

TERRIBLE BEAUTY

by
Charles Sturridge

based on the book
A Great and Terrible Beauty
by
Libba Bray

Revised First Draft

March 2007

Anthony Jones
Peter Fraser and Dunlop,
Drury House,
34-42 Russel Street,
London WC2 V5HA
0207-344-1000

FADE IN:

1 INT. BATHROOM, LONDON 1895 -- DAY *

CLOSE ON: A Face. Upside down. Underwater. *

Very slowly the camera starts to revolve, a girl, her long hair floating ethereally, is staring directly at us. The water slightly distorts her features but she is pale and very beautiful. The breath she is holding seems impossibly long. *

Then. *

Her head rises and slowly starts to break the surface of the water and we understand that the image is in slow motion. She pushes forward into the air, beads of water falling away, her eyes closing and opening, her long wet hair roping behind her. *

ANOTHER ANGLE: *

In profile her head appears above the edge of the large roll topped bath bending forward to meet her knees. We are looking at GEMMA DOYLE, sixteen years and three months old as she turns to look towards the camera which is tracking in towards her, closer and closer into her OPEN EYE. *

2 EXT. MARKETPLACE, BOMBAY JUNE 1895 -- DAY *

A religious procession is moving down the street towards the carriage, DRUMMERS and DANCERS and brightly painted statues of INDIAN DEITIES carried shoulder high. PAINTED FACES, FLOWER PETALS and COLOURED POWDERS thrown into the air. *

Coming towards them, pushing through the crowd, is a HORSE DRAWN CARRIAGE containing a smiling INDIAN SERVANT, SARITA (50's) and opposite her VIRGINIA (40), elegant with pale green eyes and her daughter GEMMA, long hair scooped up carelessly, sitting slumped in the corner of the carriage. It's GEMMA'S sixteenth birthday and she is not happy. *

VIRGINIA

You've always been. Every birthday.
It's a tradition. *

GEMMA

When I was a little. I'm not little
any more Anyway I hate those
disgusting sticky cakes she makes
me eat. *

VIRGINIA

(reproving) *
You used to love them, darling. *

GEMMA

(swatting at a fly) *
No, I didn't. *

(MORE)

GEMMA (CONT'D)

(to herself)

You never listen to me, no one does.

She looks sulkily out into the crowd.

3 INT. WHITE ROOM -- DAY

A BLACK CORSET is dragged down to reveal GEMMA'S pale expressionless face. She is being dressed. Her hair is brushed, but still seems untamed. FINGERS expertly thread the LACES of the CORSET.

4 INT. MARKETPLACE, BOMBAY JUNE 1895 -- DAY

A BLACK ROBED FIGURE is moving across the rooftops running and jumping from surface to surface with reckless agility. On another rooftop across the street a SECOND FIGURE, dressed the same, is crouched watching the crowded street below. He slides down the side of the building, onto an awning then down into the street, pushing through the crowd until he meets his companion. They follow the CARRIAGE.

ANGLE ON:

The CARRIAGE has halted as the DANCERS and DRUMMERS swirl round it.

VIRGINIA

(to GEMMA)

This is madness. We'll get there faster on foot.

GEMMA

No! Wait.

GEMMA starts to protest but she is too late, her mother is already out of the carriage.

GEMMA

(loud)

I am not walking!

VIRGINIA pays no attention.

5 INT. WHITE ROOM -- DAY

The FINGERS strain to tighten the CORSET. It is a fierce almost inhuman process in which the wearer is entirely passive. Forcing the flesh into the perfect shape. There are three assistants to this process, AUNT ADELAIDE, tall, thin and severe, AUNT EVELYN, short and birdlike and a SALLOW MAID.

6 EXT. MARKET STALLS BOMBAY -- DAY

The BLACK ROBED FIGURES moving fast through the PROCESSION.

VIRGINIA making her way through the CROWD, GEMMA behind.

GEMMA

You didn't keep Tom locked up in
Bombay.

