

SUICIDE WATCH II

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Who's to say a starspent sky didn't warp or flex above the foothills that night? Or that any kind of light at all broke free of the clouds to knife its gloom across the snow-banked rooftops and empty lots of Blacksburg, Virginia's 3 a.m.? All I know for sure is the clamor the cordless made from my desk and the gin-and-tonic headache I woke to, my sister's voice like static.

This was in my final semester of college, hawking Rolling Rocks and hoagies to Engineering Professors and to the ROTC at a deli not a block from the power plant. On Fridays I'd kneel in rubber gloves to cleanse the massive industry of Steakumms and Kraft powdered alfredo for an extra under the table five. Then I'd clock out to fight the gales of wind that gathered speed between the dormitories and halls before finding my seat around the conference table of amateur theorists.

But I have no idea what 3 a.m. this was or whether the westerlies howled or bayed as my sister's words caromed the complicated wound of my ear. All I know for sure is how slowly the receiver fell from my hand, the dent it left in the hardwood, the lights in the hallway snapping to life, my foggy-eyed roommates emerging from their bedrooms.

Who knows what else happened that day? I've read a platoon of American boys led a night raid on Kabul and came back men. I've no doubt the

thermometers ruptured at the county airport with cold. Somewhere, certainly, God made another of his billion daily revisions of the world.

But what did any of that matter anymore? The only thing I could see was Mary. The ledge. All that snow. The only thing visible was her mother clenching the bed sheets in her sleep, her father holding his head in his impossible hands. The phone call I had to make.