

About the Telegraph

by Elizabeth Gordon

“Mother has just had a telegram from Grandmother that she’s on her way to visit us,” said the boy named Billy. “I’m strong for Grandmother and I’m going to train to meet her.”

“We’re all fond of Grandmother,” corrected Big Sister, “and we’re all going to the train to meet her. Who brought the telegram?”

“Nobody brought it,” said the boy named Billy. “When it got to town it just hopped off the telegraph wires and hopped on the telephone wire and came right out here. That’s got magic beaten a mile I’ll say. Whoever invented the telegraph system anyhow?”

“Oh, you with your ‘who inventeds’!” said Big Sister. “Why don’t you study up such things yourself?”

“I can read it afterwards,” said the boy named Billy, “but when Somebody tells it to me that makes a story of it. Please, who did invent the Telegraph?”

“Samuel F. B. Morse did,” said Somebody. “He was born at Charlestown, Massachusetts, April 27th, 1791, and lived until April 2nd, 1872. He was a portrait painter, and student of chemistry, and went to London to study painting under Benjamin West, where he made such progress that when he returned to America he was given a commission to paint a full length portrait of LaFayette.”

“LaFayette was some hero and worth painting,” said the boy named Billy, “but when do we come to the telegraph?”

“Right now,” smiled Somebody. “The idea of electricity had been talked of for a long time, and while Mr. Morse was away on one of his trips to England it was found by some experimenting that electricity could be conveyed by means of wire over distances.

“A gentleman whom Mr. Morse met on ship board told him of these experiments and it brought to his mind the old belief held by Benjamin Franklin that intelligence some time would be conveyed by electricity, a belief which he had always shared. He went to work to perfect an instrument and a code for the system which he had in mind, with the result that when the boat landed his idea was ready to present.”

“He struck before the iron was hot, didn’t he?”

“In a manner of speaking, yes,” said Somebody, “but it was two long years after that before the system was completed and in working order. And it took quite some persuasion also to get other people to believe in it, but finally Congress voted him thirty thousand dollars to help him along with his project and so he won out.

“Where, before, it had taken months and years to get word from or to distant places, it could now be done almost instantly. Samuel Morse’s life was one long record of courage, integrity, patience and faith.”

“Bob White and I are fixing up a wireless on the roof of our garage,” said the boy named Billy. “It’s two hours before Grandmother’s train pulls in. Don’t forget to call me, and many thanks, Somebody!”

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