FARAWAY PRISON

The prison was situated far away from other lands - that is why it was called FARAWAY PRISON. The Prison Governor and all the inmates were of mixed heritage which became even more mixed as they intermarried. Faraway was governed by its President and an elected Council, a Court of nine Judges to which residents could appeal when needed. Faraway was a small, tropical island, its lush and mountainous landscape dotted with small villages, ringed with palm trees, beautiful sandy beaches and an emerald sea. The town, called Peace, had a population of about twenty thousand people, shops, ten junior and high schools, several chemists, a well-stocked library, and a theatre. Next to the Townhall was the Court and the Prison. It had a Governor, a middle-aged single woman who had risen from the ranks and ran a tight ship. There was one woman, about sixty years old, who was on Death Row. Her name was Jessica Small, an unusual name for such a very tall woman. The prison Governor, Miss Patricia Stander, visited Jessica early one morning.

“I am sorry to tell you, Miss Small, that your execution date has been set for Friday, the first of May, at ten thirty.” “Thank you, Miss Stander,” replied Jessica. “I shall be ready to be hanged for a crime I did not commit. The ways of God are mysterious, and I believe I shall be set free, even at the last hour.” Miss Stander rose to go, she had a lot to do, and privately thought Jessica was bonkers.

It was nine o'clock already and the prisoners would be in the yard, lined up and waiting for her. There were a hundred and fifty men and fifty women, all dressed in orange cotton shirts and trousers. "Good morning," she said, using her clip-on mic. "Good morning, Governor," they responded in unison. "Today," she said, "I am happy to announce the release of prisoners twenty, Miss Fancy, and prisoner forty, Mr Swift. Please come forward so we can wish you well in your new life. You have both been ideal inmates and trained well for new careers – Miss Fancy as a nurse, and Mr Swift in the hospitality sector. Give them a round of applause and shake their hands as they leave to start a new and quite different life from that they had before!"

At twelve thirty, Miss Stander entered the visitors' dining hall. The tables were impeccably set with perfectly ironed tablecloths, good cutlery, sparkling wine glasses, side plates, serviettes shaped like swans, and small bowls of mixed flowers from the garden. Miss Stander stood at the door welcoming the people who had booked seats for lunch. It was very popular for its delicious food, excellent service and no tipping! There were tables set for two, most were set for four, and there was a large family birthday party set for twelve. When everyone was seated, the Prison Chaplain, Father John, said grace, the waitrons brought menus and took orders, champagne corks popped except on Miss Standers table. She had been brought her standard drink- cola tonic with lemonade and no ice because she

was at work, and nothing escaped her beady eye. While waiting for his starter to arrive, Mr Smallbones, a large jovial man, said to his waiter dressed in black trousers, white shirt and black bowtie, “Hi! What are you in prison for?” “I got into a drunken brawl and stabbed a man in his head. Fortunately, he survived, or I’d have been sentenced to death.” “How long did you get?” queried Mrs Smallbones. “Ten years, Ma’am,” he answered. “I have only two years left and, when I leave, I will get a good job in the tourist industry – so it’s actually a good thing I landed up here!” The starter, which was half a peeled avocado filled with pieces of crayfish and mayonnaise, arrived. It was followed by slices of rolled roast lamb shoulder, mint sauce, crispy roast potatoes, and mixed vegetables. Everyone said, “Compliments to the chef” as their plates were removed. To top it off there were three small chocolate Brownies and ice-cream, followed by a cheese platter and cups of coffee. The happy guests left to sleep it off and Miss Stander went into the kitchen.” Annabel,” she said to a waitress, “I noticed you spilt a few drops of wine when you were pouring it.” “Sorry, Gov,” she replied. “I shall stay and practise with water, I won’t be so clumsy again!” “Andrew,” she said. “Find out which side you remove plates from – you sometimes did it from the right and sometimes from the left!” “Oh dear,” he said, “did you notice that?” To Simon, the chef, she said, “Delicious as usual! If I could knock off a year of your sentence I would!” To which he replied, “Gov, I have no family and I really like it here! Planning weekly menus, ordering supplies and taking Willie and Ben to pack

their trolleys with potatoes and apples from the store and any fresh vegetables, lettuce, tomatoes, strawberries and fruit from out orchard. I believe our prisoners have much better food than those who live in Faroff Lands."

