

The Saint of Incipient Insanities: A Novel

By Elif Shafak

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The Saint of Incipient Insanities is the comic and heartbreaking story of a group of twenty-something friends, and their never-ending quest for fulfillment.

Omer, Abed and Piyu are roommates, foreigners all recently arrived in the United States. Omer, from Istanbul, is a Ph.D. student in political science who adapts quickly to his new home, and falls in love with the bisexual, suicidal, intellectual chocolate maker Gail. Gail is American yet feels utterly displaced in her homeland and moves from one obsession to another in an effort to find solid ground. Abed pursues a degree in biotechnology, worries about Omer's unruly ways, his mother's unexpected visit, and stereotypes of Arabs in America; he struggles to maintain a connection with his girlfriend back home in Morocco. Piyu is a Spaniard, who is studying to be a dentist in spite of his fear of sharp objects, and is baffled by the many relatives of his Mexican-American girlfriend, Algre, and in many ways by Algre herself.

Keenly insightful and sharply humorous, *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* is a vibrant exploration of love, friendship, culture, nationality, exile and belonging. **Elif Shafax** is of Turkish descent, and a prizewinning novelist. She was born in France and spent her childhood in Spain. *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* marks her American debut and is the first of her books to be written in English. She teaches women's studies at the University of Michigan.
The Saint of Incipient Insanities is the heartbreaking story of a group of friends and their never-ending quest for happiness and fulfillment. Ömer, Abed, and Piyu are roommates, foreigners all recently arrived in the United States. Ömer is a Ph.D. student in political science from Istanbul who adapts quickly to his new home and falls in love with the bisexual, intellectual chocolate maker Gail. Gail is American yet feels utterly displaced in her homeland; she moves from one obsession to another in an effort to find solid ground. Abed pursues a degree in biotechnology and worries about Ömer's unruly ways, his mother's unexpected visit, and stereotypes of Arabs in America as he struggles to maintain a connection with his girlfriend back home in Morocco. Piyu is Spanish, studying to be a dentist in spite of his fear of sharp objects, and is baffled by the many relatives of his anorexic Mexican-American girlfriend, Alegre—and in many ways by Alegre herself.

As time passes, their relationships with one another change and challenge these mismatched friends' preconceptions of themselves, their countries, and their

adopted homeland. A vibrant exploration of love, friendship, culture, nationality, exile, and belonging, *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* introduces us to a wonderful new voice in international fiction.
"Exuberant."—**Janice P. Nimura, *The Washington Post Book World***

"This is an exhilarating roller-coaster ride of a novel—a breathless and vivid journey into the lives of a motley assortment of brilliant, obsessive, and often troubled young immigrants, and an American whom one of them marries. With its themes of displacement, its Boston-area setting, and its ease with academic topics, Shafak's novel suggests Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* with the amplifier cranked up all the way to eleven. A work replete with dazzling wordplay, an infatuation with pop culture, and a fearless intellect, *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* marks Elif Shafak as a compellingly original voice in twenty-first-century fiction."—**Adam Langer, author of *Crossing California***

"Shafax offers us an indelibly haunting portrait of contemporary America, in all its sexual/ethno/religious contortions. Goofy, sad, wise, and heartbreakingly funny, her novel is a bittersweet delight to read."—**Fernanda Eberstadt, author of *The Furies***

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
Three graduate school roommates—a Moroccan, a Turk and a Spaniard—are strange bedfellows in a potentially inhospitable land in this painstakingly multicultural but rather discombobulated first novel in English by Shafak, a prize winner in Turkey. Set in Somerville, Mass., in 2003, the novel shifts erratically between Ömer, the Turk, who's supposed to be finishing his poli-sci Ph.D., but prefers regular sex with his American girlfriend, Gail, a suicidal, feminist chocolate maker; Abed, the pious Moroccan, who cures his nightmares by watching slasher films; and Piyu, the clean-freak Spaniard, who loves food but dates a bulimic Mexican-American who doesn't. Each character is lost in one sense or another, and the book is about their attempts to discover how they tick and for whom. There's lots of potential there, but the story is stretched too thin by extraneous characters, subplots, repetition and contrivances. Shafak strives to explain to readers what it means to be an outsider in America—"So wonderful was his azonal void, of a substance so translucent almost invisible under the veneer of anonymousness; such a consummate stranger he had become in a world of suffocating familiarities"—but her linguistic acrobatics distract rather than enlighten. This is a brave attempt at a post-9/11 story about immigrants in America, but Shafak flails in the 21st-century melting pot.
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From Booklist
Starred Review Three roommates, Omer, Abed, and Piyu, are all foreigners, studying and living in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Omer, a handsome party boy studying political science, has recently arrived from Istanbul, and he lands a room in the house of Abed, from Morocco, and Piyu, a dental student from Spain. Omer falls in love with the neurotic vegan lesbian Gail, and they eventually marry. Abed is a consummate worrier who must contend with his mother's visit from Morocco. Piyu is awestruck by his girlfriend Alegre's cooking, but not necessarily by her close-knit family full of watchful aunts, and unaware of the secret she herself harbors. Together, these three friends experience love, exile, and a lack of cultural identity as they forge ahead with their lives in a new land, with relationships with new people, confronting their greatest joys alongside their worst nightmares. Shafak is a prizewinning author who, until now, has written only in her native Turkish. This is her first novel in English, and she presents a masterful command of language, which she uses cleverly, humorously, and engagingly. *Michael Spinella*
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Review

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Ronda Caesar:

Have you spare time for the day? What do you do when you have more or little spare time? Yep, you can choose the suitable activity intended for spend your time. Any person spent their particular spare time to take a go walking, shopping, or went to the Mall. How about open or perhaps read a book titled The Saint of Incipient Insanities: A Novel? Maybe it is to become best activity for you. You understand beside you can spend your time along with your favorite's book, you can wiser than before. Do you agree with it is opinion or you have various other opinion?

Catherine Nelson:

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James Stevens:

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