NOLA

It was billed as the event of the year: Nola Featherstone's wedding to Jeremy Jack in the beautiful Cathedral of St Mary's in the capital City of Beauty in the country of Paradise.

Nola had never worked, preferring to live an indulgent and luxurious life with her billionaire parents, Jim and Lola Featherstone. She was an only child, adored and spoilt by her parents. She met Jeremy Jack at a party in a mutual friend's home. It was love at first sight. Both were attractive, indulged, spoilt and had never been in love with anyone other than themselves.

As they had always been given what they wanted, the wedding date was set for a month ahead and they were blissfully happy. Nola chose her three best friends, Cathy, Ella and Lauren as her bridesmaids, and Jeremy chose Benjamin as his best man. St Mary's Cathedral was the church where all the rich and famous were married, even though many, like Nola's and Jeremy's parents never attended services except, occasionally, on Christmas day.

The wedding reception was to be held in the ballroom of the Featherstones' house, and top restaurants were chosen to submit menus and accompanying wines. BEST FOR FUNCTIONS was chosen. And then, Nola had to choose her wedding dress, her bouquet and her bridesmaids dresses

and bouquets. Of course, Lola did nothing but choose. Her harassed secretary did all the hard work as Lola changed her mind frequently.

It was the day before the wedding. Nola was excited and happy. She drove to the Jack's house, opened the front door and ran into the sitting room, after all, it would be her in-laws home tomorrow. A sight shocked and startled her. A long-legged blonde was lying on a sofa with her head resting on the seated Jeremy's lap. Now, Nola was not the brightest girl in her class, but she was adept at making social excuses and she kept her cool. "Hi darling," she said, "just came to see you once again before our great day." "Hello, my Sweetheart," he replied, "that's wonderful of you." Nola waved and left. But she was mad. Spitting mad!

The wedding day arrived. The house was filled with pink and white roses imported from countries far away. Lola rushed in. "Darling!" she exclaimed, "your wedding day has arrived. Jane will bring you breakfast in bed and then you must have a leisurely bath. I will come and dress you." After her bath, her parents came in with gift for her. Jim handed her a gift-wrapped smallish box. "I hope you like them." Nola, pretending to be very excited, unwrapped the gift and saw two boxes. One contained a bracelet with three strands of diamonds, the other a long necklace of two carat diamonds. "Oh! Thank you, darlings," she cried, "You spoil me too, too much!" And she flung her arms around them.

Lola returned a short while after with Cathy carrying the wedding dress. Dior had designed it for her. It was white and made from the finest silk, the bodice was cut fashionably low in front and was covered in tiny, shiny pearls. The skirt flowed from a tiny waist to in the floor in crinoline. The veil flowed down to a long train encrusted with pearls when it reached the carpet. “You look amazing,” said her mother kissing her. “Your bridesmaids look lovely, your bouquets are in the hall, and Daddy is waiting impatiently for you.” “I won’t be long, Mummy,” she said.

As soon as she had gone, Nola opened her cupboard and took out a knapsack. She changed rapidly into yellow shorts and a pink T-shirt, ran to the kitchen, opened the door and walked slowly down the street until she saw a taxi and hailed it. “The Central Station, please.” she said. The destination was five hundred miles away. She had booked a suite at the Seaside Hotel in the land of Beauty. “I’m here,” she said to herself, “and no one can find me.”

Lola had meanwhile entered the cathedral, looking radiant in her pink silk dress also designed by Dior. She greeted the Jacks and kissed Jeremy who was standing with his best man waiting for Nola’s arrival. The organist was playing happy voluntaries, keeping an eye out for the bride’s arrival. He loved playing Mendelsohn’s Wedding March. But Nola was very late. Her bridesmaids, looking lovely in their

flowered blue silk dresses and small pink roses in their hair, were already at the cathedral waiting in the porch.

