THE WESTERNS

Jasper and Jemina were born in the Land of Truth. It was a pleasant land in which to live. Fertile valleys lay below high blue granite mountains on which snow fell in winter, cascading down in blue waterfalls to the blue rivers and lakes below. Most of the population were farmers who grew fruit trees and vines, bred sheep, goats and cattle, sold all their produce to adjoining countries which were not so blest. Many farmers became very wealthy, but not Jasper and Jemina's parents. They lived on small farms in attractive, neat bungalows which they loved. Like other farmers, they bred sheep, goats and cattle, sold the milk locally and made soft cheeses. They did the same with their apples, pears, watermelons, grapes, cherries plums. and vegetables. The wealthy farmers lived in luxurious houses with views stretching over their farms to the distant mountains. They exported their produce to adjoining countries which had no farmlands. Jasper's and Jemina's farms lay many miles apart and so they attended different schools. Both were very bright and always top of their class. They also excelled at sport, were captains of their teams and elected Head Boy and Head Girl of their respective schools.

They both decided to study Law at the University of Truth and so attended lectures together in the Great Hall. There were about five hundred first year students and it was several months before they met in the Café. Jemina was sitting alone at a table for two. "Hi"

said Jasper, “Do you mind if I join you” “Please do,” she responded. “I’m Jasper,” he said, “and I am Jemina,” she answered They got on very well and found out that their homes were not in other provinces but fairly near to each other. “Come and have a game of tennis with me,” said Jemina. “Great,” said Jasper. And that was the start of their courtship which progressed rapidly. Jasper worked after lectures in the Café as a waiter. He was paid by the hour and soon had quite a large sum in his bank balance. He went to a jeweller in the city. “I have one thousand dollars, and I want to see what engagement rings you have for that price.” “We have a large selection, Sir. I will bring you the tray.” After thinking for some time, he chose a brilliant cut white diamond set in gold. “If it doesn’t fit Madame, we will alter it at no extra cost.” “Thanks,” said Jasper and went and booked a table for dinner at the Grand Hotel. “Jemina,” he said, “Let’s go out for dinner. I have booked a table at the Grand Hotel.” Jemina had some idea about what she thought would happen, so she went to BEST BOUTIQUE and splurged on a simple floral silk summer dress with a matching headband for her luxuriant red hair. After placing their orders, Jasper got up, kneeled in front of her and offered her the ring, saying, “I love you, Jemina, and I always will. You are my soulmate.” “Yes!” she exclaimed jumping up and kissing him. Jasper called for a bottle of the finest champagne, and they toasted “To our future!” They were married in the Baptist Chapel near the entrance to the University. Both of their

parents came and got on famously having much in common. They ate a hearty and happy meal at the nearby Grand Hotel. Jasper and Jemina gratefully received generous gifts of cash which they invested wisely.

The years flew by. “Graduation Day!” exclaimed Jasper. “I can’t believe it. “No! And we are top students by far,” Jemina answered. More years flew by. They bought a cottage in a pleasant suburb, had a baby boy whom they doted on. His name was Simon. “We must have another baby,” said Jemina, “or he will become a spoilt brat.” But, after many attempts, no baby was on the way. The went to Doctor Chalmers who did several tests to try and find out why. “It’s because you, Judge Western, have a very low sperm count. It’s a miracle Simon was born.” Jasper and Jemina returned to the third property they had bought. It was situated in the City of Truth near the High Court overlooking the distant hills. The house was very modern, had magnificent views and was luxuriously furnished. “Simon needs a brother, or he will become a spoilt brat,” said Jemina, he’s nearly one.” “Let’s go to the adoption agency nearby,” said Jasper. “Yes, we have a very good-looking baby on our books,” the woman said. “He’s six months old and has been tested for any genetic diseases.” That day the adoption papers were signed, and they went home with Melville who smiled at them and said “Coo.”

All went well for a few years but when Melville was five, and he was taller and fatter than Simon, he took Simon's new bike, threw it on the ground and broke the handlebars. "Hey!" shouted Simon, "stop that!" Melville ran at him and punched him in the face. With a bleeding nose, Simon ran screaming to his mother. "Melville did this!" he screamed. Jemina, angry and worried bathed his bloody face, gave him a chocolate bar and left him with Nanny. Jemina found Melville sitting high up in a tree. "Come down at once!" she said. "No," he replied and didn't move. By then Jasper had heard what had happened, and he climbed the tree, sat next to Melville and asked, "Why did you hurt Simon?" Melville replied, "Because I wanted to. I'm glad I smashed his bike." "Bad deeds must be punished," said Jasper in his most judge-like voice. "Get down from this tree immediately. I am going to thrash you with my belt."

From then on, things only got worse. Jasper and Jemina were called to the headmaster's study. They were annoyed because they had to postpone cases in the High Court. "I know how busy you are, and I apologize for interrupting your schedule. But Melville has been terrorizing his classmates. He's a real bully and, I'm afraid, poor Simon gets the worst of it. He swears at his teachers, steals whatever he fancies and refuses to do his homework. The School Council and I have decided to expel him." Several other schools

did the same, with the result that Melville was illiterate, knew nothing about Maths, except when he stole things and sold them on the black market. When he was eighteen, he stole a gun and shot a man in his arm with whom he was arguing. He was arrested and brought before Jemina. He pleaded not guilty to shooting a man in the arm with an unlicensed firearm. Jemina said, “Melville Western, I sentence you to ten years imprisonment with hard labour.” He was driven to prison and locked in his cell. Jemina sorrowfully went home and drank two large whiskies.

