

Helpline / Hold Music

by Oz Hardwick

I fumble with the details like I'm shuffling a pack of cards underwater, awkward and slow, as rigid certainty gives way to mulch. I said / she said / he said nothing, and the rain blew through the open window, and the bus left town with nobody waving goodbye. Early Bowie on a cheap record deck. Pills swallowed in a stranger's room. Streets became sick veins, pumping poison in ever-decreasing circuits, and the city's flesh and bones grew tough and slow. In a seedy loft, I cut cards with rough speed and tied a snake around my neck. I said / she said / he said nothing, and the rain rained forever in a single night, the waters rising with all the predictability of a myth we take for granted. Forty years later, I am in a room full of straggly pot plants and empty boxes. The door may or may not be locked, but I'm too tired to check. The details are clear as crystals in a run-down museum, my pockets full of business cards of people I've already forgotten. Voices crack behind paper-thin walls. He says / she says / I fumble with even the simplest expressions.