

# The Assistant (2019 film)

***The Assistant*** is a 2019 American drama film written, directed, produced, and edited by Kitty Green. The film stars Julia Garner as a junior assistant at a film production company. Matthew Macfadyen, Makenzie Leigh, Kristine Froseth, Jon Orsini, and Noah Robbins also star.

*The Assistant* premiered at the Telluride Film Festival on August 30, 2019, and was released in the United States on January 31, 2020, by Bleecker Street. It was well-received by critics, who especially praised Garner's performance and the film's claustrophobic depiction of office life.

## Plot

The film takes place over the course of a single day in the life of Jane, a junior assistant who has been working at a film production company in New York City for five weeks. She arrives before dawn and performs various menial administrative tasks. Her job's long hours and demanding tasks keep her busy and stressed. During a phone call with her mother, Jane learns that she forgot to call her father on his birthday.

As Jane's day progresses, it becomes clear that her boss has been having sex in his office with women and facilitating a culture of sexual harassment at the company. Many of the male executives make snide comments about the boss's affairs while the female executives handle their own workloads and discuss the possibility of transferring to other departments. Whenever Jane does something her boss deems a mistake, he verbally abuses her over the phone as her two male junior assistant coworkers watch silently. Throughout the day, a variety of people from the boss's life interact with Jane, including his wife, his children's nanny, a famous actor, and a group of Chinese film producers.

In the afternoon, a young, inexperienced woman named Sienna arrives from Idaho, saying she has been offered a job as a junior assistant. Concerned for Sienna's well-being, Jane goes to the human resources department to file a report after dropping Sienna off at a five-star hotel being paid for by the company. Wilcock, the head of HR, encourages Jane to share her concerns, but later makes clear that he is turning a blind eye to her harassment claims, before demeaning her, speaking down to her, and calling

### The Assistant



Theatrical release poster

<b>Directed by</b>	<u>Kitty Green</u>
<b>Written by</b>	Kitty Green
<b>Produced by</b>	Kitty Green <u>James Schamus</u> Scott Macaulay P. Jennifer Dana Ross Jacobson
<b>Starring</b>	<u>Julia Garner</u> <u>Matthew Macfadyen</u> <u>Makenzie Leigh</u> <u>Kristine Froseth</u> Jon Orsini <u>Noah Robbins</u>
<b>Cinematography</b>	Michael Latham
<b>Edited by</b>	Kitty Green Blair McClendon
<b>Music by</b>	<u>Tamar-kali</u>

her jealous. He also implies that filing a formal complaint would accomplish nothing. As Jane leaves his office, he reminds her that she has nothing to worry about, as Jane is not the boss's "type". Visibly upset, Jane receives a call from her boss when she returns to her desk. He has been informed about her visit to HR and demands she write an email apology addressed to him, which she does. He replies saying that he is especially "tough" on Jane because he knows how great she is.

Toward the end of the day, Sienna arrives at the office so Jane can teach her how to use the phone systems. As night falls, Jane prepares a microwave dinner for herself while other employees leave; her boss stays late in his office with a young actress. Over the intercom, he tells Jane he no longer needs her for the day. Jane goes to a coffee shop across the street and calls her father as she eats a muffin. After she hangs up, she sees a silhouette in her boss's window appearing to have sex.

## Cast

- [Julia Garner](#) as Jane, a junior assistant at a film production company
- [Matthew Macfadyen](#) as Wilcock, the head of the HR department at Jane's company
- [Makenzie Leigh](#) as Ruby, an aspiring actress
- [Kristine Froseth](#) as Sienna, a newly hired junior assistant
- [Alexander Chaplin](#) as Max
- [Juliana Canfield](#) as Sasha
- [Dagmara Domińczyk](#) as Ellen
- [Bregje Heinen](#) as Tatiana
- [Clara Wong](#) as Tess
- [Patrick Breen](#) as Roy
- [Jon Orsini](#) and [Noah Robbins](#) as Jane's fellow junior assistants
- [Purva Bedi](#) as an executive assistant and Jane's immediate boss
- [Migs Govea](#) and [Daoud Heidami](#) as film executives
- [Patrick Wilson](#) as famous actor (uncredited)<sup>[4]</sup>
- [Jay O. Sanders](#) as boss (voice)

## Production

In September 2018, it was announced [Kitty Green](#) would write and direct the film with [James Schamus](#) and [Scott Macaulay](#) producing under their Symbolic Exchange banner.<sup>[5]</sup> Green was inspired to make the film while she was promoting her documentary *[Casting JonBenét](#)* at the Sundance Film Festival in 2017. Members of the press and festival organizers assumed Green got her ideas for the documentary from her male colleagues. The experience nearly led her to leave filmmaking, but she instead decided to "explore the underlying sexism she was exposed to, a subject that initially took the form of [sexual misconduct on college campuses](#) but pivoted when the [Weinstein story](#) broke."<sup>[4]</sup>

<b>Production companies</b>	<div>Symbolic Exchange</div> <div>3311 Productions</div> <div>Level Forward</div> <div><a href="#">Cinereach</a></div> <div>Forensic Films</div> <div>Bellmer Pictures</div> <div>JJ Homeward Productions</div>
<b>Distributed by</b>	<a href="#">Bleecker Street</a>
<b>Release dates</b>	<div>August 30, 2019</div> <div><a href="#">(Telluride)</a></div> <div>January 31, 2020</div> <div><a href="#">(United States)</a></div>
<b>Running time</b>	87 minutes <sup>[1]</sup>
<b>Country</b>	United States
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Budget</b>	\$1.7 million <sup>[2]</sup>
<b>Box office</b>	\$1.4 million <sup>[2][3]</sup>

