original Paramount IP *Whispers in the Dark* (1992), which is a psychological thriller that follows a psychiatrist, Ann Hecker, who becomes entangled in a web of mystery and danger after treating a seductive patient, Eve Abergray. The film explores themes of trust, ethics, and manipulation, set against the backdrop of Ann's professional and personal life. Despite a strong premise and compelling performances, the film struggled to make a lasting impact, both critically and commercially.

I saw the potential in *Whispers in the Dark* as a concept that could shine with the right execution. The premise—a psychiatrist wrestling with her own trauma while being drawn into a manipulative patient's world—offers fertile ground for a rich, character-driven narrative.

Logline Slide

A troubled psychiatrist struggles to keep her personal traumas at bay as she becomes entangled with a manipulative patient whose secrets may hold the key to both redemption and ruin.

Comps Slide

The tone and themes of *Whispers in the Dark* draw strong inspiration from shows like *The Undoing* and *Sharp Objects*. Like *The Undoing*, this series explores the fragility of trust and the unraveling of seemingly composed lives, set against a moody and elegant backdrop. Both shows share a cinematic quality that heightens the tension and psychological intrigue.

Similarly, *Sharp Objects* delves into themes of trauma and unresolved grief, paralleling Ann's journey in *Whispers in the Dark*. The layered storytelling and dark, atmospheric tone of these shows resonate strongly with the world for this series, making them ideal comparisons for the narrative and aesthetic I aim to achieve.

Tone/Worldbuilding Slides

The story of *Whispers in the Dark* unfolds in the bustling yet isolating world of Manhattan. The city serves as a character in its own right, providing a backdrop that is both vibrant and cold.

Manhattan's towering skyscrapers and shadowy streets reflect Ann's internal struggles, blending the overwhelming pace of city life with the quiet desperation of her personal battles.

Next Slide

The tone is dark and moody, with a cinematic feel that mirrors the psychological tension of the story. The sleek, polished offices and luxurious apartments contrast with dimly lit alleyways and quiet parks, symbolizing Ann's composed exterior and her chaotic inner world.

Character Slides

Ann Hecker (Kelsey Asbille)

The story follows protagonist Ann Hecker is a skilled psychiatrist haunted by the trauma of her father's suicide. Her dedication to helping others is challenged as her personal life becomes entangled with a charming new romance and a patient whose control tests her professional boundaries."

- **Why Kelsey Asbille?**

Kelsey Asbille brings a natural depth and vulnerability to her performances, as seen in *Yellowstone*. She has the ability to portray a character with a composed exterior while subtly revealing emotional cracks underneath. Her nuanced acting style makes her the perfect fit for Ann, a character who must balance professional poise with deeply personal struggles.

Eve Abergray (Nathalie Emmanuel)

Eve Abergray is a captivating and magnetic patient seeking therapy for the abrupt end of her relationship. Her confessions blur the line between truth and manipulation, making her a captivating yet dangerous presence in Ann's life.

- **Why Nathalie Emmanuel?**

Nathalie Emmanuel, known for her role in *Game of Thrones*, has a magnetic on-screen presence that commands attention. She excels at portraying characters with layers of complexity, combining charm and intensity. Her ability to shift between vulnerability and control makes her ideal for Eve, whose allure and manipulation are central to the story.

Doug McDowell (Oscar Isaac)

Doug McDowell, Eve's seemingly genuine ex-partner, quickly becomes a stable presence in Ann's life. However, his hidden connection to Eve complicates their relationship and leaves Ann questioning his trustworthiness.

- **Why Oscar Isaac?**

Oscar Isaac is a master at playing multi-faceted characters, as demonstrated in *Ex Machina* and *Scenes from a Marriage*. He has the charisma to make Doug appear warm and trustworthy, while also conveying the subtle undercurrents of mystery and deception that make the character intriguing. His depth and emotional range make him perfect for this role.

Sarah Green (Jodie Turner-Smith)

Sarah Green, Ann's closest friend and a fellow psychiatrist, is a trusted confidante. However, her composed exterior hides a shocking agenda that remains concealed until the final moments.

- **Why Jodie Turner-Smith?**

Jodie Turner-Smith, known for her work in *Queen & Slim*, has a commanding presence and the ability to convey both warmth and quiet intensity. Her skill in portraying layered characters makes her ideal for Sarah, who needs to appear supportive while concealing darker motives. Turner-Smith's charisma and depth ensure that Sarah's eventual reveal is both shocking and believable.

Format Slide

This series is crafted for an adult audience, with each hour-long episode designed to explore its gripping narrative. I envision 6-8 episodes per season, each tackling distinct themes: Season 1 explores Ethics and Obsession, Season 2 delves into Trust and Betrayal, and Season 3 confronts Truth and Confrontation.

Script Synopsis Slides

In the pilot episode, psychiatrist Ann Hecker struggles to maintain her composed professional exterior while battling vivid nightmares of her father's suicide. Her personal life takes a hopeful turn when she begins a budding relationship with Doug, a charming and seemingly stable man she meets through a dating app. However, the arrival of Eve Abergray, a magnetic new patient, quickly disrupts Ann's fragile balance. As Eve seeks therapy to understand the abrupt end of a

relationship, her commanding presence and fixation on control intrigues and unsettle Ann, blurring the lines between professional and personal boundaries.

Next Slide

Ann confides in her closest friends, Sarah and Leo, sharing the weight of her nightmares and opening up about Doug, but even their support cannot dispel her growing unease. The episode climaxes with a haunting nightmare of her father's death, shattered by the sudden appearance of Eve, leaving Ann questioning the nature of their connection and setting the stage for a psychological thriller where trauma, trust, and power collide.

