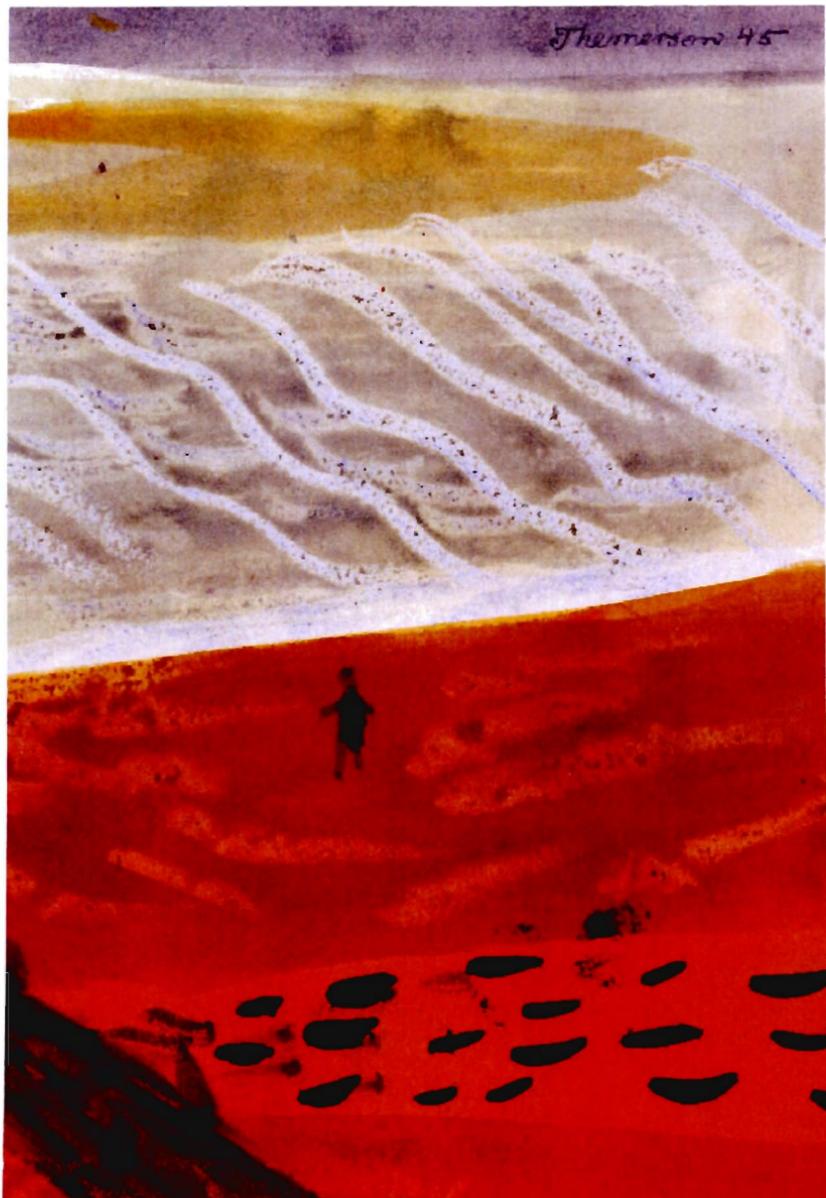


Stephen-Paul Martin
Safety Somewhere Else



SAFETY SOMEWHERE ELSE

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STEPHEN-PAUL MARTIN

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Franciszka Themerson's *Seascape: figure on the beach* (1945) appears on the cover with the permission of Themerson Archive.

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OBSCURE PUBLICATIONS

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“Watch Out for Obscure Publications”

SAFETY SOMEWHERE ELSE

The greatest mistake of all time took place thousands of years ago, when God let Noah's family survive the flood. God's plan was to start a new human race with a man he thought he could trust, but the limits of Noah's moral awareness were obvious right from the start. No sooner had God's rainbow vanished into the clouds than Noah was getting drunk and cursing his grandson, declaring that Canaan's descendants—one-third of the future human race—would be the lowest of slaves, a monstrous over-reaction that would have tragic consequences for countless generations of innocent people. Clearly, Noah wasn't the man God thought he was.

If God had been smart, only non-human animals would have been allowed on the ark. The human race would not have survived and gone on to mistreat and destroy all other creatures. Instead, God made a point of encouraging human domination, assuring Noah that "the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth." Why was someone as crazy as Noah given such ominous power? Why were all the animals put in such a compromised position? Had the "beasts of the earth" really done anything wrong?

History has consistently shown how cruel our species can be to other animals, even those we've domesticated. We call dogs our best friends, but think of the horrible treatment they often receive. I've had dogs all my life, and I know they can be great companions, so when I think about the disgusting things that happen to them in research labs, I go out of my way to set things right, especially when the crime hits close to home. The most extreme example of this took place twenty-five years ago in New York, when my friend Karl was living with his dog, a beagle he called the Buddha, in a basement apartment a few blocks south of Canal Street.

Karl woke one night at half past one with a ruptured appendix. He almost didn't make it to the emergency room. Other complications developed after the surgery, and he had to stay in the hospital for a month. His next-door neighbor was willing to feed the Buddha, but Karl's problems went beyond immediate care for his dog. He had no health insurance. Whatever he had in the bank was needed to pay his medical bills, leaving him with nothing to pay his rent. He was already three months behind, and the landlord lost his patience. He called the Salvation Army and had Karl's furniture taken away. He put an ad in the paper and got a new tenant the following day. By the time Karl's neighbor got home from work that night, there was no dog to feed. The landlord had taken the Buddha to the dog pound, which kept him forty-eight hours, then gave him to a medical research lab.

If I'd been in New York at the time, I would have tried to help out. At the very least, I could have saved the Buddha from the lab. But I was on tour with Karl's two

other close friends, Charlie and Stu. Our band was in Japan, then Germany and Sweden, places where the cutting edge music we'd learned to play had caught on quite nicely, though in the States people thought we sounded like stray dogs howling at the moon. The tour was fun, especially off stage, and we came home eager to tell Karl about all the wild things we'd done and seen, only to find him hospitalized and homeless.

