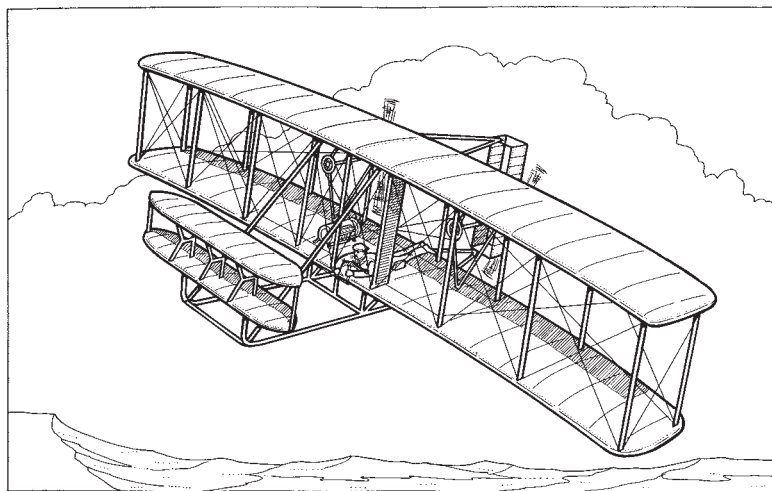


THE STORY OF
**THE WRIGHT BROTHERS
AND THEIR SISTER**

by
Lois Mills



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AUTHOR'S NOTE

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My thanks are also due to Mr. Charles E. Taylor, maker of the engine for the first powered flight, for permission to use his account of scenes in the Wright Cycle Shop during the experiments preceding the successful flight at Kitty Hawk.

Mrs. I. C. Shafer graciously shared with me memories of her childhood in Dayton, where her family and the Wrights were friends. I appreciate, too, her kindness in arranging for Mr. Taylor to read the manuscript.

Two friends I name with gratitude for their constant interest in this book, Norma Landwehr Bowles, who assisted in research, and Elaine St. Johns, who gave valuable criticism and advice.

Lois Mills

1955



“We were [blessed] enough to grow up in an environment where there was always much encouragement to children to pursue intellectual interests; to investigate whatever aroused their curiosity. In a different kind of environment, our curiosity might have been nipped long before it could have borne fruit.”

—Orville Wright.

“Isn’t it astonishing that all these secrets (of flight) have been preserved for so many years just so we could discover them.”

—Orville Wright, 1903

PREFACE

The Story of the Wright Brothers and their Sister is a wonderful example of how Almighty God chooses to use the foolish things of this world to confound the wise. It is nothing short of a miracle that the two sons of a little known Christian minister, experienced only in bicycle repair and largely self-educated, would be responsible for unlocking the secrets of flight to a waiting world.

It should come as no surprise, however, that these simple and quiet young men did not achieve their success alone. They had the constant support of loving parents and a caring sister, and above all they had the help of the Lord.

Young people need to understand that God can and does bless the efforts of humble and industrious people, young and old alike. The Wright brothers were committed to being useful; they dared to live their God-given dreams even in the midst of public ridicule and financial poverty. They discovered the great thrill of overcoming trials and problems through humble, childlike faith and determination.

May the following story inspire all of God's children to dare great exploits for the glory of Jesus Christ and the good of mankind.

Michael J. McHugh

2005

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ONE: THE TOY



Bishop Wright took a deep breath as he stepped down from the train. How good it was to fill his lungs with the clean, crisp evening air after his long ride in the soot-filled coach!

“Drive you home, Reverend? Only ten cents anywhere in town,” called the station carriage driver as he flapped the reins over the back of his bony horse.

Milton Wright hesitated. "It is a long way," he thought. "If I walk, the children may be eating supper, and I'll have to wait to give them their presents." But he shook his head and said, "No, thank you, I will walk." He had spent too much money already. He must not pamper himself.

"Will they like what I am bringing?" he wondered. The handkerchiefs—maybe his wife would have liked a drafting board better. She was always drawing plans for the boys. "I know Sterchens will like her doll. It's easy enough to choose a gift for a little girl." Father Wright smiled as he thought of his young daughter.

