

Option: No Callers

A Treatment by John Doona

The future. 2090.

Jennifer returns home from work. She lives in a fully automated house. Today the house will fall under the control of the manufacturing authority and she will be forced to make un-returnable choices.

The house is a wonder; climate and ambience -controlled, self-cleaning, food-preparing and through the wall-sized inter-active screen, connected to a digital world of entertainment, communication and news. She toys each day with the character of the voice the house will have.

On returning Jennifer receives her personal messages; from her partner, Michael – who has sent her a gift which he wants her to take into the bath with her, from her mother, from the management group (monitoring the functioning of house) and from her ‘social cause’ – a message from the African child she sponsors and his mother.

Then begins the daily digest of news; we hear snatches of news about suicide bombers before Jennifer orders bad news off, it continues with news of inane technological advances, including holidays ‘on the edge of space’.

A little later the house has run Jennifer’s bath and she soaks in it. Her partner calls again – she opens the gift, a love amulet – you give one to your partner so you both have one on your wrist. When I caress my amulet you will feel the sensation of my caress wherever you are in the world and vice versa. It is also capable to transferring other emotions such a fear or horror. Jennifer has left work today for a weeks holiday, she is going away to a Sky Cruiser, a kilometre wide cruiser permanently moving through the stratosphere in constant sunlight above the clouds; a serene holiday experience.

Jennifer will not live with her partner and he is becoming increasingly frustrated. They have conceived a child together many years ago but the child is in storage and not yet born. Jennifer is reluctant to advance with the child’s ‘emergence’. Michael presses her. They argue. Jennifer’s question is whether she wishes to bring a child into the world as it is... she has the child on hold.

Alone again a little later Jennifer calls up the ‘virtual child’ – a kind of advanced tamagochi – the characteristics of their stored embryo have been anticipated and Jennifer has bought the function to be able to watch the child on screen as if it had grown. The child, a son, would now have been 22 years old. She can see how he would look and, indeed, speak to him. She calls him up as an eight year old and speaks to him for a short time. She then calls up the news – the violent conflicts, the wastelands in the south, the attacks on the closed city.

She then calls up ‘Option: No Callers’ – a function in which the house denies access to all communications and callers – a ‘lock-down’. At this the whole house grinds to a halt. Something has gone wrong. The lights even click off. Jennifer is alone in the dark and the house will not respond. The doors are locked. She is trapped.

Jennifer panics at the silence and dark. There are always technological voices around her, offering comfort and a sense of connectedness. Now she is alone.

(Elsewhere Michael registers her terror through the band, but cannot contact her.)

After a short time the house begins to 'reboot' and clicks back into life. When it does so, however, it is no longer under Jennifer's control. A new voice that refuses her instructions – will not allow her to alter the voice selection or climate of the house.

The house has a purpose. It has knowledge of her beyond possibility. It has things to tell her and decisions for her to make....

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