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ON THE WAY TO KALLIMARMARO

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When Thomas asked me to go for a run with him, I would reply, “I don’t have time,” or, “No one can wake up this early to go running.” Nevertheless, he insisted: “Come on, you’ll see—we’ll start at Yannelis Tower, reach Haramida and Ermogenis, and then come back.”

“Man, you are out of your mind,” I’d shoot back, changing the subject.

There is a seaside road in Lesvos that passes by the island’s airport. Every day, many people run or walk there. It’s on the eastern side of a peninsula that faces the Turkish shores. The first eight and a half kilometers are flat, and then it’s hills until you reach Haramida Beach, farther south. It’s a distance of approximately 16K¹.

“If you make it there and back, you can run a marathon,” Thomas told me one day. Then he added, “I’m talking about the Athens Marathon—the one with the climbs that takes you to the Panathenaic Stadium and makes you feel...” I can still remember how he put it: “...makes you feel like a hotshot.”

Eventually, I gave in and joined his game. He started piling on the kilometers gradually. Every Sunday, we would go a little farther—one or two kilometers more than the last time. The first year of training for a marathon is full of records—you set a new one every week. Our pace was steady, and the minutes

¹ 1K. = 0.62 miles so 16K.= 9.94 miles or ~ 10 miles.

we added to our runs brought us closer as friends. I suppose we already had things in common, but running helped us deepen our friendship in a way that would otherwise have taken many drinks and coffees to achieve.

Spending three hours straight with someone is not easy—your mood shifts all the time. It's difficult to find joy and not compromise it for even a minute. Some say that friendship is measured by the amount of silence you can share. Thomas and I rarely shut up during our runs, often confiding in each other. But we also shared our silences in equal measure, letting the road speak for us.

Most people say that all you need to take up running is a good pair of athletic shoes. Hogwash! In the end, what we really need is a good interlocutor—someone with whom to delve into the meaning of *friendship*, someone you carry with you even when running alone.

The week before the race

The time is near, the celebration approaches!

From this point forward, take it easy with your training. In these final few sessions before the race, focus on maintaining quality and intensity. Listen to your body, and during this final stretch, avoid going overboard—whether that means doing more or going faster. Don't try to make up for any missed sessions by adding extra work.

Ensure your carbohydrate intake is sufficient and your diet remains rich in nutrients, with plenty of fruits and vegetables up until two days before the race. An ideal pre-race diet should consist of roughly 65–70% carbohydrates, 15% fat (preferably unsaturated, such as olive oil rather than saturated fats like butter or visible meat fat), and 15–20% protein. If possible, give up desserts and sugary foods—even for just three days. In general, nutritionists recommend reducing fat intake during the days leading up to the race. Increase your carbohydrate intake in proportion, not in overall quantity.

Your scale might show an increase of one to two kilos (2–4 pounds), but don't be alarmed—especially if you're following the recommended diet. The added weight is most likely water stored with glycogen, which will benefit you during the race. Stay properly hydrated throughout the week by consuming at least two and a half liters of fluids per day in small, regular amounts—perhaps even more if needed.

Remember, you are well-prepared, and nothing can undermine your performance on race day. Positive thinking always

supports a good outcome. Whatever training you've done is sufficient—trust it. From here on, success depends on your goals and strategy.

Don't let other runners' comments affect you. The rule—"During the race, I never try anything I haven't tested during training or a previous race"—is absolute. This applies to everything from your shirt and shoes to your socks and underwear.

Trim your toenails carefully at the beginning of the week, not at the last minute. Also, avoid joining group sports or other activities to "blow off steam," as you might strain muscles you haven't used recently. Finally, prepare your race bag and travel essentials early so you can enjoy peace of mind in the final days before the event.



I've eaten two to three kilometers' worth of spaghetti this week. If I line up the rice and potatoes with that, it'll reach four. Ever since Tuesday, I've been in a strange phase. I worry that I'll suddenly start suffering from one ache or another, or that I'll contract a virus out of the blue. As a precaution, I take royal jelly, pollen, and propolis every morning. At this rate, I'll end up eating the bees themselves. I'm very stressed and keep postponing all my tasks. The marathon has completely taken over my mind. I watch start-line videos and study race splits from previous years. I read Dimitri's instructions over and over again, trying to memorize the basics. It drives me crazy that, under all this pressure, instead of training hard and giving it my all, I'm only running lightly and at an easy pace... I'm a small pressure cooker ready to explode!

I met Dimitris through Thomas. He used to live on the island, too. Every Sunday, I write to him about my runs and how I