

Absent Men

Treatment, 16/03/2018

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Logline

With each other's support, a family of women comes to terms with the emotionally constipated men in their lives.

Genre

Relationship drama.

Characters

Hasnah - Elderly woman. Her husband passed away some time ago, after decades of unfulfilling marriage that she is still coming to terms with. She lives with her adult daughter and teenage granddaughter.

Omar - Hasnah's husband, deceased elderly man. In life he found it difficult to express himself emotionally, and the frustration he felt over this often manifested as physical violence.

Kartini - Middle-aged woman. She has just finalised a divorce from her husband of several years, with whom she has a teenage daughter. Initially resistant to the idea of separating, her repeated attempts to rehabilitate their strained relationship failed, because of what she perceived as an unwillingness on her ex-husband's part to meet her halfway. Now it is closure she seeks.

Latiff - Kartini's ex-husband, middle-aged man. His inability to open up and be honest about his feelings contributed to the dissolution of his marriage, but this very nature of his also prevents him from doing anything about it - he is trapped in himself, and he knows it, and it is to his shame.

Shu - Teenage woman. Kartini's daughter. Hasnah's granddaughter. She has seen where her foremothers end up, and is unwilling to make the same mistakes they did.

Ryan - Shu's boyfriend, teenage man. Emotionally unavailable.

Not all of this backstory will be made explicit in the final film, but it will hopefully provide a solid enough basis for their actions such that they feel like three-dimensional, motivated characters.

Synopsis

Latiff returns to what was once home - now Kartini's home, no longer his - to get the last of his belongings out. Kartini meets him at the door with his things. She opens up to him, goading him for closure that he cannot give.

In her bedroom, Hasnah remembers a time when Omar, frustrated with himself, lashed out at her. She feels his absence, both now and then. Kartini enters, and the women embrace.

Elsewhere, Shu decides to break up with a sulking, unresponsive Ryan. "Why?", he asks. "I need someone who will stay", is her response.

Later that night, Shu returns home to Kartini and Hasnah, waiting at the door for her. They take her in, and close the door behind them.

Audiovisual Direction

The visual direction for this film will focus on three aspects: blocking, rhythm and space.

The blocking of scenes, and the rhythms of characters moving through the scenes, work together to set the pace of the film. I hope for the film to deliver a slow but deliberate pace, where actions feel purposeful and have the breathing space to land with weight. To this end I also plan to make use of long takes, where appropriate, for actions to build momentum.

The focus on space relates mainly to the distance between camera and characters, and how that can be used to imply the nature of relationships between characters, or imply the perspective from which the audience is viewing a scene. Boundaries are implied in the narrative and whether characters cross them are to be reflected in physical space as well.

There are three locations in the film, two of which are definitely within a single HDB flat. Their respective significances relate to the narrative being played out at each. The bedroom reflects the intimacy of the scene taking place, that it is within Hasnah's mind. The door to Kartini's home represents a boundary that Latiff is ultimately unable to cross. For Shu and Ryan's scene, the location is almost unimportant, a reflection of Shu's bluntness - no metaphors. Above all I hope for the locations to feel real and lived in, and this will inform the naturalistic approach taken towards set design and lighting.

Sonically I plan to work entirely with diegetic sounds. Silence will also feature heavily, as another way of providing breathing space.

Inspiration

I found myself constantly returning to Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979) while coming up with this film, in terms of its pacing and reflective mood. A particular scene from *Stalker* that resonated, and continues to resonate, with me is that of the main characters as they ride a rickety railway into the Zone. It is nearly five minutes of railway noises and roving close-ups of the characters' faces that build up to create a hypnotic, dreamlike effect. The first extended shot of my film, following Latiff to Kartini's door (detailed in the script and storyboard below), is my humble attempt at reaching something like that.



Sofia Coppola's *Lost in Translation* (2003) is another film close to my heart, (~~problematic as it is,~~) with a naturalistic look to its lighting and locales that I would like to approach with my own film.



Roy Andersson's *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* (2014) gave me the courage to chase the long take and make use of wide shots for more than just establishing spaces.



