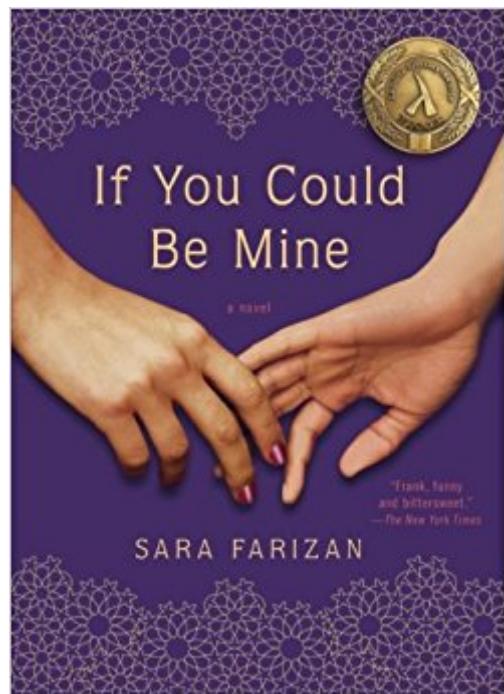


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# If You Could Be Mine: A Novel



## **Synopsis**

Winner of the Lambda Literary Award for Lgbt Children's/Young Adult One of Rolling Stone's 40 Best Ya Novels A 2014 Ala Rainbow List Top 10 Title A Booklist Top 10 First Novels for Youth 2013 A Chicago Public Library "Best of the Best" • 2013 This Forbidden Romance Could Cost Them Their Lives Seventeen-year-old Sahar has been in love with her best friend, Nasrin, since they were six. They've shared stolen kisses and romantic promises. But Iran is a dangerous place for two girls in love--Sahar and Nasrin could be beaten, imprisoned, even executed. So they carry on in secret until Nasrin's parents suddenly announce that they've arranged for her marriage. Then Sahar discovers what seems like the perfect solution: homosexuality may be a crime, but to be a man trapped in a woman's body is seen as nature's mistake, and sex reassignment is legal and accessible. Sahar will never be able to love Nasrin in the body she wants to be loved in without risking their lives, but is saving their love worth sacrificing her true self?

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Gr 9 Up-In this terrific debut novel, readers meet Sahar, a 17-year-old student who lives in Tehran. She is smart and ambitious, and she has a secret that could get her arrested or even killed; she is a lesbian and is in love with her best friend. When Nasrin's parents arrange for her to marry a young male doctor, Sahar knows that she and Nasrin will no longer be able to be with each other. When desperate Sahar meets transsexual Parveen at a party given by her gay cousin, she thinks she sees a way to be with Nasrin. In Iran, it is not illegal to be transsexual, as it is to be gay or lesbian, and the state will even pay for sex reassignment surgery because it is seen as a necessary medical

procedure. Sahar pursues sex reassignment, dreaming of marrying Nasrin even though she knows in her heart that she doesn't really want to become a man. As Nasrin's wedding approaches, Sahar realizes its inevitability and must decide what she is going to do. Farizan's portrayal of Sahar and her predicament is sensitive and heartbreaking. Even less-sympathetic characters, such as Nasrin and her parents, are portrayed in a nuanced manner; in the culture Farizan depicts, the girls' fears that their romantic relationship will become known are realistic and understandable. Rich with details of life in contemporary Iran, this is a GLBTQ story that we haven't seen before in YA fiction.

Highly recommended.-Kathleen E. Gruver, Burlington County Library, Westampton, NJ (c)

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*\*Starred Review\** Teens Sahar and Nasrin have loved each other since they were young girls, but homosexuality is a crime in Iran, and the two girls could be severely punished, even executed, for their romantic love for one another. When an arranged marriage for Nasrin threatens the girls' secret relationship, Sahar vows to take action, but what can she do? Desperate, she decides to have sex-reassignment surgery to become a man so that she can marry her friend. Surprisingly, such surgery is legal in Iran and even paid for, at least in part, by the government, and Sahar also has the caring support of a transsexual friend. Still, will she be able to follow through, and, if not, what will the future hold for the two devoted friends? Farizan's first novel is an accomplished and compassionate look at a heartbreaking situation and the possibility of an unlikely but plausible solution. Throughout, the author presents a groundbreaking, powerful depiction of gay and transsexual life in Iran and its similarities to and differences from that of the West. An intimate look at life in modern-day Iran and its surprising Westernization, even though much of this culture is clandestine. Grades 10-12. --Michael Cart --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

