Finishing Kick

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For twenty-six miles they have run together in front of the pack. When one moved ahead, the other tucked behind, matching strides until he drew even again, then surged.

Shadows overlapping, they mounted a hill and drew together once again, drifting apart only long enough to grab cups of water they drank as they ran back toward the center and each other. Autumn sun reddened the taller man’s bald head to nearly the shade of the shorter man’s battered bicycling cap, and the air grew thicker. Now they reach the final stretch, entering a flat boulevard of bare maples that sway in a sudden change of wind. They leave themselves behind in there, emerge into the light of the last hundred yards where, instead of words, they listen to breath, learning all they need from each slight shift. Instead of time, they pay attention to the way arms move and feet strike, still watching for the moment to begin their finishing kicks.