

Meeting Ms. Anna

By Liliana

My name is Rio, an ordinary kid of a so-so family in this capital of Indonesia. It is December 19, 2117 which means I will celebrate my 9th birthday in five days. Just like the previous birthdays, my parents allow me to request what present I want from them. And just like the other years, I ask them to make me a dish of fresh fish. "Oh, dear, you know that it is not possible for us to make it for you." That is exactly the same answer I get every year for asking a dish of fresh fish for my birthday.

Last two years, when I asked them the same thing, they came out with grilled chicken which they cut into a form of fish. And last year, they made some snacks from tofu shaped like fish for me. So what I have so far for my birthday were chicken, tofu and other meat and ingredient in a form of fish. I thank them every time they made the dish for me as I know they had tried their best. Oh, also, in every fish-like dish they prepared, they put some fish flavor available in supermarket in it.

Alright, that's enough about my birthday. Now, it is time to go to school.

"Good morning, kids!" Ms. Anna greeted us with full spirit as usual. She is the youngest teacher in this school. The rest of the teachers are forty years old and more. We actually had some young teachers before but those ended up leaving the school and do something else. "For today's theme, we will talk about animal. Could you name me five animals that you usually see?" Ms. Anna starts the lesson. Diana, the smartest kid in the class quickly raises her hand.

"Yes, Diana."

"Dog, cat, chicken, ant, and lizard."

"Alright, that's good"

"Anyone else?"

A student then raises his hand.

"Yes, Tommy."

"Bird, mosquito, fly, mouse, and cockroach"

"Good"

Tommy is a kid of less fortunate family. His father is working as a parking man and his mother is working as a housemaid. Every day after school, Tommy goes to Ancol beach to work as a trash taker. And most importantly, Tommy has never tasted a fish in his life. I am lucky that I could eat fish at least once in a year. Every 17 of August, the government lowers the price of fish so family could buy some fish for their family but of course with limited number of purchase for every family. My father usually comes home with two long jawed mackerel on that day.

Diana, on the other hand, could eat fish at least once in a month. As her parents working as high level officer in a company where my parents are working as staffs, her parents could afford the synthesis fish sold in some supermarkets.

“Alright, to conclude our topic on animal, I would like to invite you to the city planetarium tomorrow at 9 AM. Please bring your note and pen with you tomorrow.” Ms. Anna ends the lesson.

At 9 AM sharp, everyone has arrived at the only planetarium in this city. Ms. Anna does the headcount and helps us with the entry process. Ms. Anna always works hard to introduce us to different thing outside the class. And all the entry tickets today are paid by her.

Today, we see things we have never seen before. We see many beautiful fish, shrimps, octopus, crabs, and other see living animal as well as corals and seaweeds. Ms. Anna tells us that everything we see were actually living in the sea years before but then forced to die by trash people throw into the river that flows to the sea and gathered in the ocean. That is why it is difficult for people to eat fresh fish nowadays. My mother once told me that a kilogram of tuna on the ordinary day equaled to a roundtrip airplane ticket from Jakarta to Bangkok. That is why we have more cow and chicken meat for dinner.

“My father was a fisherman when I was in your age.” Ms. Anna started a lunch time story.

“He would leave house at late evening and came back in the late afternoon or early evening with some buckets of fish in his boat. He took almost everything he got to the fish auction and brought some home for dinner.”

“Back then, I had fish for dinner almost every single day. But things are not the same anymore as the globalization kicked in and people became absolutely ignorant about the environment especially the ocean. Because of the limited land for waste management, more people take shortcut to get rid of their trash by throwing it away in the river or purposely bring it to the sea.”

“It has been twenty years since my father left his job as a fisherman because there is no fish to catch. Many have died as the result of polluted water.” Ms. Anna looked sad that she unable to continue her sentence.

Everyone is in silent trying to put together all images in Ms. Anna story. None of us has a picture of a fisherman and fish for almost every day dinner.

“Rio! Rio! Rio!” I heard my mother’s voice.

“Happy birthday, my boy!” said my mother while giving me a warm hug. “You are 29 now. Not so young anymore.” She finishes her sentence.

I was in the middle of confusion. So it was a nightmare that I had minutes ago.

“Mom, what do we have for my birthday dinner?”

“Your favorite dish of fresh fish of course.”

“How much did you spend for the fish?”

“What kind of question is that? It is normal just Rp 25,000 per kilogram.”

I gave a big sigh responding my mother’s answer. I glance over my calendar. It is December 2017. “Happy birthday to me!”