



## A Disturbance in One Place

By Binnie Kirshenbaum  
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### Introduction

*A Disturbance in One Place* follows the life of a distant, aloof, tough-talking, married woman who blithely breaks seven of the Ten Commandments in her search for innocence and a safe place to land. Rootless, bouncing from bed to bed, she knows she is pure of heart. If only she could find where her heart got lost. Erotic with a rare honesty, darkly humorous, and profound, *A Disturbance in One Place* points to the small but infinitely deep cracks in our masks, drawing us irresistibly into the world of a woman who seems unable to decide whether she is out to prove or disprove the Talmudic wisdom: If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there.

### Discussion Questions

1. We don't learn that the narrator is married until after she has sex with her Brooklyn "hit man." Were you surprised?
2. Infidelity in both *History on a Personal Note* and *A Disturbance in One Place* comes across commonplace, disconnected from marriage. Why do characters in these two books cheat? What does the act of infidelity reveal about them? Discuss how these books subvert our notions about who commits adultery. Does infidelity affect genders differently?
3. The narrator takes great pride in her masterful blowjobs. But the multimedia artist does not like that particular sexual act. Why does he withhold from her the one activity she feels she has mastered? The multimedia artist is also cheap and petty. Why would she be drawn to him more than the hit man, who will give her anything?
4. With her penchant for affairs, why did the narrator decide to marry in the first place? What role does a husband play in her life? Is there a particular desire he fulfills?
5. The narrator reveals the events of her life with great sangfroid, nearly blas\_. At what points in the story do we know that she has more feeling about events than she lets on?
6. When the narrator eats the kasha varnishka, traditionally an Eastern European Jewish food, she describes it as "something that has gone bad, food that's turned on me." What is the symbolism of this experience? Discuss the old woman's dismissal of the narrator, who she does not realize is Jewish, calling her a "shiksa" and other derogatory terms. What does being Jewish mean to the narrator? Why did she not tell the woman she is Jewish?

### About the Author

Binnie Kirshenbaum is the author of two short story collections and five novels, most recently *An Almost Perfect Moment*. She is a professor of fiction writing at Columbia University and lives with her husband in New York City.