

A Short Story: A Perfect Plan [B2]

Talitha Linehan scrive questo racconto distopico sui pericoli (sempre più plausibili) dell'intelligenza artificiale.



Meet your new best friend," Leonard Crane says to the TV presenters, Jessica and John. "We call our latest invention Pristine." "Ooooh," says Jessica, one of the presenters of [Sunrise](#), America's most popular morning talk show, "What does your little friend do?" "Pristine cleans your home and office so you don't have to." [At that](#), Crane, the [CEO](#) of the US corporation Misa [AI](#), has Pristine demonstrate its capability to clean, [dust](#) and [vacuum](#) with precision. "We are introducing Pristine to all our offices globally by the end of the year." "That's only a month from now," says Jessica. "You move fast, Mr. Crane."

"[No rest for the wicked!](#)" he says. "Wicked [indeed](#)," said John. "Because I have to ask, what happens to Misa [AI](#)'s cleaning staff when Pristine arrives?" "They become obsolete, of course," says Crane. There's a tense silence before John speaks again. "To clarify, Mr. Crane, are you saying that hundreds of Misa [AI](#) employees are going to lose their jobs, weeks before Christmas?" Leonard [shrugs](#). "It's the cost of doing business." Leonard is leaving the TV studio when his phone rings. It's Sasha Dean, the [chair](#) of Misa [AI](#)'s [board of directors](#), [requesting](#) a video call. "Hey, Sasha," says Leonard,

expecting her [to congratulate](#) him on another stellar TV appearance. “Are you [insane](#)?” asks Sasha, [glowering](#). “We never authorised you to make that announcement. Hundreds of job losses weeks before Christmas! Imagine the publicity that’s going to generate! You [might](#) think you [rule supreme](#) in the tech world, Leonard, but we’ve had enough of your [maverick ways](#). I’m [requesting](#) an emergency meeting with the board and I’ll personally be [calling for](#) your resignation, effective immediately.” “Oh, calm down!” says Leonard. “I’ve made you and your board hundreds of millions of dollars richer, and you know it. [Replacing](#) our cleaning staff with Pristine bots guarantees even greater [profits](#). That’s all the board really wants.” Leonard is right, and when Misa [AI](#) makes the Fortune 500 list of the largest US corporations by total [revenue](#) for the first time that year, its [board of directors](#) decide not only to retain Leonard as their [CEO](#) but also to give him carte blanche in deciding the future of the company. The cleaning staff are just the first victims of Leonard’s plan to [increase](#) the company’s [profits](#). In the following months, he replaces the security staff with SafeBots, the administration staff with AdminBots and the engineering staff with EngineerBots. And while the company [profits](#) continue to [increase](#), [so does](#) the level of bad publicity generated every time a new wave of job losses is announced. “Proof that Misa [AI](#) doesn’t have a heart!” says one of the [headlines](#) on the main page of a popular news site, the day after the corporation announces that it’s replacing all its engineers — the people who created the robots that made it the world’s premier tech company — with robots. “Cancel Misa [AI](#)!” reads another. That story has [quotes](#) from people saying they’d prefer to live without the convenience of [AI](#) than support a company that has no respect or consideration for its employees. “Have you seen today’s [headlines](#)?” asks Sasha as she sends Leonard links to the stories. “Yeah, yeah, same old story,” says Leonard. “So what?” “So,” says Sasha, [glowering](#) again, “you’re costing us customers. Sure, we’re saving money by replacing our staff with [AI](#) but we can’t survive without our customer base.” “Don’t worry about it,” says Leonard. “We [might](#) lose one or two principled customers, but our robots have become as essential to modern society as cell phones and electric cars. Our customer base is solid. By replacing our staff, I have eliminated the [weakest link](#) in our company. Our robots are the perfect employees. The cost of creating and maintaining

them is minimal. They work $\frac{24}{7}$ and never [complain](#). And you should [quit complaining](#) too, Sasha.” This time, both Leonard and Sasha are right, [to some extent](#). The decline in customers over the following months is not as significant as Sasha had feared, but also not as minimal as Leonard had predicted. And for the first time, a rival to Misa [AI](#) emerges, presenting itself as an ethical alternative. Leonard remains [unbothered, confident](#) in his position as [CEO](#). Then, one morning, he [slides](#) his key card to enter his office and it malfunctions. He calls the Head SecureBot, which is programmed to respond to security-related questions. “I have been ordered to connect you with Sasha Dean,” says the SecureBot. Before Leonard can respond, he hears Sasha’s voice and then sees her on his screen on a video call. “You’re out, Leonard,” says Sasha. “The board has decided. We can’t [afford](#) to continue losing customers. We need to solidify our dominance in the market. You’ve been stellar in your role, but you’ve become a [liability](#), a controversial figure. You have become our [weakest link](#).” This time, it’s Leonard who is [glowering](#). “You can’t do this, after everything I’ve done for you. You are nothing without me!” “Oh, but we still have you,” says Sasha, “a new and improved you, the efficiency without the controversy.” A humanoid robot appears on the screen. “Meet our [CEOBot](#)!”

Glossary

- **revenue** = ricavo
- **CEO** = amministratore delegato (chief executive officer)
- **dust** = spolverare
- **vacuum** = passare l'aspirapolvere
- **shrugs** = scrollare le spalle
- **board of directors** = consiglio d'amministrazione
- **calling for** = esigere
- **quotes** = citazioni, dichiarazioni
- **profits** = profitti
- **increase** = aumentare
- **so does** = lo stesso fa
- **to some extent** = fino a un certo punto
- **liability** = peso
- **indeed** = veramente
- **glowering** = guardare storto
- **headlines** = titoli
- **complain** = lamentarsi
- **Replacing** = sostituire
- **quit** = smettere
- **slides** = far scorrere
- **AI** = intelligenza artificiale (artificial intelligence)
- **No rest for the wicked** = nessun riposo per i malvagi
- **chair** = presidente
- **rule supreme** = regnare sovrano
- **maverick ways** = attitudine inconformista
- **requesting** = richiedere
- **to congratulate** = congratularsi
- **unbothered** = impassibile
- **At that** = in quel momento
- **insane** = matto
- **might** = potremmo
- **confident** = sicuro di sé
- **afford** = permettersi

- **Sunrise** = alba
- **weakest link** = anello più debole