

Chapter 5

Harris picked at his food; he had no real appetite. Reflecting on his meeting with Femi, he was totally conflicted between his role and their friendship, between mentor and student. After he had terminated their conversation, far from concluded, Harris had left the building informing Quintain he would work from home the following day, and to cancel all his meetings. His assistant did not even raise an eyebrow and would comply, but Harris knew it would seem odd, he could count how many times he had done this on one hand. Despite all the innovative technology available, he was quite a traditionalist, needing to be very visible and accessible to his senior team. It would be minus one soon, no doubt, he thought sadly.

His ‘apartment’ was vast, top floor, and by the waterfront in view of the Golden Gate bridge. All glass, automated, environmentally conditioned, and only thirty minutes by fly-limo as direct as the crow used to fly. One of Emperor Trump’s most maddest of actions, and there were so many, removing intelligent, even sentient species considered a ‘threat’ to humanity. Vive la revolution, thank the gods. Life seemed monochrome since the rather colourful thirty-year reign of the father and the son. No holy ghost in that story.

He knew what he had to do with Femi, ending four years of working together, *being friends together*. He looked up from the dining table that had been set up by Lazarus, his senior VocBot, and eyed the entrance to his home ‘lab’, that blue glow discernible through the frosted glass. culpabilité worked fast, he would give them that! And then he was pulling the metal helmet off his head. Huh, what? He shook his head and checked the time, not even ten minutes had elapsed since he must have stepped into the lab, and now here he sat. He thought about his decision process leading up to now, and of Femi. Yes, no guilt, no conscience in his memory of their meeting. He would fire him first thing in the AM. Harris finished his meal, appetite restored.

He rubbed his stubble, poured himself a liberal helping of synthi-hol and knocked it back in one gulp. Harris realised it would be devastating to his young protégé, not to mention he’d no longer be able to afford culpabilité, but he didn’t care. At all. Jeez, this was astonishing, he could start to see why all the trials converted to contracts, but he had to find out more about this all, there must be a downside, there always is. There *can’t* be a free lunch when removing someone’s guilt.

‘Quintain, please ensure that Mr Ade is in my office at 7:30am tomorrow, and security DumbBots are ready to escort him from the building, the *quiet* way out, at 09:30am. He will need to be processed and debriefed by Ms Namura before his exit. I will be in the office after all. Thank you’, and he switched the transparent screen to art, not leaving any real time to observe Quintain’s expression as he did. There was a random scene from Dante’s Inferno replacing his assistant’s face, much to Harris’s irritation. Sometimes he was sure this low-level automation was more sentient than they let on, sarcasm being the lowest form of wit for a human, but high functioning for a house automaton. He slept fitfully, refreshed and awake by 5:30am.