When Karl finally got out, each of us offered him a place to stay. But he wanted a place of his own, so we gave him money to rent a room at the YMCA. Then he went to the animal shelter to look for the Buddha. The receptionist was all smiles and friendly phrases. She searched her records and told him that the dog had never been there. But Karl had an ex-girlfriend who worked at the shelter, and though he didn't really want to talk to her—she'd left him for another man six months before—he needed someone who knew how to get around the official cover-ups and denials. Two days later, she knew the truth. She tried to protect Karl's feelings, making up a story about a freak accident at the lab, but he'd heard her lie before and he knew how to make her tell the truth. She finally admitted that the Buddha's eyes had been surgically removed as part of an experiment. Then the doctor had put him to sleep.

When Karl came over that night he was more upset than I'd ever seen him. He'd taken the Buddha off the street as a puppy five years before, claiming that the dog had approached him as a messenger from the universe. I didn't believe in messages from the universe, but over time it was clear that the Buddha was making a positive difference. Karl was becoming a better person, more dependable and

sensitive than he'd been before. The dog was the center of Karl's life. Lovers and friends had come and gone, but the Buddha was always waiting for him to come home from work at night, greeting him at the door with eager eyes, wagging his tail. They'd played in Battery Park each morning before the sun came up. They'd taken trips all over the nation when Karl's van was still running. The thought of someone cutting out the Buddha's eyes filled Karl with hate. It filled me with hate. It filled Stu and Charlie with hate when we called and told them. We'd all known the Buddha for years. We'd cuddled and played with him many times. We agreed that we had to find the doctor from the lab and make him pay. And not just financially.

Working through Karl's ex-girlfriend the next day, we found out who the doctor was and where he lived in Forest Hills. We drove to his house at midnight in Stu's old Chevy Impala. We picked the back door lock, ripped the doctor out of bed, ignored the confused cries of his wife beside him, slammed him against the wall and knocked him unconscious, took his glasses from the dresser and squashed them into the floorboards, grabbed his wallet from the nightstand, dragged him into the kitchen, shoved him down an old wooden staircase into the basement, tied him tightly to a rotting support beam, tied his wife and two young daughters to folding chairs we found beneath the staircase.

The daughters were dazed and terrified. Their mother tried to make it seem that things weren't as bad as they looked. She smiled at them and talked to us in a calm familiar voice. But Karl cut her off with what sounded like

a prepared announcement: Please forgive us for waking you up. We're not common criminals. Our visit here tonight is scientific in nature. My colleagues and I are concerned with the problem of blindness, not just in human beings, but throughout the animal kingdom. Our investigations have convinced us that blindness in animals can only be addressed by working with human subjects. We need to study human eyes, and what would be more appropriate than to study the trained eyes of a great scientist, the very same eyes that have studied the eyes of so many helpless animals. Through countless experiments, the doctor here has established the importance—indeed, the necessity—of surgically removing the eyes of his experimental subjects. Tonight this same necessity will be applied to the doctor himself!

At first I laughed. I thought he was just pretending to be a mad doctor in a movie. But when he pulled a switchblade out of his pocket I started to panic. I thought what we'd already done was revenge enough, especially with the doctor looking so damaged and pathetic. But Karl looked vicious, out of control, and all my vindictive excitement was suddenly gone. Up to this point I'd felt like words on turning pages, but once the knife cut through the fiction everything looked like a huge mistake. I turned away from the doctor's bleeding face in the dirty basement light. I knew that the law would define what we'd done as a crime. No one would even ask about the crime we'd been avenging.

I told the wife and daughters what the doctor had done to the Buddha. The wife had no reaction at first, apparently familiar with her husband's research methods. But then she

gave me a sympathetic look, figuring she'd better seem concerned. The little girls looked horrified and the younger one started crying, as if she could see that her father had done something wrong and had to be punished.

The wife took a deep breath and said: Look, he didn't know it was your dog. He didn't know it was anyone's dog. The lab gets dogs from the shelter all the time.

Karl said: It doesn't matter whose dog it was. What he did was murder. Research is one thing; violence is another. And now it's time to perform another experiment. Now it's time--

She said: It was just an animal. You can't kill a man for killing a dog.

Karl said: Why not? What makes people so special? That dog meant just as much to me as your husband does to you. And my dog didn't deserve what happened to him. He didn't hurt anyone. Your husband did.

I followed his logic perfectly. But I knew I couldn't let him take a knife to the doctor's eyes. I grabbed his arm and led him upstairs to the kitchen, sitting him down at the table.

I said: Listen man, we've got his wallet. Let's rough him up a bit more, maybe knock his teeth out, or break his nose if we haven't already, and—

Karl nearly shouted: The man has to pay with his eyes!

I said: But what if we end up killing him? If we get caught, we'll be looking at manslaughter charges. And I don't think I can bring myself to cut the guy's eyes out right in front of those two little girls. They're innocent. His wife is innocent. Even if we take them upstairs and they

don't have to watch, their lives will be ruined. Or no—what am I saying? We'll have to kill them too. They can identify us.

Karl said: We've already gone too far. We might as well go all the way.

We heard the doctor's groggy voice downstairs, then Stu's voice calling the doctor a killer, then the doctor sounding alarmed and angry, Charlie telling him to shut up, the doctor threatening Stu and Charlie with lawyers, Stu telling him to shut up, the sound of the doctor coughing and clearing his throat, the doctor threatening Stu and Charlie with lawyers again, a sound which must have been Stu or Charlie breaking the doctor's nose or knocking his teeth out, the doctor's wife and girls screaming and crying, the wife accusing my friends of being monsters, Charlie accusing her of being married to a monster.

Karl stared at the wooden tabletop. He raised the knife above his head and slammed it down as hard as he could. It stuck up from the wood like a knife in a chunk of cheese. He started talking quietly, indistinctly, to himself. I asked him what he was saying. He stared at the knife and got louder, speeding up and slowing down, as if the pace of his words had replaced their meaning. When I stood and tried to make him stop he just got louder and louder, speeding up and slowing down, gripping the sides of the table. His words were like a slaughter house of syllables, like pit bulls tearing each other apart in a billionaire's back yard, like wild applause in response to a bull collapsing with a sword in his back, or gunshots driving a herd of buffalo into a frenzy and over a cliff, or a list of similes fencing in the rage that set them in motion. He stopped, abruptly stood

and looked through the window above the sink, as if his eyes were following the streetlights into the distance. I could tell that the crying of the girls downstairs was getting to him. After all, he had two baby sisters that he'd helped his aunt and uncle raise after his parents died. He shivered and yanked the knife out of the table, retracting the blade and putting it in his pocket. He looked outside again and the streetlights told him what to do next.

