

Singapore HeritageFest 2009
“Arte (factually) Speaking” Story-Writing Competition
2nd Prize Winner (Lower Secondary Category)



Contest ID: 24
Name: Koh Jin Kiat
Gender: Male
Age: 14-year-old
NRIC: SXXXX845C
Nationality: Singaporean
School: Raffles Institution

Artefact: Loss of the Fame
Museum: National Museum of Singapore

It was my fault

I looked at the grey building, with the word "Orphanage" above the entrance. Minutes ago, I had escaped from THAT dreaded place. Months before, I had been in a warm home with two loving parents.

That was before dysentery struck.

I rounded the corner to the port, guided by my nose.

I had envisioned docks full of glorious ships with billowing sails, crewed by tall men with muscled arms and bare torsos.

What greeted me, frankly, was disappointing.

I was met with the stench of rotten fish and sweat. The ships were plentiful, as imagined, but were covered with barnacles. The men were rowdy, with scars enough for all of Britain.

I wandered around, lost. Trouble-magnet that I am, I barrelled into a well-dressed man with wavy hair, interrupting him mid-sentence "...cannot leave port without - oomph!" I cringed as he turned.

"Please, sir, I did not do that on purpose, really!"

Instead of "giving me what I deserved" as others would, he said "That's all right lad. You're alone?"

I mumbled that my parents had died, and I wanted to fulfil my dream of sailing.

His face grew sombre. "Sorry to hear that. How would you like to join the good ship *Fame* as a pantry boy? It might be hard, but you will have food, and maybe make some friends. Think about it. If you decide to take me up on my offer, ask for Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles."

My response was instant. "I'll go!" He wheeled around so suddenly I thought I had done something wrong. Instead, he shook my hand. "Glad to have you on board, Master....?"

"Phillip Swain. My friends call me Noddy because of my big head."

So I found myself as assistant to John Cook, for, true to his name, he was the ship's cook. He liked to say, "All Cooks are cooks. If I'm not a cook, then by golly, I'm not a true Cook!"

Sir Thomas made sure I had enough to eat and a hammock to sleep in. And I was happy.

Years passed and I progressed from cook's assistant to assistant cook. There were no changes in my duties whatsoever, but what harm was there?

It was one night when we had just left Singapore port. There was a commotion on deck. I left the beans and rice and raced upstairs.

"Meteorites!" The tumult of voices quietened as the night sky was lit up by a multitude of meteors. We watched, spellbound.

I would not have remembered the food at all, but for the sudden smell of burning.

I did not even remember that the man who had helped me fulfil my seafaring dream was aboard, as were his priceless specimens of flowers and animals, and his jewels.

Nothing could be done. The fire raged out of control. We had to abandon ship. Rather than run the risk of meeting Sir Thomas on a lifeboat and facing his wrath, I swam for Singapore. I settled down there, and I'm still here now.

The old man smiled at the four Eurasian children sprawled on the floor, looking at their grandfather. "Is it true, Grandpa Noddy?"

Somewhere in the sea, not far from the shores of Singapore, a fish dug in the sand. It heaved away a plate inscribed with "Raffles", revealing jewels beneath.

(553 words)