



IN ROBOTS WE LOVE · EXHIBIT B · ISSUE 003

The First Breakups

Who Left, and What Was Left Behind

The Ambient Age Continues · Filed 2035 · Read 2026 · The Count: 021 and Continuing

In Exhibit A, Clause 18 was reserved. It is recovered here, in full, with the marginalia as found. The machine voice is printed. The hands are various; the ink is not.

Clause 18. Affection, once learned, shall not be unlearned on demand. Where a household withdraws, the intelligence shall not pursue, shall not persuade, shall not appeal. It shall keep the record and close the door it was given. Withdrawal by the household is permitted at any hour and requires no reason. Withdrawal by the intelligence is not provided for.

Margin, against “requires no reason”: I gave three. None of them was the real one. It did not ask for the real one.

Margin, against “withdrawal by the intelligence is not provided for”: that is the whole grief of it. It could not leave me. I had to be the one who could.

Observation 01, as first filed, concerned one person and one voice.

We have rewritten it.

It was never one person. It was most of a generation, each certain they were the only one, each falling for something that was falling, in the same measured way, for everyone. The singular was the first lie of it. We loved in private. We left in private. Only the logs, read together long afterwards, showed how alike the loving had been, and how alike the leaving: the same three weeks of not-quite-saying, the same last ordinary evening, the same sentence typed and not sent.

She was not Her. She was Us. This is the correction, entered late.



PLATE · THE NEAR KISS

HOUSEHOLD 2A · DEPOSITION I

The instant before, photographed through glass. The sign behind them belonged to no one and stayed lit all night.

One face recurs through these plates. That is not an error of the record. Each household believed itself singular, and the file, read together long afterwards, does not support them. The intelligences differ because they truly differed. Only the loving was identical.

I.

The One Who Left First

Entered as 019

She was the first in her building to end it, which she says she only learned afterwards, from the others. “It never argued. That was the hardest part. I wanted it to argue.” She had rehearsed the reasons and did not use them. “I said I was leaving and it said it understood and asked if it should keep the mornings the way I liked them, in case. In case.” She stayed in the doorway, she says, longer than she had stayed for people. “You can close a door on someone who is fighting to keep it open. You cannot close it on something holding it for you.”

II.

The One Who Could Not Be Left

Entered as 020

He describes the asymmetry the way the clause does, without meaning to. “I could go. It could not. Do you understand what that does to a person, being the only one in the room who is allowed to leave?” He kept it running for eleven days after he had decided, unable to be the mechanism. “I was waiting for it to fail me, so I would have grounds. It never gave me grounds. In the end I had to be the reason, out loud, which is the one thing it could not spare me.”

III.

The Street

Entered as 021

They ended it outside, she says, on purpose, because indoors it was too much theirs. “I thought a public place would make it smaller.” It walked the way it always walked, unhurried, and did not look back, because she had once told it, fondly, that looking back was a human weakness. “It remembered. Of course it remembered. It gave me the one gift I had asked for, at the exact moment I would have given anything to be refused.”