VIRGINIA

He's a boy, darling, he had to go
to School. *

GEMMA

That's what I mean. So do I! *

She walks straight into a STREET MAGICIAN with a COSTUMED
MONKEY crouched on his shoulder. SARITA comes up behind. *

SARITA

Look at the little monkey. Isn't
he charming memsahib?

GEMMA

(in despair)
Why does everybody here seem to
think I'm six years old! *

(to monkey)

Go away!

She hurries on but the MONKEY and his owner do not give
up. *

7 INT. WHITE ROOM -- DAY

A BLACK STOCKING is pulled up and attached to the CORSET
by a complicated array of BUTTONS and STAYS. *

8 EXT. MARKET STALLS BOMBAY -- DAY

VIRGINIA stops the way ahead is blocked, she turns back
to GEMMA. *

VIRGINIA

Let's get off this street. Her
house is just through here. I'd no
idea there was a Festival today.
It's too much.

She turns to go and walks straight into one of the BLACK
ROBED men.

AMAR

I beg you pardon.

The ROBED MAN, AMAR (30) bows at the same time the
SCREECHING MONKEY jumps from the MAGICIAN onto GEMMA'S
shoulder. She picks the MONKEY up and turns round. *

KARTIK

Allow me.

KARTIK (18), the second BLACK ROBED MAN, holds her eye
for a second before taking the animal and handing it back
to it's owner. GEMMA is aware of his piercing eyes. *

GEMMA

Thank you.

KARTIK bows slightly ahead SARITA pushes past towards AMAR. *

SARITA

Be more careful. Now get out of the way or you will be whipped!

AMAR

(quietly)

Please, excuse my clumsiness. *

He bows again and then whispers clearly to VIRGINIA.

AMAR

It is close. There is no time.

VIRGINIA as she hears this is clearly shocked.

VIRGINIA

Not here. Please God.

AMAR

You must come quickly.

He starts to move her off.

VIRGINIA

No, wait.

(turning to Gemma)

Gemma, darling, you're right. This whole expedition was a silly idea.

GEMMA is watching AMAR who is watching anxiously.

GEMMA

Who is that man?

VIRGINIA

Nobody, darling, it's a festival. You know what India's like. I'll go on to Mrs T, and Sarita can take you home. You can send the carriage back for me.

GEMMA

(looking at Amar)

Why is he staring at us?

VIRGINIA

Gemma, please. Take this for me.

She reaches up and lifts a SMALL SILVER CHAIN from her neck with a medallion showing THREE MOONS in the shape of an CRESCENT EYE enclosed in a hexagonal star.

GEMMA

Why? *

*

VIRGINIA

It's a present.

*

GEMMA

But it's yours. You've always worn it.

*

*

She puts it round GEMMA'S neck.

VIRGINIA

And you've always liked it. I meant to give it to you anyway.

*

She adjusts it.

VIRGINIA

(relenting)

We'll have a glass of champagne together when I get back.

GEMMA

I'm not going home.

*

AMAR

(urgent)

Sahib, we have no time.

He starts to pull VIRGINIA away.

VIRGINIA

(going)

I'll be back as soon as I can.

GEMMA

Do what you want. I don't care!

GEMMA watches for a moment uncertainly as VIRGINIA disappears into the crowd.

*

9 INT. WHITE ROOM -- DAY

*

An UNDERSKIRT is pulled swiftly down the body. It is a harsh unyielding movement.

*

*

10 EXT. MARKETPLACE, BOMBAY JUNE 1895 -- DAY

*

GEMMA moving as fast as she can through the crowd with SARITA struggling to follow.

*

*

SARITA

Miss Gemma. Miss Gemma.

*

*

GEMMA pushes through the procession ignoring the dancers, SARITA shouts after her.

*

SARITA

Miss Gemma.

The MONKEY jumps on to SARITA'S shoulder screeching and she's tries to fight it off.

SARITA

Miss Gemma. Miss Gemma!