He went downstairs and said: Ladies, prepare yourself to watch a great artist in action. Stu, you still have your tattoo kit in your trunk, don't you? Go and get it.

Stu looked confused but nodded and went outside to get his equipment. When he wasn't making avant-garde music, Stu ran a mobile tattoo business out of his car, doing all his work in people's homes.

The wife took another deep breath and said: What are you doing?

Karl said: I'm making the punishment fit the crime. Your husband cut my dog's eyes *out of* his head. Now Stu is going to cut my dog's eyes *into* your husband's head.

She looked puzzled. Karl told her to wait and see. She struggled in her chair, cried out her husband's name. The doctor lifted his head, met her eyes briefly, passed out again. His face was a bloody mess.

When Stu returned with his toolbox, Karl said: Get ready, man. This is going to be your crowning achievement. You're going to give the doctor a new set of eyes. It's clear that he can't see things the way a dog sees them. So take your needle and cut the Buddha's eyes into the doctor's forehead, right above his eyebrows.

Stu looked like he wanted to laugh, but he saw that Karl wasn't joking.

The wife said: A tattoo?

Karl said: That's right, a tattoo. From now on, wherever the doctor goes, he'll see everything twice. Maybe then he'll *think* twice before he decides to cut more animals up.

She said: That's totally sick! You're a fucking psycho!

Karl said: Actually, I'm not a fucking psycho. My friends here can tell you that I'm one of the nicest people in the world. I'm a good listener, and when one of my friends is in trouble I'll do anything to help him out. Sure, I lose my temper once in a while, but I've never hurt anyone before, at least not physically. But after what your husband did to my dog, he deserves--

She said: He was doing research. *Scientific* research! Can't you understand that? He was doing something for the good of the human race. He was trying to figure out how make blind people see. He wasn't being sadistic.

Karl said: Normally you *ask* someone if it's okay before you start cutting them up. And I seriously doubt that your husband asked the Buddha to sign a consent form.

Red lights came flashing through the doorway at the top of the stairs. Apparently one of the neighbors, having heard all the screaming, had called the police. We made a quick exit, squeezing through a small basement window, got back to Stu's car through an alley and drove away undetected.

But we knew that we'd soon be in jail if we didn't make ourselves hard to find. Charlie came up with a plan, a way to vanish into the sea. He knew someone who knew

someone who called himself Captain Green, a man who'd been in the Coast Guard in his twenties and early thirties, then got involved with Greenpeace as an anti-whaling activist. He'd used his connections to buy an old Coast Guard cutter for almost nothing, and now he spent most of his time hunting down whaling ships, ramming and sometimes sinking them, or temporarily putting them out of commission. None of us had ever been at sea for more than a day. But Captain Green said he'd be glad to have us along, especially when we told him how much we respected the work he was doing.

We left from New York Harbor two days later. The ocean looked beautiful. But soon I was sure that we would have been more comfortable in jail. For the first two weeks we were seasick and dehydrated. Our beds were wooden bunks in a cramped compartment beside the engine room. The noise was so bad that for the first three nights we got no sleep. The latrine was out of commission. We had to piss and shit off the back of the ship, a difficult balancing act even when the deck wasn't pitching wildly. Often I found myself rehearsing a speech for Captain Green, begging him to take us home, though I figured he would just laugh and tell us to get tough and adjust. That's what we finally did, though only Karl really took to the sea.

At first I felt strange about ramming a ship. I knew that countless whales had been slaughtered over the years, and I thought that the captains of the whaling industry should be tried as mass murderers. But ramming and possibly sinking a ship seemed like a good way to get people killed. One of my crewmates told me that such things never happened. If a whaling ship was in danger of

sinking, the captain sent out an SOS and help arrived in less than an hour, saving the crew, even if the ship itself went down. He also told me that whaling had been banned a few years before, that the ships we were hunting were in no position to take legal action against us. I nodded and smiled but still wasn't sure what to think—until we encountered a whaling ship off the southern coast of Iceland.

Karl and three of our crewmates had positioned themselves in rubber lifeboats between the whaling ship and a group of humpback whales. The harpoon gunners couldn't fire while our boats were in the way. But suddenly Karl's boat was lifted high in the air by a massive swell, and when the boat dipped into the trough, the gunners had a clear view and opened fire. Two harpoons hit a female whale. Her blood spurted out all over the waves. Her screams were shocking, unbearable. Until that point, I'd assumed that whales took harpoons in silence.

I wanted the other whales to dive and try to save their lives. But the mate of the bleeding whale had other ideas. He turned and swam full speed toward the whaling ship, toward certain death. And not just his own certain death: It looked like Karl was about to get crushed. His boat was directly between the whale and his target. For a second I thought that someone would know what to do. A second later I knew that there was nothing anyone could do. But the whale knew what to do. He made it look easy, leaping out of the water and sailing gracefully over Karl's head, crashing back into the waves and surging on toward the whaling ship. The harpoon guns at point blank range opened fire. The whale's blood filled the waves. His cries

were even more painful than his mate's. I couldn't stand it. I wanted to sink every whaling ship in the world.

I thought of Moby-Dick ramming and sinking *The Pequod*, dragging Captain Ahab to the bottom of the sea. But why hadn't Herman Melville described the screams of harpooned whales? He'd served on whaling ships and he must have heard those tragic sounds many times. Was it possible that he didn't care, or that he thought that the voices of whales were aesthetically unimportant? Though the book had always been one of my favorites, I suddenly wasn't so sure.

But I was quite sure that something had to be done. I didn't have long to wait. Captain Green was already turning the ship and gunning the engines. I still remember the feeling of picking up speed, then the moment of impact, the shock of getting knocked off my feet and almost off the ship, the sound of metal crunching against metal, our ship jolting into reverse, pausing briefly to gather up the lifeboats, then backing and turning and sailing away, having given the other whales a chance to escape. I never found out if the whaling ship went down. We were out of sight in less than fifteen minutes.

A half-hour later, I found Karl sitting on his bunk, staring at the wall.

I said: Karl, talk to me. You look all messed up.

