

## FALLING

—Port of Málaga, Spain

Pat could have broken limbs or hit his head  
and lost his wits; he could be paralyzed  
or have internal bleeding—or be dead.  
He's eighty-six; no one would be surprised.

We were to take a tour around the town.  
The gangway to the terminal, though steep,  
connected high; we had thus to get down.  
Where was our tour guide from the ship— asleep?

The escalator beckoned. We'd been told,  
Pat says, there was no lift. I hadn't heard.  
The terminal could, clearly, not be old.  
I looked about in vain; absurd, absurd!

I took the stairs, adjacent; I chose well.  
He had more confidence. I heard a scream,  
or shout—a noise, I thought, from Breughel's hell,  
that terror which can wake you from a dream.

It was, unfortunately, as I feared:  
he'd lost his balance, fallen from the top.  
He lay there groaning; then the blood appeared.  
The awful mechanism didn't stop.

The mopping up was done; the doctor came  
and wheeled him back. Thank God. We did not lose  
much time, nor have a large insurance claim.  
A Spanish hospital is not a cruise.

It still was piteous: eight wounds, deep pain,  
infection for three months, a grilled-meat scar.  
We saw no more, of course, of southern Spain.  
At cocktail time, at least, Pat was a star.

This verse is light; the fall was not. He thought,  
while tumbling, "This may well be *it*." Events  
are strange arrangements where our steps are caught;  
and we ourselves but happy accidents.