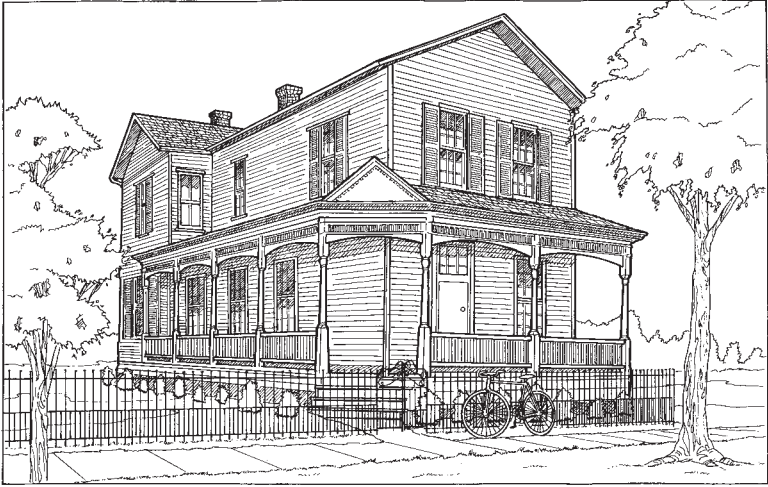
But what about the present for the boys? He had thought about it so many times as he rode in the slow train. "Will my son Wilbur like it as well as a book? Is Orville too young to play with it?" he asked himself.

He wanted this to be the best gift he had ever brought them. Even though they did not talk about it, he knew they had not wanted to move to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, this summer and leave their friends in Dayton, Ohio. They understood, of course, that a minister's children could not choose where they would live. They had to go wherever the church sent their father. But Bishop Wright knew his sons had missed the boys they played with.

"Maybe they would have liked separate presents better," he thought. But this was an expensive toy. He really could not afford to buy another.

Bishop Wright had not written to tell his family when he would return, for he wanted to surprise

them. For this reason, the three Wright children had been playing out-of-doors ever since the boys had come home from school.



The bright leaves were falling from the maple trees in front of their house, and Will and Orv had raked them into piles and made a bonfire. Sterchens laughed as she ran after them, kicking and scuffing the leaves to hear them crackle when she stepped. Indian summer was over now, and the October twilight was short and the wind chilly.

“Time to come in, boys. It’s too cold to play out now. Will, Orv, bring Sterchens. Supper’s almost ready,” Mother Wright called from the door of the warm kitchen.

None of them wanted to go in the house to sit by the stove. It seemed dull after the leaping flames of their beautiful bonfire. But when they smelled the steak and potatoes frying over the hot wood fire in

the kitchen, they were so hungry they thought they could not wait another minute.

The children's names were really Wilbur, Orville, and Katharine, but their mother called them by the names they called each other—Will, Orv, and Sterchens. The boys had given Katharine her special family name when she was a baby. They heard someone call her *Schwesterchen*, which is German for “Little Sister.” Katharine's brothers could not remember all of the word, but they liked it. So they called their sister “Sterchens.”

Will, who was eleven, and the oldest of the three, helped his mother to hurry supper by setting the table. Then he settled in the corner to read a book of Greek legends that he had found in his father's study.

Orv was only seven years old, so he could not read much. He went into the kitchen to watch his mother as she moved about quickly in the yellow light from the oil lamp on the table. He pulled a wooden chair close to the table and climbed upon it, kneeling, so that he could see his mother's face as he told her about all he had done that day.

Mother Wright's cheeks were pink from the heat of the stove. She looked young and pretty with her brown hair drawn back smoothly into a heavy knot, and her deep blue eyes, so like his own, twinkled with amusement as her son talked. “How excited he gets over everything,” she thought.

Four-year-old Sterchens sat on the floor of the living room playing with an almost worn-out cloth

doll, which her grandmother Koerner had sent her at Christmas.

Suddenly, the front door was opened and closed again. Then there was a thump on the hall floor as if someone had put down a bag or a heavy package.

Sterchens heard it first and jumped up quickly.

“It’s Father, it’s Father come home!” she called as she ran into the cold, dark hall. Soon she rode back into the living room on Father Wright’s shoulder.

Will laid down his book and ran to the kitchen door.

“Mother! Orv!” he shouted. “Come, Father’s home!”

His mother hurried in, drying her hands on her blue gingham apron. Orv dashed ahead and flung himself on his father. Father Wright lifted Sterchens from his shoulder and gave each of the others a kiss and a hug.

Quickly he opened his bag and took out some packages wrapped in strong, brown paper. When Mother Wright saw them she said, “Wait until after supper, Milton. It is ready.”