While one of the main reasons I picked this book up was for the LGBT factor, I found that my most favorite part of it was learning more about Iran and the people. I actually felt like I was immersed in life there and while it could have gone deeper and we could have seen more, I felt like it was just the right amount for this book. It wasn't too much to take in, especially since it's just part of the story. We see the laws and how things work just through Sahar's life and her comments. For example, when she got on the bus she said women have to sit in the back while the men are in the front, but in this case it wasn't actually a complaint, she said it was a blessing and commented on something along the lines of at least no men can grope her on a crowded bus (it was actually a little different,

because Sahar is slightly crass at times, and says things very bluntly). In the book we get to see different things, from her wealthy friend Nasrin's home and family, to her cousin Ali and his underground crew of gays, lesbians, transgenders, etc. There was variety and I appreciated that. I found that I was actually surprised at some things. One thing was that Western culture has permeated the country even though so much of it is illegal. People smuggle pretty much anything and everything into the country from illegal movies to alcohol. They have illegal satellites to watch television they aren't suppose to watch. It kind of surprised me at how much it was the 'norm' to do this. I also loved just learning a little about the culture. This wasn't something that was delved into very much, but from the meals she cooked, to the clothing they wore, it was all fascinating to me. I think it's important for stories like this to reach our teens. I really enjoyed Sahar a lot. She had a great voice and was so easy to 'get'. I understood her personality really well. She was blunt and honest, but held her tongue (just barely) when she really needed to. I felt like she was a bit blinded by her love for Nasrin though and this was sort of her downfall. She decides she needs to have a sex change so she can marry Nasrin, but Nasrin is already engaged to a guy and they are to be married very soon. When people try to talk sense into Sahar she refuses to listen. She feels this is her only option. While I 'get' this, it was slightly frustrating to read. But this is her journey, she has to find it inside herself to do the right thing. I do like that it was talked about, the difference in just being gay/lesbian and actually feeling like you are trapped in the wrong body and should be the opposite sex. Because being gay doesn't mean that you are trapped as the wrong sex, and some people may not really understand that. Nasrin was a character I had mixed feelings about. She's been spoiled her whole life and maybe doesn't appreciate Sahar as much as she should, but it's clear she does love her. I understand her personality and who she is and it's not really a negative to the story, but I didn't love her. Ali is Sahar's cousin and he's gay and actually flaunts it somewhat. He is a very fun character and I would love to read a book all about him. It would be SO fun! But I also want to see his HEA. I also loved Sahar's father. There's a bit of trouble between them since he's been in mourning for so long and has forgotten to live and love and so Sahar and he have a few things to work through. I enjoyed this aspect of the book and am so happy she has a kind and gentle father in a country where men can do so much harm to women if they choose. This is a short book that I cruised through in only a couple hours. It was hard to put down just because I was enjoying it so much. This book does have some bad language and talks about mature themes like sex and some descriptions regarding having a sex change. I'm not sure I would say it's for mature readers only, but be cautioned that there are some mature themes. I'm very glad I read this book and I really hope that more consider reading it. I think it should be in every library.

In If You Could Be Mine, Sara Farizan has opened quite a window. Through it, teen readers see the oppressive world of being gay in present day Iran. But the picture Farizan paints is one that reflects a global plight that many gay teens endure. From brutally oppressive nations to more enlightened ones—“even our own United States of America”—gays face opposition. They are assailed, accosted, looked down upon, despised, told they are sick, and yes, forbidden to be who God made them. Farizan’s Sahar is very much in love with her lifelong friend Nazrin. The feeling is mutual, but when Nazrin’s marriage is announced, Sahar tumbles into despair, leading her to consider alternatives that will most probably never be viable solutions. We feel Sahar’s pain, we feel her despair, and we want to shout at her, tell her that she is being foolish. But teens can be foolish—it’s in their nature. So we go along on this ride, hoping that author Farizan will eventually lead Sahar out of her quagmire and into a path that will work for her. Many of the loudest shouting readers will be exclaiming, “Leave Iran!” But, whether stuck in the gloomy restraints of Iran or in an unaccepting town in America, leaving your home, your family, is usually not an option. Far too many gay teens are living on the streets because they chose that option, and we know they need our love and understanding, yet what was supposed to be their support group failed them and led them to flee. Farizan explores that option for Sahar, as well as a few others, and gay teen readers will benefit from it. But most of all, all readers, teen or otherwise, will benefit from this sensitive exploration of what it is like to be gay, and what it is like to be gay in Iran.

This book isn’t necessarily poorly written or anything. Just... F\*\*\* this book, man. Never before has a book left me more depressed and brokenhearted. If you have any empathy in you, this book will tear you to shreds. I almost threw up when I finished it. In terms of quality this probably deserves more than one star. But I can’t bring myself to rate it any higher. This book has made me feel s\*\*\*ier than any other piece of media ever has. I did not enjoy this book, I wish I had never read this book. It’s too much. Too much.

I found this book on an LGBT reading list, and that is why I grabbed it. However, I felt that there were other factors that made me enjoy it - I enjoyed the writing style and, as an American woman, learning about how daily life is for women in Iran. The stories this book tells - there is the main one, but also of the underground world of Iran. Though this is from Sahar’s perspective, and she doesn’t quite understand all that goes on in this dark area of the public, Farizan has a knack for letting the

reader know just what's up. For example, 'Mother' and 'Daughter' were two women Sahar meets and doesn't fully understand, but I found myself knowing what was going on from almost the beginning. This book is wonderfully written and, though not a life-changing book, one that I would recommend. Also - If you liked this book, you should check out "Tell Me Again How a Crush Should Feel" by Sara Farizan (same author).

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