He said: I'm not all messed up. I'm trying to fully take in what just happened.

I said: I practically shit in my pants, and I was just watching. You must have been going crazy with that whale coming at you.

He said: For a second it was like being in a world without names. For a second there was something in the sky, something that only made sense in a world without names. Then there was all that blood, those horrible sounds. The whale was coming and then he was six feet above me, and his eye seemed even closer, maybe because it was so big, almost the size of my head. But the most amazing thing was the look in his eye, like he knew we weren't his enemies, like he knew we were trying to help. I know it sounds crazy, but I know what I saw when I looked in his eye. It was like when I used to look in the Buddha's eyes, and I knew he cared about me, and I knew he cared that I cared about him. That's the feeling I got when I looked at that whale. And it wasn't like I'd been with him for years and he'd learned to love the way I fed him and played with him. We'd never seen each other before.

I said: He even made sure that he didn't whack you with his tail when he came down. And he did this even though other members of our species had just killed his mate in cold blood.

Karl said: That's right—in cold blood.

A few days later, Karl announced that he'd found his true calling. He told Captain Green that he wanted to spend the rest of his life saving whales, that he didn't care how violent things got. In fact, he wanted violence if it meant saving innocent lives.

Captain Green said: You're welcome to stay with me as long as you want. But if it's violence you're after, you should probably give Peter Winston a call when we're back in the City. You've heard of Peter Winston, haven't you?

We shook our heads.

The captain said: I'm surprised. They did a TV special on him several years ago and—

I said: We don't watch TV. We made a group vow five years ago never to turn the damn thing on again. In fact, we don't even have TVs, and we stay away from places that do.

Captain Green said: Good for you. But I'm still surprised that you don't know the name Peter Winston. He's never been shy about promoting himself. Some people say that he's just a publicity hound. But he's actually quite serious about what he does, even though his methods are more outrageous than mine. He's got the names of all the ships he's rammed tattooed on his chest. You might think he sounds like an ex-Hell's Angel. But he's got a Ph.D. in American fiction and he tells his crew to call him Captain Ahab.

Charlie laughed and said: It's been a while since I read *Moby-Dick*, but didn't Captain Ahab have a grudge against a whale? Didn't he work in the whaling industry?

Captain Green said: That's what I thought too, back when I was on Peter's ship, the same year I first got involved with Greenpeace. But Peter claimed that if Captain Ahab were alive today, he'd be opposed to the slaughter of whales. His obsession with the white whale showed that he didn't care about whaling as a business. He turned away from whales he was supposed to be killing to pursue one particular whale—symbolically pursuing himself, or the image of himself that he'd projected onto God, or onto Fate, or onto the universe, or--

Stu laughed: This Peter Winston guy definitely sounds like someone with a Ph.D. in fiction.

Captain Green said: He was *living* the fiction, just like Captain Ahab. He even had a nineteenth-century cannon on board that really worked, with cannon balls specially made so he could fire the damn thing. And his cabin was filled with AK47s, which he didn't hesitate to use. But don't get me wrong. I don't mean to make Peter Winston sound crazy. At first I was eager to work with him. He had a way of drawing you into the intensity of what he was doing, like a book where you can't stop turning the pages. But after a while he was too crazy for me. I found a way to get my own ship. Then I got a crew together through people I knew in Greenpeace. It wasn't that I doubted his commitment. Peter Winston would do almost anything to save whales. But I don't like bullets and cannon balls, and I didn't like taking orders from someone who openly ridiculed Greenpeace, made movies of everything he did, spent lots of time in his cabin writing a book about himself, and made sure the pantry was filled with hamburger meat.

As a hardcore burger junkie, I suddenly felt that I might be on the wrong ship. Our captain insisted on meatless meals. There was no escape from canned vegetables and pasta. Though I told myself it was wrong to want to eat animals, I'd been hooked on red meat since I graduated from baby food, and the stuff I ate on the ship tasted like nothing. I fantasized every day about hamburgers and cheeseburgers and thick steaks covered with onions. I even started telling myself stories about going to restaurants, enjoying the décor, flirting with the waitresses, ordering meat and savoring every bite. The fantasies took up so much mental space that they gave me headaches.

But it wasn't so bad that I lost track of what I was doing. Each time we interfered with a whaling ship, I felt like we were agents of cosmic justice, protecting innocent beings from a violent species gone mad. Karl tried to convince us to stay and dedicate the rest of our lives to whales and other creatures of the deep. But Charlie and Stu and I had our music to return to, so our work at sea ended when we found out that an animal rights group had made it safe for us to go home, exposing the violent procedures of the lab the doctor worked for, getting the courts to dismiss the charges against us.

I was pleasantly shocked. I hadn't expected anything but bullshit from the legal system. But when I heard that the judge on the case had three dogs of his own, I wasn't quite so surprised. People with dogs know that their animals are amazing creatures, capable of things that human beings will never understand. Time spent with animals puts you in a different place—and in some ways a more valuable place—than time spent with people. There's no need to talk. I can go for days without saying anything to my dogs. This would not be possible with people, who are generally uncomfortable with silence when it lasts more than a few seconds.

The obvious objection here is that the intimacy words help people create goes beyond the simple connections that are possible with animals. But let's test this assumption by consulting *The Odyssey*, a renowned example of what people can do with words. I don't think I'm alone in my belief that the most moving scene in Homer's epic occurs when Odysseus, returning to his palace disguised as a beggar, is recognized by Argus, his neglected and aging

dog, who lifts his head, wags his tail, and dies from excitement. The dog alone can see through the hero's disguise. Everyone else is fooled, even Penelope, who cautiously questions her husband to make sure he's not an imposter. What does the dog know that Penelope doesn't know? Even though Argus was only a puppy when Odysseus departed twenty years before, somehow he can feel or smell his master's essence, something Penelope apparently can't recognize. She can only determine her husband's identity by testing him. His claim that he's Odysseus is not enough. She knows that words are often tools of deception. But even the goddess Athene cannot disguise Odysseus fully enough to avoid his dog's non-verbal understanding.