But the children begged to open the packages. Seeing how eager they were, Mother Wright started toward the kitchen. She knew they wanted to see the gifts their father had brought them all the way from New York City.

“All right, all right, just a minute,” she said, laughing. “I’ll pull the food to the back of the stove so our supper won’t burn up.”

Her husband followed her into the kitchen, a thin package in his hand.

“Here, my dear, I’m more impatient than the children. Please open it right away.”

When Mother Wright opened the package and saw the fine linen handkerchiefs in a fancy box, her eyes filled with tears. She knew her husband must have denied himself necessities on the trip so that he could bring back these gifts.

“Don’t you like them, Susan? I thought you could carry them to church and to Missionary Society meetings,” Father Wright said anxiously.

“Of course, I like them,” Mother Wright said, “but you shouldn’t, you really shouldn’t, Milton. They are just beautiful, so fine and dainty. But all the present I ever want is to have you safe at home again.”

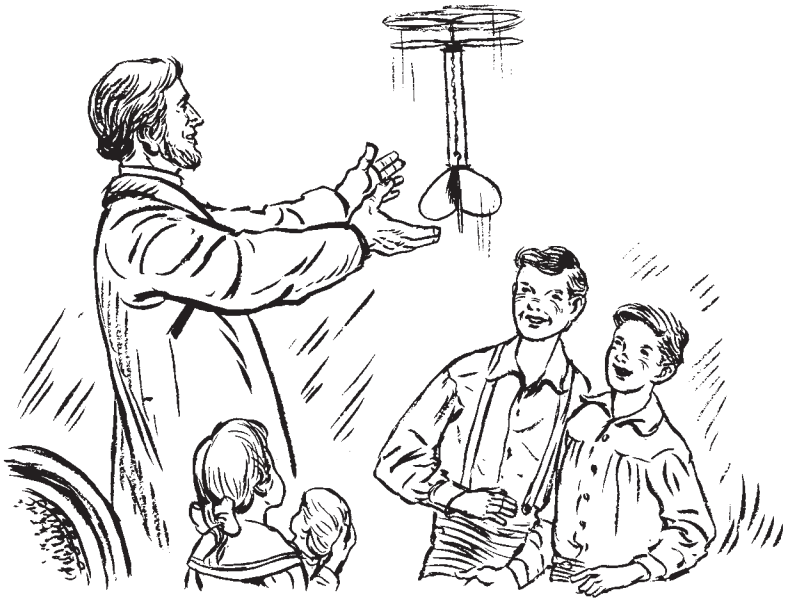
With a sigh of relief, Father Wright took his wife’s hand and led her back into the living room.

Sterchens was too happy to say a word when she saw the beautiful little doll that was in her package. It was a real store doll in a starched dimity dress. Its cheeks were very pink, and its eyes were blue and shiny.

Politely, Will and Orv looked at the doll and stood waiting for their present.

“Now, boys,” Father Wright said, stepping into the hall, “I brought you something together.”

The boys looked curiously at each other as they heard their father opening a package. They watched eagerly for him to come back into the living room. As he came in the door again, he threw something into the air. This something flew about the room, bumping against the wall and hitting the low ceiling.



“Oh, a bird!” Sterchens called out in excitement.

“No, Sterchens, it’s a bat,” said Orv positively.

But Wilbur watched it with a puzzled look on his face until it fluttered slowly to the floor. Then he picked it up and looked from it to his father.

“What is it, sir?” he asked as he held the wings of paper and bamboo lightly in his hand.

“The man who sold it to me called it a ‘helicopter,’ Son. He said it is a new sort of scientific toy just over from Paris.”

“But what makes it go? What makes it fly?” asked Orv, who always had to know the whys and hows.

“See,” Father Wright said, taking the helicopter from Wilbur. Both boys bent over for a close look. “First, I twist this rubber band. That makes these two small fans whirl around and push the toy through the air.”

“Like the propellers on a boat,” Orv said quickly.

“Yes, just like propellers,” Will agreed.

“That’s right, boys. That’s the idea,” Father Wright said heartily. He was pleased and a little surprised to see how quickly his sons understood his explanation.

Just then Mother Wright called, “No more play now, boys. Supper is on the table.”

Will and Orv were so excited over their present that they could scarcely be quiet while their father said grace. And tonight he said a longer one than usual. After a blessing for the food, he prayed for “our absent dear ones, Reuchlin and Lorin,” his two sons who were away at college.