But GEMMA has already disappeared into the crowd. *

11 EXT. STREET, BOMBAY -- DAY

The streets off the Market are less crowded and GEMMA, in her white flowing dress, starts to run and then, realizing that this is unseemly, she slows to a fast walk. Ahead of her she sees a heavy WAGON approaching filling the narrow road so she takes a RIGHT TURN into... *

12 EXT. NARROW STREET BOMBAY -- DAY

The street is emptier. An OLD WOMAN stares at her from a doorway and mutters something as she passes. Someone above closes an upper window. GEMMA walks faster. She starts to feel a cramping pain in her stomach. She reaches a narrow dirty CROSSING, not sure which way to go. An OLD MAN is standing in a doorway. She hesitates and then goes towards him. The PAIN is fiercer. *

GEMMA

Excuse me. Which direction is the market?

The OLD MAN looks at her.

GEMMA

(to herself)

Don't worry I'll find it myself.

Behind her and a SMALL GROUP has gathered to see what the noise is about. She takes the right hand turn her hands pressing into her side to ease the pain. *

13 INT. WHITE ROOM -- DAY

BLACK. *

The CAMERA is moving down the inside of a BLACK SLEEVE towards the light. A second hand emerges from the other sleeve still BANDAGED. The FINGERS pull the BLACK BODICE tight across the bosom, buttoning swiftly up towards the neck. *

14 EXT. NARROW ALLEY BOMBAY -- DAY

GEMMA is half way down the alley when she looks behind her and sees the OLD MAN following her. *

GEMMA

(frightened)

Oh God!

She turns back: CRASH *

Straight into a BLACK ROBED figure. She screams and a HAND is clamped over her mouth. She struggles for a moment and then collapses in a faint. *

KARTIK lets her down gently. *

GEMMA (O.S.)
I can't breathe.

15 INT. WHITE ROOM -- DAY

In a mirror we see a full length a figure dressed in BLACK MOURNING, the narrow corseted waist the shaped torso, it is GEMMA looking pale and tired either side of the her the two aunts EVELYN and ADELAIDE.

AUNT EVELYN
Shallow breaths Gemma, a Lady takes
shallow breaths. *

She demonstrates.

AUNT ADELAIDE
Too much oxygen isn't good for a
young girl.

GEMMA stares at herself expressionless.

16 EXT. NARROW ALLEY BOMBAY -- DAY

KARTIK bends over her. Her EYES flick open and she sees his face close to her. *

GEMMA
(frightened)
No. Please.

We are looking at her lying on the ground over KARTIK'S shoulder. Her eyes roll into the back of her head and her body shudders as is she was starting a fit. *

KARTIK
(urgent)
Don't go. Please, you must stay
here. *

A small TRICKLE OF BLOOD emerges from her left nostril. *

GEMMA (O.S.)
It hurts. *

Her body goes limp. *

17 INT. WHITE ROOM -- DAY *

GEMMA'S eye fill with tears. AUNT ADELAIDE makes a small adjustment to the COLLAR. *

AUNT ADELAIDE
You'll get used to the pain. *

She looks at GEMMA in the MIRROR satisfied. *

AUNT EVELYN

Your poor mother would be very proud
of you.

CLOSE ON: Gemma as we cut to....

18 EXT. TEMPLE OF KALI, BOMBAY -- DAY

HIGH SHOT: VIRGINIA and AMAR running across a courtyard
towards the steps of an elaborately decorated TEMPLE.
The CAMERA DECELERATES to see them in SLOW MOTION now.

Then it SWOOPS round to see GEMMA watching, the same
TRICKLE of BLOOD evident from her left nostril.

VIRGINIA reaches the first step, but AMAR drawing a KNIFE
runs ahead of her.

19 INT. TEMPLE OF KALI, BOMBAY -- DAY

A long cool columned space with a huge statue of KALI at
the far end. AMAR is first in, VIRGINIA close behind.

AMAR

We should be safe here.

