

R E C O L L E C T E D   I N  
T R A N Q U I L L I T Y



C L I V E   J A M E S

You realize that this is no reprieve  
But merely a delay?  
The comedy must end. The way it ends  
Has just been put off to another day.  
Perhaps two months from now, perhaps two years,  
It will be known to family and friends  
That you, at last, are more dead than alive,  
With nothing left to say.  
When any tears there are will be their tears,  
Not yours, the wave of silence will arrive  
With which you leave.

So this must be the storm before the lull,  
These webs of words  
Slowly assembled at the summer's peak  
Here in the portico of your downfall,  
As you sit watchfully to count the birds –  
So few beside the Heathrow rush of spring –  
Which in the garden briefly peck and preen  
Before continuing  
To Finland, Iceland, Baffin Land, wherever:  
Your chance to speak before you never speak  
Again, your next to final scene.

This peace, which will be perfect by and by,  
Came out of chaos. When the drugs went wrong  
It almost seemed a burden not to die  
As I shared that Babelic rumpus room

With the trouser thief and the lady with one song  
She sang forever. Racing, my brain teemed  
With stuff to tell the doctors so they might  
Unbolt the door, but that place was a tomb  
Sealed tight. I ate my sleeping pills and dreamed  
Of all I could have had –

The happiness I wasted. Now, set free,  
I see that my whole life  
Had been a greedy fever. A sad spell  
Of frenzy only summed it up. My wife  
And daughters built this studio for me  
In which I read and write and rest. They know  
Something ill-mended in my mind demands  
I live alone. And so they come and go  
To help me do that, and so all is well,  
As I wait for the day the last bird lands  
And nightfall finally

Blankets my vision of this bright arcade.  
Outside, in that cane chair,  
I sat to read *The Faerie Queene* and found  
Garbled accounts of knights and damsels made  
Melodic sense, in verse as light as air.  
On this desk, crowded as a burial mound  
With treasured papers, my Chinese notebook,  
Full of unfinished thoughts, will still be there,  
When I, at last, can't reach it. Should things look  
As if I knew despair, of this be sure:  
I loved it here.