Miss Stander lived in the comfortable Governor's apartment. Every morning, she woke at six, said her prayers, showered and ate her breakfast of oatmeal porridge, scrambled eggs, brown toast, butter, marmalade and two cups of coffee. She read the Faraway News which had been pushed through her letter box, and started work at eight thirty, smart in her blue cotton uniform. Her personal maid, Nellie, arrived soon after she had left and did all the washing, polishing and cleaning required.

There were several hospitals and one large university in Faraway Land. One of Miss Standers innovations was to start a Nursing Training College for prisoners who wanted to become nurses on release. At present, there were sixty women enrolled and twenty men. There were about four hundred people in the prison. The prison's Building Team had built a Medical Block, with wards for men and women, and a lecture hall. The course lasted for three years, and the students sat for their yearly examinations in Faraway Land's Central Hospital. The nurses wore the regulation uniforms, aprons and caps. Each year on passing they were given a star until their third one on graduating. As in all the hospitals in Faraway, they worked shifts, and in their first year were expected to do menial things, like washing

patients, emptying bedpans and answering call buttons. They were told that nursing was a calling. The prison employed two doctors and two matrons, one for each shift. After their eight- hour shifts, the students had lectures and demonstrations by them and were left to study their textbooks until nine pm when they went to their cells. Miss Stander took a great interest in the prison hospital and visited it every day except Sundays to speak to the sick and ask if they were satisfied with the care they were receiving. “How are you, Jack?” she asked a man idly putting down a magazine next to his bed. “I’m doing alright, Gov,” he replied, “but I can’t wait to get back to the Building Team and my mates!” “And how are you, Suzette?” she asked a young woman in the women’s ward. “I’m Ok thanks,” she replied, “but I wish I was in a supermarket pinching some makeup!”

The first of May came. It was execution day. Jessica Small was about to be hanged. A large crowd had gathered outside the prison. Over the years, few executions had taken place because the population of Faraway was generally peaceful. Miss Stander sighed as she walked into Death Row’s cell. “I am so very sorry, Jessica, that it has come to this. You have been an exemplary inmate. Goodbye. I shall pray for your soul.” “Thank you, Governor, for all your kindness,” Jessica responded, “but my soul is in my Saviour’s hands, and I am not afraid.” Shortly after that Father John entered the cell. He clasped Jessica’s hands and said, “I am so sorry it has come to this,” he said sadly.

“Let us prayer for forgiveness of your sin. God will forgive you.” “Thank you, Father, but No! I can’t pray for a sin I did not commit.” At ten thirty, two guards entered the cell. They bound her hands and placed a hood over her head. The phone rang and a guard answered. “Stop the execution!” yelled Miss Stander. “Jessica is innocent, and I have proof! Bring her to me.” They found a rather plump grey hired man with her. “This is Mister Hugo Smart, old Mrs Summers’ lawyer.” “I am so very very glad I got here in the nick of time. Mrs Summers loved Jessica who had been her companion for many years. I have been travelling the world with my wife and had no idea of what was happening here. An execution on a tiny, insignificant island like Faraway never makes headlines. I got home, picked up Faraway News and was shocked. As you know, Faraway’s Judges have made a ruling that there may be no gaps in a will’s text except at the end. Here is the will. See for yourselves! The will, on which this execution was made, has a final paragraph inserted on the same typewriter which says that Mrs Summers leaves everything to Mr Selwin Summers, her nephew.”

Selwyn was sitting in the lounge of Mrs Summer’s sumptuous home. “It’s all mine,” he said to himself. “It’s all mine!” He flicked on the television, anxious to see the crowd gathered for the execution, opened an expensive bottle of the finest champagne and lifted a cutglass wineglass to this nose, swirling it gently. The door opened. A policeman said, “I arrest you for the murder of your aunt,

Mrs Summers”. Dropping his glass, Selwyn fled, only to be caught by three burly policemen who handcuffed him and pushed him into the back of the police van, locking the door.