Bottom of the Ninth

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Stan drove a fly ball to deep centerfield and on his way to first, thought, *What if I don’t make it?*  
(The coach says, “doubt is the motherlode of failure” and all his boys nod, their heads bobbing like weatherbirds tipped with the mercury of knowledge.)

Stan’s feet hit the ground in tandem, raising dust. He fixed on the once-white bag of first base that seemed no closer than it had a step before, and thought, *I could stop.*  
The coach wagged a finger and boys on the bench threw their voices onto the field like litter:

**HUSTLE HUSTLE DIG DIG DIG**

a striped Greek chorus giving good counsel sponsored by the local kosher butcher.  
Full count: the crowd undulated in rare unison, and as he pounded into first, blinded by a consortium of dust, Stan’s mind wandered to why each weekend he risked ignominy, what was for dinner, who mattered, whether he existed. He thought of Descartes. Was unconvinced. Its source, he glanced up to see the ball committing its inexorable arc.