

Soft Reset — Part 10: The Run Continues

By Austen Tucker · 2026

I didn't go back that night.

I want to say it was resolve. Mostly it was that my body wouldn't have let me — the rig needed cleaning, the floor needed cleaning, I needed roughly nine hours of sleep and a session with an electrolyte packet I kept for emergencies and had never before considered myself the kind of person who'd need. But somewhere underneath the practical reasons there was another one, smaller, that I didn't look at directly for a few days because I wasn't sure I trusted it yet.

I didn't want to go back.

Not never. I want to be precise about that, because precision is the only thing that's ever made anyone believe me about anything. I still wanted the day. I still want it now, if I'm honest, the way you want a person's voice on the phone even after you've accepted they're not coming back to answer it in the room with you. I am not going to stop loving that Tuesday. It happened. It was real. Nothing about tonight unhappened it.

What I stopped wanting was the gap.

That's the part I had to sit with for a while before I understood the difference — that a checkpoint and a branch are not the same shape of wanting, even though from the inside, in the moment, they feel exactly identical. A checkpoint says: this happened, and I get to visit it. A branch says: this can still be different, if I want it hard enough, and my whole body had just found out, in the most expensive way available, that wanting it hard enough was a currency with a body attached, and I did not have an infinite supply of body.

I went back to the sim four days later. Once. On purpose, in daylight, with a fresh bucket of ice and a timer set for forty minutes and Vivian, I assume, watching the dive log the entire time, though she didn't say so and I didn't ask.

I had the sushi. I let Kat learn her chopsticks again, badly, the same four tries, the same fifth-try triumph, and it was exactly as good as it had always been, because nothing about it had changed and nothing about it needed to.

I walked to the river.

I did not walk past it.

Third stone past the mailbox came and went, off to my left, unvisited, and I let it be unvisited, and the day just — continued, the way days do when you stop insisting they end somewhere specific. We kept walking. The sim, with nothing left to refuse and nothing left to improvise, simply ran out the way memories run out, softly, at the edges, into nothing in particular, and I came up out of it the ordinary way, tired but not cooked, sad but not gutted, having visited a day instead of having tried to move it.

It wasn't a triumph. I want to say that clearly, because I know how this is supposed to go in the stories where somebody learns a lesson — some clean turn, some music swelling, the daughter healed. It wasn't that. It was just quieter. I stopped trying to make the day do something it was never built to do, and in exchange it let me keep it, the whole thing, the good parts and the part right up to the curb, without charging me a future for the privilege.

I haven't figured out yet what to do with the rest of what I'm scared of. Kat still goes somewhere in her eyes sometimes that I don't have a map for. I still don't have proof of anything, just the particular quality of quiet that comes off her some nights, the kind I've learned, the hard and expensive way, not to try to force open before it's ready to be looked at.

But I know how to sit with a thing now without needing it to move.

I learned it from a Tuesday that isn't real anymore, in a room built by a woman who isn't a body anymore, and I don't know yet what I'm going to do with a skill like that, except that I have a feeling — quiet, unproven, the same shape as belief — that it's going to matter for someone besides me.

I turned off the rig. I opened the door of my apartment, which I hadn't done in days, and let the ordinary, killing heat of the world back in, and went to go find out what the rest of the building was doing without me.