

**Singapore HeritageFest 2009**  
**“Arte (factually) Speaking” Story-Writing Competition**  
**Shortlisted Entry (Lower Secondary Category)**



Contest ID: 196  
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Artefact: Loss of the Fame  
Museum: National Museum of Singapore

The last voyage of Fame

The artist furrowed his brows and stared intently at the blank canvas; perhaps graphics would magically appear on its smooth white surface and he would not have to revisit the night that haunted his dreams. His paintbrush hovered above the dirty palette; dried paint hardened unattractively at its edges. Beads of sweat dribbled down his pain-stricken face. He could paint from memory; it was easy; all he had to do was close his eyes-

2nd February 1824: The Fame sailed through the vast midnight blue sea towards England. The artist- much younger, with a youthful, energetic face and bright twinkling blue eyes. The ship's lobby had an aura of grandeur. Women in Victorian gowns and paper fans clung onto the arms of their male counterparts. The air was merry, with the chatter of women, and gallant laughter of men. The artist ambled down the grand spiral staircase; carpeted in red and gold, with mahogany wood railings. He smiled as he made his way through the crowd to a beautiful young lady. A white lace gown outlined her petite figure. Curls escaped her elaborate hairdo, twirling delicately at the nape of her neck. Elizabeth. My Elizabeth-

The artist forced his eyes open with a guttural sound. He must not get distracted. He closed his eyes, sifting through the memories-

Suddenly, a bloodcurdling scream pierced the air. He made out some of the hurried chatters as chaos broke out. Fire...? It made his throat dry. He grabbed Elizabeth's hand and flew up the stairs towards their room.

"What ails you? What is wrong, dear one?" She demanded. "Fire," he explained, "I know not why, but we have to jump ship." Horror-struck, they snatched up their few valuables. Then the two of them fled.

"Ladies first!" The uniformed men on the deck hollered as frantic ladies pushed through the desperate crowd to get onto the boats. He gripped her shoulders tightly. "Fear not; we shall get to England safely and I will wed thee there," he promised, his fingers brushing her cheek. "Go!" With a push, she stumbled, climbing onto a boat. A backward glance; tears of love and sorrow; and she was gone.

He pushed his way through the crowd; a full life boat was being lowered down into the murky waters. With an agile leap, he leapt onto the boat and held on. The boat rolled away hastily. He caught his breath. Beside him, a handsome young man cried out; his face contorting in grief as flames engulfed the ship. His possessions on the ship had meant the world to him. Flames and smoke were swallowing the ship as small boats escaped away; it was magnificently frightening.

The artist opened his eyes, his brush unknowingly danced against the canvas; painting his nightmare. Powerful emotions unleashed through swift strokes.

The scene appeared; portrayed in uncanny similarity. Exhausted, his paintbrush clanked to the floor noisily. He fell to his knees. The truth was he never saw Elizabeth again; she was lost at sea. After all the years, he finally opened up his heart; his shoulders shook with racking sobs; and he cried.

"No sir; I know not of her," the man shrugged apologetically as he tied the boat to the dock. The artist clenched his fists as his heart slammed into his ribcage. Elizabeth. He turned and walked away aimlessly. He knew not how long he would walk; maybe a day; ten days. Or maybe forever.

(574 words)