

I Am a Pilgrim & a Stranger

At the one clear interstice
between a spasm of endorphin-
fueled fear & a ragged
pulse-tone emitted
by his heart monitor,
uncomprehending, hopeless, rueful,
paid of recrimination, my father
wants, again, to roll up
the pastel pajama leg
and show me the ulceration
which pits his thigh.
I have no more arguments,
on the twelfth of twentysix
floors for compliance & denial
at Brigham & Women's Hospital.
I can't even hold his hand.
Nothing to be afraid of?
An amber circle rims
and measures the ulcer.
Bruise purple at the edge,
hub & core gray
as axle grease, the skin
crusts with scabs.
It's pocked, cratered, a pelt
nicked by sprays of acid.
Look long, alone,
and it's like staring hard
into the sun; turn away,
the after-image burns
on your retina, a negative,
another more restless
and weary eye
blankly glaring back.

Clench shut your lids,
it tracks inside your head.
Not God's eye, since he's
withdrawn from the universe
and spot-welded the seams,
leaving all his laws
inside to gear the engine.
Not pain's. Or pride's.
But the eye of a pilgrim
and wanderer, for whom
earth is only a wind-struck
and lonely ridge overlooking
the cities sprawled below
on a plain the color of straw.
What have I seen, what have I seen
I have not let go of & only loved?