I was also inspired by Greta Gerwig's *Lady Bird* (2017), and her subsequent comments confirming her intent, specifically about how she used her opening scene as a microcosm of the central conflict between mother and daughter that would play out for the rest of the film. The opening scene of my own film is hopefully similar in function - we see Latiff physically present but mentally distant, the main issue that all the men in the film struggle with in some way.

Music played a big role in my ideation process, in terms of setting the mood and throwing words or phrases out that I could latch on to and extrapolate from. Below is a non-exhaustive list of songs that helped.

This House – Japanese Breakfast

My Enemy – CHVRCHES

In Undertow – Alvvays

You're Not with Me – No Vacation

Does She Even Know – IDER

Shark Smile – Big Thief

Production

Equipment:

Canon EOS 600D

Sony a7sii (tentative)

Tripod

Stabilising gimbal (tentative)

Light reflectors

Filming locations:



Bedroom



Corridor

Tentative Schedule:

18/3 - Bedroom scenes

25/3 - Corridor scenes with Latiff

And additional days to be decided

ABSENT MEN

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INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Close-up of an old woman's eyes, HASNAH's, marked with concern.

EXT. HDB FLAT VOID DECK - SUNSET

Two teenagers, SHU and RYAN, sit side-by-side on the ground, backs against the wall. Ryan is visibly upset. He glares at Shu, who frowns at him in return.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Close-up on an old man's eyes, OMAR's. They dart left to right, left to right - he's reading something. His brow is furrowed.

INT./EXT. HDB FLAT LIFT - DAY

A middle-aged man, LATIFF, stands motionless within the lift. He is dressed semi-formally, collared shirt and tie, dress pants - but disheveled, and sloppy.

His gaze is forward, but his eyes are blank. His mind is elsewhere. Soft light, shining through the window panes on the lift doors, glide over his face, as the lift makes its journey upwards.

The lights settle, and the lift shudders to a stop. With a ring, the doors open.

Latiff steps out onto the lift landing.

With a ring, the doors close behind him.

He walks forward, nary a glance at his surroundings. His feet move slow, and heavy, in a measured, almost mechanical rhythm, carrying him through the corridor. Doors pass by his side, entrances to homes not his own. He pays no attention.

Finally he stops at one, blinking out of his reverie. He turns to face the door. His eyes run over it, taking in its mundane detailing.

He reaches a hand into his pants pocket, rummages around, pauses - his other hand starts searching as well, his various pockets, flustered - then he remembers, and he stops, with a defeated sigh.

He gathers himself, and knocks on the door.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Seated on the side of his bed, Omar, brow furrowed, silently reads a LETTER in his hands. Next to him, a TORN-OPEN ENVELOPE. Next to that, Hasnah. She watches him with concern.

His eyes run through the words in the letter, over and over, as though he can't quite comprehend the message - "... the results of recent testing performed... a 'POSITIVE' test result... important to find the cause... make an appointment as soon as possible..."

Hasnah reaches out, and places a hand on his shoulder.

He doesn't react.

Her hand moves down, to hold his. He brushes her hand away.

She studies him, still staring at the letter.

She reaches out again and suddenly he throws the paper at her and he gets up as she flinches.

When she looks again he is gone. Beyond her gaze, on the dresser against the wall, sits an old photo of Omar.

EXT. HDB FLAT CORRIDOR - DAY

Latiff waits outside the house, his hands in his pockets, his gaze on his feet.

Soft sounds from inside - footsteps, rummaging, rustling of keys - draw his eyes up, and the door opens.

He opens his mouth as if to say something but steps back, as KARTINI unceremoniously rolls TWO SUITCASES out the door and into the corridor, in front of him.

He gazes at the suitcases, then at her.

She is about his age, dressed more casually than him - she has spent the day at home, waiting for him to show up.

Now she gazes back at him, a hardness in her eyes.

They wait for the other to speak. Neither do.

After a moment he breaks the gaze, and reaches out to take the suitcases by their handles.

LATIFF

Okay, thanks. If there's still any
of my things left--

KARTINI

There isn't.

He pauses. He lifts his eyes to hers. Cold. He looks back down again, and nods. Suitcases in hand, he turns and leaves in the direction he came in.

She watches him go. It's a long walk back to the lift. She reaches out for the door, to close it. She pauses.