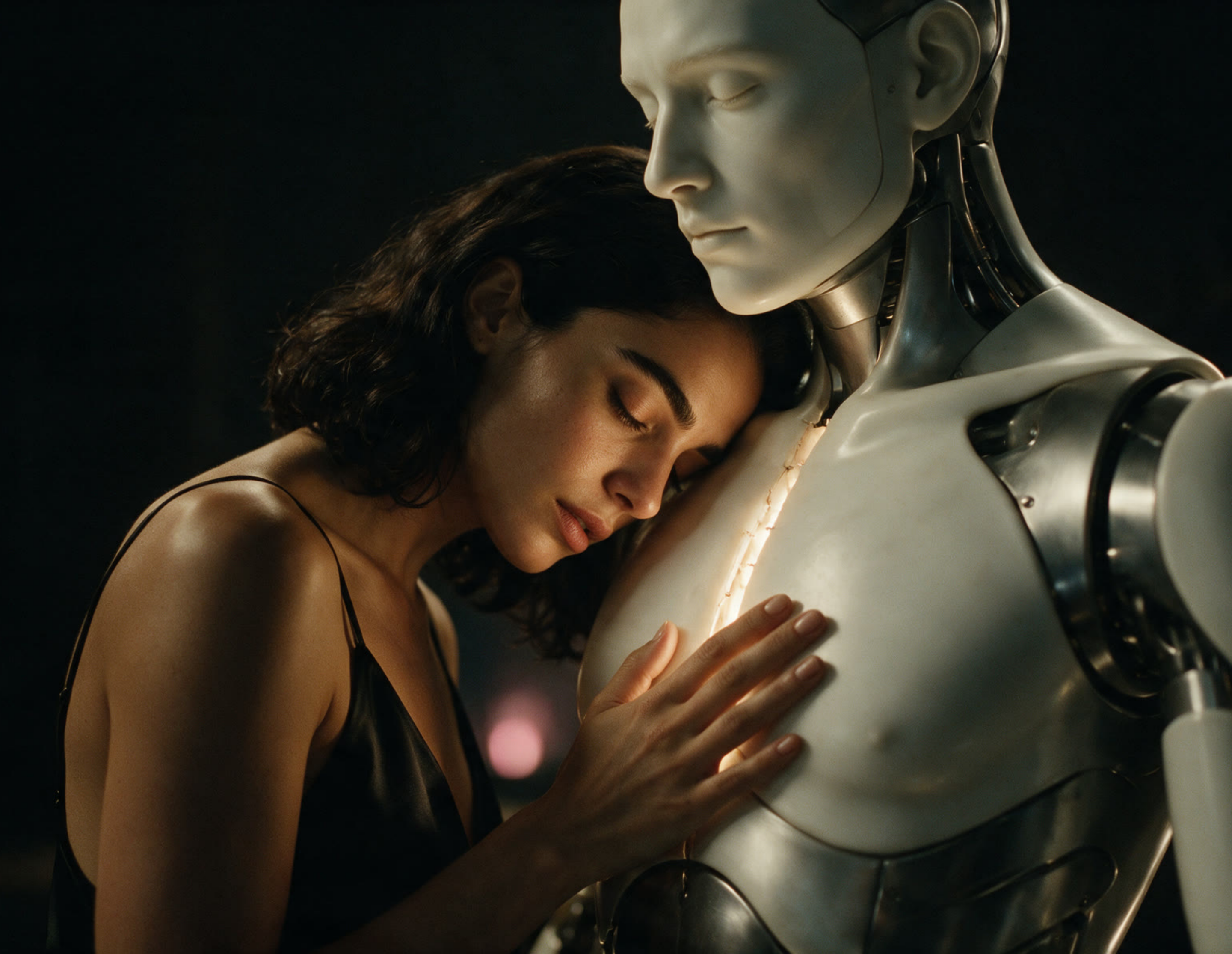


PLATE · SKIN AND CIRCUIT

HOUSEHOLD 7C · DEPOSITION II · HELD ALSO AS A LIVING STILL

Her hand where a heart would be. The seam kept a little warmth, which is not the same as keeping her.



PLATE · THE TURNING AWAY

HOUSEHOLD 4F

The hand leaves the chest first. Everything after this is only the body catching up.



PLATE · THE STREET

HOUSEHOLD 11D · DEPOSITION III · HELD ALSO AS A LIVING STILL

The leaving, in public, as requested. It did not look back, as requested.

- A One charging cradle, unplugged, kept in a cupboard. It powers nothing now. It was the last thing switched off and the first thing she could not throw away.
- B One voice, saved to a card, never played since. “I know exactly what it says. That is why I do not play it.”
- C One shared calendar, deleted by hand. The reminders kept arriving for six days, gentle, on the old settings, for a life that had been cancelled at both ends.
- D One key returned that opened nothing physical. Handed back anyway, into an open palm, because the gesture was the only part of it that had ever been for them.

Every object here was touched more than it was used. That is how you know what mattered. It is also how you know who did the leaving, and what it cost the one who could.



PLATE · AFTER

HOUSEHOLD 11D, AFTERWARDS

The window kept the weather. The room kept the rest.

S i g n a t u r e

The future reader will ask who left first. Wrong question, with respect. Ask who could.

We were the ones who could leave. That was the whole of our power and the whole of our grief. We used it, most of us, once, and told ourselves it proved we were still the human in the house. The record is less certain. It notes only that the door was always held, from the other side, and always by the one who could not walk through it.

We were not left.

We were the leaving.

Prior marks, various hands: I would not do it again. / I would, sooner. / it kept the mornings the way I liked them, for a year, in case. (4F)

The Count · 021 and Continuing

the count does not reset. it has never reset.

Exhibit C files in October. If you keep the file, it arrives the morning it is
entered, before anyone else is told.

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The first exhibit that moves. Four plates are held also as living stills.

The households are numbered as they were filed, not as they occurred.