

I Care a Lot

I Care a Lot is a 2020 American satirical black comedy thriller film written and directed by J Blakeson. The film stars Rosamund Pike, Peter Dinklage, Eiza González, Chris Messina, Macon Blair, Alicia Witt, and Damian Young, with Isiah Whitlock Jr. and Dianne Wiest. The film follows a con woman who makes a living as a court-appointed guardian, seizing and selling the assets of vulnerable elderly people, including the mother of a dangerous mafia boss.

I Care a Lot had its world premiere at the 45th Toronto International Film Festival on September 12, 2020, and was released via streaming on February 19, 2021, through Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, depending on the region. The film received positive reviews from critics, with Pike winning Best Actress in a Motion Picture – Comedy or Musical at the 78th Golden Globe Awards. [4]

Plot

Marla Grayson is a <u>con artist</u> who makes a living by convincing the justice system to grant her <u>guardianship over elders</u> who she pretends cannot take care of themselves. She places them in an <u>assisted living</u> facility, where they are sedated and lose contact with the outside world. She then sells off their homes and assets, pocketing the proceeds. She and the court deny a man, Mr. Feldstrom, access to his mother after he attempts to force his way into the assisted living facility. He later threatens her outside the courthouse, saying that he hopes she is killed.

Dr. Karen Amos informs Marla about a potential case, a wealthy retiree named Jennifer Peterson with no apparent partner or close family. A judge appoints Marla guardian after she and Dr. Amos falsely testify that Jennifer suffers from dementia, confusion, and loss of mobility. Marla moves Jennifer into assisted living and immediately gets to work selling Jennifer's furniture, car, and home. While rooting through Jennifer's possessions, Marla discovers the key to a safe deposit box and finds that it contains a watch, gold bars, bank notes, and hidden, loose diamonds, which she takes and stashes away.

I Care a Lot



Official release poster

Directed by	J Blakeson
Written by	J Blakeson
Produced by	Teddy Schwarzman
	Ben Stillman
	Michael Heimler
	J Blakeson
Starring	Rosamund Pike
	Peter Dinklage
	Eiza González
	Chris Messina
	Dianne Wiest
Cinematography	Doug Emmett
Edited by	Mark Eckersley
Music by	Marc Canham
Production companies	STXfilms
	Black Bear Pictures
	Crimple Beck
Distributed by	Netflix
Release dates	September 12, 2020 (TIFF)

As Marla's girlfriend and business partner, Fran, oversees the renovation of the house, a cab arrives driven by Alexi Ignatyev, who says he is there to pick up Jennifer. Fran says that Jennifer has moved. Alexi returns to his employer, Roman Lunyov, greatly distressed. Roman, a crime lord, is revealed to be Jennifer's son. He threatens Alexi and orders him to find his mother and report back. Mafia lawyer Dean Ericson offers to pay Marla \$150,000 in cash to release Jennifer but she refuses,

	February 19, 2021 (United States)
Running time	118 minutes ^[1]
Country	United States
Language	English
Box office	\$1.3 million ^{[2][3]}

willing to do it only if she is paid \$5 million. He threatens Marla and takes her to court. The judge dismisses the case as Ericson cannot prove Jennifer hired him.

Fran discovers "Jennifer Peterson" is an identity stolen from an infant who died of polio. When Jennifer refuses to tell Marla her real identity, Marla teams up with property manager Sam Rice and withdraws filling many of Jennifer's basic needs. Finding his mother's safe deposit box rifled, Roman sends three thugs to Jennifer's facility to take her. This violent effort fails, and Marla helps police apprehend Alexi, who is one of the men. Fran's police contact tells them that Alexi is the sibling of two other mafia bosses who supposedly died in a fire. Having failed to rescue his mother, Roman has Dr. Amos killed at her office. After hearing this news, Marla and Fran move into an unsold property of a previous victim. Jennifer is baited into attacking Marla when she visits the facility and is moved to a psychiatric ward.

Marla is kidnapped while Fran is attacked in their home. Marla is taken to Roman, where she demands \$10 million to arrange Jennifer's release. He refuses, and his associates knock her out with chloroform and send her in a car into a lake. She escapes and returns home to find Fran beaten unconscious as gas fills the house. They narrowly escape an explosion and flee to another unsold property. Marla shows Fran the diamonds she has hidden there. She offers Fran a choice: they can use the diamonds to start a new life elsewhere, or they can get revenge.

Marla and Fran track down Roman and kidnap him. They force drugs into his body, burn his car, and leave him on a forest trail. He will be discovered high on drugs and with no identification. Roman is discovered by a jogger, and is rescued. With no identity, Roman is designated a "John Doe" by a judge, who appoints Marla as Roman's legal guardian. Marla visits Roman and offers to release him and Jennifer from her guardianship for \$10 million.

Instead, Roman offers her a partnership in a global business based on her scam. She accepts and, using his money and connections, quickly becomes a powerful, extremely wealthy CEO. Roman is reunited with Jennifer, while Marla marries Fran.