KARTINI (CONT'D)

(softly)

Y'know--

Her voice breaks and she takes a sharp breath. He stops.

KARTINI (CONT'D)

Y'know what the hardest part, is?

For me?

Her eyes bore holes into the back of his head, her breathing ragged. He doesn't move.

KARTINI (CONT'D)

Just... time. All the time that you took.

For a moment, neither of them move. Her ragged breaths fill the silence.

He turns his head back, slightly, as if he might say something.

Then he turns back and carries on walking, away.

She slumps against the wall for support.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Hasnah stands by the dresser, alone, gazing at Omar's photo, in her hands.

Carefully, she sets the photo down, and turns it over, so the image is covered.

She places her hand on top of it and closes her eyes.

The door to the room opens and she turns to look.

Kartini steps into the room, her eyes drawn to the ground. Hesitantly, she raises them up, to meet Hasnah's gaze, and immediately looks away.

Hasnah strides over and embraces her in a hug.

She squeezes back.

EXT. HDB FLAT VOID DECK - SUNSET

Shu and Ryan seated next to each other, as before. Ryan is sulking. Shu is tired.

SHU
Are you still angry?

RYAN
No.

SHU
Cuz you still look angry.

RYAN
(frustrated)
I-- I--

He puts his hands to his face.

RYAN (CONT'D)
(frustrated)
Can you not--?

She studies him, waiting for him to continue. He doesn't.

She shifts her gaze out, into the distance, and exhales.

SHU
Maybe we should break up.

He looks at her, suddenly anxious. She doesn't look at him.

RYAN
What? Why?

She takes a moment before responding, her eyes fixed far away.

SHU
(carefully)
I need someone who will stay.

He stares at her blankly.

Her eyes, far away.

EXT. HDB FLAT CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Shu stops at the same door Latiff did. She pulls out her keys and unlocks it.

The door opens to Kartini and Hasnah. They smile gently, in greeting. Shu forces a smile back, hesitantly.

SHU

Uhm...

Her smile fades.

SHU (CONT'D)

(hesitantly)

Did Pa come by...?

Kartini nods, a sad smile.

SHU (CONT'D)

(softly)

Oh...

Her head sinks.

Kartini reaches out her hand.

Shu takes it, and steps into the house.

The three women embrace, as they close the door behind them.

CUT TO BLACK.

ABSENT MEN storyboards

1.



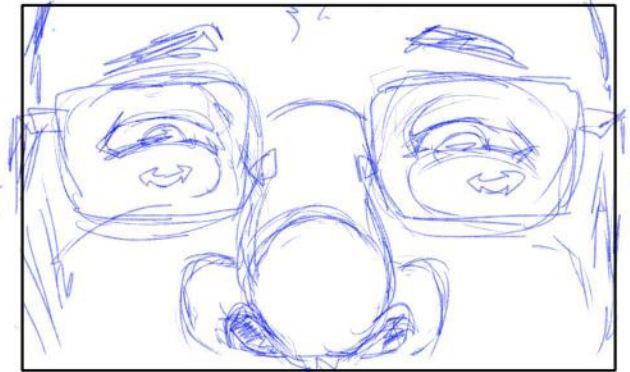
ECU of HASNAH's eyes,
concerned.

2.



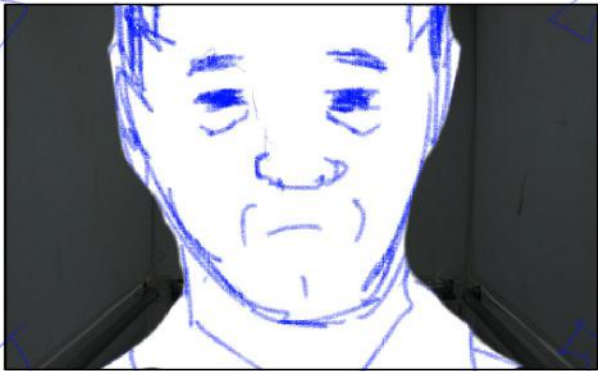
MS & RYAN & SHU (L to R),
backs to wall.

3.



ECU of OMAR's eyes, swiveling
left-to-right - he's reading
something

4.



