

SY SAFRANSKY'S NOTEBOOK

I TAKE DARKNESS AND LIGHT TOO SERIOUSLY, AS if the night really held secrets, as if dawn heralded anything new, as if one day followed by another added up to a life truly lived. Still, I'm thankful this morning for black coffee in a cream-colored mug. I'm thankful for the moon, and how it reflects the sun, so that even in the darkness, the sun lights my way. I'm thankful that dawn will be here soon. As George Harrison sang, "Daylight is good at arriving at the right time."

I THINK IT WAS RALPH WALDO EMERSON WHO said that if the stars came out only once every hundred years, we'd stay up all night just to look at them. What if the sun rose only once every hundred years? I suppose there would be some people who'd say, "Get up that early? You must be kidding."

I WANTED TO SLEEP. OF COURSE I DID. I WANTED to stay lost in illusion. But somewhere down the hall an alarm kept ringing.

I STILL HAVEN'T LEARNED TO GET IT RIGHT. I don't give enough to the poor, or remember to be thankful for every bite, or fully grasp what a marvelous world we're destroying. Everything that should matter all the time matters only some of the time; everything that should never matter — well, sometimes it matters quite a bit.

IF I HAD TO EARN A LIVING AS A MEDITATOR, I'D be on welfare.

WHEN I TOLD MY FRIEND DAVID THAT I WAS TRY-ing to eat more mindfully, he told me about the Zen student who was surprised to see his master eating lunch and reading a newspaper at the same time. "I don't understand," said the student. "You teach us to be mindful in all things. You say, 'When I eat, I eat. When I sleep, I sleep.'" The teacher replied, "And when I eat and read the newspaper, I eat and read the newspaper."

I WENT TO HEAR A TALK ABOUT CROP CIRCLES. How beautiful and astonishingly intricate they are. Many people think they're a hoax; maybe they are. Or maybe they're a message from some unearthly intelligence. Or maybe the earth herself is telling us something. In another age, we might have said the gods were speaking to us, but the gods have turned away from us, or we from them. In any event, the esoteric doesn't call to me the way it used to. Are the crop circles any more mysterious than the fields of wheat in which they appear, or this blue-green planet teeming with myriad forms of life? What good is deciphering the circles if we haven't learned to live with greater awareness? What can they tell us that we haven't already been told a thousand times before?

NORMA AND I LEAVE TOMORROW FOR A ONE-week vacation. This means that for the past week I've been

working well into the evening. I know, too, that I'll need to work harder than usual when I get back. Scientists say that for every particle of matter there's a corresponding particle of antimatter. I wonder if for every vacation there's an anti-vacation.

MAYBE IT WAS THE UNFAMILIAR BED. OR THE fragrance of a soap we'd never used before. Or the moonlight through the curtains. But making love with Norma in our hotel last night felt dangerously exciting, almost illicit, as if we were cheating. Hervé Le Tellier: "With a little bit of imagination, it is hard to be faithful, but with a huge amount of imagination, it may be possible."

WE'RE FIGHTING A WAR AGAINST TERRORISM. But this morning I'm unaware of any threat to my safety except for the outfit my wife is wearing. I know that Norma isn't looking for another lover; she just wants to prove to herself that she's still attractive to other men. If only I were the kind of man who *wants* his wife to walk down the street in clothes that are sexy and revealing, who wants her to turn heads. But I'm not. I am, however, a man who understands that life is uncertain. Is this how I'd want to spend my last day on this beautiful planet — worrying that my beautiful wife is making herself *too* beautiful?

CLOSING THE NEWSPAPER, I WONDER WHAT UN-nerves me more: another man seeing my wife's breasts, or U.S. spy planes being able to decipher handwriting on a clipboard from an altitude of eighty thousand feet.

FREEZING RAIN SWEEPED THROUGH THE CENTRAL part of North Carolina yesterday, coating trees and roads with ice. Bent by the weight, tree limbs snapped and fell, bringing down power lines. According to the radio, more than a million homes are without electricity this morning. *Thank God we're not one of them*, I think. At precisely that moment, our power goes out.

LAST NIGHT, WITH OUR POWER STILL OUT, THE temperature dropped to the midtwenties. Fully clothed inside down sleeping bags, we slept on the floor in front of the fireplace — which, like a sullen teenager, wants to be fed every couple of hours, but gives precious little in return. Still, it's better than no heat at all, which remains the situation for hundreds of thousands of families. Norma is still asleep. Our cat Nimbus is curled up on the mantle next to the bronze Buddha. Cirrus, our other cat, is taking refuge in my lap. Knowing that the power will be back on in a matter of hours, or perhaps days, makes the situation more tolerable. *It's temporary*, I tell myself. Then I remember that's true of everything: the blazing fire; our two gray cats; my lovely wife with her long graying hair. If only I never lost sight of this. If only I didn't shut my eyes except to sleep.