So why do we assume that human intelligence, constructed by language, is superior to the ways of knowing other animals practice? Why do we try to measure an animal's intelligence by comparing it to our own, running endless experiments, for example, to see if apes can be taught to speak? The obvious answer is that we can see only what our language tells us to see. Other forms of perception are beyond our understanding. We can think about them only in the terms our language proposes, the pictures and mental designs our words create. These designs have helped us build the technologies we use to dominate the rest of the animal kingdom, leading us to develop our ongoing sense of superiority. But who can look at President Bush, arguably the world's most powerful man, without realizing how delusional our master species complex really is?

I generally assume that those who voted for Bush in the last two elections are sub-human idiots. But some of them are actually quite brilliant by mainstream standards and have even won the Nobel Prize for their research. An old friend of mine used to work for one of these brilliant people at a university here in San Diego. In fact, recently I ran into this friend—I'll call him Doug—at a café near the school. I like the café because it's on a hill and has views of the ocean in one direction and mountains in the other. It's also quiet. The owner is an ex-hippie who doesn't fill the place with media noise. Often I sit there for hours enjoying the scenery and reading.

When Doug walked in I didn't recognize him at first. I didn't even know he was in San Diego. I'd known him when we lived in New York, but we'd fallen out of touch, and the last time I'd seen him was more than twenty years ago, when he was a biology student at NYU. But he knew me right away and shook my hand eagerly. It turned out he'd been looking for a job without success and was getting desperate. I remembered him as being a brilliant assertive person, so it surprised me that he was having trouble with his career.

When I asked him what the problem was, he looked around the room carefully, making sure that the wrong ears weren't listening. Then he said, or rather half-whispered: I know this is going to sound paranoid, but I'm getting screwed because I offended the wrong people.

I smiled: I've offended the wrong people many times myself, and I've paid the price, so you're talking to the right person.

He looked around the room quickly again before he said: Here's what happened. Maybe you heard that I got a post-doc here at the school?

I shook my head no.

He said: It was almost fifteen years ago. I thought I had it made. I'd hooked up with a neuro-biologist who'd almost gotten a Nobel Prize for his work on Alzheimer's. Initially I thought it was an honor to be working with him, and I'd been told that there might be an opening in his department, a full-time job. We got along so well that he was going to recommend me for the position. Everything seemed perfect. But after a while I couldn't stand what he was doing to the monkeys.

I made a face.

Doug said: I'd always told myself that we needed to use animals in medical research. I mean, without animal research we never would have come up with the polio vaccine and all sorts of other medical advances. But when I started working there and saw those monkeys in cages, it really got to me. I'd worked with rats and mice, and even with old dogs from the animal shelter. But this was different.

I made another face. I said: My mother died of cancer. Some day scientists doing animal research might come up with a cure for cancer and AIDS and who knows what else. But I still can't stand the thought of taking animals and putting wires in their heads or strapping them down to an operating table. I remember in New York a friend of mine had a dog who ended up in a research lab, and—

Doug said: This neuroscientist didn't cut up any dogs while I was there, but he routinely put rhesus monkeys on

the operating table. He'd slice open their flesh down to their skulls, then he'd drill his way through the bone to their brains and start poking around. I'm trained to deal with this kind of stuff. The first few times, I told myself not to let it bother me. I just went along with what was happening. But then there were times when I was in the lab by myself, since it was my job to give the monkeys their meals, and I'd go in and switch on this harsh overhead light in a room with a concrete floor and no vegetation of any kind and I'd see the monkeys looking at me from their cages. They were going crazy from boredom and isolation. The cages were way too small and each monkey was kept in a separate cage, with no other monkey to touch or play with, and monkeys don't do too well when they can't touch or play with each other, especially in sterile environments like this one. I mentioned this to one of the other research assistants there, a guy who'd been there longer than I had, and he just laughed and said that the place was an animal *research* facility, not an animal *resort*. Anyway, one of these monkeys eventually chewed his own tail down to a bloody stump. Another one chewed his arm down to the bone. And then they'd end up on the operating table, and it would take the man hours to drill holes in their skulls, and the sound of that drill was way worse than any dentist drill I'd ever heard. After a while, I couldn't take it any more.

I said: So you quit?

Doug said: I didn't just quit. I also joined a local animal rights group. I wrote articles for their newsletter describing what was going on at the school. The articles got people upset. I'm surprised you didn't hear anything about it. I got lots of media--

I said: And now no one will give you a job?

He said: Now no one will give me a job. You don't rock the boat in this field. Getting a job is all about recommendations and connections, and I offended the wrong person. This guy knew everybody.

I said: There was no one outside his sphere of influence?

Doug said: Actually, there was, and I found a job with him for about six months, a guy named Larry Parker, who was trying to teach chimpanzees to talk, or at least use sign language. He was at a small college up in Oregon, and he treated his chimps like members of his family. They were in cages at night, but each one had at least one companion, and during the day they circulated freely in a large research compound filled with trees and other vegetation. Most of what Larry did with them involved games and observation. Nothing violent or invasive. I made sure of that before I agreed to work with him. I showed him the articles I'd written.

I said: And he wasn't afraid of hiring you?

Doug said: He was seen as an outsider anyway, and I think he figured that his grant money would keep coming in as long as he didn't do anything too extreme. At that point he wasn't active in the animal rights movement, though he told me that he liked what I'd written and he certainly felt that the animals he worked with had to be treated with respect. But a few months after I started working with him, he got a call from one of his colleagues who'd seen the way lab monkeys were being treated at the National Institutes of Health in Washington. So the next time Larry had business in the capital, he visited the D.C. labs himself and saw what

his friend was talking about. He was totally disgusted. He came back with stories about how the NIH was driving their monkeys insane by keeping them in cages so small they could barely turn around, then killing them by drilling into their skulls or injecting them with deadly viruses. Pretty much the same thing I wrote about in my articles.

I said: But why did they let him visit the labs if they were doing these horrible things? Weren't they afraid of bad publicity?

Doug said: They didn't see anything wrong with it. They assumed they had nothing to hide. I think they figured that groups like PETA generally get regarded as a bunch of fanatics, especially when there's some kind of protest, and the people with the signs and megaphones appear on the news looking like raging hippies who forgot to get their prozac prescriptions refilled. And like I told you before, everyone knows everyone else and you don't rock the boat, not with the National Institutes of Health. But after what he saw there, Larry stopped worrying about whose boat he might be rocking.

