The Assistant

by stephen hastings-king

She walks quickly past the same series of four buildings again and again like there is in this place a single series of four buildings copied and pasted end to end.

A Voiceover accompanies her:

The Assistant is lost again in a grid city. Again she feels disconnected from the world. Where she is the sound has been switched off.

She walks quickly arms folded around her midsection.

She likes being an assistant. She admires her employers for their belief in continuity. She seeks direction through imitating them. To be an assistant is to be a disciple.

Q. I want to believe but I cannot believe. What should I do?

A. Act like you believe: eventually you will forget you don't.

It is knowing that gets in the way. She wishes she had never read that.

There is in this place a single series of four buildings.

She works with a mirror on the Employer's comportments. She reflects on her new expressions in windows. She practices acquired speech while walking The Employer's dog. With time, they will feel natural.

But as the months pass things begin to change. She realizes that the Employer has also been adapting to the Assistant. The comportments that were to guide her are imitations of her own.

Again, she feels betrayed.

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One day she came home from school to find her father hanging in the kitchen. She would not want me to tell you. But specimens cannot hear.