

## And I would run 500 miles...

Kian paused inside the front door to lace up his worn-out trainers.

“You off out?” Mum called from the lounge.

“Just a run.”

Tearing himself away from the PlayStation had been easier today. The lads at school had spent all day chatting about the new game, *NinjaStrike III: Return of the Shoguns*. Kian had been saving the money from his birthday and paper round, knowing Mum couldn't afford to buy it for him. And he almost had enough. It was gutting to hear everyone raving about the game when he couldn't join in.

-*Soon*, he told himself, *soon*.

Outside the block of flats, Kian headed for the scruffy park, hoping the druggies wouldn't be there. Since he'd started running, they couldn't really keep up with him. But he still didn't like them. Their teasing. Their bullying. Their menace.

Halfway round his usual 5k route, the running app on Kian's phone pinged, and he glanced down to see the screen filling with balloons, and a message:

“Congratulations! Awesome Achievement Award - You've clocked up 500

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miles!”

At home, Kian showed Mum the message. The pride in her eyes broke his heart. For someone who barely left the sofa, let alone the flat - for someone who was practically the dictionary definition of morbidly obese - just the idea of going for a walk was alien to Mum. At the age of just 33, she was often tearfully aware of what this meant for her own mortality.

But she was so proud of Kian for finding the confidence to start running. Proud of his determination to give himself a better future than she currently had. Proud of his ability to resist the ever-present temptation to veg on the sofa and do nothing. Once it was clear Kian was going to keep on running, day after day, Mum had given him nothing but encouragement. And in return, her delight at his success boosted Kian’s confidence daily.

Kian was thrilled to have Mum’s support, but it wasn’t running itself that had sparked his recent enthusiasm for exercise - that had been the sailing trip. He’d loved being on board the boat, and although the physical tasks - hoisting and lowering sails, grinding winches - had been demanding, he’d felt a sense of belonging that he’d never felt before. A sense of freedom. Potential.

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Those tiny tastes of hope had given Kian confidence to join in fully, even showing encouragement to other kids in the group. The ones who were seasick, or struggling in other ways.

But best of all had been the feeling Kian got when the skipper praised his positive attitude. He was a great influence on others, she said. An inspiration. Kian was blown away that someone believed in him. When she invited him back to sail again, he was over the moon.

So running was Kian's commitment to the new-found sense of potential he'd found on board the boat. If he could run, he could keep himself fit, and then the future was his for the taking. That was the deal he'd made with himself. It kept his worry about Mum's health at bay.

"Go get showered, love," said Mum. "And after, let's go for a walk. Five hundred miles has done wonders for you. A bit of exercise might do me some good too."