



## 'The Assistant' Is A Powerful Depiction of A Horrible Boss and A Workplace That Enables Him

By **Murjani Rawls** - Feb 20, 2020

Sit back and think about what the job type of an assistant means to you. You picture someone doing the most mundane tasks such as getting coffee or making copies. It's also implied that there's a certain amount of abuse that's taken with the title. Think of depictions of media like old HBO show, *Entourage* with the characters of Ari Gold and Lloyd. In October 2017, the New York Times [published 12 accounts](#) of women who had accused film producer Harvey Weinstein of sexual assault and harassment. The old visual of Hollywood is unending happiness, money, and success. However, there's an underbelly that is far more insidious where powerful figures and enablers collide.

*The Assistant* takes place over the course of an entirety of one day. Starting right from when Jane (**Julia Garner**) wakes up to go to work begins a small escalation on how toxic a workplace setting can be. She's in the office before everybody else setting things up. She cleans up break rooms, schedules people to be taken to airports, and delivers scripts. It's when a call from the irate wife of the film executive happens where things start to descent. Julia receives a rather disrespectful phone call reprimanding her. Her co-workers also "help" her type an apology note likened to graveling at the feet of a king.

Not only does the office view her as meek because of the position she's in, but also because she's a woman. When she tries to have an ounce of reprieve by taking a break, that's not granted to her or she feels like she can't have it. There's a brief conversation where she speaks to her mother about forgetting her father's birthday. One of the simple, but hard-hitting parts of dialogue is when she says to Julia, "he knows your busy. It's ok." Within the maelstrom of the culture of her workplace and abuse she endures, Julia is starting to fold into herself.

Director **Kitty Green** puts us at two different viewpoints. There are times where we are the fly on the wall at the agency. While Julia is our main character, there's an entire office with certain interactions that lets us know certain behavior is just accepted. From Julia's point-of-view, we see her put on a poker face while she carries out these tasks. She briefly exhibits anger as everything that's going on around her is too much to bear. That's quickly extinguished by the weight of the day's events. You feel every insult that's hurled at her and how she gets manipulated after. The color pallets of the movie become more grey as you go on depicting Julia's emotional state.

The audience never sees the big executive. If there's a glimpse, it's just a specter. Rather, his impact is felt by what Julia has to endure or things that are found like a desk drawer full of prescription pills. You only feel his presence through uncomfortable exchanges through email, inferred lascivious meetings with potential actresses behind the doors of his office, or berating his colleagues. He doesn't have a name and he doesn't have to be seen because there is more than one of these kinds of bosses out there.

The overall message of *The Assistant* is that people who are put in positions that exert their power to the detriment of others are a constant problem. It's not only a critique from that perspective, but also on the entire workplace that this happens. Unfortunately, in Hollywood, money is king. Where there's cash flow, there's an entire group of people who will prop up a structure against their morality.

One of the more heartbreaking scenes occurs when Jane tries to report that her boss is flying in a young girl, Sienna (**Kristine Froseth**) to the HR manager, Wilcock (**Matthew Macfadyen**). Not only does he dismiss Julia's claim, but he also pretends to care about her aspirations and throws them back in her face. This mode of gaslighting is echoed at the end of the film when her boss tells her that he's only hard on her because he wants to make her great. It's this sick

By the end of the movie, Jane is beaten down, downtrodden and exasperated. Even with the progress Me-Too movement and organizations like Times Up, there are still an abundance of these places that harbor figures like this. That's the scariest thing you take away from *The Assistant*. Unfortunately, there are people who have to endure their various abuses like Jane and people who are more than willing to look the other way.

## **Murjani Rawls**

*<http://murjanirawls.com>*

Journalist, Self-published author of five books, podcast host of The War Report and The Deadscreen Podcast, and photographer since 2014, Murjani "MJ" Rawls has been stretching his capabilities of his creativity and passions, Rawls has as a portfolio spanning through many mediums including music, television, movies, and more. Operating out of the New York area, Rawls has photographed over 200+ artists spanning many genres, written over 700 articles ranging displaying his passionate aspirations to keep evolving as his years in media continue.

