

JESSICA DUNNE

Escape from the Zoo, 2003
Oil on Linen, 96 x 71 in



PRIVATE COLLECTION, PHOTO CREDIT: DONALD FELTEN

He knows it's missing.

It's okay.

Okay? Fuck you, Irving, he's a detective! He lives to do this kinda shit!

He won't find us.

Are you kidding me? He found the son of Marlon Brando! If he can do that, he can sure as hell find his own damn marsupial!

His what?

It's a marsupial. It's not a bear. I told you!

She won't know the difference.

Where do we go now?

Where else? To her place.

So there we went, driving like escaped cons for the border. As a matter of fact, her house was pretty near the actual border, in this old run-down neighborhood out by Ysleta High School. We took a bunch of rights and lefts on the way, to lose what we thought was J.J. Armes in his trademark bulletproofed limo. The whole time, I was imagining my throat getting torn apart by these gleaming titanium hooks or being fed alive to his Bengal tigers. Irving was trying to feed the koala some of the leftover Chico's Tacos straight outta the bag. The little thing wasn't having none of it.

What do these marsupials eat?

Leaves, man. Some *pinchi* leaves that grow only in Australia.

Hell's bells.

We pulled up at her house at close to four in the morning. Irving insisted I come with him to the porch with the wilted cactus, just for moral support. He knocked on the door real loud to make sure people woke up, and about a minute later, the door opened and it was her old man. He was an unshaven unhappy mess in a Scooby-Doo T-shirt.

¿Si?

Sir, may I have a word with Roberta please?

¿Saben que hora es?

Irving looked at me and I spoke to the old guy.

¿Podemos hablar con Roberta por favor?

No está, he said. *Se fué a California hace una semana.*

A vivir con su tía en Fresno.

Irving, she's gone. She's moved to her aunt's house in Fresno.

Wait. That can't be.

She's been gone for a week, dude.

That just can't be.

The old guy peered down at the furry clump in Irving's arms and said in English, Where did you get the monkey?

We got back in the truck and I started us home. Light was breaking slowly beyond the trees. The cars were pale ghosts streaming through the blueness of dawn.

She has to know.

We need to take this thing back, *ese*.

This is badass shit I done for her. But how is she gonna know, if she's blown town? How the hell am I gonna get this to California?

You're not. You're taking it back.

And just like that, he turned. His ears went all red and he pounded the dash with his fist, causing the glove box to fly open.

No! he cried. Mundo, you and me are going to Fresno! We are taking this stupid bear to Bobbie one way or the other!

Something in me gave too, 'cause without even thinking, I yanked the truck off to the gravel shoulder, slammed the brakes, and got out in a rage. I stomped to the passenger side, but he was already there spitting into the dirt, bracing for a fight.

You dumb fuck, when are you gonna learn? There's nothin' you can do that'll make her come back to you! She's done, *ese*! She don't want you no more! Accept that and move the fuck on!

What do you care? You don't know her!

I explained to him with all the expletives at my disposal that I knew Bobbie better than he ever would, and that, in fact, she had confided in me her desire to go to Fresno long before they even broke up. Irving kept shaking his head, but I told him that nothing he'd ever done had really impressed anybody but me. And that now I too had reached my limit. You can go to Fresno if you want, I said, but you're going without me.

His face went slack and he blinked twice. She actually told you she was goin'?

In so many words. She just didn't know when.

Irving looked at me like it was my fault we'd come to this pass, like it was 'cause of me that we'd stolen a koala bear from J.J. Armes and ruined a perfectly good beer buzz