

# SY SAFRANSKY'S NOTEBOOK

## **I ADORE THE MORNING. I HATE TO SEE HER GO.**

But the morning never promised to stay forever, never promised a thing. The way my heart opened when the sun came up — that was real, all right. But so is the bond, deep and abiding, between the morning I long for and her lover, the night.

## **I'VE TAKEN MYSELF HOSTAGE, LORD. HERE ARE**

my demands: No more people I know being told they have cancer. No more guardian angels asleep at the switch. No more punishments handed down for crimes we committed when we worshiped the wrong gods; or when we thought that being in love would save us; or when we imagined, as smoke filled the crowded theater, that knowing where the exits were would save us.

## **TODAY'S DATE USED TO BE IMPORTANT TO ME,**

but now I can't remember why. Is it the anniversary of my first marriage? My second? Is it the birthday of an ex-lover? One who's dead, or one who's still alive? I feel as if I'm picking through the used suits at the thrift store, trying to find one that fits. What about this double-breasted pinstripe? But the jacket's too big, the pants too long. And, man, is it *old*.

## **SAYING GOODBYE TO NORMA WASN'T EASY. IT**

never is, if you happen to be me. When Norma gets ready to leave town, I feel as if she's taking with her the ground I walk on and the air I breathe. I know the fear is irrational, that the origin of my anxiety is in the past — somewhere between my mother's haunted psyche and the crib where I lay crying, somewhere between her fear of men and my outstretched hand. I've spent years in therapy trying to gain more insight into my fears, but insights don't keep the panic at bay. For a while I tried Prozac, a miraculous drug, helpful as a raincoat on a rainy day, except you can't take the raincoat off when it's sunny, and you have to wear it to bed. These days I just accept the fact that before Norma leaves town I'm going to get drenched. I try to endure the racing heartbeat and stomach-twisting dread without blaming Norma for leaving and without blaming myself for feeling left. It helps to remember that most of my anxiety will diminish once Norma is gone, since missing her always turns out to be a different experience than *anticipating* missing her. Being afraid of feeling lonely is what makes me panic. Feeling lonely is just . . . feeling lonely.

## **I DIDN'T WANT TO CRY, SO THE SADNESS STAYED**

in my body. Then, instead of feeling sad, I felt anxious, like a bird trapped inside a house whose windows are boarded up.

## **WORLD LEADERS MET RECENTLY TO CONSIDER**

whether to forgive the debt of the world's poorest countries. I

wonder when I'll be ready to forgive the debt of all those impoverished places in my psyche that are still such a hopeless mess. I need to remember that not all childhood wounds can be healed, nor can all swamps be turned into glittering cities where international travelers feel at home.

## **WHEN I THINK ABOUT NORMA LEAVING TOWN**

again next week, anxiety grips me. Is it because I imagine I'll feel lonely when she's gone — or is it because I feel lonely right now? It's five in the morning. I'm up, but Norma is still asleep. Do I feel less lonely when I remember she's just down the hall? Won't she still be just down the hall when she's out of town? It's just a longer hall.

## **JEALOUSY KNOCKS. HE WANTS TO STAY A FEW**

days. I try to explain that this isn't the best time for company, but he brushes past me, flops down on the sofa, plants his feet on the coffee table. *Now*, he says, *where's that pretty wife of yours?*

## **JUST A FEW WEEKS UNTIL YOUR BIRTHDAY, MY**

general. Will you mobilize the troops, try to win another battle or two? O my general, there are rumors: your cat died; your vision is failing; your wife keeps leaving town. You've been spotted with a panicked look on your face — your aging face, my general — running from an enemy the younger men can't see. Some of them whisper that last winter you sat in front of a light box every morning, trying to keep the Dark One at bay. That's not the white light you once dreamt of, my general. This isn't the campaign you planned.

## **DRINKING COFFEE MAKES A DIFFERENCE. DRINK-**

ing wine makes a difference. So why not get down on my knees and drink from the Mystery? Here, on my knees, I don't need to impress anyone with my knowledge of metaphysics. Here, on my knees, I don't need to worry about offending my readers. I don't think I'll scare God away.

## **GOD IS MY REFUGE IF I REMEMBER THAT ONLY**

God is real.

## **I DROVE TO THE AIRPORT YESTERDAY TO PICK UP**

Norma, happy as a thirsty plant about to be watered; happy as a hungry cat about to be fed; happy as a poet who's finally found the elusive word he's been searching for, the only word that will do. I've heard some men say they're thrilled when their wives leave town. I believe it, just as I believe that some men have walked on the moon. But last night nothing thrilled me more than knowing that the plane carrying my wife was beginning its descent, that its wheels would soon touch the ground.