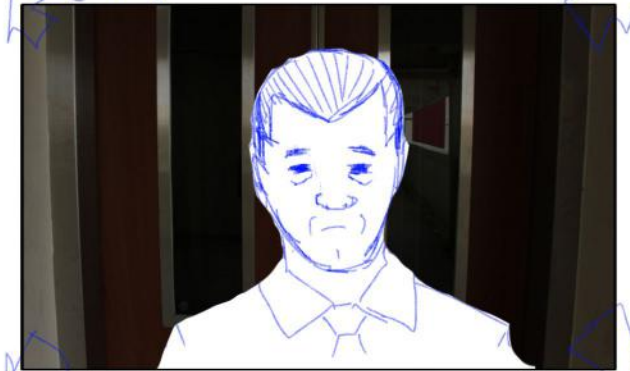
CU of LATIFF's face, as
he's standing in a HDB flat
lift

4 (cont.)



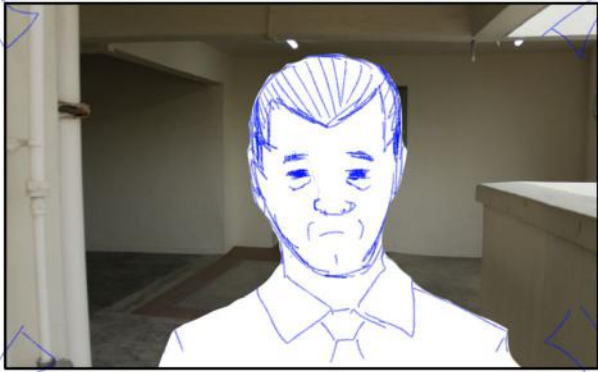
Pull back

4 (cont.)



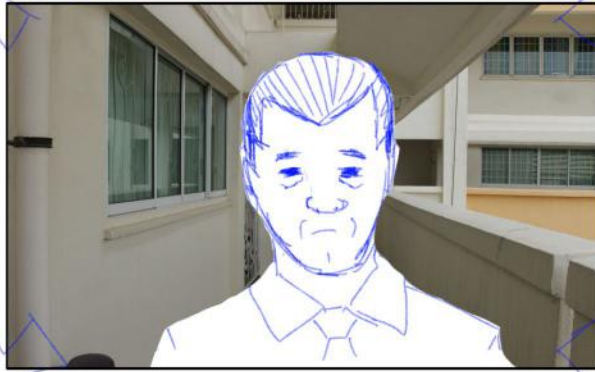
Dolly back to maintain distance
from Latiff as he exits the lift

4 (cont.)



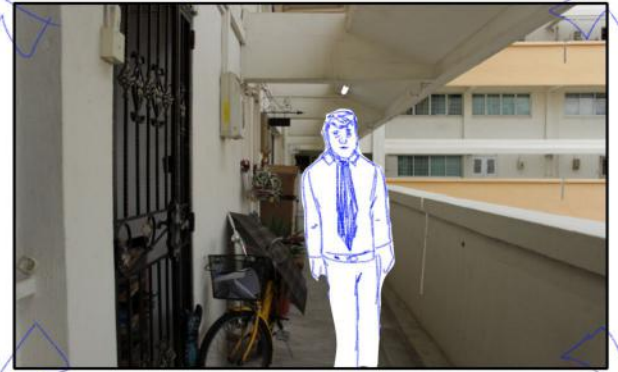
follow as he walks forward

4 (cont.)



Latiff keeps his head forward, eyes blank, ignoring his surroundings

4 (cont.)



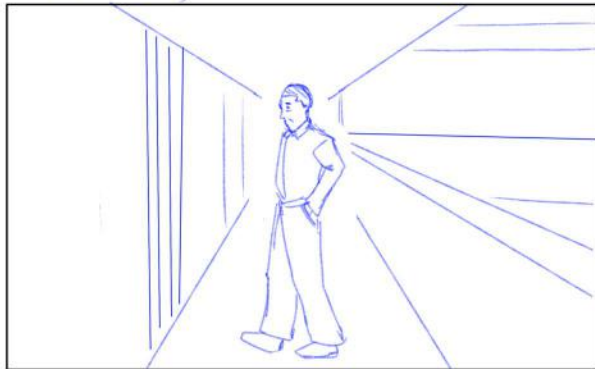
He stops at a door. Camera dollies back further to a wide shot (next frame)

4 (cont.)



