



## Introduction

**I**N THE PRE-DAWN OF 19 MARCH 2006, David Mitchell did a runner from the Alexandra Rest Home in Newtown, Wellington, where he had been housed for the previous year. It was no itinerant's flit, nor spur-of-the-moment thing. He was in trouble and he knew it. He needed help. His body systems were breaking down. He dressed in the dark and slipped out to a taxi waiting in Rintoul Street. He had with him his passport and an airline ticket bought with money scrimped from his invalid's pension. The driver popped the boot and placed therein a portable typewriter, a back-pack and a well travelled suitcase containing clothes, letters, papers, cricketing memorabilia and all the manuscripts that he possessed, both the originals and the photocopies bound into thick blue volumes. He left behind the usual detritus—and the bronze Katherine Mansfield Fellow medal he had been awarded in 1975. The taxi took him to the airport at Rongotai, where he boarded the early flight for Sydney. His daughter Sara lived there. He had phoned ahead and she would be at the other end to meet him. It was the latest, perhaps the last, of many flights to Australia. Steal away, boy . . .

**HIS PARENTS CAME FROM ELSEWHERE.** His father, David Eric Mitchell, was born into an Irish Jewish family in western Sydney in 1880; he was not partial to school and ran away to sea aged twelve; when he couldn't get a ship, he went rabbiting in the outback. In World War I he was a stoker on troop carriers and then a deckhand in the trans-Tasman trade; in 1923 he was paid off and put ashore at Napier after a cargo sling tore and dropped a length of rail iron that crushed his foot. Mitchell's mother, Rossetta Cousins, born 1903 in Strathclyde, was the fourth of nine children who,

## A Letter

I am here my love  
beneath an apricot sky.

Summer is a young girl,  
her voice is thick

in these green islands.

The valley gorse was burning  
last week. Quietly in the night.

Tonight it is warm. Just a song bird  
and the hills.

It is not lonely, but very slow.

I am here my love.  
This is all

my beauty.

## day & tide

1.  
today

in the small heat  
of a morning courtyard  
behind the sky stilled leaves  
seven men sit  
on seven small stools

hand chin  
to elbow knee'd  
while above them  
in that clean blue arch  
the steady sun turns to its timeless tune

before them  
in the garden  
lies the cool lady  
spoilng in the stillness  
of their regular gaze

i weep and walk down  
the white chalk hill  
to dine alone  
at a bright wooden table  
immaculate  
on the beach.

2.  
the tide has not quite come  
and there are crescents in the sand  
wind crescents  
at the dry summit

round the baked rim  
these thirsting elements swoon  
in that blue reverence  
enamoured am i of walking

the busies don't understand  
the ironing board pleasure

of walking

the meet heat  
of the slow solemn feet  
and . . . . . the sand !

3.  
the tide has not yet come  
and there are wet sea laps  
where the lappings are

daisies !                      daisies ?  
yes.    daisies in the sea.

daisies  
in the dog eared shadow  
of the daymoon

the sea, the sea, the  
lunar, lunar sea

4.  
i can afford to smile though  
can't i ?  
with my gullet an ecstasy  
of jingling gums

i can afford to stand on the beach  
at the limit

to toe the never settled line  
with low embarrassed shoes  
and a donnegal tweed coat

silent  
with my hand a bone at my bony brow  
and stagnant hair  
my eyes darting this way or that

i can afford to    can't i ?  
that's the insurmountable joy of it !