Jim had been waiting for Nola in the sitting room. After a time, he said to Jane, “Please go and fetch my daughter, we are already late for the wedding.” Jane ran upstairs and was shocked to see the wedding dress crumpled on the floor. “She’s gone!” she exclaimed to herself. “I never liked that Jeremy!” She told Jim what she had seen, and he immediately called Lola. “The wedding’s off,” he said. “I will come and make the announcement and apologize to Jeremy and the Jacks.” The reception went on as planned, Jeremy appeared to have a good time, laughing with the bridesmaids and guests. The Jacks felt insulted. How could Nola have humiliated their darling Jeremy so? He was the catch of the season! When Lola and Jim got home, they scoured the house looking for a note from Nola. But there was none. She had completely disappeared. They were mortified as it became a great scandal on the society pages of glossy magazines.

The Seaside Hotel in the land of Beauty had all the luxury to which Nola was accustomed. Her suite had a sitting room and a bedroom ensuite, all with huge windows overlooking the sea and the harbour of the village of Fishing. “Oh! This is lovely,” she said to herself, “a mixture of antique and modern, beautiful blue curtains which don’t distract from the view and my personal maid. I’ll order coffee and

cheesecake now, eat it on the balcony off the sitting room and then unpack." Nola had only arrived with her knapsack, much to the surprise of the of the woman on the desk. "Is that all Miss Allison?" she asked. "Yes," replied Nola, "I want to buy the latest summer wear here." "The best boutique is Madame's – most of our clients shop there," the woman said. "Thanks! I will have a rest and go to Madame's after lunch."

When Nola had reached the Central Station in Paradise, she went straight to the branch of her bank. "Good morning, Miss Featherstone," her personal assistant said. "How can I help you?" "I want a cheque from the bank for two billion dollars. I am going to go to another bank and open an account." "May I ask why? Are you disappointed in our service?" "No, definitely not, you especially have been marvellous, and I can't thank you enough! You will find out the reason today." Nola went to the Bank of Beauty. "I am Jennifer Allison," she said to the clerk at the desk. "I want to open an account with the bank. Here is a cash cheque. I also would like a credit card and one hundred dollars in cash."

Nola went to Madame's and found it very different from the exclusive stores where she shopped. It was full of people all chattering away or telling their children to behave. There were racks which had FOR SALE and racks which had NEW ARRIVALS. As Beauty had a temperate climate, all the

clothes were for summer. Another difference was that there was no one assigned to help her and carry her shopping to the till and outside to the waiting limousine. “This is fun!” Nola said to herself. “I must remember my new name.” Her trolley was soon piled high, and she looked forward to her next visit. On reaching the hotel she changed into a new dress, put on a sunhat, took a hotel towel and walked down to the beach where she hired a shaded sunbed. It was very hot, and the sea was at hightide. She ran down to the sea and plunged into the first huge wave. She stayed in the sea for a long time before lying on her sunbed. “Just as well I used a lot of suntan lotion!” she exclaimed to herself. “There’s no sea in Pleasure and I haven’t swum recently. I wanted to be pale and beautiful for my wedding. I wonder what’s happening at home, I wish I could tell Daddy and Mummy that I am OK.”

At breakfast, there was a tall, handsome man some years older than herself. She had bumped into him a couple of times while surfing yesterday. He came over to her table. “May I introduce myself?” he asked smiling at her. “I am Allan Peters.” “And I am Jennifer Allison. Please sit down and have breakfast with me. I don’t know anyone here.” “Neither do I,” he answered pulling out a chair. “Where are you from Jennifer?” “I’m from Paradise,” she replied. “What a coincidence!” Allan exclaimed. “I am too! I wonder how the investigation into the disappearance of Nola is going?” “I haven’t read anything about it in Beauty’s press,” Jennifer

replied. “Let’s go to the beach. I will try not to bump into you!”