The waitress came and Doug ordered coffee. I ordered coffee and a spinach croissant and told Doug that the croissants were not to be missed, so he ordered one for himself, even though he said he was on a diet. Ever since the French had enraged right-wing Americans by opposing the U.S. war in Iraq, I'd been making a point in restaurants of ordering anything that sounded French.

Something caught the waitress's eye. I followed her gaze out the window, saw what she must have been looking at, but I couldn't say what it was. My eyes were prepared to tell me it was a cloud, but what I really saw was a globe of

transparent glass filled with lightning bolts and rain, spinning slowly above the sea, maybe two miles distant. A second later it seemed to be less than a hundred yards away, even though it didn't look any larger. Then it disappeared, replaced by a line of pelicans gliding and dipping down and skimming the sea, rising and falling as each wave rose and fell. I looked back to see if the waitress was alarmed, but she'd already turned away to get our coffee and croissants. I thought of asking Doug if he'd seen what I saw, but he wasn't facing the sea. He was watching the waitress walking away.

I said: So Larry got more radical?

Doug turned back to face me with a horny smile and said: Right. Larry got more radical, especially after he went to another research facility near Atlanta a few months later. They'd invited him there to give a talk on the progress he'd made in teaching his chimps to talk, and after his presentation he got taken on a tour of the facility, where he saw an adult male chimp in a five-by-five-by-seven-foot cage. I think Larry said they were calling him JoJo, or maybe it was Bozo or Bonzo—I can't remember—but I guess they figured if they gave him a name it would make their treatment of him sound more humane.

Doug looked across the room, where the waitress was nodding and smiling, taking the orders of a bloated couple with killer whales on matching Sea World t-shirts. He looked back at me and said: Anyway, JoJo had been there for ten years, with nothing in the cage but an old tire dangling at the end of a rope from the ceiling. That was supposed to be his source of amusement. Larry told me that all he had to do was look in JoJo's eyes and he could see

that the chimp had been reduced to a state of terminal boredom and depression. But JoJo saw that Larry was giving him a different kind of attention than he got from the lab personnel, so he reached out between the bars of his cage to stroke Larry's face, and they held hands for a few minutes. Larry couldn't stop himself—he broke down and cried, even though there were other scientists there behaving like serious professionals, whatever that means. In that world keeping a straight face means being objective and people have to take you seriously.

I said: It's really that bad? I thought we were living in the age of the hip scientist who's actually a cool guy when you get past all the research and the terribly brilliant scientific papers he's published.

Doug said: That's just an image. When you get right down to it, these guys are all caught up in prestige and money, and that means taking yourself seriously when you're with colleagues. But Larry couldn't stop himself from crying. The sadness in JoJo's eyes and the tender way he was holding Larry's hand really got to him. He could never get the look in that chimp's eyes out of his mind. The whole experience got him so upset that he joined PETA and began writing articles and lobbying and picketing research facilities. And soon his government money stopped coming in, even though his work with the chimps has been recognized all over the world. So that was the end of my job. He couldn't afford an assistant any more.

I said: Sounds horrible. But how did Larry convince himself that his own work was okay? It sounds like he was still keeping his chimps in a restricted situation, even if he was being nice about it.

The waitress came back with our coffee and food, avoiding Doug's encouraging eyes and quickly turning away. For a second he looked like he might start crying. I remembered that back in New York I'd always felt strange about the contradictions in his behavior. On the one hand, he seemed like a sensitive intelligent guy. On the other hand, he wasn't afraid to push his way to the front of the line, and he often went out of his way to use macho language. Any woman he wanted to fuck was a fox, and of course he himself was a wolf, not just another nerd in a lab who didn't know what to do with his cock. But in the wake of the feminist movement, men with attitudes like his were seen by intelligent women as pigs, and I could see that he felt more unsure of himself than he had in the past, especially now that he couldn't find a job.

He shrugged and looked at his spinach croissant and said: Actually, PETA wasn't too pleased when they came and saw that Larry kept the chimps in cages at night. But he told them that without some kind of research the human race would just go on treating animals like food or work machines and--

I said: But why did he want to teach chimps to talk? Why not just let them communicate in their own way?

Doug said: He wanted to show the world how smart they were.

I said: Talking equals smart?

Doug laughed: I can see you're not a scientist. What did you end up doing, by the way? Someone told me you were in law school after your career as a rock star ended.

I said: That lasted a year. I tried about ten other things after that, and now I'm a freelance photographer. Last week

I was taking menu pictures, full-color shots of hamburgers and ham sandwiches, even though I don't eat meat anymore.

Laughter came from the next table. I turned to see myself looking back twice from the mirror shades of a white-haired woman wearing a big straw hat. She said: Do you really know what an animal is?

I glanced at Doug and we shared confused looks. Then I looked back at my doubled self in the woman's wrap-around shades.

She said: A *real* animal, not a dog or a cat or some other cuddly quasi-human creature. Have you ever actually met an animal in the wild?

I said: Where would I find the wild? Does it even exist anymore?

She smiled condescendingly and said: You have to know where to look.

I said: A former girlfriend once told me about a hiking trip she took in the Yukon wilderness, where she got cornered for several hours by a mountain lion. If a group of hikers hadn't come by and scared it away, the cat might have killed her. At the time, she was a hard core member of the Animal Liberation Front. She'd spent time behind bars for letting animals out of their cages. But her feelings changed after that.

The woman said: My son was killed by a grizzly bear.

I didn't know what to say. I knew what I wanted to say, but I didn't want to create an unpleasant situation. I wanted to say that people kill people far more frequently than so-called wild animals do. I wanted say that sharks, supposedly the most fearsome of all non-human creatures,

are responsible for only two human deaths each year, whereas just in San Diego more than two people had probably killed other people in the minute or two we'd been talking.

