WENDY

Wendy arrived in the maternity ward of a private hospital in Johannesburg, yelling, arms flailing and generally making her presence felt to her delighted parents, Sam and Elinor Thomson. She was a healthy eight-pound baby and her parents thought she was beautiful although her face had got a bit squashed during her delivery. They took her home immediately where the nursing sister they had employed was waiting to receive her new charge. “OH! she’s beautiful!” she exclaimed, putting Wendy in an expensive pram and covering her tenderly. “I’ll take her to the nursery where I am also sleeping and put her to sleep. Mrs Thomson, I’ll bring her to you for her first feed at twelve o’clock.”

Wendy was a contented baby. She did everything at the right time – soon she slept through the night, began to smile at her delighted parents and everyone else. Before they knew it, she was ten months old, toddling around the house and garden and saying a few words. When she turned two, she could sing several nursery rhymes and count from one to ten. Wendy loved to draw and listen to stories. She learnt

to say grace before meals and her prayers before going to sleep. Her parents could not have been happier. And then disaster struck. Mummy was diagnosed with breast cancer. After chemotherapy, she was very tired, and the Thomsons said, “No more children. Let’s adopt a baby sister for Wendy. We’ll call her Jenny.”

Soon after this, Mummy said to Wendy, “Daddy and I are going to get a lovely surprise for you. Be a good girl for Nanny while we are out.” “Please tell me,” Wendy begged, but Daddy said, “No! It’s a surprise.” Wendy spent the next couple of hours while her parents signed all the adoption papers and met Jenny. They held her tenderly in their arms and kissed her. She was six months old, a pretty baby with short blonde hair who smiled at them and said, “Coo.” Wendy was standing at the gate impatiently waiting for her parent’s return. The Mercedes drove up the long driveway and Wendy, delighted, tugged at Nannie’s hand and exclaimed, “Take me to them! I want to see my surprise!” Mummy got out of the car and took Jenny out of her carrycot. “Here’s your surprise, Wendy,” she said. “A baby!

A real baby for me!" exclaimed Wendy! "Can I feed her please?" she begged. "Later on," replied Mummy, "she's just had a whole bottle of milk. You can help to feed her some mashed vegetables later."

The two little girls soon became great friends. Wendy said to Jenny one day, "I love you soooo much!" And this love was returned. Mummy and Daddy were delighted. "It's wonderful!" exclaimed Mummy, "Two real sisters couldn't love each other more than Wendy and Jenny do."

The house in which they lived was very large and full of beautiful antiques and paintings by famous artists. It was double storied, had a thatched roof and four acres of garden. There was a stable block for horses and a beautiful swimming pool that had a fountain cascading down one side. Wendy and Jenny loved chasing each other along the walkways filled with flowers all year round. Of course, all this required a large staff to maintain it, from the housekeeper down to the stable lad. Daddy did not work

any longer. When he was young, he had started a factory manufacturing sweets and it had done so well that an international sweet company bought it. Daddy had invested the fortune wisely and he was now a billionaire.

Daddy and Mummy loved to travel, and so Wendy, four, and Jenny, two, went all over the world. Their Nanny Lois went with them pushing them in their pram or holding their tiny hands so that they could not be lost on cruise ships, or strolling in the beautiful parks in Japan, or in huge busy shopping malls in London. When they were older, Daddy and Mummy took them to countries they had never visited. They went to South America where they visited the ruins of ancient civilizations, to South Africa where they went to the Kruger National Game Reserve, to Australia where they listened to a concert in its amazing theatre, to China where they walked on the Great Wall. During these visits, Wendy and Jenny missed a lot of school. But Daddy said, “Our girls are getting a better education with us!”

Daddy and Mummy had been Christened in Methodist churches, been confirmed in Methodist churches, and were married in All Souls Methodist Church. They went to church twice a year, on Christmas Day and Easter Sunday. When Wendy was six and Jenny four, they went with their parents. “You will really enjoy the church bells and the Christmas carols.” said Mummy. Daddy gave them each one pound to put in the collection plate, and he and Mummy put in five pounds – a miniscule loss to their wealth.

