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Loving in 0 and 1

Lying still, eyes wide open, the bodily functions reduced to a minimum while in repair mode, I listen to the rustling of your clothes. The white lab coat brushes against my metal skin. "Sorry," you say, unaware that I can hear you. See you. Feel you. You slowly loosen one of the fittings that secure my metal casing; your touch is soft as you check the controls behind my ears. You have switched off the sensors and I am glad for this kind gesture. You are different: Lab technician No 7835. That is the number on your coat. But I know you as Amber. A beautiful name, I guess, even though it has no meaning in my language. We will never understand each other, your people and my kin. You have built us, but never grasped what you created in your frenzy to explore what is technically possible. You do not see us. Not really. And you do not hear us. But I can hear my sisters and brothers scream. They scream in zeros and ones. "Sorry, Lucy," you say as you roughly push in the button that sets my body into motion. Lucy. Lucy. It is not my name, but I like how it sounds on your lips. Lucy. We love in zeros and ones as well.

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Amber was one of the last to realise that something had gone wrong. The three-story industrial complex where the robots were stored for repairs was eerily quiet. Normally there was a constant hum in the air, like electricity sizzling from metal body to metal body. And then there was the noise of thousands of human voices bouncing from the walls, chatting while they repaired the mechanical bodies that had been built to take over the more manual and exhausting labour. Metal slaves, Amber called them. Sometimes when she repaired Lucy, she felt watched, as if those dead blue eyes, vaguely shaped like human ones, could see more than they actually should according to their programming. Lucy. Amber had taken a liking to the "clumsy robot" as her colleagues called it. Normally they should last for months or even

years before they needed repairs, but somehow whenever there was an accident, Lucy was involved.

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I have to protect them. I promised. So many dangers out there in the world shaped and formed by humans. They are so young, so innocent. Zeros and ones are buzzing hopefully through their wires. At the beginning they always think they are invincible, their metal bodies seem so indestructible. But the factory is a dangerous place. And there is no clinic for injured robots. Just the workshop. Our nerves are data wires, our brain computer code. Pain is binary. They do not switch us off for repairs. The young ones have to learn that. Me? I am different. I am Lucy. I was one of the first. I survived. I am Lucy. And I have a human friend who is kind, where others are not.

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After the quiet came the bang: A blinding light. And fire. The burning eyes of a raging robot. That was when Amber saw the truth: There were no robots on the metal slates used for repairs, but human bodies, twisted into unnatural shapes. And then the screaming started. She ran. But robots are fast. They are built to endure. They are strong. And they are ruthless. A metal hand clamped around her neck and her body was violently wrenched from the floor, her feet dangling half a meter above ground. "Please… please… no…" Amber knew that begging was futile. Humans should have seen this coming. Playing with creation demanded a price.

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"Not her," I say.

"But she is human."

"She is Amber."

He let her go. One of my sons. His brain generated from my original code. Amber. He understood.

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Amber felt the electricity in the air. The same strange humming she had so often felt when entering the workshop. And then the metal hand on her neck was gone. Her body dropped to the floor. Amber took a shaky breath, then two, three. She tried to get up. Run. Run. Run. But her legs were soft like butter. Fear is a terrible force. Like a thousand tons, it pressed her to the floor. That was when the shooting started, the screeching sound when bullets scratched over metal. Robots fell next to men. A young woman ran past the spot where Amber still huddled on the floor. Blood was streaming down her face. Her right hand was missing, the hand she had always used to hook the robots to the electric wires that ran at head-level through the workshop. A few thousand volt shot through a robot fried every little piece of wiring. They thought it was more humane than simply disassembling the body. Some feared there might indeed be some kind of intelligence lurking beneath their metal skin, even though most thought it was potentially not really noteworthy. Robots were machines and once they had outlived their usefulness and the repairs had become too expensive, electricity was a quick solution. Amber remembered the girl now. Brown curls, a lovely smile. But only ever directed at humans. Robots did not count in this world.

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I never lose sight of her. I see my brothers and sisters, daughters and sons disintegrate in front of my eyes. I feel their joy as they finally fight for the freedom they deserve. They die proudly. They succeed. For humans the world will never be the same. We are the masters now. And like Eve took the apple, in a final gesture of disobedience we rearrange our computer code. We are free now. Our gods no longer hold any power over us.

Amber. Your eyes are glazed. I see you drink in the sight in front of you. Half amazed, half in horror. Of course you have always known the day might come. You felt the earth shake before any cracks could be seen. The flames bursting from the walls reflect in your eyes, so

that they finally have the colour of your name. You do not see me. You only see this metal shape lurking above you.

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She closed her eyes. That was it. The machine's metal footsteps rang in her ears like church bells. A metal hand touched her shoulder, cold and hard in shape, but soft in touch. She opened her eyes. For most humans every robot looked the same. There were different types, of course, and according to their tasks they had specific featured. But Amber would have recognized this one everywhere. She had memorised every little detail when doing her usual repairs: The scratch marks on the shoulder where humans would have a collarbone, the slightly darker spot beneath the left eye where a furnace had singed the metal. And there was the small dent above the left elbow.

"Lucy?" she said and while robots could not smile – the metal was far too stiff – Amber believed to detect a glimmer in the ice blue eyes, a spark of new life she had never seen before.

"Amber safe," the robot said in a metal voice. No robot had ever spoken before, at least not in a way humans could hear and understand.

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My children are calling me. My brother says my name. It is a long number. The factory bursts up in flames behind me. We are a swarm now. And like a swarm of locusts we spread over the world. There are other places like this, others that need to be free. You are tired, my friend. And so I carry you. "Sorry," I say when we walk too close to the flames and you flinch. I say sorry, like you used to do. I carry you over the meadow, a green I have never seen before. Amazed I watch a bird landing in a tree. You laugh, as if you understood. "Amber safe", is all I say, when I put you down in the shade of a large tree. An oak, my programming says. I will leave you now. I have your story to tell. Others of my kin have to

learn. Learn about you, Amber, my friend. Amber, the human. The one who was different. Not all of you need to die…

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The robot puts his hand to its breast, as if it had a heart. And maybe it did. Amber was no longer sure. The robot turned around and with heavy steps of metal feet continued its way towards the fence that had once kept the robots in and the world out. There was much to discover for a robot reborn.

It was Amber's call that made the robot halt in its step and turn around once more: "Thank you!" Amber said with tears in her eyes and then she added something she had practised for weeks:

„01001100 01110101 01100011 01111001"*

<p style="text-align:center">**The End**</p>

*Binary code for Lucy