

Recycle And Renew

by

Philip Berry

Averill, a pristine and experienced realtor with shoulder-length hair the colour of ash, did not hurry. She dwelt on the filamentous bridge that connected the main house to the infinity pool – aptly named, for swimmers who rested their chins on the edge could look out into the depths of space.

Teresa and Douglas Flinial, almost identical in height and build - slim and fit - looked carefully to their right, following the utility link that ran to the next property in The Lattice. Privacy mattered to them. They were both pleased that they could not see the neighbouring complex. It was 200 kilometres away.

Averill caught them looking. “You really are alone here. Yet... not alone. The shuttle housed under the pool will take you to the sub-hub in half an hour. You must have come through the sub-hub earlier – or did you fly in direct? Anyway, every kind of restaurant and shop. Depends on your mood.”

Douglas bent down to whisper in Koov’s ear. Koov was their seven-year old ambigant child.

“When does it choose?” Averill asked.

“This year.” Teresa, Koov’s natural mother, seemed offended. As though the realtor’s question belied an assumption that the child was behind, and unlikely to meet the usual milestones.

Douglas calmed his wife with a light pat on the small of the back. Teresa shot him a sharp glance.

Averill turned away, smiling to herself. Pretty clear who wore the trousers in this relationship.

Douglas interrupted. “We use the neutral pronouns, by the way. Shehe. Hishers. Annoying to start with, I know, but you get used to it very quickly. You have children?”

“No.” Averill returned to the business in hand. “I must say, we have had a great deal of interest.”

In other words, make your minds up, there’s competition. But they would not be hurried, evidently.

“And this is a genuine new build?” Douglas asked.

“Absolutely. This complex, yes. The Lattice is two years old. We usually extend four residences at a time in tetrahedral fashion. But for the present, this residence is not part of a full pyramid, it’s connected to just one other. In time, two other utility bridges will be added as new residences to complete the tetrahedron, but this process is genuinely painless for the occupant. The utility link junction lies well below the house, and as you can see, the aesthetic impact is negligible.”

“What’s in the utility link?”

“Power, water, waste. That’s it. Atmosphere is generated on-site.”

“How long would we... if we took this house... be likely to remain like this?”

“Isolated? Very hard to say. Less than six months. It *is* necessary to maintain the tetrahedral sub-structure as the community grows...” (mistake! - they are clearly not interested in being part of a community – Averill recognised, too late) “...for strength. The solar winds do exert a force, and the cumulative sheer stress has to be spread across all units. Do you think that would be a problem?”

Teresa, a lawyer used to the ways of business, detected the change in salesmanship. Averill was pushing, trying to close the deal. Teresa didn’t mind. She had closed a few large deals herself.

“Not necessarily,” she said quietly, running fingers through her short black hair. “What do you think Doug?”

“It’s a necessity, clearly. How long do the engineers stay on site to secure the link?”

“No engineers. The link finds its own way, low-grade AI navigation chips in the tip. Fully automated. Usually happens at night, residents wake up to find a new link. Actually, we have found they are reassured. A sense of stability, solidity.”

Averill had moved them to the side of the pool. Each considered, then chose not to mention, the disaster that had occurred with the first Lattice, on the other side of the galactic quadrant. Both Douglas and Teresa had seen the news reports, when they were still studying at university. Having grown to a huge size over twenty-five years, a wayward, remote operated ore carrier had collided with it.

The hexagonal cells, resembling the molecular structure of graphite, in which the residences were carbon atoms placed only fifty kilometres from their neighbours, had broken down without resistance. The initial tear in the structure had destabilised the whole, which folded in on itself. The protective fields and gravitational zones had disintegrated. The loss of life was huge. And here they were, considering whether to buy into a similar project.

“What do you think Koov?”

Koov smiled. Hisher’s dark hair, rich brown as opposed to the mother’s black and the father’s mouse, made the child look, to Averill, quite boyish. Who knew what the parents

had in mind? Perhaps they were rigorous in their neutrality. Kid's choice. What a joke. But many of the professional classes chose this way nowadays.

"What do you do, if I may ask?" Averill couldn't help herself.

Douglas answered first, though Teresa's mouth was shaping up to answer for both of them. "I'm in educational media, Teresa's a lawyer. Property."

Averill moved quickly. She could barely keep her smile to herself now. New age and cut throat in the same family. God help that kid!

"Koov has allergies. What's the allergen rating? I noticed you had a bio-probe in your bag." This from Douglas.

Averill did not enjoy the feeling that Dad had been casting his eyes into her private space. But she took out the probe, waved it around unnecessarily, and held the readout up to his face at a polite distance. 99.99% free of organic material.

"Essentially sterile. The garden and arboretum are synth, of course. You would be the first people to set foot in many of the areas since they were gamma soaked before transportation from the orbiting factory."

Douglas nodded approvingly.

Teresa was staring back to the house. Its proportions seemed to please her.

Averill mused she'd seen a lot of buildings.

The deal was sealed by the time they had toured the covered garden and returned to the main house. Douglas and Teresa Flinial committed, verbally, to buying the 857th unit in the ever-expanding Lattice, each side of which extended 2000 kilometres long into a privileged portion of space beyond the orbit of Nascen III's eleventh and most exterior planet.

(End of preview)

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Philip Berry lives in London. His short stories have appeared in *Metaphorosis*, *The Corona Book of Science Fiction*, *Ellipsis Zine* and *Headstuff* among others. A collection of 30 previously published SF stories was published in 2017, called *Bonewhite Light*. He can be found at his [website](#) and on [Twitter](#).