

# SY SAFRANSKY'S NOTEBOOK

**MY FEELINGS WERE HURT WHEN NORMA DIDN'T** want to make love last night. And this morning, because I stayed up late, I can barely keep my eyes open. Maybe I can grab a nap between sentences. Maybe, if Norma doesn't mind, I can dream we're making love. Norma can just keep gardening. The dream Norma knows what I like, knows we don't have much time, knows I'm going to wake up in a moment and start feeling sorry for myself again. So, as a married man, I need to know: If I can't make love with the woman I adore — a woman who is, after twenty-five years, still the girl of my dreams — is it all right if the girl of my dreams makes love to me?

**NORMA DOESN'T MIND WHEN I WRITE ABOUT** our marriage, even if I mention her snoring or an argument we've had or the ridiculously large bed she insists we sleep in, which should have come with a global-positioning system so I can find her in the middle of the night. No matter what I write, she says, she's "narcissistic enough" to enjoy it. I ask if I can quote her. "What do you think?" she replies.

**I'M GRATEFUL THAT ALL MY EXTRAMARITAL** affairs occur in my dreams, and that most of them involve my wife. (Well, my *dream* wife.) I'm grateful, too, that even as a young man, I realized that my attraction to women was unlikely to diminish as I grew older — in other words, that calling a man of sixty-three a "dirty old man" is no less a slander than calling a young man "dirty" because he'd rather spend Sunday afternoon reading poetry to his half-naked lover than watching football or figuring out how to get rich. The old man is dirty only if sex is dirty, only if the birds are dirty, and the bees are dirty, and the sweet honey taste of her lips is dirty. Sixty is dirty only if thirty is dirty. Dirt is dirty only if the planet Earth is dirty, only if God is dirty, only if children who sink their hands into God are dirty, only if the young boy surprised by his first erection is dirty, only if his covert glance at a young girl is dirty.

**I GOT JEALOUS YESTERDAY LISTENING TO NORMA** talk about another man — how intelligent he is, how funny. He's just a friend, she insisted; there's no reason for me to feel threatened. But I did feel threatened. Did I trust that Norma was telling me the truth — or did I trust that she didn't want to hurt me by telling me too much of the truth?

**WHEN THE RIVER OF TRUTH RISES, WHEN IT** washes over the sandbags I've placed around my life — for my own protection, of course — do I grieve or rejoice?

**A TELEMARKETER CALLS WITH "IMPORTANT IN-**formation" about a prepaid burial plan. I politely decline his

offer. Later, over coffee, I ask Norma if she still intends to be cremated after she dies. She says she's not sure. "Why?" I ask. "I don't want to contribute to global warming," she says. This is an excellent example of how different we are: My thoughtful and compassionate wife, even when contemplating her own demise, is still concerned about the fate of the planet. I, on the other hand, don't want to be cremated because *I don't want to die*.

**MUST IT BE LIKE THIS? I ASK THE MIRROR. DON'T** ask me, the mirror says.

**NEARLY EVERY WEEKEND FOR THE LAST SIX** months, Norma has been working for the Obama campaign: registering new voters, going door-to-door to get out the vote, intoning magic spells to make sure the giant lever in the basement of Republican headquarters jams this year. And thanks to her and millions of other Obama volunteers, yesterday we witnessed a political miracle, heaven touching earth, a last-minute pardon for a condemned prisoner. I can't recall another time when I've felt so caught up in a moment of collective celebration. I remember plenty of expressions of collective grief, or angry protest, or numbed helplessness, but not this sustained note of joy, this incredulity at our great good fortune, sweeping up black and white, young and old, women and men, Democrats and even some Republicans. It's as if America has won the lottery. (What were the odds?) It's as if our jumbo jet has touched down safely after circling the airport for hours, the fuel gauge on empty, the pilot a rookie who'd never had to land in a hurricane before.

Soon enough the campaign strategy will be dissected, the miracle deconstructed, the butterfly pinned to the page. Soon enough we'll be reminded that, despite the changes President-elect Obama will bring, Mr. Money will still demand a seat at the head of the table. Frauds in high places will still pose as patriots. Screwing up a job, a marriage, or a planet will still be distressingly easy for the 59 million Americans who voted for McCain, and the 68 million who voted for Obama, and the 73 million eligible voters who cast no votes at all. For, as the spiritual teacher Eckhart Tolle writes, "If the structures of the human mind remain unchanged, we will always end up recreating fundamentally the same world, the same evils, the same dysfunction."

But this morning, at least, you won't hear a peep out of me about the dying forests or the disappearing bees. This morning I'm celebrating the news that Democracy hasn't been imprisoned in some secure, undisclosed location but is confidently walking down the street. She's slapping people's backs and shaking their hands. She's wiping a tear from her cheek.