

At Bluecliffs

For My Wife

I'm at the fishing hut, the farthest end of
that curving blade of a beach whetted by tides,
and there's your Dad, comfortable on the doorstep,

knocking the dottle from his pipe, thumbing in
a fresh fill of his favourite tobacco,
Murray's Erinmore Flake, to scent the woodsmoke.

He's not alone: here come his sons-in-law
back from checking out the Waikoau,
Ted always keen to know was it fishable,

and Johnny chuckling still at his lucky find,
a Fiordland lake where big trout lined the shore
like wallflowers at a dance, and not one landed.

And there's your Uncle Bill and cousin Sam,
solid men now sketchy in the glitter.
I hear their voices sounding in my head,

tenor and baritone, as they review
the lamb schedule with cheerful pessimism.
I've finished picking seaweed from the net,

the tea has drawn, your father taps the billy,
sets out five mugs – and at once I know
how they had all come to be here together,

and I must wake up, hoping that I might wake,
desperate that you would wake up too,
to hear that I'd come back, and where I'd been.