

Beyond the Handshake

I shook his hand and said "G'day, how're ya doin mate"?
The last time we met at the old farm gate.
His grin was broad as he said "Yeah, can't complain,
'though it would be good to see some bloody rain."

I'd known him for most of my life.
We'd both taken on the family farms with our wives.
Life was good, 'though sometimes tough
But I never heard him complain or say he'd had enough.

We yacked a while about this and that.
Two old friends making idle chat.
There was nothing in his words that day,
to show that this would be our last G'day.

"Well, better be going mate, the work wont get done on it's own"
"and it's almost dinner time and Jen will be expectin' me home"
They were the last words I ever heard him speak.
Next day I learned they'd found him down by the creek.

I knew the drought was taking it's toll on all of us.
The crops were failing, the earth was dust.
What I didn't know was how bad it was for Slim
or how he felt it was all closing in on him.

The bank was takin' the farm he'd worked for all his life
He thought he'd failed his kids and wife,
Alone, inside his personal hell he couldn't share with anyone,
he drove down to the creek with that bloody gun.

From a small boy he's been taught a man must stand tall and never cry.
To take whatever life throws up and never question why.
Hard lessons taught by his father, a man who always seemed so strong.
If he'd only seen inside his father's mind he'd have known that image was wrong.

Jenny told of how they'd found him there in his old ute.
They buried him the following Monday in his best suit..
The neighbours rallied 'round her and helped with the kids
And talked about their mate who'd always said "I wouldn't be dead for quids"

While I just sat on my porch lost in thought,
It was a valuable lesson that Slim had taught.
We ask a mate "how it's goin" We share a yarn or two.
But we never really say what's on our mind or ask is everything ok with you?

If I had that day to live again, I know what I would do.
I'd know what was on his mind, the hell he was going through.
"Cause I'd ask "How're you *really* doing mate?"
And I'd go beyond the handshake at the old farm gate.