



## The Assistant (New Directions Paperbook)

*Robert Walser*

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***The Assistant* by Robert Walser?who was admired greatly by Kafka, Musil, Walter Benjamin, and W. G. Sebald?is now presented in English for the very first time.**

Robert Walser is an overwhelmingly original author with many ardent fans: J.M. Coetzee ("dazzling"), Guy Davenport ("a very special kind of whimsical-serious-deep writer"), and Hermann Hesse ("If he had a hundred thousand readers, the world would be a better place"). Charged with compassion, and an utterly unique radiance of vision, Walser is as Susan Sontag exclaimed "a truly wonderful, heart-breaking writer."

*The Assistant* is his breathtaking 1908 novel, translated by award-winning translator Susan Bernofsky. Joseph, hired to become an inventor's new assistant, arrives one rainy Monday morning at Technical Engineer Karl Tobler's splendid hilltop villa: he is at once pleased and terribly worried, a state soon followed by even stickier psychological complexities. He enjoys the beautiful view over Lake Zurich, in the company of the proud wife, Frau Tobler, and the delicious savory meals. But does he deserve any of these pleasures? *The Assistant* chronicles Joseph's inner life of cascading emotions as he attempts, both frantically and light-heartedly, to help the Tobler household, even as it slides toward financial ruin. Tobler demands of Joseph, "Do you have your wits about you?!" And Joseph's wits are in fact all around him, trembling like leaves in the breeze?he is full of exuberance and despair, all the raptures and panics of a person "drowning in obedience."

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