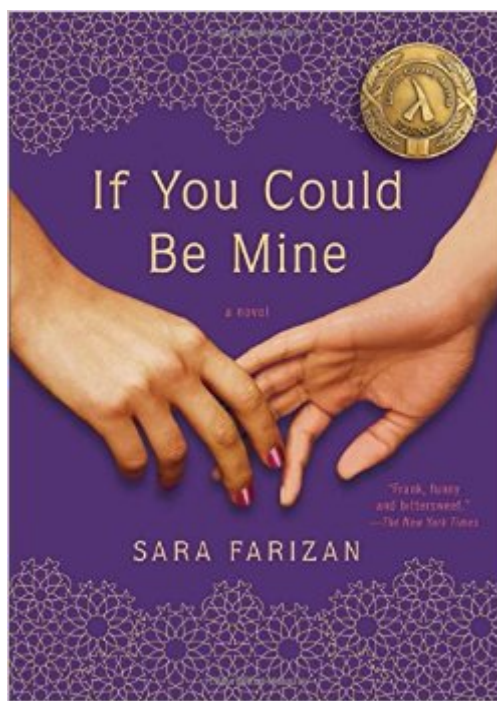


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If You Could Be Mine: A Novel



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? Â

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars Â See all reviews Â (85 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

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.

A book like *If You Could Be Mine* is hard to review because as a fictional exploration of a very real, very pressing social issue, I think it does its job. While reading, I felt I got quite a bit of insight into the Iranian culture and really came to understand where Sahar is coming from. As a book, it didn't quite do it for me, and while there are multiple reasons for that, there's one in particular that stands out: I didn't want Sahar to succeed in being with Nasrin because Nasrin, while a product of her environment, is quite simply a jerk. Since the whole book centers around Sahar trying to find a way to be with Nasrin "even going as far as to consider sexual reassignment surgery" this was a major point where the book went downhill for me. No matter what Sahar did, I was hoping she would fail, which is not something I want to be thinking about a main character. Sahar herself was a sympathetic character, but Nasrin seemed to regard Sahar as merely a passing moment, while for Sahar, Nasrin was her life. In this mindset, it was hard to root for the main characters. Here's the thing: I didn't want Sahar to succeed because I found Nasrin to be utterly unsympathetic. At no point did I ever BEGIN to even entertain the idea that Nasrin really loved Sahar. At all. And so of course I was rooting for Sahar to fail in her mission because even though she wasn't the best character either, she deserved better. None of the characters felt like real people "they all seemed to exist for the sake of the story, instead of the story coming naturally from the characters and their development. The writing also felt a bit sloppy and rushed. After talking about it with other readers on Twitter, I've seen multiple people say, and I agree, that this felt like a first draft.

IF YOU COULD BE MINE is getting some major buzz. It is one of the launch titles for the Algonquin

Young Readers imprint and was highlighted at this year's BEA conference. Clearly, a lot of people are confident about this title. That gave me pretty high expectations. Some of my expectations came from the Algonquin name. It's one that I associate with literary quality. Sara Farizan's prose is competent, but nothing special. There's a love story at the heart of IF YOU COULD BE MINE, driving its heroine Sahar's desperate decisions, but there's little passion in the words. Sahar is overflowing with emotion, but her drama is muted on the page. Sahar is a lesbian. She lives in Iran, where she could be killed if her relationship with Nasrin is discovered. But she's willing to do anything for Nasrin, who is breaking up with her to marry a man and make her family proud. She's even willing to have a sex change, because being trans is legal in Iran. In fact, the government will even pay for the sex change in order to prevent the perversity of someone in the wrong body. Farizan does do a good job with Sahar's dawning realization of the seriousness of a sex change. I am not surprised by Sahar's willingness to jump into it without thinking, as she is seventeen and in love and afraid for her life. I also liked the range of people Sahar meets on her journey, and that they aren't perfect. They have their own prejudices. Farizan shows where Iran is more progressive than the US - trans rights - but she doesn't shy away from where it is less. I wish there was more Nasrin in the book. Most of her scenes involve her pulling away from Sahar and acting fairly cold. That's where the real frustration with Sahar's decisions come in.

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