**Just one day a year.**

As he sat, waiting restlessly in his garden his mind went back five years to the moment he received the verdict of The Court. He would only be allowed five hours access on just one day of the year.

As he looked again at his watch he was aware just how much his hands were trembling with excitement. He caught his breath as he heard the click of the garden gate and the creaking of the still rusty hinges. Then she was with him again.

He could see in an instant how much she had changed. The gangly twelve year old of last year had transformed into the blossoming teenager. As she came and stood in front of him he looked once again into her blue eyes. They were sparkling, full of life, full of fun, and perhaps he detected full of mischief.

“Hi Britney. It’s fantastic to see you again”.

“Hi dad” she replied, “How’s things?” He had just begun to reply when she interrupted.

“Let’s go to the park” she shouted excitedly,” In our new home I miss playing on the swings”.

As they walked along he busy road leading to the park gates she skipped ahead, playing some sort of hopscotch. All the swings were empty. Only a few minutes later she was flying into the air, backward and forward, her golden hair flowing in the wind. As he watched her his heart ached. He could see how much she was loving every moment. His thoughts turned, fleetingly, to the strict conditions imposed on him, the penalty for breaking them being that he would never see her again.

“Come on” she shouted “ I dare you to go as high as me”.

The higher he went on the swing, to his great surprise, the more he enjoyed it, rekindling long lost childhood memories. He was starting to keep pace with her when, at the top if its arc on the swing, she took a flying jump and with a great shout of triumph landed safely on the worn grass. He decided to slow down to come to a stop, thinking at his age it was wiser.

From the swings she had spotted the winding river. “Let’s go for a walk along the towpath down to the locks”.

As they walked along he asked if she had made any new friends over the last year.

“Oh, loads and loads” she replied with a huge grin on her face. He burst out laughing, something he rarely did.

“Still exaggerating and still making fun of me”.

“Dad, as if. You know I’d never do that” and she couldn’t resist giving him a wicked smile.

As they meandered along the winding path she shared with him all about her new life and the changes she had now adjusted to. He was relieved, and at the same time saddened to realise that she was now really settled. He had been worried over the years about the challenges she and her mother had to come to terms with. He began to feel that his concerns were now groundless.

When they reached the locks she ran across the top of the gates to the derelict Keepers Cottage. There was an old oak bench that had been constructed from railway sleepers and she sat down, calling him over. He had always had a fear of water so he held tightly onto the steel rail as he crossed the gates.

He needed to talk and she somehow sensed this instinctively.

“This past twelve months I’ve finally given up the drink” he said, and for the first time he saw her look edgy, almost nervous. “It’s been a very difficult battle and I’ve needed the help of some close friends”.

“Look Dad, we’ve not got that long and mum thought you might bring this up” Britney replied.