

SY SAFRANSKY'S NOTEBOOK

IN YOGA CLASS, I LOOK AT MY TIRED, TREMBLING legs, the legs of a man who forgot to do yoga for thirty years. "Don't forget to breathe," the teacher says. One more thing I've forgotten.

MIDDLE AGE HAS BEEN AWKWARD, LIKE ADOLESCENCE, something to get through. Like a teenager walking out the door for the first time with his father's car keys, I'm learning what it's like to be *old*.

IT'S ALWAYS THE SAME: THE REVOLUTIONARY insisting on "freedom now," the bureaucrat saying, "Let's appoint a committee." On my birthday, I need to avoid the temptation to pretend I've become wiser, some sort of elder statesman. Sooner or later, the mob will pour into the streets. Their demands will be the same as they've always been, and my little speech won't impress them.

THERE WAS A STORY ABOUT ME IN THE NEWS-paper. The reporter tried his best, just as I do when I write about my life. He didn't get everything right. But how much of the story do I get right? What if my reliable source isn't reliable?

VLADAMIR NABOKOV: "ALL THE INFORMATION I have about myself is from forged documents."

I OPENED MY EYES AND GOT OUT OF BED THIS morning. Can I open my eyes a little more? Can I give up the belief that I haven't suffered enough? That I'm not worthy enough? For years I've worshipped such beliefs. Can I leave behind my prayer shawl and my begging bowl?

I WANTED TO BE ELOQUENT, BUT LANGUAGE WAS in one of her goddamn moods again, silent, brooding. I tried to touch her. She slapped my hand.

LAST NIGHT, I DREAMT I WAS LIVING ALONE. I woke up crying. Loneliness: my faithful companion. When I reach for her, she's always there. How readily she forgives me for all the times I've fallen in love, gotten married, left without a goodbye. With or without a ring on my finger, she knows I'll be back.

NORMA WANTED US TO STAY ANOTHER DAY; I didn't. But neither did I want to seem selfish, which is a pretty selfish motivation in itself. Our disagreement turned into an argument, not about whether we'd stay — nothing as simple as that — but about why, after all these years, we couldn't argue without hurting each other's feelings. Norma went to bed weeping. I lay on my back staring at the ceiling. Happy anniversary, Sy and Norma. I guess we needed to be reminded that when you're celebrating a marriage, you're celebrating its difficulties, too. You're celebrating the fighting and the troubled sleep and

the nights that last forever. And you're celebrating the sunlight coming through the blinds and the birds greeting the day. Are they singing for you, too? Impossible. But they are, you both know it, and you can't be too proud to admit it. When you're celebrating a marriage, you can't be too proud. The morning says, *Look, you're married to me, too.* The morning says, *Put on the coffee and start the day together, and start again, and start again.*

SO MANY THINGS I'LL NEVER KNOW: WHO KILLED John Kennedy. Why my wife loves me.

I'VE GAINED FIFTEEN POUNDS IN THE LAST FEW months. Maybe it's the long winter nights. Maybe it's the impending war. Gluttony laughs at me. *Go ahead,* he says. *Blame it on the season. Maybe it's all George Bush's fault.* When I weigh myself in the morning, he reminds me how many people will die of hunger today. When I start another diet, he laughs. *What will it be this time?*

WILL THERE BE A WAR WITH IRAQ? PERHAPS, perhaps not. But there will always be war — if not this year, then next year; if not next year, then in five years or ten. Wasn't war in the headlines the day I was born? Won't it be in the headlines the day I die? It won't be the same war, of course. It will be fought with different weapons by different countries for different reasons. As always, history will be written by the victors. As always, the vanquished will teach their sons and daughters what they must never forget.

PRAYER IS DIFFICULT. SO I PRAY FOR THE WILLING-ness to pray. Prayer is a mystery to me. So I pray to remember that God isn't my idea of God.

I SIT BESIDE A LAMP, NOT DOUBTING THE LIGHT it shines on this page. I don't say, *I believe in the lamp.* I don't argue with myself about what I mean by the word *lamp*.

DO I DESERVE A MOON LIKE THIS? IT LOOKS SO fat and happy tonight, so unafraid of fullness. *Plenty of time tomorrow,* says the moon, *to lament what cannot last.*

I DREAMT THAT GOD WALKED IN AND SAT DOWN. I asked if I could get him anything. *A cup of coffee would be nice,* he said, as pleasant as could be. Did I imagine that God had no manners? Did I think he'd be self-important or condescending? Was I afraid he'd lord it over me, all omniscient this and omnipresent that? When I handed him the coffee, he took a sip and smiled. *That's good coffee,* God said.

Editor's Note: After this month, my Notebook will appear less regularly so that I can concentrate on other writing for The Sun.