The girls went to Sunday School and really enjoyed singing choruses and having Bible stories read to them. Sometimes there was even a film of Mrs G telling a Bible story to four children who came knocking on her door. One Sunday a theological student called John spoke to them about why Jesus came to earth and why he died. “If you believe that Jesus died for your sins and want to be forgiven, come to me and I will pray for you.” “Come on Wendy,” said Jenny taking her hand. “No!” she replied pulling her hand away. And she never went back to Sunday School. Jenny

made many new Christian friends. Tammy became her best friend, and Wendy was very jealous and rude to her when she visited them.

Over the years, Jenny and Tammy grew in grace, were baptized, something Tammy's parents were thrilled by but Jenny's parents not. They became Youth Leaders and later Sunday School teachers, their free time revolving around the church. This resulted in a rift with Wendy who felt hurt, jealous, and betrayed. Daddy and Mummy were very upset by this. "Please Jenny," asked Mummy, "can't you forget about Tammy? Wendy is your sister after all?" "No, my darling Mummy," replied Jenny, "it goes deeper than that – it would mean giving up my church affiliation which means everything to me."

The years seemed to fly by. Wendy had graduated as a doctor, and Jenny had studied Art. She was very gifted and had already held exhibitions of her paintings and sculptures, donating all she made to her favourite charities. The sisters had both grown into beautiful young women.

Jenny was quiet and thoughtful and Wendy gregarious, fun and rash.

And then the unthinkable happened. Daddy and Mummy were killed in a crash when a drunk driver came around the road on the wrong side. Wendy and Jenny were inconsolable. The funeral was held in All Souls Methodist Church where Daddy and Mummy had worshipped twice a year at Easter and Christmas. It was well attended because they had had many influential friends. Reverend Smith preached. “I am preaching today on the two most important verses in the Bible,” he said, “They are found in the Gospel according to 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.’” The weeping Jenny thought that was the perfect choice for a sermon and prayed that the family and their friends would listen to it and become believers, and the weeping Wendy thought “That’s

nonsense – most of Daddy and Mummy's friends will be offended."

The sisters, who had never lacked anything found that Daddy and Mummy had left nothing to their friends or servants who had served them long and hard for decades. Their darling daughters were their sole heirs. "Wendy" said Jenny, "I think we must correct this and pay all our servants a generous sum. It is the right thing to do." "I don't think so," responded Wendy. "They were well paid and in secure jobs for many years." Jenny did not tell Wendy, but she made good her parents' lack. The stable man Tom said, "Thank you very much, Miss. Now I can go to university. I want to be a vet." The cook, Mrs Peters, said, "Thank you very much, Miss. Now I can fulfil my dream and open a restaurant." "I am sure you will do very well," said Jenny. "You are a wonderful cook."

Jenny asked Mr Curtiss the executor of her parent's joint will to invest her inheritance. He was delighted to oblige and

looked for sound places to invest. Wendy left hers in the care of her bank advisor and set about spending her inheritance on a grand scale. She stopped work and bought a luxury yacht in which she sailed to ports that interested her. The first was Monaco where she went to the casino and lost a tidy sum over two nights but was not worried as she was so rich. That was the start of her downfall. Like the prodigal son, she lived a luxurious, carefree, sinful life until she found she had nothing left in her bank balance. She managed to get a position at a private hospital, rented a small flat and got an advance on her month's salary which enabled her to eat and buy a stethoscope. She had neither time nor inclination to resume her bad habits like taking drugs. She had learnt her lesson.

Jenny had watched Wendy's fall from wealth to poverty. Her own assets had grown, and she had now made another billion to the one she had inherited. She went to the hospital and asked to speak to Wendy. "Hello Wendy," she said hugging her affectionately. "Can you come and have tea with me at St Margaret's café?" "I'd love that Jenny if you

can bear with the prodigal daughter, I have really learnt my lesson!" Before they ordered coffee and cake, Jenny handed Wendy a cheque for one billion dollars. "Now we are back to where we began." she said. "Yes," replied Wendy with a sob. "You are far too generous." Jenny, taking Wendy's hand, answered, "It will be great fun to see how we can help our charities and needy people. Wealth, if properly used is a God given gift. Let's go and resign from your job and cancel the lease on your flat. Then we'll have lunch at the Savoy and buy you some new clothes and go back home!"