To prepare for the film, Green spoke with people who had "worked under toxic, often predatory bosses" in the entertainment industry.<sup>[6]</sup> Her interviews included former assistants at film studios, agencies, and production companies, some of whom had worked at the Weinstein Co.<sup>[6]</sup> Green "picked up on patterns of women feeling disempowered, threatened or ignored, incorporating them into the screenplay."<sup>[6]</sup> She said she experienced some early difficulties in getting the film made because it was critical of the film industry. Green said there were several female executives "who really loved it" and said they would recommend it to their colleagues, but then Green received emails back from these executives that said their colleagues were "refusing to even read it".<sup>[6]</sup>

In December 2018, Julia Garner joined the film's cast.<sup>[7]</sup> Green cast Garner after seeing her on the TV series *The Americans* and needing someone "striking" to contrast with the mundanity of the office tasks in the film.<sup>[6]</sup> In April 2019, Matthew Macfadyen, Kristine Froseth, Makenzie Leigh, Noah Robbins and Dagmara Domińczyk joined the cast. Production concluded that month in New York City.<sup>[8]</sup>

Although the boss figure is a looming presence in the film, he is never actually seen. Green said, "I was always more interested in the machinery [of the workplace]. We know what happens when the door is closed. We've read those stories. ... What I was more interested in was what's on the other side of the door: what people knew, what was going on, the culture in an environment like that."<sup>[6]</sup> Green also eschewed the use of a score, saying, "the cultural silence [around sexual harassment in the office] is something we were exploring. That quiet was really important to me."<sup>[6]</sup>

## Release

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*The Assistant* premiered at the Telluride Film Festival on August 30, 2019.<sup>[9]</sup> Shortly afterward, Bleecker Street acquired its distribution rights and released it in theaters on January 31, 2020.<sup>[10][11]</sup> It also screened as an official Spotlight selection at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival.<sup>[12]</sup>

## Reception

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On Rotten Tomatoes, the film holds an approval rating of 93% based on 242 reviews, with an average rating of 7.7/10. The site's critical consensus reads, "Led by a powerhouse performance from Julia Garner, *The Assistant* offers a withering critique of workplace harassment and systemic oppression."<sup>[13]</sup> On Metacritic, which assesses films on a score out of 100, *The Assistant* holds a score of 79 based on reviews from 43 critics, indicating "generally favorable reviews".<sup>[14]</sup>

Writing for *The Guardian*, Peter Bradshaw called *The Assistant* "a claustrophobic, intimately unsettling movie" and wrote, "it can claim to be the first drama that addresses the #MeToo issue".<sup>[15]</sup> In a similarly positive review, Moira Macdonald of the *Seattle Times* lauded Julia Garner's performance and said the film shone "a light on a malevolent shadow". She also called it "wound taut and perfectly controlled", just like its protagonist, making for an experience that "feels entirely real".<sup>[16]</sup>

Jeannette Catsoulis of *The New York Times* called the film "less a #MeToo story than a painstaking examination of the way individual slights can coalesce into a suffocating miasma of harassment", and wrote that Garner's performance "makes the slow draining of Jane's soul almost visible".<sup>[17]</sup> Justin Chang of NPR

concluded that "it's the rigorous understatement of *The Assistant* that makes it so powerful in its vision of how easily the Harvey Weinstains of the world could exploit their absolute authority for years with little fear of consequence."<sup>[18]</sup>

## Accolades

Award	Category	Nominee(s)	Result	Ref.
<u>Boston Society of Film Critics Awards</u>	<u>Best Actress</u>	<u>Julia Garner</u>	runner-up	<sup>[19]</sup>
<u>Casting Society of America Awards</u>	Outstanding Achievement in Casting - Low Budget Feature - Comedy or Drama	<u>Avy Kaufman</u> , Scotty Anderson	Nominated	<sup>[20]</sup>
<u>Columbus Film Critics Association Awards</u>	Best Overlooked Film		Nominated	<sup>[21]</sup>
	Breakthrough Film Artist	<u>Kitty Green</u>	Nominated	
	Best Actress	Julia Garner	Nominated	
<u>Deauville Film Festival</u>	Grand Special Prize	Kitty Green	Nominated	<sup>[22]</sup>
	Louis Roederer Foundation's Directing Prize		Won	
<u>Golden Trailer Awards</u>	Best Drama		Nominated	<sup>[23]</sup>
<u>Gotham Awards</u>	<u>Best Feature</u>	Kitty Green, Scott Macaulay, James Schamus, P. Jennifer Dana, Ross Jacobson	Nominated	<sup>[24]</sup>
	<u>Audience Award</u>		Nominated	
<u>Heartland Film Festival</u>	Truly Moving Picture Award	Kitty Green	Won	<sup>[25]</sup>
<u>Independent Spirit Awards</u>	<u>Best Female Lead</u>	Julia Garner	Nominated	<sup>[26]</sup>
	<u>Best First Screenplay</u>	Kitty Green	Nominated	
	<u>Best Cinematography</u>	Michael Latham	Nominated	
<u>IndieWire Critics' Poll</u>	ICP Award for Best First Feature		7th place	<sup>[27]</sup>
<u>St. Louis Film Critics Association Awards</u>	Special Merit (for best scene, cinematic technique or other memorable aspect or moment)		Nominated	<sup>[28]</sup>
<u>Online Film &amp; Television Association Awards</u>	Best Feature Debut	Kitty Green	Nominated	<sup>[29]</sup>
<u>Women Film Critics Circle Awards</u>	Adrienne Shelly Award		Nominated	<sup>[30]</sup>

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## External links

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- Official website (<https://bleeckerstreetmedia.com/the-assistant>)
  - *The Assistant* (<https://www.allmovie.com/movie/the-assistant-vm7742677142>) at AllMovie
  - *The Assistant* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9000224/>) at IMDb
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