

Key West (Triple Ballade with Enjambed Refrain, plus Envoy) · Judith Moffett

for David Jackson

The garden's shading. Let there be
Tea in the deck-and-louvre tent
Begun, degree by slow degree,
Upon its languid, smooth descent
Toward eighty. Rose and succulent
Look up from blooming peatbeds thick
With strangeness, lush, ebullient
Displayed against white-sand-and-brick

Paving. From frond to shrub to tree
(So *that's* what Orphan Annie meant!)
Lizards are leaping — skittery,
Dirt-colored, slim, belligerent,
Each furnished with a prominent
Accessory featured in their shtick,
Unvocal, yet grandiloquent
Displayed against white sand and brick.

Say X has accidentally
Invaded turf big Z has spent
His little life defending; Z
Does jerky push-ups, does Present-
Throat-flat (inflated? through a vent?),
Out-in, out-in, erotic tic
Of warning — Pounce! and *skitter* went
Displayed-Against. White sand and brick

Are not much less intelligent,
Frankly. They'll "flap" a leaf or stick,
Bright membrane flashing Go! Repent!
Displayed against white sand and brick.

The reptile brain is cold and small,
No space, no need for judgment there.
Watch. In the deepest Turtle Kraal
A monstrous head pokes up for air,
Lairpet of Grendel's, chased from lair
To scare up dinner. Jaws of dread
Gasp open. Eyes of earthenware
Identify. The loggerhead

Lunges on cue; the guide will trawl
A chunk of rotten lobster where
He'll strike. Abruptly I recall
The moth aflutter on the bare
Floorboards, the little lizard's stare,
Fixed, from the threshold, how it sped
Across the varnish . . . yes. Compare?
Identify? the loggerhead

Who wallows, tries to climb the wall,
Whose ton of crushing-power can tear
A man in chunks and eat him all,
Whose fins thrash up the mal de mer,
Who now, with all that force to spare,
Crushes the bait and sinks like lead.
A blond child shrieks. These kinds of scare
Identify the loggerhead

And lizard with its charming flare
Round as a flannel tongue and red.
Look long, think well before you dare
Identify the loggerhead.

A green iguana spined with plates
Blinks at the tourist with a ques-
tion not these flattened welterweights':
Where are the dinosaurs of yes-
ter-Age? New Zealand and Loch Ness,
Pygmy Iguanodon, poor thing.
That clockwork, kneejerk, passionless
Instinct persists, but Reason's king.

It's Sophosaurus rex who baits
The sea-troll Instinct now. I guess
I'm glad — though how he tolerates
That filthy pool — ! (As Freud would stress,
Whatever dragon we repress
Befouls its prison.) Evening
Brings us to ours, we both undress,
Instinct persists . . . but Reason's king

Here where a white bar melts, and spates
Of filtered water effervesce,
Pure azure balm that liquidates
Disturbing thoughts, the turtle mess,
The saurian heat, the — S.O.S.?
Again? This same dumb lizardling
Keeps trying, with the same success —
Instinct persists (but Reason's king

Or else) — to scale the tiles. Noblesse
Oblige, a royal palm's frayed wing
Retrieves him from a giantess.
Instinct persists but Reason's king.

These trinkets, David – waterslick
Pool tiling, tiny splayfeet spread
On surface tension (rhetoric?),
Sea monster in his muckbath fed
On rot, display in tropicbed –
All thanks to you. The length of string
They're threaded on is only thread:
Instinct-persists-but-Reason's-king.