

SARA FARIZAN

on writing

TELL ME AGAIN HOW A CRUSH SHOULD FEEL

When I talk about my writing, I usually mention that I write books I wish I had when I was a teenager. This novel would have been very, very helpful for me when I was in high school.

I began writing *Tell Me Again How A Crush Should Feel* when I was 23. In high school and college, I got the crazy idea that I wanted to write for television when I got older. So, like any young person looking to strike out into this kind of field, I moved to a place where the sun always shines, everyone is beautiful, and all dreams come true: Los Angeles.

L.A., for me, was not an ideal destination. It's actually where my adolescent fantasies went to die a slow, painful, sometimes humorous death. My internship was over, the Writers Guild of America went on strike, and I was spending my nights at a West Hollywood bar watching my friend pick up guys while I drank margaritas wearing a two sizes too small Mister Roger's T-shirt.

I was very alone in L.A. and realized that writing for TV was maybe something I wasn't cut out to do. The speculative work I was doing in hopes of getting an agent were scripts for existing sitcoms, or they were pilot scripts very similar in style to soapy teen favorites. They featured main characters of European descent who were also heterosexual.



Mark Karlsberg

SARA FARIZAN

is the author of *If You Could Be Mine*. The daughter of Iranian immigrants, Sara lives in San Francisco, California, but Boston, Massachusetts, will always be home. She is an MFA graduate of Lesley University and holds a BA in film and media studies from American University. *Tell Me Again How a Crush Should Feel* is her second novel.

“*I still didn't feel like I was getting anything right. Like there was a manual that hadn't arrived in the mail for me yet.***”**



The scripts I was writing did not feature people who looked like I looked or felt many of the things I felt. I also was still not fully at ease with who I was as a person. I was around other Persian people in “Tehrangeles,” but I didn’t feel like I could be honest and forthright or fully myself in a lot of ways. I was certainly more comfortable with being gay than when I was younger, but not totally casual or open about it. I still didn’t feel like I was getting anything right. Like there was a manual that hadn’t arrived in the mail for me yet.

I was proud of being Persian and being gay, but I constantly worried about what other people thought of me. It was a stupid, useless anxiety, but I didn’t know better back then.

While trying to figure out if L.A. was for me or not, I began writing a story about a teenage girl who had a background like mine and problems like mine but was actually brave enough to be the person she wanted to be at a much younger age. I was always given the advice “write what you know,” so I began a hyper-fictionalized high school do-over.

None of the characters in *Tell Me Again* are real, but they do have combinations of qualities of people I know or knew. The voice of Leila, our heroine in this book, is the most similar to mine as any other character I have written or will ever write, but I promise she isn’t me. I wish I had been as brave as Leila is in high school and had had the courage to try and find romance and be honest with the people around me. I was a big chicken back then. Sometimes I think I still am.

One day while I was in Los Angeles, my mother called me and sensed how unhappy I was. She asked me, “What is it that you want to do with your life?”

I thought about it for a moment and I said, “Write.”

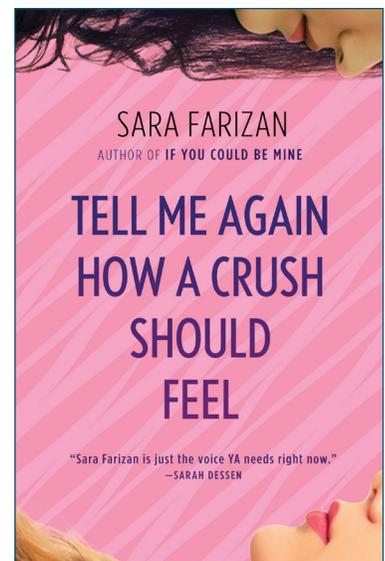
She asked, very sweetly, “Well, why can’t you do that here?” So I moved back East and began figuring out how to be truly comfortable in my skin, rather than pretending that I was, and how to be a writer.

As I was discovering how to be happy again, I continued writing Leila’s story, partially as catharsis but also to use in my applications to creative writing programs. When I did get into Lesley University’s MFA program, Leila’s story became better with the right tutelage (thank you, Pat Lowery Collins and Chris Lynch) and also turned into, in some ways, a typical teen story, but with a protagonist who was unusual in young adult lit.

Tell Me Again How a Crush Should Feel is about dispelling stereotypes, falling for people who aren’t right for you, self-acceptance, family, cultural identity, parties, theater rehearsals, embarrassing moments, dealing with loss, and finding moments of humor in the middle of all that.

If you enjoy the book, we have the city of Los Angeles to thank.

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YOUNG ADULT FICTION

On sale October 7, 2014

Ages 14 and up, Grades 9 and up

\$16.95 Hardcover

304 pages, 5" x 7"

ISBN: 978-1-61620-284-2

E-Book ISBN: 978-1-61620-435-8