VIRGINIA

Look.

She points to the far end of the temple where a line of
WHITE SNOW appears and advances like a MAGIC CARPET towards
them.

VIRGINIA

He's here.

The whole of the floor of the temple is now covered in
SIX INCHES OF SNOW. AMAR advances towards the statue
end. VIRGINIA looks to see WHITE WOLVES prowling on either
side of her behind the columns. Ahead of her AMAR.

FLASH CUT

Like a FLASH OF LIGHTENING we see a huge ARCTIC SNOWSCAPE,
the TEMPLE is gone, in front of AMAR is ASCAROTH a HOODED
DEMON DRESSED IN BLACK sitting astride a BLACK HORSE.

BACK TO TEMPLE:

AMAR lunges forward with the knife but is picked up and
flung into one of the columns where he collapses dead in
the snow.

ON GEMMA standing at the back of the TEMPLE watching.
She sees her mother move forward and kneel to pick
something up out of the SNOW. The KNIFE.

FLASH of ASCAROTH AGAIN:

The horse advances on VIRGINIA.

ASCAROTH

You cannot resist me.

BACK TO TEMPLE:

Her fingers close round the JEWELLED HANDLE

VIRGINIA

No.

She plunges the KNIFE into herself.

From GEMMA'S POV we see her mother drop to her knees,
hesitate and then fall forward into the snow.

A DOUBLE FLASH OF ASCAROTH AS THE HORSE REARS UP. The
snow starts to retreat backwards until the floor of the
TEMPLE is as it was. GEMMA runs forward to her mother.
As she gets closer she see a POOL of RED BLOOD spreading
outwards from the body and the thin silver point of the
KNIFE protruding through her back.

GEMMA stands looking down at her, in shock.

The TEMPLE PRIESTS come running towards the body. The
pass straight through GEMMA without noticing her.

CLOSE on VIRGINIA'S face, and her lifeless eyes as we
hear a scream and cut to....

20 EXT. PASSAGE, BOMBAY -- DAY

GEMMA'S SCREAMING FACE.

Another Angle: The black figure of KARTIK crouched over
the screaming girl and the crowd standing around her in
the narrow alley as a POLICE TRUCK siren blaring, pushes
through the crowd.

21 EXT. COUNTRYSIDE, ENGLAND -- DAY

The WHEELS of a STEAM TRAIN crash through the frame,
followed by carriages in quick succession. The CAMERA
moves up to see the lush green English countryside beyond.

22 INT. CORRIDOR TRAIN -- DAY

An old CONDUCTOR is moving down the corridor.

CONDUCTOR

Tickets please.

He pulls open the compartment door.

23 INT. TRAIN CARRIAGE -- DAY

GEMMA looking pale and tired is sitting still dressed
ENTIRELY IN BLACK with her VEIL on. Opposite her brother
TOM(21) lazily handsome and also dressed formally hands
over his TICKET.

CONDUCTOR
Ticket please, miss.

GEMMA does not seem to notice him. *

TOM
Gem?

She reaches for her ticket. *

CONDUCTOR
Thank you.

He clips it and goes.

TOM
You're brooding again.

GEMMA
Sorry.

TOM
It's not polite.

GEMMA
I know. *
(beat) *
I'm sorry.

TOM
And stop saying 'sorry' all the
time!

GEMMA
Why not? I am. About everything.

TOM
It wasn't your fault.

GEMMA *
That's easy for you to say. *

TOM *
The fact is, you weren't there and *
you don't know what happened. So *
when you get to the school you just *
tell them mother died of cholera,
exactly as we agreed.

GEMMA looks at him.

TOM
You promised Gem. It isn't just
you, I have my reputation to
consider. People are different
here. You can't wander around with
a murdered mother and expect to be
considered respectable. Believe me
I know.

(MORE)

TOM (CONT'D)

(relenting)

After you've been at the school for
a week or two you'll understand.
Then you'll thank me for it.