When he finished, the boys, ignoring their food, asked him so many questions about the helicopter, that their mother finally said, “I declare, you haven’t even looked at your plates, boys. Sterchens and I are almost ready for our pudding. Now eat your suppers and let your father eat his.”

Father Wright smiled at his sons.

“Your mother is right. Besides, I have told you everything the man who sold it to me said. You’ll just have to figure it out for yourselves. After all, it’s only a toy.”

When they were in bed that night, the two boys went on talking about their amazing gift.

“Let’s make another one,” said Orv.

“We could measure this one and try,” replied Will, who was always more cautious.

“Now—tell me the story you read tonight,” said Orv eagerly, as he twisted until he made a comfortable hollow in the feather bed.

Tonight’s story was the Greek legend of Daedalus, who made wings for himself and his son, Icarus, from feathers fastened in wax. At last, the boys fell asleep, thinking of Daedalus and of their new toy.

In fact, Will and Orv thought of nothing but their new toy during the next few days. They flew it in the house, they flew it out-of-doors, and they fairly tore it to pieces trying to see how it was made. When the light paper was so torn from the bamboo framework that the helicopter could not be made to take to the air again, they set about making another. To their joy, the copy flew as well as the original.

Sterchens neglected her new doll to tag at her brothers’ heels. She squealed with delight every time the curious plaything made one of its wild, wobbling

flights. “Of all the games I have shared with Will and Orv, this was the best of all,” she thought.

It was such fun to play with their new toy that the boys decided to make one twice as large. But this was a failure. No matter how they tried, they could not make it fly. Puzzled, they put the toy aside. There were other things to amuse them now. It was cold enough for winter sports and for pulling Sterchens on the little sled that Mother Wright had made for her.

The toy was put aside, but it was not forgotten; nevertheless, it would be many years before Will and Orv would solve the puzzle.

Two: A HAPPY HOME



During the next few years, Father Wright moved his family to Indiana and finally back to Dayton, Ohio. He was not a minister with a church of his own but was a bishop of the United Brethren Church. He traveled about the country overseeing the work of churches in Ohio, where he lived, and in other states, as well. Sometimes he was away for months.

Born in a one-room log cabin, Bishop Milton Wright had grown up in the tradition of a pioneer.

Like Lincoln, he studied by the fireplace in the light from pitch pine knots. Work on the farm was hard, for his father used oxen and a wooden plow, but young Milton finally earned enough in this way to attend a small church college called Hartsville. His years there only increased his desire to learn, until he was not happy unless he could be surrounded by books.

Volunteering for missionary work after graduation, he was sent to teach in a church school in Oregon. When he found he would not be allowed to take his books with him on the difficult journey across the Isthmus of Panama, he packed them in a great box and sent them to this wild new land in a sailing vessel, which went all the way around Cape Horn.

Shortly before leaving for his frontier post, Milton Wright met Susan Catharine Koerner, three years younger than he, and still a student in Hartsville College.

“I am going to be lonely way out there in Oregon,” he said, “please promise that you will write to me.”

“But you will have your books,” Susan replied with a teasing smile. After all, she was a little weary of hearing her English professor’s constant praise of this former student. She liked to read, but not all of the time. It was in the practical courses where she shined, in mathematics and in science.

“Anyway, what could I write about? I hear that life is very exciting in the Oregon Territory with Indians, buffaloes, and bears. Nothing exciting happens here.”

“You could write about the college. I’d always be glad to hear about the college.” The young man hesitated and cleared his throat. He did not wish to seem bold. “You could write about you. I’d always be very glad to hear about you.”

Although the packet ships brought few letters from her, Milton Wright could not forget the rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes under Susan’s lace-frilled bonnet. Nor could he forget her merry laugh and quick wit, and the feeling of comradeship that had grown during their brief acquaintance. As he sat in his bare room in the mission school, he realized that even his beloved books were not enough to bring him happiness, so he dared to write some of his thoughts to Susan. Finally, as soon as his term was completed, he returned to Indiana to persuade her to marry him.

The farm on which Susan lived with her parents was large and well-managed. There were in all a dozen neatly painted buildings. One of them was Father Koerner’s carriage shop. Here he manufactured carriages and farm wagons of such fine quality that his fame as a skilled mechanic was known in other states, as well as in Indiana.

