The Story

Jimmy Giuffre 3

Benny is a Welsh coal miner. He is a radio ham. He is 23 years old, married to Molly. They have a son, young Ben, age 4, and a new baby. They look after Benny's twin brother Billy, who is apparently a vegetable. The mine is closed by the market forces. The Male Voice Choir stops singing, the village is dying. One night Benny takes Billy on a pub crawl. Drunk in a brightly-lit shopping mall, Benny vents his anger on a shop window full of multiple TV images of Margaret Thatcher's mocking condescension. In defiance, he steals a cordless phone. Later that night, Benny cavorts dangerously on the parapet of a motorway footbridge, in theatrical protest of the tabloid press. That same night, a cab driver is killed by a concrete block dropped off a similar bridge. The police come to question Benny; he hides the cordless phone under the cushion of Billy's wheelchair.
Billy is different, he can receive radio waves directly without the aid of a tuner; he explores the cordless phone, recognizing its radioness. Benny is sent to prison. Billy feels as if half of him has been cut off. He misses Benny's nightly conversations with radio hams in foreign parts. Molly, unable to cope, sends Billy to stay with his Great Uncle David, who had emigrated to the USA during the war. Much as Billy likes Uncle David and the sunshine and all the new radio in LA, he cannot adjust to the cultural upheaval and the loss of Benny, who for him is 'home'.
Uncle David, now an old man, is haunted by having worked on the Manhattan project during World War II, designing the Atom Bomb, and seeks to atone. He also is a radio ham; he often talks to other hams about the Black Hills of his youth, the Male Voice Choir, about home. He is saddened by the use of telecommunication to trivialise important issues, the soap opera of state. However, Live Aid has decynicised him to an extent. Billy listens to David and hears the truth the old man speaks.
Billy experiments with his cordless phone, he learns to make calls. He accesses computers and speech synthesizers, he learns to speak. Billy makes contact with Jim a DJ at Radio KAOS, a renegade rock station fighting a lone rear guard action against format radio. Billy and Jim become radio friends, Reagan and Thatcher bomb Lybia. Billy perceives this as an act of political "entertainment" fireworks to focus attention away from problems at "home".

Billy has developed his expertise with the cordless phone to the point where he can now control the most powerful computers in the world. He plans an "entertainment" of his own. He simulates nuclear attack everywhere, but de-activates the military capability of "the powers that be" to retaliate. In extremes perceptions change, Panic, comedy, compassion. In a SAC bunker a soldier in a white cravat turns a key to launch the counter attack. Nothing happens; impotently he kicks the console, hurting his foot. He watches the approaching blips on the radar screen. As impact approaches, he thinks of his wife and kids, he puts his fingers in his ears. Silence. White out. Black out. Lights out. It didn't happen, we're still alive. Billy has drained the earth of power to create his illusion. All over the dark side of the earth, candles are lit. In the pub in Billy's home village in Wales one man starts to sing; the other men join in. The tide is turning.
Billy is home.

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