

The Rotary Club of Richmond

presents

The Slade Literary Award

Sponsored by Mark Slade
in memory of his uncle, Rotarian Henry Slade

Winning Entries 2012

Winning Entry: "**Harry and Albert**"

by Abigail Fisher, Melbourne Girls' College

Runner-up: "**Forget Me Not**"

by Ginger Argiro, Melbourne Girls' College

ESL Winning Entry: "**Secret**"

by Daphne Pang, Balwyn High School

Encouragement Award: "**The Charnel House**"

by Sarina Barkho, Brunswick Secondary College

Welcome to the Slade Literary Awards 2012

The Slade Awards are named in honour of the late Henry Slade who founded the competition in 1993 and sponsored it until his death in 2005. These awards aim to encourage literary skills and offer the opportunity to showcase the creative talents of students in Years 9 and 10 within the City of Yarra and neighbouring municipalities.

All participants are required to submit a piece of original prose or poetry up to 1000 words on a topic of their choice. This work is then read and evaluated by a panel of judges who are looking for creativity, originality, fluency, enthusiasm and appeal.

Award Prizes

Winner: *Cash prize of \$200 & books up to a retail value of \$50*

Runner-Up: *Cash prize of \$150 & books up to a retail value of \$50*

ESL Winner: *Cash prize of \$150 & a book up to a retail value of \$50*

[Awarded to the best entry (other than the winner and runner-up) from a student who qualifies as an 'English as a Second Language' (ESL) student:]

Certificate of Encouragement: *Certificate of Encouragement and a book up to a retail value of \$50*

The Slade Criteria

We use five main criteria to reach our conclusions. These are:

Creativity - the treatment of the subject in a fresh, lively and interesting way. The subject itself does not need to be novel.

Originality - the novelty of the subject. Is the work about an unusual subject or new idea?

Fluency - how well was the English language handled? How well was the piece structured? A good writer has to have a grasp of grammar and vocabulary that raises the text above the tedious, jumbled and mundane. The author must also have a good grasp of the importance of structure and variety of style.

Conviction - did it sound convincing? Did the author make the reader believe in them? If the author is talking about their emotions, the reader needs to be convinced the emotion is genuine to be swept along.

Appeal - more than an enjoyable experience: did it hook the judges? Did we want to keep reading? We don't mean just a feel-good experience: the writer had to keep us wanting to know what is coming next. This is the most difficult criterion to deal with as it is so subjective for the individual reader

Harry and Albert

By Abigail Fisher

Melbourne Girls' College

Winner

The sun was sending last, regretful rays of farewell over Venice Beach as it sunk over the horizon. The shopping strip had gotten a little busier, its characters seedier and more desperate as darkness approached. There is a place for everything at the beach, night time especially, and the light continued obligingly to get weaker and more golden as evening progressed.

A little way down the sand were the chess players, clustered in small group at various wooden tables, playing that slow and calculated board game under the shade of large umbrellas. Despite the approaching darkness, many of the games were just beginning.

One, however, was coming to an end.

The two men playing were old, presumably approaching eighty, and they shared between them that comfortable silence that takes years of practice to perfect. They both watched as a weathered hand moved a knight two spaces forward and to the left.

The hand belonged to the older of the two, Albert. He was older by just six months, which was naturally of no significance anymore, but had been when they were both younger and half a year was a reasonable proportion of their lives. His face was sturdy and brown, written upon by the sun and the years, with blue eyes that showed an amused sort of concentration as he peered down at the board and occasionally up at his companion.

The second player gazed calculatingly at the arrangement of the pieces before moving his rook in conjunction with Albert's king. His hands were paler, and shook a little as they moved the piece.

"Check mate," said the man to his friend. This was Harry, and it was the second time he had won that day. Neither of them minded, really, or even counted the scores. Harry himself was in the very early stages of dementia; some days were better than others, and he often felt a win like this was a small victory over his disease, as opposed to his friend.

Albert smiled, a gentle smile of defeat, and stretched a little.

"What time is it?" he asked. Harry peered down at his watch.

"Seven forty-five. We should get going."

After chess the two men always walked along the beach. They set off slowly, the twinkling lights of Santa Monica pier far off behind them. Albert walked with a slight limp in his left leg, one of many souvenirs from his days in the army, and it was visible in the footprints the two men left in the sand. As they walked they made easy, natural conversation that ebbed and flowed in a way not unlike that of the ocean beside them.

Albert brought up his eldest daughter, Katrina, who had just started a new job in a law firm. He was worried that she had too much on her plate—two young kids at home, and another on the way. "I know she knows what she's doing, but you can't help worrying, can you?" He looked over at his friend.

Harry agreed that you couldn't help it, but that Katrina seemed like she was very happy. Albert smiled.

"It's true. She knows what she wants."

Harry laughed. "Katrina's always known what she wanted." Harry had a soft spot for Albert's eldest fiery daughter, with her hot temper and fierce determination. He had two sons of his own, and three grandchildren who lived with their father in Arizona. He saw them only at Christmas and was sometimes scared by his occasional inability to picture their faces.

