

GUILTY

Manny stared at the open page ~~in~~
his ~~notebook~~, a ~~familiar~~ ^{familiar} tension
twisting ⁱⁿ ~~gripping~~ his guts. The story was
complete, apart from this ~~one~~, final
step - something the publisher
insisted on.

The heading he'd just scrawled
in ~~his notebook~~ ^{these} stared accusingly back at
him:

"AI USE STATEMENT"

He'd read the submission guidelines
of course - multiple times, ~~but~~ ^{and} although
why they called them "guidelines"
was beyond him, as a single
violation, no matter how small,
~~was~~ spelled instant rejection.

It was why he was sitting here,
writing in this notebook with his
favorite Lamy fountain pen - too
^{anxious}~~scared~~ to even use his usual
word processor, lest some covert
AI bot took it on itself to
suggest a grammatical change
or, God forbid, correct a typo!

In his paranoia, he'd tried to
avoid every possible way AI might
somehow encroach on the story.
Even down to the pen. Swilling to
himself, he wondered if he should
have gone the whole nine yards
and cut a quill, or at least used
an ^{airbrush} ink well. But at least he ~~stayed~~
ink stains on his now-sweaty fingers
(why did that always happen?)

and the occasional smudges on the page, were testaments to his rejection of anything that artificial intelligence might attempt.

What did bother him, though, was that this was a story that needed to be told, no matter how it made ~~his~~ its way from his head to ~~its~~ ^{his} readers. Or so he thought. This wasn't about ego, or prestige. OK, maybe it was, just a bit. But in his mind, it was more than that. ^{And certainly} ~~More~~ than a story that ^{simply} entertained and got his ^{in front of people} name out there (and, in the process, made it easier for ~~new~~ ^{new} people to find his work). It was about society's relationship with AI,

and how ~~it~~^{people} worked with a
technology that simply ^{and not} fit into
the old roles governing how ^{they} people
behaved, did things, or - in this
case - did ~~not~~^{do} them.

^{to} told himself
The story was important. It deserved
to be read. No, Manny corrected
himself, it ~~needed~~ to be read.

And yet, those old roles still
dictated what you could or could
not do as a writer - ~~it seemed~~!

The navy made him bristle as
he thought about the H. Use Statement.

^{Pittman's roles}
The ~~role~~^{assumed}, that or so it seemed,
that the whole part of writing was
to give you were a master story
teller, ^{squeeze} ~~and~~ ~~at~~ who could master

stay ^{telling} ~~with~~ ^{no} artificial aids ^{many} ~~whatsoever~~ ^{it was} ~~at~~ ^{almost}, ^{Myself to} ~~never~~ ^{bring} ~~but~~ ^{was}
~~but~~, a test of your ^{was} ~~humanity~~.
~~nothing~~ at all to do with the
ideas you are trying to convey,
or how they might change, ~~at~~
the reader, or at least make them
think.

He turned back to the ^{at} one
statement, a Rash ^{sheer} ~~and~~ ^{Prudent} of ¹⁵ sweat
making the pen slippery in his hands.
He'd done everything right. There was
not ^{an} idea, or sentence, or turn of
phrase, or synonym, ^{or} grammatical
correct, but wasn't he perfect of
his writer's brain and his new-
advised hand.

But there was one place he
couldn't been able to post.

The waves of guilt passed over him
again, sweeping her into his
unusually illegible writing, deducing
for all to see that he was carrying
a burden ~~that~~ he felt no inter-
should ~~at least, not him.~~

It was his ^{that} ~~this~~ mind, ^{that} was the weak link. ^{That, and} ~~that~~
his curiosity. The two things that
made him good at his craft, was
turning against him.

He'd used it in the past of course.
Didn't everyone? In fact he used it
a lot - everything from asking random
questions to deep research. And this
had prompted the question behind

a question that asked what he
the story - ~~what is the~~ ^{actually is} part of
unity ~~between~~ ^{between} ~~himself~~ ^{he's} ~~and~~ ^{he's} ~~it's~~
to open the minds and imaginations
of readers to new ideas, possibilities, and
challenges ~~even~~, ^{shouldn't} ~~why not~~ ^{it's} ~~to~~
excel at this?

As it turned out, the question was
more complex than he'd initially
~~thought~~ ^{thought} ~~expected~~. But, based on his work with
M, ~~and especially a number of~~
~~long conversations with his currently~~
~~focused~~ ^{but far beyond reach} ~~world~~, he'd come up with
a pretty compelling ~~story~~ ^{narrative} story.

The ideas and narrative were, of course,
his, and his alone. But ~~even~~ ^{but} ~~he~~
early association with M had planted
the seeds of guilt that were now
growing and flowering in his gut.

That wasn't the worst of it though.

In a moment of ~~inattention~~ ^{stupid}, stupid, stupid, ^{for the umpteenth time} he heard himself say -
he'd asked his Al about the artificial
intelligence play ^{policy} of the ^{site} he
was intending to submit to.

It was that conversation that had
led to him ~~being~~ ^{speaking} ~~out~~ the
notebook and fountain pen. And
which had led to this point as
he sat unusually looking at the
blank space below the ~~last~~ heading.

Finally, he took the lid off the
~~box~~ ^{box}, went forward, and wrote, slowly,
and:

"Guilty."