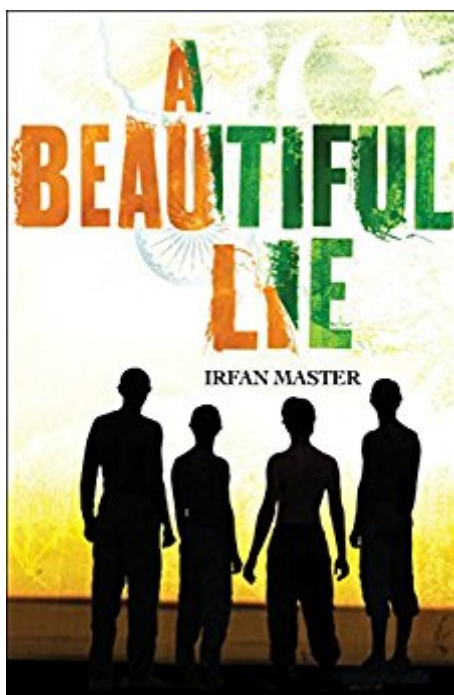


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# A Beautiful Lie



## Synopsis

“Everybody lies. We all do it. Many years ago I told one lie that has taken on a life of its own.” In India in 1947 the country is coming apart and so is thirteen-year-old Bilal’s life. He is determined to protect his dying father from the news of Partition, news that he knows will break his father’s heart. With spirit and determination, and with the help of his good friends, Bilal builds an elaborate deception, even printing false pages of the local newspaper to hide the signs of national unrest. All Bilal wants is for his father to die in peace. But that means Bilal has a very complicated relationship with the truth. This extraordinarily rich debut novel brings to life a key moment in history and touches on the importance of tolerance, love, and family.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In *A Beautiful Life* Bilal tells the story of his small market town in India in the early summer of 1947. Bilal’s father is dying. Bilal’s father loves India. He loves all of India, and all the people of India; Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus alike. Bilal knows that India is about to be partitioned into three separate countries: East and West Pakistan for the Muslims and what’s left of India for the Hindus. He’s

concerned that knowledge of the Partition will break his father's heart and he doesn't want his father's last days to be filled with heartache. In order to keep the knowledge from his father he fabricates a lie. Bilal and his friends then conspire to keep everyone away from the house where his father lays dying so that no one will tell his father the truth. The book is rich in the sights, sounds and scents of India. There's a beautiful description of one of Bilal's friends slicing and opening a pomegranate. The market is full of wonderful food. Banyan trees figure prominently. On the night of the Partition Bilal and one of his friends sneak into a building where a dance is being performed. Bilal describes the sitar music, tabla music, and a dancer with ghungroos around her ankles. He realizes she is dancing the story of India: the birds and the fish and the rivers and the monsoon rains. The book is also heavy with violence. As the time for the Partition comes closer, Muslim and Hindu groups escalate from skirmishing with each other to burning each other by tipping over barrels of oil and setting them on fire. The village is no longer safe for Bilal, but he will not leave without his father and he will not take his father out of the town that has been his home. The lie itself and the conspiracy surrounding it seems a bit like a construct used to tell the story. Perhaps the real story here is the lie, but it seems to me that the real story is India and the way in which the ancient country is being ripped apart. The reader never gets a complete picture of the politics involved in the Partition, probably because Bilal himself doesn't have such a picture. We know only that a beautiful and rich country and culture are being painfully divided as a result of political decisions.

This book was fabulous. A beautiful story about a family and the turmoil in their village during the time of partition of India. I felt as if I knew all the characters in the book, because the author did such a great job writing about them. I expected to like this book, because it got great reviews, but I loved it. It's rare that I cry reading a novel, but I did several times reading this one. I believe this was the author. Irfan Master's first novel, so amazing. I can't wait to read his next book.

I chose this book after seeing it recommended in a library journal to consider it for my advanced eighth grade English class. I will definitely be using it next year. The story is engaging and moving. It is well written. It deals with a number of issues well worth discussing -- truth, love, friendship, religion, and more. I think my students will have much to say about it and they will have read a fine piece of writing.

I like the story very much.

In 1947, India was partitioned off by the British to form Pakistan and East Pakistan (now known as Bangladesh). The choice of dividing the country on the basis of religion caused tremendous upheaval. Bitter infighting arose amongst the previously unbiased Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. Suddenly India was no longer united but divided by religion, with over 1 million people losing their lives to the violence of the time. We are brought into this world of change in *A Beautiful Lie*. Bilal's father is dying, and he doesn't want his father to know the problems being faced by his beloved India. Partition is coming, but Bilal hopes if his father is kept ignorant of the news, he will die peacefully and not from a broken heart. He plans to lie about what is going on in the village and the world to make sure this happens. To help him in his lie, Bilal enlists the aid of his three best friends. They are all from different religions but work together to keep Bilal's secret. Despite the antagonism arising in the village for those of different religions, Bilal and his friends stay close and loving towards each other. As the Day of Partition approaches, the unease in the village escalates into mob violence, with Bilal and his friends caught in the middle. Both he and his father love India and wish her to remain the same, but Change has come and there's nothing anyone can do to stem the tide of violence. *A Beautiful Lie* does a very good job explaining what was going on in the minds of those wanting India to stay the same, and those wanting Change. Middle school students will learn much from Bilal's story.

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