At 23rd Avenue they turned, leaving the beach and entering the suburban streets as they made their way to the corner where they would part—Albert to his large blue house, along the canal to the right, and Harry to the car park where he'd left his car earlier in the afternoon.

It was getting much darker now, the sun barely strong enough to illuminate the horizon, let alone their way through the streets. Harry's frame seemed frail next to his companion's sturdy build, and it could easily have been assumed that throughout their friendship he'd been protected by Albert. This had never been the case, not as children, nor as teenagers, and certainly not during his friend's long years in the army. Where Harry had once been the maths tutor and advice-giver, he later became a trusted confidant and the only medical professional that Albert would agree to see.

It was only now, with the onset of old age, that the roles had become somewhat reversed. This was hard for Harry; it is often easier to step up and look after a friend than it is to admit you need help yourself.

When they reached the corner Harry went to say goodbye, but Albert hesitated. "Why don't I walk with you to the car? It's not too far, and sometimes those parking lots can be confusing."

"I'll be fine." Harry replied dismissively.

Albert looked unconvinced. "Just let me come, I could do with the walk anyway."

"Drop it, okay?" snapped Harry. "I can find my own damn car." There was a brief, tense silence and then he softened. "I'm sorry. You know what? It'd be nice to have the company."

"I'm sorry too, Harry," said Albert, resting his hand briefly on his friend's shoulder.

"It's fine." Harry sighed. "You're right, anyway. There's no harm in being safe, and I guess I can't deny it forever." The two men set off down the sidewalk, Albert picking up the conversation where it had been left off.

"Did I ever tell you that story about the taxi driver? Suzanne was telling me..."

Harry had heard it, but he didn't mind, and his gentle laugh rung out through the street when necessary. They passed over another canal and their voices echoed softly off the stagnant water below. Several stars were becoming visible in the velvety sky, faint pinpricks of light shining against the blue as the two old friends made their way through the night.

Forget Me Not
By Ginger Argiro

Melbourne Girls' College
Runner-up

Anna Greenwood was in desperate need of a shower. Mud and fertilizer had stained both the knees of her baggy, faded overalls, seeping into the frayed threads of the denim and soaking her skin beneath it. Tiny granules of earth were wedged underneath her chipped fingernails, outlining the whorls on the pads of her fingers. The ends of her dark hair were frizzy from the humidity of her mother's garden, the shorter strands closest to her scalp plastered to her sweaty forehead. A faint smell of dampness and manure had drifted into the hallway as Anna closed her front door behind her, the scent wafting through the still air with each movement she made. She dumped her faded grey handbag by the door and traipsed down the hallway, treading mud from her clunky boots into the carpet.

Her mother was getting worse, Anna could tell. When she had arrived that morning at the ramshackle cottage she had lived in for the first twenty one years of her life, it had looked peaceful and unassuming. It looked no different to the way it always did when Anna turned up on a Saturday morning to help her mother in the garden. The red paisley curtains were drawn at the windows, and her father's old mucky gumboots were still sitting by the welcome mat, unworn for five years now.

She had rung the doorbell, and listened as the clanging tones interrupted the lonely silence that always reigned in her mother's house, echoing throughout the quiet, empty rooms. The doorbell fell silent and Anna had waited patiently. It wasn't unusual for her mother to take a while to answer the door. Anna knew it was hard for her to ease herself out of her armchair and shuffle up second time, and when again she couldn't hear her mother's dusky pink slippers hobbling towards her, she pulled the spare key from under a pot of geraniums.

The door creaked on its hinges as Anna tentatively pushed it open. A sense of foreboding gripped her as she crossed the threshold, her mind racing at the thought of what could face her as she travelled deeper into the house. She could just picture her mother's slight form slumped in her armchair, her bony hands cold and slack around an abandoned cup of tea. But the voice that Anna could hear drifting up the hallway from the kitchen was very much alive.

"Hello?" it said. "Hello, who is it?" Anna sped up and shoved her shoulder against the closed kitchen door. She fumbled with the door handle, turning it the wrong way in her panic. As the door gave way, Anna fell into the room, stumbling over the rip in her mother's brown lino. Her mother was standing by the phone on the wall, clutching it to her ear in frantic desperation.

"Hello?" she said again, her hoarse voice trembling. "Roger, is that you?"

Anna stared at her mother's stooped frame, faded blue dressing gown hanging loose about her hunched shoulders. Her thin white hair was tousled, and the prominent veins on her hands gave the impression that she had plunged them into spider-webs.

"Mum," Anna slowly moved towards her mother, her boots making tracks on the dusty floor. She placed a hand on her mother's shoulder and waited for her to realise she was there.

“Sh, I’m on the phone, dear,” exclaimed her mother, perplexed at the sudden appearance of her daughter. Anna gently prised the phone from her mother’s tight grip and held it to her ear, listening intently. All she could hear was the steady bleat of the dial tone.

“Mum, there’s no one there,” she said. Her voice was hushed and steady, despite the cold fear that gripped her whenever her mother did something truly senile.

“But there is, I heard it ringing!” Her mother stared indignantly at Anna, desperation in her beady, drooping eyes as she willed her daughter to understand.