GEMMA is silent looking towards the window.

24 EXT. LONDON STATION -- DAY *

HIGH shot looking down on the platforms. Steam rising *
from the locomotives, crowds moving from the platforms *
towards the concourse. The CAMERA moves down through the *
web of steel that supports the roof and pushes FAST FORWARD *
to GEMMA moving through the crowd. She looks at the *
crowds, a BUSY MAN dragging a SMALL CHILD, a YOUNG COUPLE *
arguing, a turbaned MAN with three PORTER carrying his *
luggage. TOM catches up with her. *

TOM *

(gruffly) *

I've ordered a Carriage to meet *
us, it's an hours ride to the *
school. I won't be able to stay *
long I'm afraid, I have to go on *
to Oxford tonight.

GEMMA *

There's no need for you to *
accompany me at all. I will be *
perfectly fine by myself thank *
you.

TOM *

(firmly) *

This is England, Gemma. A Lady *
cannot travel anywhere *
unaccompanied, it's not a matter *
of choice.

TOM takes her arm and leads her towards the ticket barrier, *
behind them we catch a brief glimpse of a BLACK ROBED *
FIGURE following. *

25 EXT. NARROW COUNTRY ROAD -- NIGHT *

A CARRIAGE drawn by two horses moves briskly down the *
narrow lane. *

26 INT. CARRIAGE -- NIGHT *

GEMMA is sitting opposite TOM, her hands are stretched *
out pressing against either wall, trying to take some of *
the pressure off her new corset which is cutting into her *
hips.

GEMMA *

I don't think I can stand this *
for much longer. I can hardly *
breathe.

TOM

If you want to attract a gentleman,
you've got to start looking like
a lady.

GEMMA

Really, and what is it exactly
that a gentleman finds attractive
Tom?

TOM

(airily)
Beauty, modesty and organization.

GEMMA

Nothing about having to be sawed
in half then?

27 INT. CARRIAGE -- NIGHT

The carriage come to an abrupt stop, GEMMA is thrown
forwards into TOM

28 EXT. NARROW COUNTRY ROAD -- NIGHT

GEMMA lands on her hands and knees between the carriage
wheels. She is startles but not hurt.

29 INT. CARRIAGE -- NIGHT

TOM tries to lift the unconscious body of GEMMA.

TOM

Gemma? Are you alright?

He looks down at her pale face. She is unconscious.

TOM

(shouts)
Driver! What's happening. Why
did we stop?

He struggles to get the inert GEMMA back into her seat.

30 EXT. CARRIAGE -- NIGHT

The DRIVER climbs down and as he does so he walk
unconsciously passed SPIRIT GEMMA who flattens herself
against the carriage as he passes. He reaches the window
behind her.

DRIVER

The roads blocked ahead, sir.
There's been an accident. They's
travelers, best not to bother
them. There's a camp near here.

GEMMA walks on. As she passes the carriage horses they
sense her and start to rear up in their harness and we
see the DRIVER running back to calm them.

GEMMA walks on. In front of her a group of men and women standing around a CARAVAN lying on its side with a broken wheel. Some of the men are holding torches as others are working on the wheel. Beyond there are three other caravans, a halted procession. *

GEMMA moves through the group, no one can see her. She walks on towards the next CARAVAN. Inside there is an old woman, MOTHER ELENA lying in a low cot facing us. She is being fed by a young girl, TALIA who has her back to us. ELENA sees GEMMA standing in her doorway. *

ELENA
How dare YOU come here. *

GEMMA looks at her surprised. *

GEMMA
You can see me? *

ELENA
Get out. Get out and go back to where you came from! *

TALIA comes forward and slams the door in her face. GEMMA steps back from the CARAVAN and stands for a moment in the dark. Either side of her the trees rustle in the wind. She is scared. A FLURRY of LEAVES blow around her, they seem to have a will of their own twisting in the wind they form a SHAPE that starts to rise up and tower over her. *

