

**The Novice And The Bard** page one

He hailed me with a handshake on a dusty road to somewhere;  
my quick appraisal told me I could bite him for a meal.  
Delivering his florins, he produced a pen and paper –  
“Would coaching by The Master be considered as a deal?”

I eyed my hopeful rhymers while I thought about his question  
and thanked him for directions to an eating place in town.  
“Accept this verse,” I answered, “to repay the coins you’ve spared me;  
it’s all I have to offer as my poet’s luck is down.

*The deference you show me is a comfort to my ego;  
in truth it’s had a beating from my introspective hand.  
A troubled life’s behind me and the way ahead’s uncertain;  
I write a weary collage of our vast and varied land.*

*The grist I gather daily makes my hot-devoured poems;  
the damper for my readers, while they watch their billies boil.  
Those dreamers and romantics drift, protected from the burden  
of struggles for survival, as my faceless heroes’ toil:*

*My Ne’er-do-wells and Sweeneys, in a score of down-and-outers,  
my Drover’s Wife past caring for her role of lonely hack.  
They’re real to me as moonlight snakes that ripple down a river;  
their ghostly glances haunt me when I tramp along the track.*

*I’ve humped my swag with swells and bums, with willing souls and bludgers,  
the ones you can depend on and the ones who’ll shake you down.  
A hundred seats on Cobb & Co and midnight trains I’ve polished,  
en-route to ‘Eldorado’ or some boarding house in town. 12*

**The Novice And The Bard** page two

*I've heard the hum of shearing sheds, their rouseabouts' arousal  
when savaged by a squatter or his pens of burry rams.*

*I've tagged along with Andy, droving cattle down the Lachlan  
in easy-riding mimicry, like business-men on trams."*

The fellow took my scribbles with an air of satisfaction  
and eyed them, as a pilgrim might inspect the Holy Grail.  
Two drafts among the dozens that have fallen by my wayside –  
the jottings of a writer as he pauses by the trail.

*"You dream to emulate me man," I said. "I like your spirit!  
A poet's pen is lonely and the counsel kept's his own.  
Our bush is full of heartaches, every writer soon discovers,  
when tapping folk for wisdom with the skills we pare and hone."*

*"I'm grateful to my maker for this hand which He has dealt me,  
though bitter lees I swallow just as often as the sweet.  
I cannot wish you anguish, friend, that's stock-in-trade of poets  
and hope you're still a dreamer, if we chance again to meet."*

**'The Novice And The Bard' Footnote**

The "deal" between Henry Lawson and the hopeful novice actually happened. Two handwritten drafts of unpublished and unauthenticated poems by the bard are now held by his family as treasured heirlooms. To have them verified, they would need to gift them to the authenticating body. Would you?