“No mum, that was just me ringing the doorbell.” Anna’s voice was quivering. She could feel an all too familiar lump rising in her throat. The fact that her mother was no longer the strong, steady woman she had for so long been terrified Anna. She could remember a time when just the smell of her mother’s lavender perfume on her cardigan could comfort her. She was frequently reminded of the way things used to be, mundane situations confronting her with memories when she least expected it. She could be sitting on the train and hear the tinny sound of ‘You Are My Sunshine’ emanating from some busy shopper’s headphones and suddenly she was six years old, in bed with chickenpox, her mother singing away the tears of frustration.

And even though it had been almost forty years since her worries could disappear with a lullaby, Anna knew nothing could make her forget that everything had once been that simple. It panicked Anna immensely that her mother was rapidly losing control of her own life, and she knew that a song could never erase the problems she was faced with now.

Anna took hold of her mother’s sleeve. The flannelette shirt she wore beneath her dressing gown was buttoned up crookedly.

“Why did you hang up?” her mother asked forlornly. “It might have been Roger.”

Anna began to walk, leading her mother out of the house that had not been a home since her father’s death.

“Don’t worry, mum,” said Anna pacifyingly. “He’ll call back.” As she closed the back door behind them, Anna looked out upon the flowerbed behind the garden shed. Her father had lovingly tended to it every day he had lived there, talking to the azaleas and rhododendrons as though they were his children. Every Saturday since he had been stolen away by cancer’s stalwart grip, Anna and her mother had watered the forget-me-nots, clipped the rose bushes, pulled up the weeds. And it pained Anna to think that her mother had long been too frail to continue her father’s work.

* * *

With a sigh, Mrs. Greenwood sank her frail, aching bones onto a worn garden bench, clutching a cup of iced tea. As the mid-morning sun formed pools of sweat on the back of her neck, she watched as the dumpy middle-aged woman who claimed to be her daughter sank her knees into the soil. Something in the way this woman nodded her head as she hummed to herself seemed familiar, but as she closed her eyes against the sun’s intolerable glare, the old lady thought only of the six year old girl she had long-ago sung to sleep and wondered where she could possibly have disappeared to.

Secret
A secret makes a woman woman
-Vermouth (Detective Conan)
By Daphne Pang

Balwyn High School
ESL Winner

What's the secret about?
In Ann's diary
She wrote:
"Kelly lost her school bag.
She was really sad."
I was the only one
Who helped her look for the bag?
She said:
"You are my best friend!"
In the toilet
The bag was found.
It's the secret to friendship

The secret is: I threw the bag there.

What's the secret about?
In Fiona's diary
She wrote:
"In the classroom the girls come and go
Talking of Michelangelo"
They say he looks very old.
I agree and I nod.
They say "let's leave him alone".
I say "that's good".
They say "leave him alone" all around
I know he may have no friends from now on.
It's the secret to vanity.

The secret is: He is my brother.

What's the secret about?
In Irene's diary.
She wrote:
"Teachers think I am good.
Classmates think I am cool."
They all like me
And me too
There is also someone
Who always puts a rose
Inside my desk in the classroom
Or outside my home.
It's the secret of youth

The secret is: All the thing's above are not true.

What's the secret about?
In Lilith's diary
She wrote:
"My cat is away.
It can't find its way"
I try to find it anyway,
But there is no way.
It must be weak
And I'm nearly sick
Finally I find the cat,
It's dead in the dustbin in the laneway.
It's the secret to death.

The secret is: I killed the cat

What's the secret about?
In Vivian's diary
She wrote:
"I said goodbye to him.
I don't want to stay with him."
I said I have fallen in love
With others, not him.
He didn't want to leave.
I slapped him and I left.
I hate him.
I love him.
It's the secret to love.

The secret is: I have cancer and I am going to leave.

The Charnel House

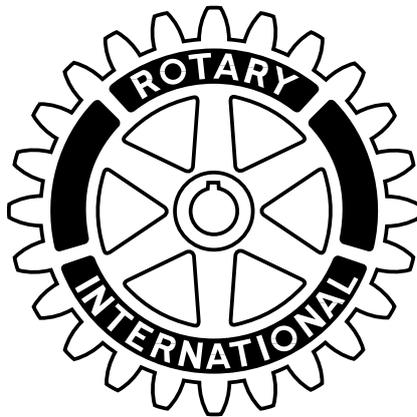
By Sarina Barkho

Brunswick Secondary College
Encouragement Award

I pay my respects to those who lay,
Beneath the soil, out at bay.
Their souls lay peacefully, undisturbed,
Beneath this evil hard-ridden world.
Their souls lay happily, as their bones not
They sit in the Charnel House, beginning to rot.
Maggots, and other infective creatures,
Crawl and munch on delicate features.

I pay my respects to those who lay,
Beneath the soil, out at bay.
I weep quietly and oh so hastily,
Fearing the bones precious safety.
May these people never rest?
Do creatures see this simply jest?

I pay my respects to those that lay,
Beneath the soil, out at bay.
I make my way home, quiet as a mouse,
I wish peace for those, in the Charnel House.



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