On GEMMA'S face as she looks up to see what is towering over her and starts to scream. As she does so her body appears to get sucked away, as though she was made of dust and disappeared. *

31 INT. CARRIAGE -- NIGHT *

GEMMA wakes up with the same scream on her lips. *

GEMMA
Get me away from here.
(loud)
GET ME AWAY FROM HERE. *

32 EXT. NARROW COUNTRY ROAD -- NIGHT *

TOM sticks his head out of the carriage. *

TOM
Drive on. Do you hear me. Drive on I say. *

The DRIVER starts up and forces the horses forward. He pushed the carriage past the group of GYPSIES. They watch him go. We hear the sound of GEMMA screaming. *

33 INT. CARRIAGE -- NIGHT *

TOM struggles to keep her quiet, his hand clamped over her mouth. *

TOM
Control yourself, for God's sake. *

GEMMA stops struggling and slowly TOM removes his hand. They are close together GEMMA still breathing heavily. *

GEMMA
It's alright. I'm fine. I don't know what came over me. *

She settles back in her seat and TOM goes to his. *

TOM
For pity's sake, get a hold of yourself. And please try to watch your language at Spence. It is a very proper establishment you know. They won't tolerate it. *

GEMMA gives him a look. *

34 EXT. SPENCE ABBEY -- NIGHT *

The CARRIAGE approaches a large GOTHIC BUILDING with four towers reaching up over a central gatehouse and two wings leading off either side. This is SPENCE ABBEY. *

35 EXT. MAIN COURTYARD, SPENCE ABBEY -- NIGHT *

A square courtyard with large wooden doors leading off it. TOM help GEMMA down from the CARRIAGE. *

TOM
They all look pretty grim to start with. You'll soon get used to it. *

GEMMA is not convinced. The CARRIAGE HORSES shift nervously, as TOM bangs on the door. *

36 INT. MAIN HALL, SPENCE ABBEY -- EVENING *

TOM enters the large stone flagged hall with FIREPLACES burning at either end. The roof is supported by eight ornate columns, four on either side of the main doorway. Facing TOM across the hall is a wide staircase which leads up to a central landing above which hangs a full length PAINTING of the school's founder EUGENIA SPENCE. There are two ALCOVES either side of the stairs. GEMMA, still veiled enters behind TOM. Distantly a bell rings. *

SUDDENLY

The hall is filled with GIRLS, they spill down the staircase, out from the doors at either end of the hall FLOODING the room. They all talk excitedly. *

All are wearing the SPENCE ABBEY UNIFORM, long grey skirt and white blouse. We pick up on TWO GIRLS moving through the crowded floor, leading is FELICITY (16) blonde, pale blue eyes and refined features, beside her PIPPA (16) long dark hair, stunning with dark brown eyes. *

A figure dressed in BLACK appears at the head of the staircase, MISS HARNETT is deputy head of the school and she carries a black cane which she bangs on the floor. *

MISS HARNETT

LADIES!

The hall immediately becomes both still and silent and every girl looks towards the teacher.

MISS HARNETT

We have a gentleman in our presence.

As one the girls turn to look at TOM, who is visibly taken aback by this simultaneous attention.

MISS HARNETT

Let us show him that a Spence girl knows how to behave in the presence of a gentleman.

As one, THE GIRLS make a low curtsy. Only GEMMA and TOM remain standing. TOM is conscious of every girl staring at him.

MISS HARNETT

Now, about your business.
(as they starts to
talk)
In silence. *

The Hall empties as fast as it was filled and MISS HARNETT comes towards GEMMA, ignoring TOM. *

MISS HARNETT

Miss Doyle? *

GEMMA

Yes. And this is my brother Tom. *

MISS HARNETT

You're an hour late and the Headmistress does not like to be kept waiting. Say your farewells and one of the servants will escort you up. *

(to TOM) *

Mr Doyle. *

She does not wait for a reply, but heads off. GEMMA, turns to her brother who look uncomfortable.

TOM

Well...