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Bottom of the Ninth

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BOTTOM OF THE NINTH

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.