

TRUE STORY

In 1920, my grandfather Jack stood black at the foot of his father's coffin,
What have I done? What have I done?
remembering :

They were plodding home at the end of day,
tired ... tools shouldered ... stirring dust from the cattle pad
when his father tripped on a root, twisted and fell.
Surprise and the mattock
made his sharp fall awkward
and the muscles in his belly ripped.

While Jack and his Ma brought his Da home slowly
over bumpy paddocks and rutted tracks,
Isobel galloped for the doctor

Da's heart – so weak they'd moved far north for the climate.
Da's hernia?
The doctor wiped his hands and said – *When the pain gets bad ... keep him still.*

Jack was twelve.
He left his schooling and worked the farm.
Five years on, kind hands calloused,
he watches his father's body,
the question beating,
remembering yesterday :

Isobel, flying through the scrub and screaming :
Jack! Jack! Ma needs you! Da's having another attack!
He vaulted the rails and ran.

Outside the house, the little ones huddled.
Inside – chaos.
Da – writhing on the bed and roaring, so far gone with the fire in his gut ...
Flung about the room were sisters, furniture, mother - face bloodied –
Oh Jack, thank God, – we can't hold him ...

Jack tried to pin his Da to the bed, but he fought so hard –
So he clenched their bodies tight together ...
Then the roaring turned to a scream
that choked and rattled in his ear ...
He felt the heart's frantic bashing ...
the fight in the man collapsing,
his father's body limp and sweaty in his arms ...

His mother fraught beside him,
Jack clenched a body, limp and sweaty in his arms

Jack staggered out, afraid and away, the question beating –
What have I done?... What have I done?