Internal Struggle Slide

Ann's trauma is rooted in the death of her father, an Army veteran who struggled with PTSD and ultimately took his own life. This devastating event left Ann feeling that she might have been able to help him if she had more control or understanding. This need for control now defines her life, shaping her relationships and decisions. After her father's death, Ann's mother became distant and emotionally absent, leaving Ann to navigate her grief alone. Her tendency to isolate herself is reflected in her small circle of trust, which includes only Sarah and Leo.

Ann's need for control also plays a significant role in her professional life, driving her to help others but leaving her vulnerable to the allure of Eve, whose own commanding presence mirrors the control Ann craves. This dynamic creates a dangerous tension, drawing Ann further into Eve's world and testing the boundaries she has worked so hard to maintain.

Season 1 Slide

As the rest of season one unfolds, Ann becomes increasingly drawn into Eve's captivating and manipulative world. Eve challenges Ann's professional boundaries and ethical principles, forcing her to confront her own unresolved trauma. The more Ann becomes involved with Eve, the more vivid and haunting her nightmares about her father's suicide become. These dreams start to blend with cryptic flashes of Eve, making it harder for Ann to distinguish between her subconscious fears and reality. This escalating intensity leaves Ann emotionally drained and struggling to maintain control over her life.

Meanwhile, Ann's relationship with Doug provides moments of solace, but subtle hints of his connection to Eve begin to emerge, adding tension to Ann's personal life. Ann continues to navigate her growing emotional investment in Eve while grappling with her deepening trust in Doug. However, near the end of the season, Ann discovers the shocking truth: Doug is Eve's ex-boyfriend. This revelation shatters Ann's trust, triggering a mental breakdown as she realizes

she was deceived by someone she relied on for stability. The season climaxes with Eve's mysterious death, leaving Ann emotionally shattered and setting the stage for the investigation and fallout in Season 2.

Season 2 Slide

Season 2 begins with the investigation into Eve's murder, led by Detective Morgenstern. Doug quickly becomes the main suspect, straining his attempts to regain Ann's trust. Still reeling from the revelation of Doug's connection to Eve, Ann becomes consumed by the need to uncover the truth, even as her personal trauma continues to surface. Her vivid nightmares intensify, now offering subtle but cryptic hints about what may be happening in real life. These dreams blur the lines between Ann's subconscious and reality, pushing her deeper into paranoia and self-doubt.

Her sessions with other patients reflect her unraveling mental state, further complicating her ability to navigate the investigation. As startling details about Eve's life and relationships come to light, the case grows increasingly complex. Ann is torn between her lingering feelings for Doug and her growing doubts about his innocence. Meanwhile, Leo and Sarah provide support, but subtle cracks in their dynamics begin to show, hinting at deeper tensions.

The season ends with a shocking twist: Leo is wrongfully imprisoned for Eve's murder, leaving Ann devastated and isolated. This revelation sets the stage for her quest for justice and the unraveling of her relationships in Season 3.

Season 3 Slide

Season 3 begins with Ann's disbelief in Leo's guilt. Convinced of his innocence, she becomes determined to uncover the real killer. Her vivid nightmares continue, becoming increasingly symbolic and unsettling. As Ann delves deeper into the investigation, the nightmares start to provide clearer hints, guiding her toward the truth. Doug, still under suspicion, works tirelessly to regain Ann's trust, showing genuine care and remorse for his past actions. Slowly, Ann begins to let Doug back into her life, though lingering doubts remain.

Meanwhile, Ann's relationship with Sarah starts to unravel. Small inconsistencies in Sarah's behavior and veiled comments spark Ann's suspicion. As Ann digs deeper into the mystery, she begins to uncover hidden truths about Sarah's role in Eve's life and her disturbing obsession with Ann.

In a pivotal moment, just before Ann uncovers the truth, her father appears to her in a dream, speaking directly for the first time. He offers her advice that helps her regain focus and resolve, pushing her closer to confronting her trauma and finding the real killer. Armed with renewed

clarity, Ann pieces together the final clues, leading to the shocking revelation that Sarah has been the real killer all along, driven by her twisted fixation on Ann.

This revelation leads to a deadly confrontation between the two women, where Ann must fight for her survival. The season concludes with Ann overcoming Sarah, Leo's release from prison, and Ann resolving to confront her trauma head-on. Despite everything, she decides to give Doug another chance, signaling a new chapter in her life where she chooses to face her past rather than bury it.

Showrunners/Directors Slide

I envision showrunners like Marti Noxon or Shonda Rhimes bringing their expertise in psychological depth and character-driven storytelling.

Directors like Karyn Kusama or Susanne Bier could bring the atmospheric tension and layered emotion this series demands.

Networks Slide

This series aligns with the programming of networks like Netflix, Max, Hulu, and FX.

Netflix

- **Mindhunter, The Haunting of Hill House, You:** They specialize in suspenseful, character-driven dramas like these, which share *Whispers in the Dark's* focus on psychological tension, obsession, and trauma.

Max (formerly HBO Max)

- **The Undoing, Sharp Objects, Big Little Lies:** They excel in producing dark, emotionally rich dramas that explore themes of trust, manipulation, and unraveling facades, aligning perfectly with the series.

Hulu

- **The Handmaid's Tale, The Girl from Plainville, Nine Perfect Strangers:** They are known for emotionally complex stories that delve into power dynamics, manipulation, and psychological depth, which mirrors the tone of *Whispers in the Dark*.

FX

- **The Americans, The Patient, Fargo:** They thrive on intense, character-driven narratives that balance dark suspense and interpersonal drama, making it an ideal home for Whispers in the Dark.
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Thank You Slide

I believe this series will captivate audiences with its layered characters, suspenseful twists, and emotional depth. Thank you for listening.