

FLOYD SKLOOT

*Finishing Kick*

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.