

PHILIP ROSENTHAL

Point, 2011
Enamel on Panel, 36 x 48 in.



courtesy: the artist

VANESSA BLUMBERG

Botanical Gardens of Vallarta

The Kempers were in Puerto Vallarta for eight days and seven nights at a beachfront resort hotel, all-inclusive. Malcolm Kemper, a businessman, needed a relaxing vacation, and his young wife, Frances, had never been to Mexico. The hotel advertised tourist excursions (Swim with the dolphins! Ride the Water Slide! Visit the Botanical Gardens of Vallarta!), and at breakfast, on the mezzanine overlooking the azure kidney-shaped pool, Malcolm suggested that Frances go without him. A fat American couple at the table to their left was engrossed in seconds from the buffet. A few feet away, in the direction of the swimming pool, the couple's fat little boy taunted a magnificent iguana with a magenta hibiscus flower tied to the end of a string. The boy tossed the flower, aiming to hit the iguana, and then yanked the bloom quickly away.

"Someone should stop that child," Frances said, anxious, wondering when Malcolm had decided about the excursion, that she would go and he would stay.

"Someone else," Malcolm told her, his back to the boy. "Relax, it's why we're here remember?"

Weren't they also here to be together, a Romantic Getaway? Typical Malcolm—he tipped generously for secluded corner tables with views of the ocean, then proceeded to introduce himself to whoever sat at the table next to theirs, and today, except for his bare feet, he was dressed for tennis.

If I go, Frances realized, he'll find someone among the guests to return his serve. Forgetting her, he could unwind, have fun. She took in a long slow breath, tasted the salt in the air—the sea or her own sweat. She knew he didn't regret bringing her, his secretary and now his wife. On the contrary, he would never have come to relax at this vacation resort without her. They'd been married only two years. He still loved her. And she loved him. Except this morning, since he wanted to play tennis, he was sending her off alone.

"I better wear my hat, then," she said. It was an eye-catching, narrow-brimmed, pink straw hat with a large, blown-open silk rose on the band—for show, not for sun, but that wasn't why Malcolm objected to it. Though he had no interest in or eye for women's clothes, it was just wrong for her.

"More coffee, señora?" the waiter asked.

Señora. It was only customary, but it made Frances