

I'm a Fan

Sheena Patel

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The unnamed narrator of Sheena Patel's edgy novel *I'm a Fan* is a woman of color and a stalker.

Although she lives with her doting boyfriend, the writer is having an affair with a rich, prominent, emotionally unavailable man who is married. Not only this: he is also entangled with other women, one of whom is a successful social influencer who fills her Instagram grid with expensive candles and organic food displayed in handmade pottery.

The narrator despises her rival for her cultural appropriation and pretension. She mocks the influencer's followers for expressing grief over the sale of a buttercream sofa or outrage over a burnt dishtowel. Meanwhile, she understands that her lover gets social capital from being seen with her, a brown woman. She wonders if she would be with him if not for his money and connections.

No one is named, and details about the characters are sparse. The narrator refers to her lover as "the man I want to be with," and her lover's lover, the social influencer, as "the woman I am obsessed with." In brief vignettes (sometimes only a paragraph long), she hyper-analyzes her lover's words, texts, and actions, as well as the social media feeds of the influencer. The lack of specifics about the objects of her obsession makes her ruminations all the more intimate, as if she is sharing secrets about celebrities who would be easy to recognize were their names divulged.

A woman who is aware that social media feeds are façades, but who just can't help herself, makes ill-advised choices in *I'm a Fan*, a biting satirical novel.

SUZANNE KAMATA (September / October 2023)

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