“Too bad Susan isn’t a boy,” he often thought when his daughter came to watch him as he worked in his shop. Sometimes he let her help him, and he was amazed at the ease with which she handled his tools. Why, he scarcely had to tell her what to do! She just seemed to know!

Sorrowfully, he recalled these days as he stood on the porch beside his wife waving good-bye, while the bride and groom drove away after their simple wedding. Then he thought of the future.

“How can she leave this comfortable home to go away with a penniless young minister? Of course, Milton is as fine a young man as I’ve ever seen. There is that to remember, and it is an honor to be a minister’s wife.”

“Don’t worry, John,” the bride’s mother said, slipping her arm through his as they watched the buggy disappear down the dusty road. “We started with very little, and we’ve always been happy. Susan will know how to make a happy home.”

“That is my only wish for her, that she make a happy home,” said Father Koerner.

Immediately after her wedding in 1859, Susan did make a happy home. For no matter how often she and Milton moved to a different house, their home was the same. It was the same in their love and consideration for each other and in their partnership of Christian ideals for the children who were born to them.

But a special feeling of belonging in a place, as well as to each other, came to the family when they moved to the house at 7 Hawthorne Street in Dayton. This house through the rest of their lives was “home” to the Wrights.

The house was small, but it was large enough. It was a frame house made from wide clapboards painted white, with green shutters at the windows and

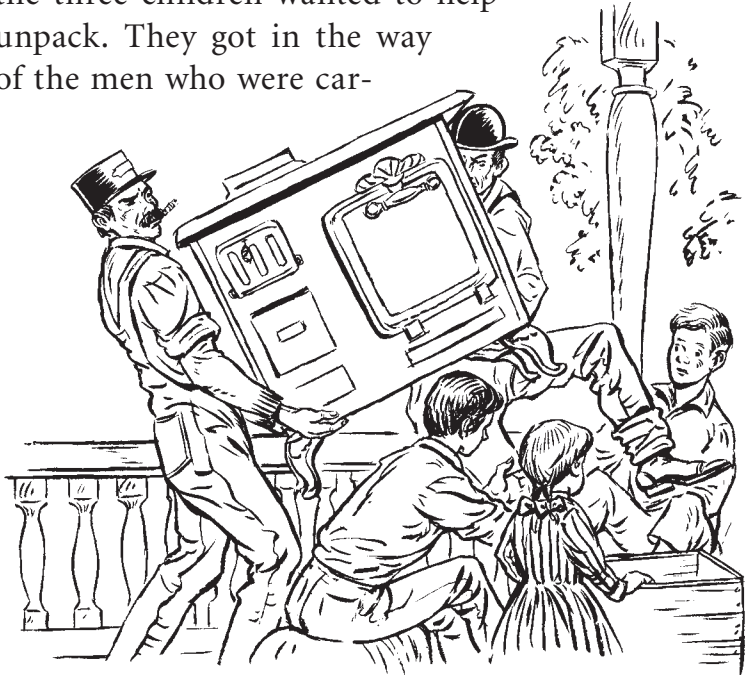
wooden shingles on the roof. Just outside the back door, there was a well with a wooden pump.

While they were moving in, their father called Will and Orv and showed them the pump and the large wood-box on the back porch.

“Now, boys, this is your job. I don’t ever want your mother to carry in wood or water while I am away.”

So Will and Orv took turns bringing wood from the shed, where it was piled. They took turns, too, working the long pump handle up and down and carrying water from the well for their mother to use in the kitchen.

When the dray that brought the Wrights’ furniture from the railway station backed up to the porch, the three children wanted to help unpack. They got in the way of the men who were car-



rying in the heavy stoves and beds until they spoke gruffly to Mrs. Wright.

“Lady, can’t you keep your children out from underfoot?”

“Yes, children,” Mother Wright said nervously, “you *must* stay out of the way.”

“But what can we do, Mother? What can we do now?” the three asked together. “Please let us help.”

Mother Wright looked about her with dismay. The living room was filled with boxes and barrels. Opening barrels of dishes packed in excelsior was no task for children, but surely there was something they could do.

By this time, Wilbur was reading his mother’s careful handwriting on the labels of the boxes.

“These say ‘Books.’ Why can’t we unpack the books?”

“Of course, you can, boys; and Sterchens can help, too. It’s quite a job to unwrap each one. Your father always packs them so carefully.” Mother Wright gave a sigh of relief. She knew her children would be busy for some time.

