

Review: If You Could Be Mine by Sara Farizan



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?

This book has a very interesting premise, but for me, it failed to live up to its potential.

The focus of [If You Could Be Mine](#) is obviously the romance between Sahar and Nasrin. I didn't

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find either girl particularly likeable, and as a result, I never became emotionally invested in their relationship. Because the story is told in first person from Sahar's perspective, she comes across as the more sympathetic of the two -- she lost her mother at a young age, forcing her to step into the role of parent when her father became severely depressed and distant, and she's fiercely devoted to Nasrin and willing to do anything to be with her legally. Nasrin, on the other hand, is the spoiled youngest child of a wealthy family who expects to have her cake and eat it too -- that is, live comfortably as the wife of a doctor and continue her relationship with Sahar in secret.

However, I quickly grew weary of Sahar's constant reminders of how spoiled and selfish Nasrin is (Farizan would have done well to follow the old writing rule "show, don't tell" here), which I found somewhat hypocritical. Sahar gets angry at Nasrin for accepting the doctor's marriage proposal without considering her feelings, but her plan to undergo gender reassignment surgery shows a similar disregard for Nasrin's feelings -- she never shares this plan with Nasrin, simply assuming the latter will break off her engagement and marry her once she's legally able to do so.

I was still interested in finding out whether or not Sahar would go through with the surgery, but because I couldn't connect with either of the main characters, her decision and the novel's ultimate resolution lacked any real emotional punch. The lack of resonance isn't helped by Farizan's writing style, which is frustratingly simple, nor by the poor editing -- dialogue is punctuated incorrectly, character names are misspelled, and at one point Sahar suddenly slips into third person when she states that she is "counting the days until Sahar's wedding."

The best thing about this book is the supporting characters. Sahar's cousin Ali is also gay, but unlike her, he embraces his identity and lives a hedonistic lifestyle, selling drugs, alcohol, and illegal DVDs and throwing secret parties for his LGBTQ friends. He introduces Sahar to a group of young trans people, who share their experiences with her and help her with her own plans to transition. I'd be interested in reading an entire novel about these characters, particularly Parveen, a confident trans woman who becomes Sahar's close friend, and Maryam, another trans woman whose brother blackmailed her into transitioning when he discovered she was in love with a man.

This book would have benefited greatly from more rigorous editing and more development of the two main characters, particularly Nasrin. If the story was told jointly from the perspectives of both girls rather than Sahar's alone, it would help to make Nasrin a more sympathetic character and make their romance more convincing. There are enjoyable elements, namely the supporting characters, but ultimately, these elements aren't enough to compensate for the book's flaws.

Rating: 2.5 out of 5 stars