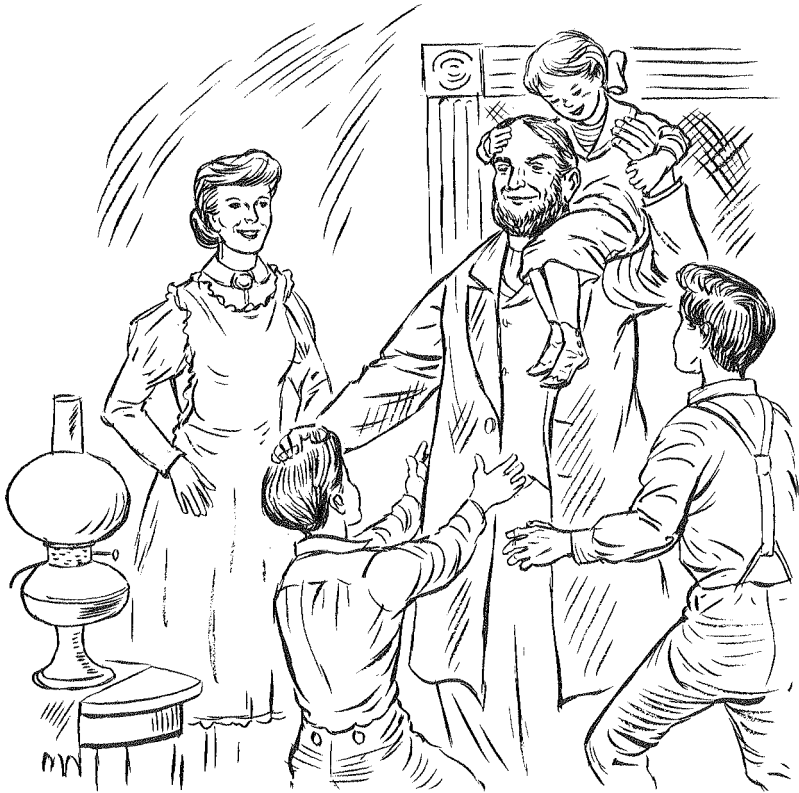


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ONE: THE TOY



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.”

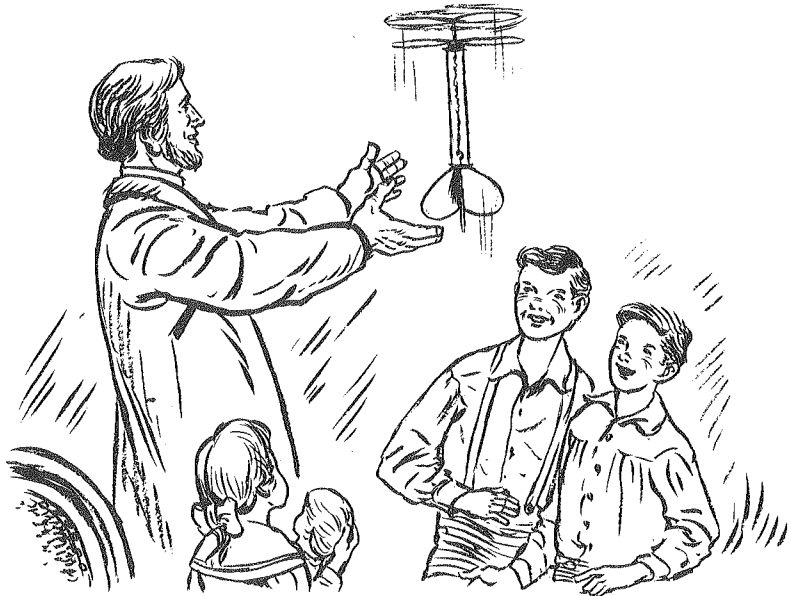
With a sigh of relief, Father Wright took his wife’s hand and led her back into the living room.

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.