Will and Orv puffed and panted as they carried Bishop Wright’s heavy books of theology and philosophy upstairs to his study and piled them on the shelves around the walls.

They had noticed that there were low shelves around two walls of the living room, too.

“Now there will be a place for the books we like, where we can get at them whenever we want to read,” Orv exclaimed happily. “And for Sterchens’s books, too,” he continued.

“Yes, let’s give Sterchens the bottom shelf so she can reach the books herself,” Will agreed.

Her brothers patiently sorted out her picture books and fairy tales and helped her arrange them on her shelf.

Some of the volumes that the boys placed on the shelves downstairs had worn covers, for they had made the two-way journey around the Horn. Others were more recent purchases. All were books which interested them and which the family would read together.

Plutarch’s *Lives*, Addison’s *Essays*, a set of Sir Walter Scott’s novels, Boswell’s *Life of Johnson*, Green’s *History of England*, and a set of scientific books—these favorites must be within easy reach.

When the boys unpacked the cumbersome set of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Will thought it should be carried upstairs to their father’s study.

But Orv insisted that it be kept downstairs. “Then we can look up things—even when we’re eating. If there’s something we don’t know, we can look it up.” And so the *Encyclopaedia* was always at hand to settle the questions that constantly arose in this inquiring household.

When the stovepipes had been fitted to the stoves and the dishes and pots and pans were in place on the cupboard shelves, Mother Wright realized that she was tired. She sat down wearily in the kitchen.

Then she jumped up. "I'm going to make hot biscuits for supper," she announced with a determined air.

"But, Mother, you're so tired," Bishop Wright protested.

"We're all tired. The children have worked, too. Hot biscuits will make it seem we're really living again," she replied in a do-not-argue-with-me tone of voice.

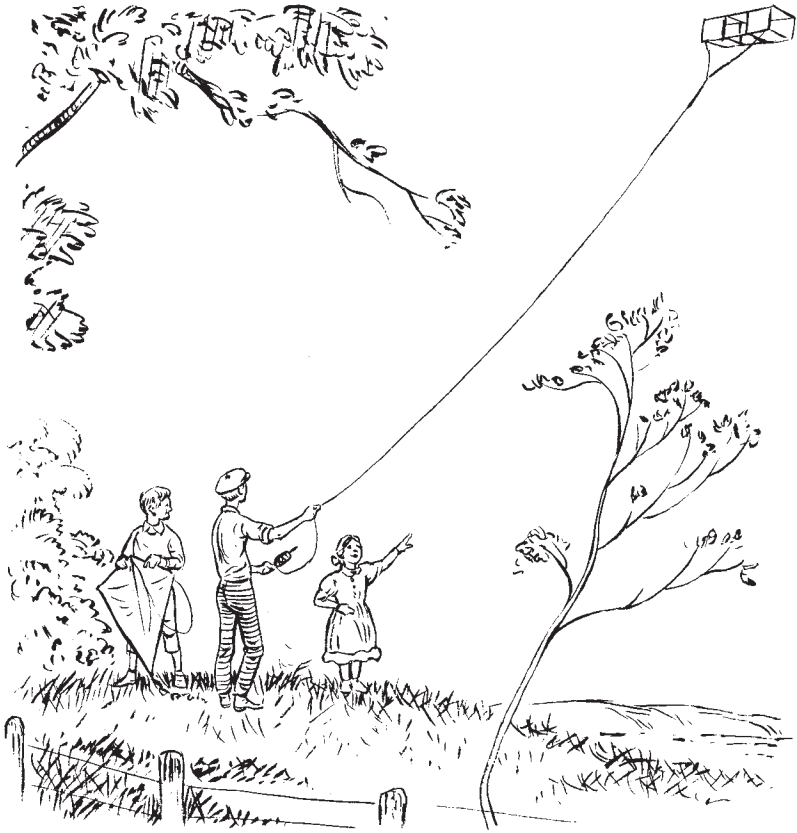
And it was not long before the Wrights were really living in their home. In a few days, the flowered ingrain carpet was cut to fit the living room floor and tacked tightly around the edges. There were new lace curtains for the windows and some new cushions for the worn sofa. Nothing else in the room was new and everything, old and new, was simple. As for hanging wall decorations, Mother Wright had no patience with the painted pie tins and frying pans, which were in vogue at that time. Since she did all of her own housework and sewed for her family, too, she had no time for dusting useless ornaments. She believed that pans belong in the kitchen, where they were used.

