



The World's Worst Mothers

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This Dahlesque story starts well with a trio of vignettes, each concentrating on communication break-down between a parent and child. But things get darker once the mothers concerned are lured away to a re-education course for compulsory re-training by a maverick toy-maker. He has his own hare-brained schemes for eventually doing away with the need for mothers altogether. Their replacements back at home are robots who look human: Stepford mothers rather than wives. Unfailingly obliging, the robots eventually give themselves away through minor malfunctions. Starting to miss the real thing, the three children track down their mothers who are now virtually imprisoned on an island in the North Sea. But by this point storylines have become dangerously stretched, with belief pushed to breaking point. The moral of this novel also seems a bit odd for these days, with the mothers accused of not doing enough ironing and cooking to keep their children happy while their husbands are left free from any significant criticisms at all. Expertly translated, there are still some good moments here from an author who is extremely popular in her own country but will have to do rather better than this to acquire a following over here.

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