

## A GOOD PLACE FOR THE NIGHT: STORIES

By Savyon Liebrecht

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### ABOUT THE BOOK:

This collection of short stories, first published in Hebrew in 2002, explores the meaning of place for Israelis living both at home and abroad in an age of airplanes, cell phones, and atomic bombs. Each of the seven stories is named for a particular location in the world: America; Kibbutz, Hiroshima, Tel Aviv, Munich, Jerusalem, and a post-apocalyptic inn known as "A Good Place for the Night." The characters in these stories are physically and emotionally distant from home, but find themselves drawn by the gravitational pull to return: A man goes back to the kibbutz where he was raised to confront the woman who once cared for him with the terrible truth about his parents; an Israeli journalist covering a Nazi war crimes trial in Munich witnesses anti-Arab violence that compels him to return to his family; an architect working in Hiroshima for nine years is drawn to reunite with her Israeli lover in Jerusalem. Many of these stories are marked by acts of devastating and shattering violence which force both their characters and us as readers to re-examine the sense of stability and security which we depend on in order to live in this world.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Savyon Liebrecht was born in Munich, Germany in 1948 to Holocaust survivor parents. She arrived in Israel at the age of ten and studied philosophy and literature at Tel Aviv university. Her first collection of stories, *Apples from the Desert*, was published in Israel in 1986. Since then, Liebrecht has written five other collections of stories and novellas, two novels, and several prize-winning plays and film scripts. Liebrecht currently lives in Holon, near Tel Aviv.



**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:**

1. [America] At the beginning of this story, Hadassa declares: "Here is my truth, and as of now, my only one; your truth and even you yourself don't exist yet." Why do you think Liebrecht chooses to narrate the story from Hadassa's perspective? How would the story be different if events unfolded through Alma's eyes instead? Which character do you, as an American living outside of Israel, relate to more?
2. [America] Towards the middle of the story, Hadassa relates that she once returned from a long day of work to find Alma in her kitchen. Hadassa tells us that this reunion took place three days before Purim, a festival which commemorates a time when the evil royal advisor Haman cast lots to choose a day on which to kill the Jews of Persia. According to the Purim story, the Jewish orphan Esther (also known as Hadassa) courageously saved her people from annihilation. As a result of Esther's efforts, Haman received the fate that had been intended for Esther's uncle Mordechai, and Mordechai rose to the distinction that was once accorded to Haman. How does the Purim story serve as a backdrop to the story of Alma and Hadassa? Can you identify any overlapping themes?
3. [Kibbutz] In the final paragraph of this story, Melech summarizes his own version of his parents' story using the literary conventions of a fairy tale: "Once upon a time there was a child who found out that his parents had been murdered for the fun of it . . ." In what way does Melech's account resemble a fairy tale? Can you identify an "intriguing moral," as Melech suggests? How does this moral make you feel?
4. [Kibbutz] This story has been described as an indictment of the kibbutz movement with its socialist ideals of communal solidarity. How do you feel as an American reading a story by an Israeli that condemns an aspect of Jewish-Zionist history? Do you think it is appropriate for Israelis to write fiction that is critical of their own history?
5. [Hiroshima *and* Jerusalem] Consider the different types of survivors in these stories. They include the mother of Idit's classmate Tsila, who is obsessed with cleaning; and Kumo's grandmother, who can't bear the sight of pink. What do these women have in common? Can you identify any other survivors in this story? What about Idit herself?
6. [Jerusalem] How does Liebrecht describe the drive from Ben Gurion airport to Jerusalem? What are your associations with this trip? One of the most famous points along this highway is Sha'ar Hagai, where Arab forces killed the members of a convey of Jewish doctors in 1948. To this day, rusted armored cars destroyed in the attack still line the route. How is this history relevant to Liebrecht's story?



7. [Tel Aviv] In what way is Tel Aviv a character in this story? Could you imagine this story set anywhere else – in Jerusalem, for instance, or in New York City? What do you learn about Tel Aviv from reading this story?
8. [Munich] What is the relationship between neo-Nazi anti-Semitism in Germany and acts of political terrorism in Israel? Do you think Jews today have a place where they can feel safe in the world? What is your "good place for the night"?
9. [Munich] The murder of the Muslim girl is one of many acts of violence and destruction mentioned in this story. Can you identify the others lurking in the historical and contemporary backdrop? What is the relationship among them?
10. [A/I] In speaking about the impact of the Holocaust on her childhood, Liebrecht once commented that "The silence was terrible . . . as a child I felt I was growing up in an atmosphere of secrets. It could be that one of my reasons for writing is this conspiracy of silence. How can one break this silence, if not with words?" Do you think it is appropriate for Liebrecht to attempt to break this conspiracy of silence in her stories? Why or why not?
11. [A/I] Many of these stories feature a character who might be considered an "other" in Israeli society. Who are some of these "others," and how are they treated by Liebrecht?
12. [A/I] How does a collection of short stories offer you a different view of Israeli society than a longer novel? What were you able to get from this book that you may not have gained from a full-length novel?
13. [A/I] Each of these stories features Israeli characters, but that is not the only reason that they are Israeli stories. Can you identify any themes that unite these stories? Are these themes common to the work of other Israeli writers you have read? How do these themes shed light on your sense of Israeli fiction as a genre?