Soon, everything was in its place. Magazines and the latest church papers were lying in neat piles on the golden-oak center table. The old, carved

clock that had belonged to Mother Wright's Swiss ancestors was ticking on the shelf beside the family Bible.

All was in order. All was ready. Uncluttered by needless trinkets, there was space here for thoughts, big thoughts.

THREE: PARTNERS



On Sterchens's sixth birthday, her brothers decided that she was old enough to be their partner. Up until now, it seemed to Will and Orv that they had been partners all of their lives. Of course, they played with other boys, but they found that they were happiest when the two of them did things together. They also felt they were partners with their mother and father. Mother Wright was never too busy to talk

with them and answer their questions; and when Father Wright was at home, he was always ready to play games with his sons. Now Sterchens was to be a member of this special group; they were all partners in the truest sense because their minds and hearts were bound together. From this time on, their sister was never left out of her brothers' plans.

There was no begging for money in the Wright household. It was a fixed rule that the children should earn the money for their hobbies themselves. This they did by engaging in a succession of projects—on Saturdays and during vacations. The first project in which Sterchens joined was the scrap-iron business.

How proud she was her first morning, as a partner! Her short legs had to run to keep up with the boys' strides, as they pulled Orv's wagon through the alleys and across vacant lots. But her sharp eyes spied almost as many old horseshoes and pieces of rusty iron as her brothers found. When the wagon was full, the three took their load to the junkyard. Dumping the old iron on his scales with a great clatter, the junkman reached in his pocket and gave a few pennies to each of the boys. Sterchens's eager interest in the transaction changed to disappointment. She struggled to keep back the tears. She must not cry. But Will and Orv had said she was a partner. The boys counted their pennies.

"Great," said Orv. "Here, Will, take mine. You're the banker. Nine cents apiece. That's eighteen cents toward our woodcarving set."

Hearing a little snuffle, the older boy looked down at Sterchens.

“No, Orv,” he said gravely. “You haven’t counted right. That’s twelve cents toward our set,” and, winking at his brother, Will dropped a third of the pennies in the pocket of Sterchens’s red pinafore.

When her brothers took the wagon to the woods at the edge of town to gather nuts after the first frost, the little girl went along. Although she could only pick up the ones that had fallen on the ground, she hopped about happily until she had filled her apron. Then she added her small gathering to the nuts Will and Orv had picked. On reaching home, the boys carefully separated the nuts into three equal piles.

Sterchens could not share in all of the boys’ efforts to raise money for their hobbies, but they always made her feel that she had a part in them. When they made kites to sell, she went along to the hill above the river where they tried them out.

She stood with her heart beating fast in excitement as she saw the creations of her brothers’ clever hands rise like birds in the wind.

Stilts that they made were in great demand by other boys who saw them because they could be used upside down to gain greater height. So that Sterchens should not feel left out, they made a special, small pair of stilts for her.

When school was out in the summer, the three shared many pleasures. But most of all it was their picnics in the woods that Sterchens liked. Will and

Orv loved to cook out-of-doors. They had a secret picnic spot where they had set up a crude grill made from some old pieces of iron. Mother Wright let them take along bacon to broil over their fire and potatoes to bake in the coals. Sterchens smacked her lips, just thinking about it.

But Will and Orv were not satisfied. As they were starting for the woods one day, Will complained, "It takes too long to get the fire going."

"And it smokes too much," Orv added.

Then, as often happened in the years to come, they thought of the solution together.

"I know what we need," Will said.

And before he could finish, Orv shouted, "A chimney! We could make one from tin cans. Fit them together like stovepipe joints."

Leaving Sterchens standing on the sidewalk, the boys ran to the trash bin in the backyard to get the cans they needed for their experiment. Nothing her brothers did surprised Sterchens, and everything they did was wonderful.

When they reached the picnic spot, she gathered twigs and small pieces of wood to keep the fire going while the boys put the cans together to make a chimney.

"It works," panted Orv, his face red from the heat of the coals.

"It sure does," Will chuckled, giving his brother a slap on the back. "Inventors, that's what we are."



Sterchens was proud of the invention, too, but the part of the picnic she liked best was listening to the stories Will told as they lay on the grass after their lunch. Sometimes he made up funny stories to make them laugh. Sometimes he told them a story from one of the books he was reading.