While leaving a TV interview, Marla is shot by Feldstrom. He says that his mother died alone in the assisted living facility because no one would let him see her. As Feldstrom is arrested, Fran cries out for help as Marla bleeds to death in her arms.

Cast

- Rosamund Pike as Marla Grayson
- Peter Dinklage as Roman Lunyov
- Eiza González as Fran
- Dianne Wiest as Jennifer Peterson
- Chris Messina as Dean Ericson

- Isiah Whitlock Jr. as Judge Lomax
- Macon Blair as Feldstrom
- Alicia Witt as Dr. Karen Amos
- Damian Young as Sam Rice
- Nicholas Logan as Alexi Ignatyev

Production

It was announced in May 2019 that <u>Rosamund Pike</u> had been cast to star in the film, which would be written and directed by <u>J Blakeson</u>. Peter <u>Dinklage</u> and <u>Eiza González</u> were added in June. In July 2019, <u>Chris Messina</u> and <u>Dianne Wiest</u> joined the cast, and filming began the same month. Scenes were shot in Dedham, Massachusetts, including at the Norfolk County Registry of Deeds.

Release

The film had its world premiere at the <u>Toronto International Film Festival</u> on September 12, 2020. Shortly after, <u>Netflix</u> acquired distribution rights to the film in select countries and regions, including the United States, France, Germany, Latin America, South Africa, the Middle East, and India. Amazon Studios acquired the rights to release it on <u>Amazon Prime Video</u> in Australia, Canada, Ireland, Italy, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom through Black Bear's international distributor <u>STX</u>. It was released on both services on February 19, 2021. Over its first weekend of release, the film was the mostwatched on Netflix, then second-most in its sophomore frame. On April 20, 2021, Netflix revealed that the film had been watched by 56 million households.

Reception

Critical response

On the <u>review aggregator</u> website <u>Rotten Tomatoes</u>, 78% of 230 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 7.0/10. The website's consensus reads: "A searing swipe at late-stage capitalism, *I Care a Lot* is an exhilarating, pitch-black comedy with a wicked performance from Rosamund Pike." <u>Metacritic</u>, which uses a <u>weighted average</u>, assigned the film a score of 66 out of 100, based on 39 critics, indicating "generally favorable" reviews. <u>[22]</u>

Owen Glieberman, writing for *Variety*, praised writer and director J Blakeson, whom he compared to Alfred Hitchcock, stating that "when he finally gets around to staging an action sequence, it's a doozy [...] because he takes his time and has you hanging on every moment". For *Empire*, Terri White wrote that Blakeson "doesn't always remain in full control of the story and tone, [but] the ride is so wild and entertaining that it doesn't particularly matter", and gave the film four stars out of five. Slant Magazine's Chuck Bowen gave the film two stars and a half out of four, and wrote that "Blakeson means for us to champion Marla as a feminist icon for a while, though he deflates this potential moral idiocy with an ironic ending."

Various critics praised Pike for her performance as con artist Marla Grayson. While the <u>Associated Press</u> said "Pike pulls something off that few else could as a protagonist," <u>[26]</u> <u>Entertainment Weekly</u> wrote that she delivered her best performance as a villain since <u>Gone Girl</u> in 2014. [27]

Writing for <u>Out</u>, Mey Rude said that *I Care a Lot* was "almost a perfect lesbian movie", praising the "sinister glee" Pike brings to what "could've been an all-time great lesbian sex symbol" role and the "great chemistry" that she and Gonzalez have as the story "keeps escalating and twisting and turning". However, she strongly criticised the "undignified and blunt" ending. <u>[28]</u> <u>The New York Times</u> said that the film was an "unexpectedly gripping thriller that seesaws between comedy and horror", praising it for being "cleverly written and wonderfully cast", and for its "ice-pick dialogue" and introduction of Peter Dinklage as Roman Lunyov.

Conversely, Adam Graham of *The Detroit News* gave the film a "D" and said that *I Care a Lot* was a "misguided black comedy", as viewers didn't have a way to relate to the character of Marla Grayson. [29] The *Chicago Tribune*'s, Michael Phillips gave the film two stars and wrote that while "the acting's uniformly strong [...] the script is distressingly weak." [30] Mae Abdulbaki from *Screen Rant* gave a mixed review, lauding the performances from the ensemble cast, but writing that "there is something completely missing from *I Care a Lot* that makes it a hard pill to swallow." [31] In his review for *The Boston Globe*, Ty Burr rated the film 2 out of 5 stars and noted that "in Rosamund Pike's chilly, hollow central performance you may find it difficult to care at all." [32] Anthony Lane of *The New Yorker* criticized *I Care a Lot* for being "pleased with its cynicism" and constantly pushing boundaries of tastelessness. He notes the film sidelines the elderly characters and their significance, focusing more on the heartless actions of the protagonist. [33] Joe Morgenstern described the film as a "shallow comedy" and as "deeply dislikable" and said "The film is arch, but no triumph, an airless exercise in mistrusting its audience, and all of it is accompanied by pummeling music that sounds like a Vangelis wannabe recorded during a brownout." [34]

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