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The runner reached the crest of the steep hill and paused, jogging gently on the spot. The sky above was a cool pale blue, hazed with thin veils of white cloud, that promised a warm bright day. Along the horizon puffballs of cloud were forming a warning of possible rain later. He raised his face to the warmth of the spring sun.

“Breathing slow and steady, heart rate slow and steady. Not bad for an old ‘un,” he murmured out loud and grinned. He felt glad to be alive, and that rare feeling surprised him. The tightness across his chest eased after a couple of minutes of relative stillness. He pressed his hand to the tee shirt over his heart, imagining the fading scars concealed by the thin cloth. He was glad the sharp pain that had speared through his hip and lower back at every step, when he started out, had faded to a dull constant ache. At least today he was able to run. The enforced inactivity of the previous two weeks had almost driven him crazy. He tried to remember the last time an injury had healed as slowly, but it was so long ago that he could not recall. He checked his watch, an annoyed frown furrowing his brow. The run was taking much more time than he had anticipated. He grimaced, realising he had overestimated how far his injuries had healed. He was going to be late for lunch. Unconsciously he shrugged. It made little actual difference; he had no place he needed to be. His housekeeper had said she would provide a cold meal. He smiled at the memory. She knew him better than he knew himself. His frustration was founded in how long it was taking to return to his usual fitness level.

A shudder shook his body when sudden, vivid, random images of those desperate three days attacked his mind. He closed his eyes and shook his head, trying to shatter those nightmare images. He would not surrender to fear. He grasped the earlier feeling of joy like a talisman for the future.

“Only one more week,” he stated out loud. It was the bargain he had made with Thomas, his doctor. One more week of patient recovery, then he would take charge of a new team. As long as Thomas didn’t find out about