Melville was handcuffed and thrown unceremoniously into the waiting police van and driven off. “How can my mother do such a thing to her son!” he yelled. Showered, his long curly hair cut off, his head shaved, and his arm tagged with a bracelet inscribed Prisoner Melville 206. He was locked in his small cell. It had a washbasin, a commode and a small, barred window overlooking the square Parade Ground. Jumping up, he kicked the metal door and screamed through the tiny open gap, “Damn you all! May God curse you and your families!” It was the first time in his life that he had said the word ‘God’ “Don’t you dare kick this door again or I shall take you to the Governor and your Mum will add to your sentence,” said the warder. “Curse her too!” he yelled.

Sitting on his spartan bed, Melville stared morosely at his feet. “Ten years! Whatever will I do in this place? No fun, no drugs, no girls to seduce, no pals, and a horrible place in which to live! I wish I was dead – and my Mum too! I bet my Dad would have given me fifteen years and that brother of mine will be grinning and gloating about me.” In this he was wrong. Simon who was starting his own practice as an attorney, went to his parents’ home to comfort them. “I shall keep an eye on him for you, Mum and Dad,” he said. “I know the Governor well and he’s a Christian.”

A bell rang and Melville heard the cells in his row being unlocked. “Out! Get a move on! The Gov’s nearly at the parade ground!” yelled the warders. When his cell was opened, he did not get up. The warder came in, yanked him up and pushed him out of the cell. “Get a move on or you’ll be in solitary for a week and on bread and milk. We’ve had the likes of you here before and it fixed them!” The parade ground was a large field enclosed by an electrified fence. Three storied cell blocks flanked each side. The five hundred prisoners lined up in neat rows and Governor Sims walked in. He held a loudspeaker “Good morning, Prisoners,” he said. “Good morning, Governor.” they responded. “Let me remind you about Prisoner Adams and Prisoner Jessica. It is not a good morning for them. They will be hanged at two this afternoon. I advise you to

make the most of your time here as you prepare for your release, so you don't resume your wicked ways. You may disperse and stay here in the sun for half an hour."

Melville sat on the ground. He put his hands on his head and bent over, shutting his eyes. "You're new here today?" asked a female voice. He looked up. There was a beautiful young woman dressed in the orange top and pants that all prisoners wore. She had blonde hair because women were not shaved, and big blue eyes. "Yes." he answered morosely. "What's your name?" she asked. "I'm Melville and in case you ask me I am here for ten years. I shot a man in his arm with an unlicensed gun, and my Mum put me in here." "I'm Jane and what do you mean your Mum put you in here for ten years?" "She's a High Court Judge, he replied. "Oh" said Jane, "your father put me here for ten years because I was selling drugs and had built up quite a racket." A bell rang. "Time to go to our lessons." "What do you mean by that?" he asked. "All prisoners must study something," Jane replied. "I am studying Hotel Management so that when I leave, I shall get a good job. It's very interesting."

Melville didn't know where to go so he just stood watching the prisoners departing, all in a jolly mood as they walked briskly from the Parade Ground. "What are you studying?" asked a warder. "I

don’t know,” he replied. “I can’t read or write.” “You must go to school then,” said the warder. “There are lots of prisoners at school.” The school was on the other side of the cells. It was called the Education Block. Melville saw the playground with seats under trees, a large soccer field, tennis courts and an Olympic sized swimming pool. His spirits rose as he stared at them. Life suddenly felt better. He was taken to Grade One and found a couple of hundred prisoners seated in a classroom. “Here’s a new one, Miss Webster,” the warder said to a young woman. “His name is Melville. He can’t read or write.” “Welcome Melville,” she said and shook his hand. “I am sure you will do well in my class. Take a seat at that desk near the front.”

After mastering the alphabet and reading and writing his name, for Melville was very intelligent, the prisoners went back to their ells, ate a lunch of chicken mayonnaise on wholewheat rolls filled with lettuce, tomatoes and a slice of cheese, and drank a mug of orange juice. Melville lay on his bed. He felt relaxed and happy for the first time in his life. After lunch it was back to school which ended with a swim in the pool. Melville became an avid reader. The school library had many novels, and he read one over two nights in his cell before the lights were turned off. He was surprised to find he had a photographic memory and after two years he sat for the

matriculation exam and passed with flying colours. The Governor phoned Jasper whom he knew well. “Great news,” he said to Jasper. “Melville has done really well and he told me he plans to study Law.” That night, Jasper, Jemina and Simon went out to celebrate. “He can do his internship with me when he graduates. I can do with someone who is very bright in my practice,” said Simon.

But there was one thing he lacked and that was a belief in God. Over the years, Melville had attended the compulsory church service in the main auditorium. Although he was a confirmed atheist, he enjoyed the organ played by music students. Sheep May Safely Graze was his favourite. He sang all the hymns lustily without a hymn book because he had a fine tenor voice and leant back and fell asleep during the sermon. One Sunday as he leant back in his chair, he found his eyes would not close and he was not in the least sleepy. Father James was on top form. He preached loudly and vigorously walking up and down on the platform. “I’m sure you all know what condemned means,” he said. “Well, listen to what God says about it. You will find it in the,” he picked up the Bible on the lectern and held it up, “Bible in the Gospel written by Saint John who was the disciple Jesus loved. This is what he wrote in 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." Melville didn't hear the rest of the sermon. These verses rang in his ears, over and over again. He jumped to his feet. Father James stopped preaching. Everyone turned and stared at Melville as he shouted, "I am a Christian! I am a Christian I now understand and believe!" The Governor jumped up and cried, "Hallelujah! Amen! There is joy in Heaven today over Melville who has repented and believed."