There was something unnerving about my face looking back at me twice from her shades. I could almost see the ocean behind my head in the depth of her lenses, dolphins leaping and splashing in the waves, the wall of mist in the place where the sky came down to meet the sea, a distance pulling me out of my body, forcing me to grip the sides of my chair, forcing me to penetrate the reflections in her glasses, penetrating her eyes and looking through her head and beyond, creating a tunnel of distance in the opposite direction, as if I were moving east against the motion of the sun, reversing the flow of time and getting younger by the second, looking through the woman's face across the room and out through open French doors to the flagstone patio, where people in bright summer clothes were talking and laughing, while beyond them big white clouds were throwing shadows into a canyon, shadows obscuring the mansion on the other side of the canyon, obscuring open windows facing east from the mansard roof, each one holding the sky in a squared reflection, looking out on a desert floor at least a thousand feet below, a desert barely visible in the dust, rolling east until it reached a line of mountains eighty miles away, peaks like black teeth biting into the sky and making it bleed, and sixty desert miles beyond those peaks was a government air force base, where planes had been designed in the form of huge translucent amoebas, energized by the sun to move at supersonic speeds, constantly changing their

colors and shapes, piloted from the base by a tiny computer worth billions of dollars, planes that glowed in the dark and made people think they were looking at UFOs, and seventy miles northeast of the base was a UFO information center, a squat brick building filled with souvenirs and doctored photographs, open only one weekend a month, staffed by an elderly couple who'd been abducted fifteen years before, one of them convinced that they'd had a son before the abduction, the other convinced that they'd never had any children, that instead they'd been raising an orphaned chimpanzee before the abduction, and a hundred miles further east was the Grand Canyon, except that it wasn't there anymore, having been replaced by a hundred billion tourist pictures, images filling the canyon up to the rim, spilling out into parking lots and campsites, a garbage dump of burning clichés, replacing the sky with a fingerprint of smoke, making me feel unpleasantly hot looking back at myself in her wrap-around shades.

She said: My son was *killed* by a grizzly bear.

I pulled my face away from the matching faces in her glasses. I said: What was your son like?

She kept staring at me. She lifted her upper lip with what looked like disdain. She said: What was my son *like*? How can you even think of asking me such a question. My son is dead. And you of all people should know *exactly* what my son was like. My son loved animals. He protested against the abuse of dogs and monkeys in research labs. He protested against oil companies drilling in wildlife habitats. And now he's dead, massacred by one of the animals he was trying to protect. I got to see his body—or what was left of it—when they brought it back from the Yukon. I'm

sorry to say I didn't take any pictures, or I could show you what he looked like, though I guess that wouldn't *quite* be the same as telling you what he was *like*. What's *anyone* like? Is anyone like anyone else or anything else or—

I said: I guess not. I guess—

She said: Don't interrupt.

I felt embarrassed. I hate it when people interrupt me, and I pride myself on not interrupting others. In fact, I feel superior to most people simply because I don't interrupt them and most people I know interrupt me on a regular basis.

I told her I was sorry.

She said: I hate it when people interrupt me, and I pride myself on not interrupting other people. In fact, I feel superior to most people simply because I don't interrupt them and most people I know interrupt me on a regular basis.

I told her I was sorry.

She said: So don't interrupt me again. Especially since I'm about to tell you a story that should warm you to the bottom of your heart, just like it warmed me to the bottom of my heart when I heard my son had been arrested for breaking into a research lab, this place at Stanford where scientists were seeing what would happen if you took baby monkeys away from their mothers. Did they really need to spend millions of our tax dollars on experiments designed solely to figure out what should have been obvious even to a moron, that baby monkeys will be terrified, become depressed and probably go insane if you separate them from their mothers? How stupid can cruelty get? So my son and this group he was working with got arrested for

breaking into the lab and liberating all the monkeys, making sure the poor creatures got sent back to the jungles where they belong. My son spent three years in jail for that. Can you believe it? Three years, for doing something that should have made him a hero.

She stopped talking but didn't turn her glasses away from my face. I couldn't stand the reflections any longer. I wanted to tell her the story of how three of my friends had also done three years in jail, how they'd heard about a guy in northern Idaho making money running a bear-hunting farm, where he kept domesticated bears and offered people a chance to kill them on film, designer excitement for people willing to pay thousands of dollars to look like fearless hunters in the wild, except that the wild was carefully managed, populated by bears trained to be docile, even friendly, so friendly that when they saw people with guns, they walked up to them expecting to make friends, only to get their heads blown off by people who'd already paid for stuffed versions of the animals they would soon be killing. My friends had gotten so mad that they'd gone and released all the bears and then blown up the guy's house. I wanted to tell her this and other stories, but I couldn't face the awkward faces looking at me from her shades. I looked back at Doug hoping he would say something to change the situation. But he just sat there looking at me, trying hard to keep his face as blank as possible. He finally got up and shook my hand and said: Good seeing you. Let's keep in touch.

I watched him walk out the door knowing I'd probably never see him again. I thought briefly of all the other people I'd probably never see again, and their faces all

became one face, a face I told myself I'd never seen before, until I realized it was mine. I ran my hands across my face just to make sure it was mine. Then I quickly looked around the room to make sure no one had seen what I was doing. All the other people in the café were touching their faces, looking around to make sure no one had seen what they were doing.

I thought of opening the book I'd been reading, hoping the older woman would drop the conversation. I knew if I turned and let my face get sucked back into her glasses, I would no longer have any means of preventing myself from becoming someone else, or rather, becoming someone else twice, becoming her son before and after his death, so I tried to think of all the reasons I couldn't be her son, the most obvious reason being that she wasn't my mother, or anything *like* my mother, but then I started to think that maybe she *was* a bit like my mother, that maybe she was *exactly* like my mother, who used to love confronting people with icy stares and devastating critiques of their ideas, seeing through their lies, and with my mother I'd always felt that I was lying, or that I was somehow under the obligation of showing up to get shot down, so I turned to face the woman, preparing to say something about her son dying for a good cause, and how bicycle accidents kill more people each year than grizzly bears have killed in the century people have been keeping statistics on such things. But she was gone. The steam was still twisting up from her ham and cheese omelet.

I sat there for the rest of the day, watching the shadows of clouds gliding over the canyon, imagining how different my life would have been if I'd been raised by

people destined in their old age to run a UFO information center. Would I have grown up recalling iridescent lights in the sky, a globe of rain with lightning bolts, dogs barking incessantly for no apparent reason, my parents disappearing for several hours, returning in slightly modified form, unwilling or unable to talk about where they'd been, convinced that they should adopt all the orphaned chimpanzees in the world? Would I have grown up assuming that every time my dogs barked, something strange or magical might happen? It's often assumed that dogs have special abilities, a kind of ESP that alerts them to things that human beings can't detect, even with expensive technological devices.