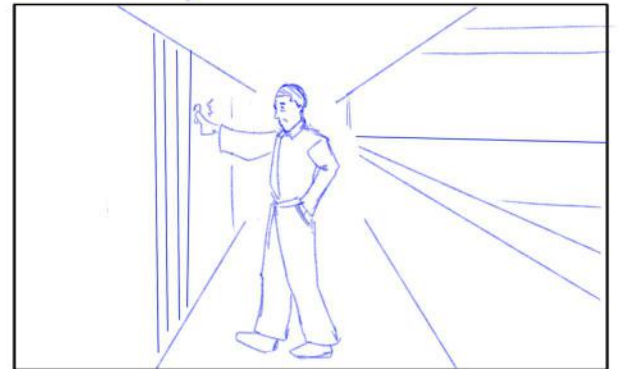
He blinks out of his trance, notices his door

4 (cont.)



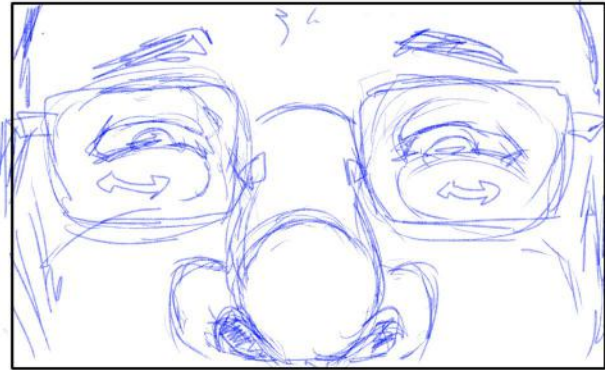
He rummages his pockets for his keys, can't find them

4 (cont.)



He rings the doorbell

5.



Continuation of shot 3 - Omar's eyes

CUT

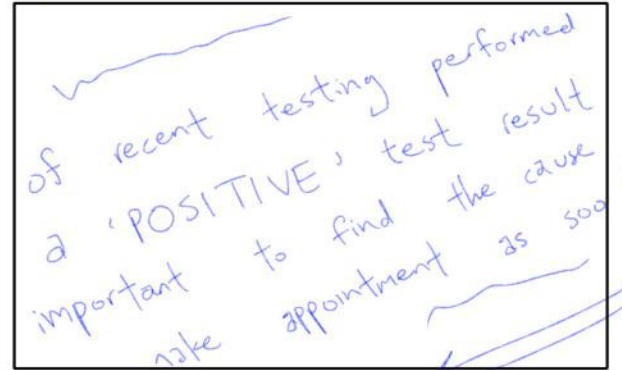
6.



Low-angle shot to reveal Omar reading from a piece of paper

CUT

7.



ECU on words in letter, motion of camera mimicking swiveling of Omar's eyes, going line by line

CUT

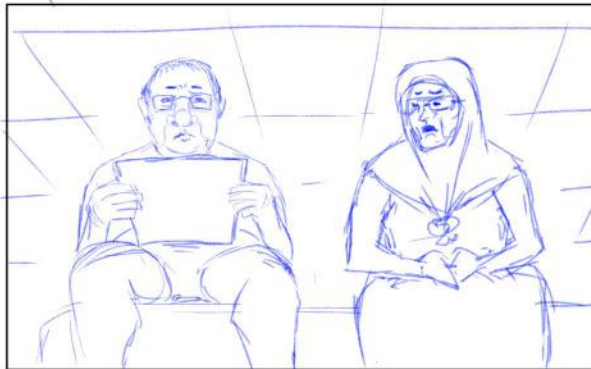
8.



