

## **The Longest Heartbeat**

At the top of the push-puff, hunch-hunch-*hurrah!* hill, Oscar looks back. His reward is sweat cooling hot skin, a wrist-flick of extra calories spun up by his Fitbit, the town's wide sweep below... and a lone tree in silhouette, heart-shaped against the awe-flushed sunset.

Days have died without this. The foliage isn't the typical kind used for topiary, so he's no idea if it's been deliberately trimmed that way, or a strange twist of nature which has somehow shaped it to this human symbol.

A different angle, a different pace, a month or two of growth, and this experience will be just another evening run, another lung-branched tree with a background sun-show for whoever happens to glance over. And yet, a tree sculpting its skeleton to resemble a heart, light framing the sky and a new landscape carved from the same old... Oscar's pulse slows, speeds, slows.

Winter turns. Birdsong unfurls spring's fresh outline – revealing every tree's real heart of wild green fullness. Oscar breathes this in and his alveoli expand like an oak coming into leaf.