

BILL HOWELL

## **NARRATIVE DISMAY**

### *ONCE*

Language, luggage: whatever we finally need when I arrive.  
Your face graphed in airport glass:  
watching me catch you placing me at the end of the line again,  
wherever we've left off. Your hand  
half-open but not letting go—a stray fidget;  
while I hang on to my one-piece limit  
beneath a careful but essential nod, glad to have something  
solid implied.

### *TWICE*

Nothing ages less than a voice. Or the way the lamplight loved  
your hair. And I was in literature, while you were taking  
shorthand. Was it two in the morning, or just the two of us  
last night? The green wind of your waist became the Milky Way  
unravelling a shroud of shouldered moments  
into an unknown season. So where were we then, in that room  
beyond ourselves, when all the walls dissolved?  
Nothing ages better than a choice.

### *SINCE*

Snow on the skylight: the igloo effect. This time the weather  
stays in place. Last time this happened, they sent out warnings.  
So the piece makes shivery predictions;  
while that old fellow you keep hugging to bed gets cagey  
& waits. Earning extra points  
for offhand understatement, he polishes the edges off  
what's left hanging. The consequential event emerges, comes  
home to listen & glisten, gets off scot-free—