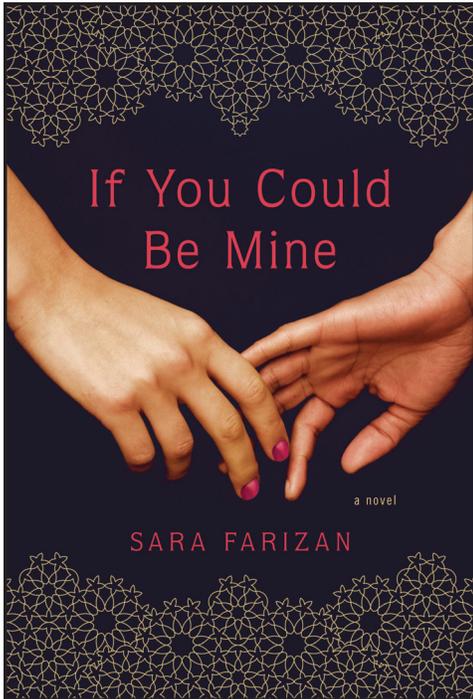


# IF YOU COULD BE MINE

by SARA FARIZAN



**YOUNG ADULT  
HARDCOVER FICTION**

On sale August 20, 2013  
Ages 14 and up  
\$16.95  
256 pages, 5 x 7  
ISBN: 978-1-61620-251-4  
E-Book ISBN: 978-1-61620-310-8

**BOOK TALK**

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 homosexuality in Iran is a crime punishable by death, so the two young women keep their relationship behind closed doors. Then Nasrin's parents announce they've arranged her marriage. As Sahar watches her beloved Nasrin get closer and closer to marrying a charming male doctor, she panics. In Iran, 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. As a man, Sahar could be the one to marry Nasrin, and Sahar knows she will never be able to love the one she wants in the body she wants to be loved in without risking her life. Is saving her love worth sacrificing her true self?

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR  
SARA FARIZAN**

the daughter of Iranian immigrants, lives near Boston, Massachusetts. She is an MFA graduate of Lesley University and holds a BA in film and media studies from American University. This is her first novel.



Photo Credit: Mark Karlsberg/Studio Eleven

**PRAISE FOR IF YOU COULD BE MINE**

★“Accomplished and compassionate . . . A groundbreaking, powerful depiction of gay and transsexual life in Iran . . . An intimate look at life in modern-day Iran and its surprising Westernization, even though much of this culture is clandestine.” —*Booklist*, starred review

“Refreshingly and believably diverse . . . A moving and elegant story.” —*Kirkus Reviews*

“[A] provocative coming-of-age story.” —*Publishers Weekly*

“[A] terrific debut novel . . . Rich with details of life in contemporary Iran, this is a GLBTQ story that we haven't seen before in YA fiction. Highly recommended.” —*School Library Journal*

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. “Tehran isn’t exactly safe for two girls in love with each other,” says Sahar on page 2. In what ways is Iran dangerous for gay people? What are the consequences of discovery?
2. Seventeen-year-old Sahar says she has been in love with Nasrin since she was six years old. She is very different from Nasrin—for one thing, she wants to be a doctor, while Nasrin dreams of going to India to be a Bollywood actress. What are some other differences between the two young women? Can you see what attracts Sahar to Nasrin? Do you think they would make a good couple if they were allowed to be together? Why or why not?
3. Was there any point in the novel when you were nervous that Sahar and Nasrin’s romantic relationship would be discovered? Were there any clues that Nasrin’s mother had an idea of what was going on between the girls before she revealed to Sahar that she knew about them?
4. Photographs of the late leader Ayatollah Khomeini and the current leader Ayatollah Khamenei are posted all over Iran. On page 12, Sahar says, “Sometimes when Nasrin and I kiss, Ayatollah Khomeini’s and Ayatollah Khamenei’s faces pop into my head.” She thinks of Khomeini as “Angry Grandpa” and of Khamenei as “Disappointed Grandpa.” What does this say about how Sahar perceives the role of government in her personal life? Do any disapproving faces enter your thoughts at awkward moments?
5. Sahar’s references often reflect American popular culture—Julia Roberts, Cat Stevens, Madonna, Lady Gaga—despite the fact that many Western CDs and DVDs are censored or banned in Iran. Her cousin Ali seems to have no trouble getting his hands on these banned materials. What other “workarounds” for strict governmental policies do Sahar and her friends witness or take part in?
6. Sahar is devastated on page 20 to discover that Nasrin will be marrying a nice doctor named Reza—“the Superman of suitors.” She knew an arranged marriage for Nasrin was inevitable, so why does it still come as such a surprise to Sahar? Does it seem out of character for Nasrin to agree to a traditional marriage? Why or why not?
7. When Sahar’s gay older cousin Ali says to her on page 30, “Sahar, it takes one to know one,” she is furious. She responds, “What you do is wrong, and I’m not like you.” What does Sahar see as the differences between Ali’s choices and behavior and her own?
8. How does Sahar’s angry reaction mirror both Nasrin’s and Katayoun’s responses when Sahar takes them to the gay underground scene at Restaurant Javan? How do Sahar’s judgments of Ali—and others—evolve during the course of the novel?
9. On page 102, Sahar daydreams about what it would be like to be a man in Iran. When she’s thinking about her father, whom she calls Baba, who “can’t even boil water,” she thinks she could leave him in the dust if she were a man. Despite her daydreams of male privilege, she never indicated that she felt like a man trapped in a woman’s body. Were you shocked when Sahar began to seriously contemplate getting a sex change to be with Nasrin? Why or why not?
10. In this novel, readers see the effects of gender-reassignment surgery on several different people, including Parveen, Maryam, Katayoun, and Jamshid. Ali tells her on page 156, “A male version of you would be perverse. It would frighten [Nasrin].” What ultimately persuades Sahar that a sex-change operation is not the right choice for her?
11. Since Sahar’s mother died, her father has been “sleeping through life.” What finally prompts Sahar to confront Baba about his withdrawal? Do you think Sahar’s decision to stay with her father is the right one, even though he admits he is asking her to stay for selfish purposes?
12. When the novel ends, it’s still illegal and potentially dangerous to be gay in Iran. What do you think the future holds for Nasrin? For Sahar? For their relationship?

Reader’s Guide by Karin Snelson

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An imprint of Algonquin Books  
A division of Workman Publishing  
[AlgonquinYoungReaders.com](http://AlgonquinYoungReaders.com)