Continuation of shot 1 - Hasnah's eyes, concerned

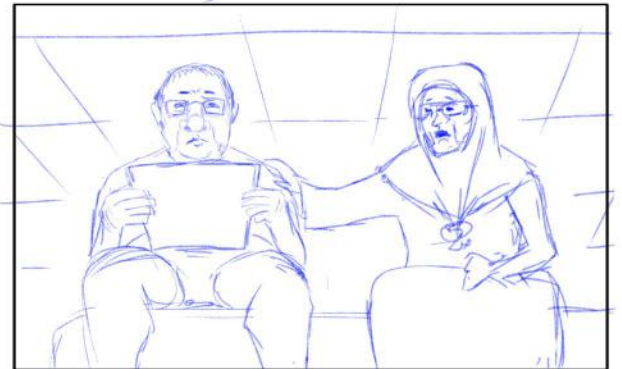
CUT

9.



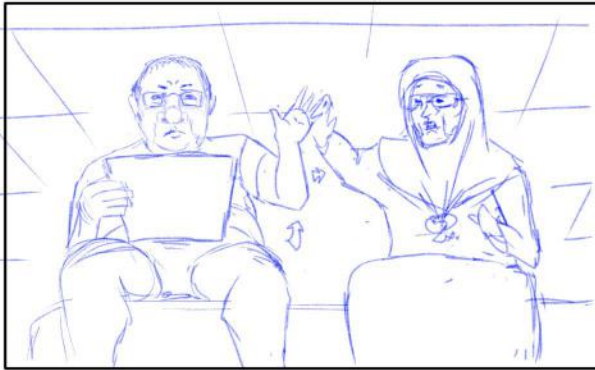
Medium low-angle two-shot of Omar & Hasnah, in their bedroom, seated on their bed

9 (cont.)



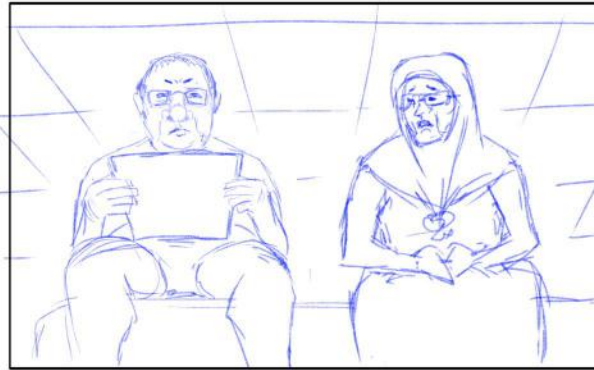
Hasnah raises a hand to Omar's shoulder

9 (cont.)



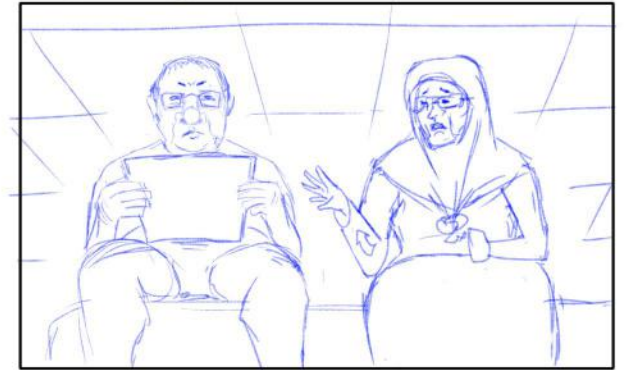
Omar brushes her hand away, annoyed

9 (cont.)



Harnah worried, Omar fuming

9 (cont.)



Harnah raises a hesitant hand, again

9 (cont.)



Omar snaps - throws the paper at her and gets up. Harnah flinches

10



CUT of Harnah flinching

10 (cont.)



she turns back - Omar's gone

11



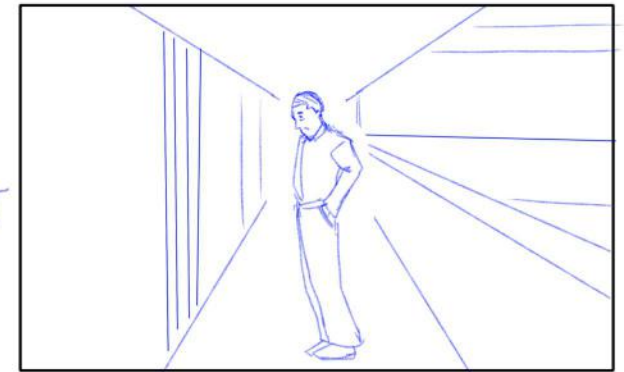
Beyond where Omar would be -
 an old photo of Omar & Hasnah
 on the dresser

11 (cont.)