Some of the neighbors thought Will was lazy because he read so much. When Mother Wright heard them say this, it made her angry. She knew how much Will did to help her in the house. “He’s just quiet, that’s all,” she defended him fiercely. “You just wait. You’ll see. That boy has powder under his heels.”

“Orvie is too busy to read,” she would add under her breath. And who would know this better than his

mother? He was seldom quiet and was full of mischief. He was always trying to make some new thing. Often he did not finish his experiments, but fortunately Mother Wright was a patient woman. She let him clutter up her kitchen until it was sometimes hard for her to cook. But she let him keep on using the kitchen as a laboratory. She did not tell him whether or not his ideas were of use but left him to find it out for himself.

Each child had a share in the housework. Orv and Sterchens received five dollars apiece on New Year's morning for doing the dishes through the year. Their father put the shining gold pieces under their plates, and they felt very rich for several weeks. Will helped his mother with the heavy work of laundry and scrubbing, for she was often ill during these years.

Although Will was four years older than Orv, they were about the same size as they were growing up. They played baseball together, did stunts on the horizontal bars, and ran on the track team at school.

Sometimes, Will would tease his brother until the younger boy was almost ready to fight.

"I like to scrap with Orvie," he used to say, "because I like to scrap with a good scrapper." But Will was quick to defend Orv if anyone else tried to threaten or tease him.

Sterchens was growing, too, but she still loved her dolls. Her brothers put their money together and gave her one on each of her birthdays and at Christmas. The year she was ten, Orv saw a beautiful doll in a

shop window. “Wouldn’t Sterchens love a doll like that?” he asked himself. “Not a girl in Dayton would have a finer one. Anyway, it would not do any harm to go in and ask the price.”

Carefully, the shopkeeper lifted the doll from the window, gently smoothing her pale blue satin dress. He glanced at the price tag and then looked quizzically over his spectacles at the eager boy.



“Well, now, this really is a doll. Opens and shuts her eyes. Dress is made out of real satin.”

Orv could not bear the suspense. He interrupted the man’s praises. Anybody could see it was a perfect wonder of a doll.

“But how much does it cost?”

“Two dollars, son.”

“Two dollars! Whew!” He might have known. Sadly, he shook his head.

“Didn’t want to go that high, son?” the shopkeeper asked in a sympathetic tone. “Well, it’s a long time to Christmas, anyway.”

The sympathetic tone gave him hope, and the shopkeeper’s remark gave him an idea. “It is a long time to Christmas,” Orv thought, several months in fact. If he saved his allowance until then—quickly he figured. He could just make it.

“Say, would you lay it away for me and let me pay you some on it every week?”

The shopkeeper considered the proposition.

“One of Bishop Wright’s boys, aren’t you?”

“Yes, sir, I’m Orville,” he answered in his most polite manner.

“Want the doll for your sister, I suppose?” the man continued.

“Yes, sir, for Sterchens.”

Orv watched his every move as the shopkeeper reached under the counter for a paper box and laid the fragile doll in it.

“All right, son, I’ll put her away for you; and when she’s paid for, you can take her home.”

If there were no customers in the shop when Orv came to make his weekly payments, the man behind the counter would open the box to let him gaze on the doll’s china beauty. Each time he saw new charms—the eyelashes, so carefully pasted on, the bright blue eyes that did in fact open and shut, the pearly teeth, the thick curls of real hair. The thought of Sterchens’s joy was almost more than he could bear. He felt that Christmas came and went each time he visited the shop.

Late in the afternoon before Christmas Eve, Orv went to the shop with his last payment. The package was ready for him, and the shopkeeper heartily wished him a “Merry Christmas.”

“Merry Christmas,” the boy replied as he dashed through the door and pushed his way through the crowd of last-minute shoppers. He clasped the package carefully in his arms as he began the icy mile and a half walk to the house on Hawthorne Street. He could not believe it! This was the doll—Sterchens’s doll. Where could he hide it? How could he ever wait until morning to give it to her?

He could not, or at least he did not. Sterchens was helping Mother Wright make popcorn and cranberry

strings for the little Christmas tree when Orv came into the warm living room.

“What do you want for Christmas?” he shouted as he unwound his long woolen muffler.

He had asked this question each day, so Sterchens twinkled at her mother and replied as she had each day, “A doll.”

Thrusting the package in her arms, Orv said in triumph, “Well then, open this.”

He could not wait another minute.