Just an hour ago, for instance, my dogs began whimpering, pacing nervously around my living room. The phone rang. It was my cousin Frank. He and his family had just landed in San Diego and wanted to stop by for a few minutes before taking a vacation trip up the California coast. I generally try to avoid my cousin Frank. He's a Republican who likes to talk about his favorite primetime TV shows. We haven't seen each other in years, but soon he's at my door smiling and laughing, and his wife is making herself at home at the kitchen table, and their two little boys are cowering in fear because they don't like dogs.

Trying to be a good host, I take the dogs into the backyard, assuming that if I smile and make small talk for a while, Cousin Frank and his family will decide to go to Sea World or the San Diego Zoo. But after I make a pot of coffee and put the boys in front of my computer, Cousin Frank starts praising George Bush for planning a nuclear

confrontation with Iran. Since I see no point in discussing politics with Republicans, I decide not to question his use of the word *confrontation*, though I know there won't really be any such thing, since Iran is only taking the initial steps to develop nuclear capability, and the U.S. could bomb them back to the stone age without fear of retaliation. I'm dying to ask Cousin Frank why he thinks it's okay for the United States, a nation which spends a billion dollars a day on hydrogen bombs, to respond with moral outrage when other countries even plan to make nuclear weapons, but his wife can sense that I think Cousin Frank is a moron for supporting George Bush, and before too long she decides that it's time to go to the zoo.

I'm relieved. But then Cousin Frank is urging me to come along, which I wouldn't do even if Cousin Frank was President of PETA. I can't stand zoos, even the supposedly humane San Diego Zoo. I can't stand looking at animals behind bars. They all look so trapped and depressed. The San Diego Zoo is famous for its animal habitats, designed to replicate the places where these animals might otherwise be living. This is nonsense. I've only been there once, and the so-called state of the art enclosures and trails the zoo's reputation is based on are just disguised prisons, and the animals know it. So I tell Cousin Frank that I've got an appointment to take photographs of grilled hot dogs in half an hour, and he can't really object because he didn't give me any advance warning about their visit.

As soon as they leave, I take my dogs to the canyon. But we've only been there a few minutes when dark clouds start to gather in the northern sky. The wind comes up, and soon it's raining. We're near a cave at the southern end of

the canyon. My house is at the northern end, three miles away, so we scramble up into the cave and wait for the rain to stop. The view from the cave is usually outstanding. The northern end of the canyon is higher than the southern end, and the cave is only ten feet below the rim, more than a hundred feet above the canyon floor. On relatively smog-free days, you can look south over the treetops and see the San Diego skyline, and beyond that the Coronado Bridge and the ocean.

But it keeps raining harder and harder, so hard it's hard to see anything but rain. Soon there are flashes of lightning, the loudest thunderclaps I've ever heard. My dogs are terrified and cower in the back of the cave. I put their heads in my lap and try to help them feel safe, singing the songs I used to sing to them when they were puppies crying at night for their mothers. The rain shows no signs of letting up. It just keeps getting more intense. The gathering darkness feels like it might make all the light in the world obsolete. The sound of the rain in the trees is loud enough to make thinking obsolete.

Soon the dark has become opaque, solid and flat as a blackboard, and I'm sitting in a fifth grade classroom. The teacher is teaching us how to walk a dog, but the chalk in his hand keeps breaking. I want to tell him that before he tries to teach us how to walk dogs, he should learn how to write on a blackboard. But I'll get in trouble if I say something like that, and I've been in trouble many times before, to the point that a few weeks ago the principal called in my parents for a conference, advising them to send me to a special school for kids with behavior problems. Now the teacher is drawing Noah's Ark on the

blackboard, except that it's not a boat. It's a globe of rain with bolts of lightning. I raise my hand to complain, but no one else in the class looks worried, and the teacher ignores my hand and keeps on talking, explaining that Noah was chosen by God because he had magic powers, that before he was born people would plant wheat and get corn, or plant corn and get barley. But Noah's presence began to change everything. He was God's favorite person. God loved him so much that he gave him dominion over all non-human creatures, allowing them to survive only if they entered the Ark and became subject to human control.

The teacher's head gets hit by lightning, shattering and tumbling like an avalanche into the dark, replaced by someone I've seen many times in the canyon, a guy in his early seventies with a lame Great Dane. He told me once that he got his dog from the animal shelter, that he'd rescued many dogs there over the years, and he always looked for the older ones that he figured no one else would want, since most people go to the shelter looking for puppies. But this man focused on dogs due to be put to sleep, or given away to research labs, figuring he could make their last few years as pleasant as possible, then go back and get another old dog and do the same thing. I remember leaving that conversation so moved that I went home with tears in my eyes, the same tears forming in my eyes right now as I realize that my dogs and I have been in the canyon all night, and the rain is still coming down, though it's not as opaque as before.

The gathering transparency is dreadful, slowly becoming a pane of glass so clear it can only shatter, breaking what it might have allowed me to see into sharp

prismatic fragments. I want to put them carefully back together, building a rainbow, but everything is too sharp, as if the colors were forbidden, as if the mere act of giving them names would mean the end of all names. Instead, I try to give myself a new name, but I don't know what I should call myself, and suddenly I can't remember the name I already have.

Then a flash, a thunderclap. The rain abruptly stops. Something hovering over the canyon vanishes in the gathering light. I don't know what it was but something is making me say what it was, a globe of rain that came from the other side of time and space, collecting billions of animals, pairs of every species that the human race hasn't killed off yet, reducing them to microscopic versions of themselves, taking them all to a place that's free of predatory bipeds, restoring them to their normal size, commanding them to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, except of course that it's not the earth, and there won't be any dominant species turning it into the earth.

Suddenly the earth feels terribly small, terribly empty. I start to feel abandoned, but my dogs haven't left me behind. They're waking up, lifting their heads from my lap and sniffing the sunlight. The canyon is full of water almost up to the mouth of the cave, more than a hundred feet above the path where we take our walks. Looking south I see that the city is gone, completely submerged. There's nothing but surging water all the way to the place where the sky comes down.

Stephen-Paul Martin edited *Central Park* in New York from 1980-1996. He is the author of numerous books of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. He lives in San Diego.

This edition is limited to 60 copies.

This is number 6.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mr. Fred M." followed by a stylized flourish.



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