

FORGIVENESS

It was night. Reema lay there, alone in the darkness. She lived in a mansion in the English countryside, far away from anyone else.

She had been raised in India, but had spent the last three years in England, bought as a slave to help her family to pay their way in the world. Reema was 18 now, and should have been contemplating her future steps as an adult. But such experiences were far away.

The only sounds that Reema could hear, curled up in her dungeon, were the sounds of her own sobs as she remembered how she had become a captive, believing those who had told her she was on the road to a better life. The room was dark, echoing the darkness of her own mind, hidden away from those who belittled her on a daily basis.

As the tears rolled down her face, moving from side to side, they reflected Reema's mood, moving from pessimism to optimism and back again, before finally staining her pillow, the only way Reema could ever leave her own mark on her surroundings. Reema was beautiful on the outside, but this hid a darkness that wrapped itself around her every thought.

Reema's one connection with the world outside were the tiny windows at the top of the walls of her cellar, visited by curious birds who flew down to explore. Some were regular visitors, and Reema had given them names. She wondered if, one day, she would meet those feathered friends, without the barrier of glass which separated them.

Then it happened. Was it fate or was it divine intervention? Reema had been cleaning the house when the phone rang. It was answered by the lady of the house who was left her in a state of panic. She threw the phone down, screaming, rushing towards her car, catching her coat in the front door as she went, so that the door did not close.

That chink of light was the route that gave Reema an avenue to the outside world. Not daring to believe what was happening, she waited until the lady's car had left and made a bolt for freedom. She ran and ran, the wind blowing through her hair, so that it cascaded over her shoulders like a waterfall.

Reema was free!

Ten years later, as a free woman, Reema went back to the house, determined to meet the lady again. Looking around her, she wondered if the birds she could hear were her old friends.

Then she knocked on the door. What had been a door that had admitted light ten years before, was now a door which revealed darkness.

'I have made a new life.'

'I know. The day you left was the day my husband died.'

Staring into the sadness of the woman's eyes, Reema understood that the moment of freedom for her had been the moment of tragedy for her captor.

Then Reema exercised that most powerful of all superpowers: the power of forgiveness.