Lying on their sunbeds, they bought Cokes and doughnuts from a passing vendor. “What did you do, Jennifer” Allan asked. “Did you go to university” “No,” she answered, “I was a spoilt socialite. I knew Nola well. What did you do, Allan?” “I was a neurosurgeon, but I have resigned my post as I felt like writing. This is what I really love, and I have had several romances published.” “You must take me to the bookstore after lunch. I would like to read some of them,” Jennifer said.

Jennifer bought a copy of all his novels and read them avidly. “Which one did you like the best Jennifer?” Allan asked. “Oh!” she exclaimed, “without a doubt THE PHILADERER! I’m glad you made him pay for his actions.”

On Sunday Allan said, “I’m going to church at eleven. Please come with me.” The Baptist Church of Trintiy Chapel was not far from the hotel, and they set off at ten forty-five. It was a beautiful modern church which had recently been consecrated and replaced the small church which had been demolished. Families were chatting outside to their friends before entering the church. Several people welcomed Allan and Jennifer. The church bells rang, and the service began. Jennifer smiled as Allan sang Immortal,

Invisible, God only wise, and take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to thee. He had a fine tenor voice. There was a children's story told by the minister's wife who was a teacher at the local primary school. Jennifer listened fascinated as she told them the story of the Good Samaritan. The choir sang The Lord's Prayer, and the minister, Reverend John Green stood behind a marble lectern and preached.

My text today is taken from the Gospel of John, Chapter Three, Verses sixteen and seventeen. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved." Reverend Green explained these verses in great and impassioned detail. As he concluded his sermon, he said, "If there is anyone here today who wants to be a follower of Jesus Christ please come up to me and I will pray for you." Jennifer looked at Allan. "Go Jennifer," he said, and she went. "I'm a real Christian now," she said on the way back to the hotel. "I thought I was before because I was christened when I was born. But my family never went to church." The next day Allan took her to the bookstore and bought her a Bible. It had all the most important verses printed in red.

The following Sunday, Reverend Green preached on the verse 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' As Allan and Jennifer walked back to the hotel, Jennifer said, "I have a confession to make to you Allan." "Oh my!" he exclaimed laughing, "that sounds serious!" "Yes, it is to me. I have been living here under an alias. I am not Jennifer Alison but Nola Featherstone." "I know," Allan said." Your picture at society events was in all the newspapers." After a delicious Sunday lunch, they changed into casual clothes and went for a walk in the National Park. Sitting on a bench under a cherry tree in full bloom, Allan said, "I am a romance author, but I don't know how to say this. "Will you marry me? I fell in love with you as soon as I saw you." "Yes, my darling Allan, I fell in love with you as soon as I saw you!" And they kissed and kissed and kissed.

That night Nola said to Allan, "I will phone Mummy and fly home tomorrow. I won't tell her anything about us, just about why I ran away." "And I," said Allan "will fly back with you, and go to your house a few hours later to speak to your father and ask for his blessing on our marriage." "I don't want a society wedding," said Nola. "Just our families." And Allan agreed.

Allan drove up to the imposing entrance of the Featherstone's house. Running up a flight of stairs, he rang the doorbell. The butler let him in. "What can I do for you

Sir?" he asked. "I wish to speak to Mr Featherstone," Allan replied. The butler led him to Mr Featherstone's large and luxurious study. He knocked on the door, opened it and announced, "Doctor Allan Peters Sir." "Please sit down, Doctor Peters," said Mr Featherstone, "I suppose you have come to ask for a donation for some medical research?" "No, Sir," Allan replied. "Something much more important. I have come to ask your blessing on Nola's and my marriage." "What!" exclaimed Mr Featherstone, "well I never! If Nola really loves you, of course you have my blessing. They'll be in the conservatory." "Darling," he said to Lola, let me introduce Doctor Featherstone." "Not necessary," replied Lola. "I am a great fan! I have read all his books!"

And Allan and Nola had a wonderful Christian, family wedding conducted by Reverend Green, and as all good romances end, they lived happily ever after.