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A Great and Terrible Beauty

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“If you will listen, I will tell you a story – one whose ghosts cannot be banished by the comfort of a roaring fire. I will tell you the story of how we found ourselves in a realm where dreams are formed, destiny is chosen, and magic is as real as your handprint in snow.” – page 87

Bray, Libba. *A Great and Terrible Beauty*. New York: Delacorte, 2003. JUV PZ7.B7386Gr 2003.

After the murder of her mother, sixteen-year-old Gemma Doyle leaves India for London and is quickly shipped off to Spence, a boarding school where young ladies learn deportment, the importance of appearance, and the skills expected of a proper wife. Gemma is lonely and certain she will remain so at Spence. She is also afraid. Since the day of her mother’s death, Gemma has been having strange and unexplainable visions. To make matters worse, she realizes Kartik, the mysterious, caped boy she met in India, has followed her to England with instructions to watch her. Kartik insists that Gemma fight off her visions. But Gemma doesn’t know how...or if she really wishes to do so.

Nevertheless, aside from occasional visions and threatening messages received from the lurking Kartik, Gemma grows comfortable at Spence. She makes three friends – Felicity, Pippa, and Ann – and begins learning to control her visions. For a short time, it seems the hardest part of Gemma’s life will be conforming to society’s expectations. That is, until Spence’s unconventional art instructor, Miss Moore, takes the class to a cave on school grounds. There, Gemma learns about more than just primitive drawings: she learns about the realms, a magical place where anything can happen and about two former students of Spence who released a horrible creature from that magical place – a creature that is now hunting Gemma.

A combination of fantasy and historical fiction with a dash of romance as well, *A Great and Terrible Beauty* is the first in the Gemma Doyle trilogy. Set in 1895, the work skillfully weaves the paranormal with a statement on the expectations of women in Victorian society. Gemma is no ordinary girl; it is clear from the beginning of the work that she has strength and conviction. So when the complicated and sometimes catty friendship between Gemma, Felicity, Pippa, and Ann is magnified by the power of the realms to create a dangerous situation for all, readers can trust Gemma will know what to do. Although the ending isn’t exactly a cliffhanger, *A Great and Terrible Beauty* will leave readers ready for the next work of the series.