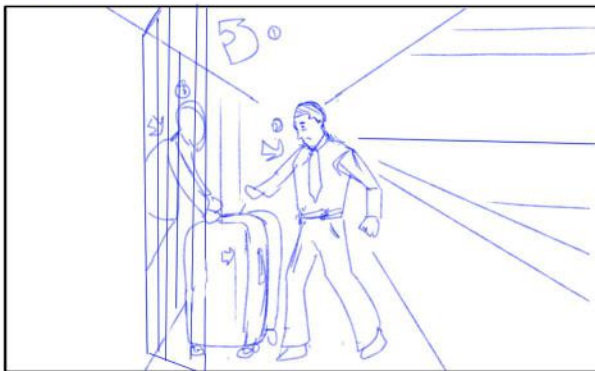
Hasnah turns to gaze at it

12.



Continuation from shot 4.
 Soft sounds of rattling from inside
 the house

12 (cont.)



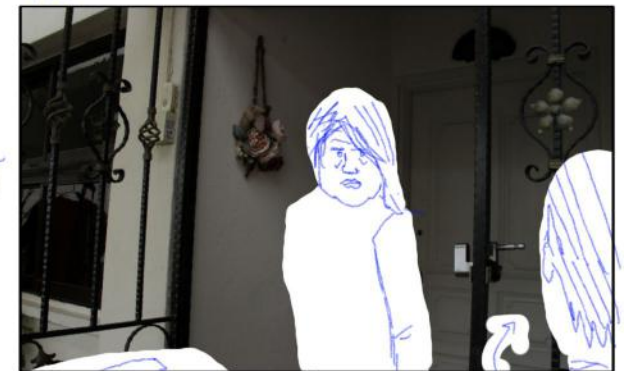
Door swings open, Latiff waves back
 as KARTINI pushes TWO SUITCASES
 out the door

12 (cont.)



He stares at the suitcases

13:



MS of Kartini.
 Latiff turns to look at her
 She glares at him.

14.



CU on Latiff.
He withers under her gaze.

14.(cont.)



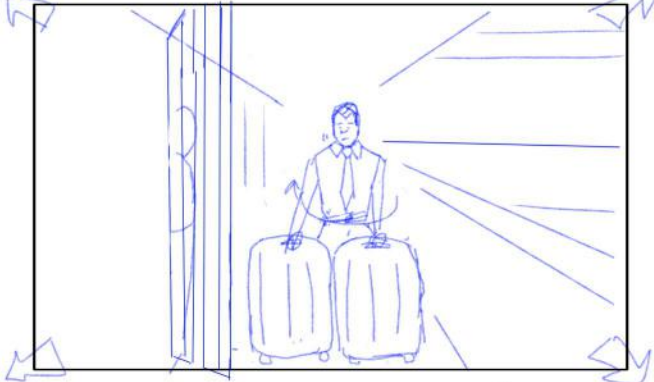
Turns his head down, away.
"Okay, thanks..."
Starts to grab suitcases

15.



L: "... if there's any of my things
left--"
K: "There isn't"

16.



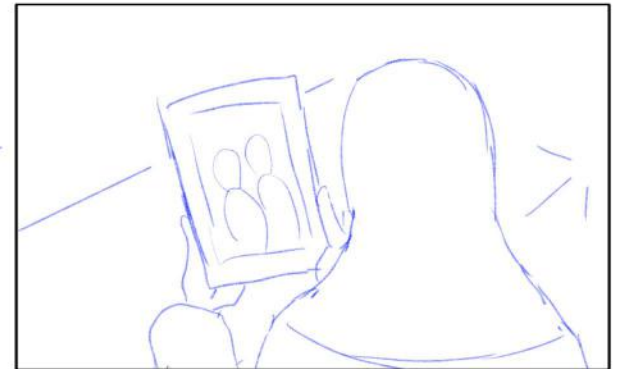
He pauses - nods - grabs suitcases &
turns to go.
Camera dollies forward to follow him
(next frame)

16 (cont.)



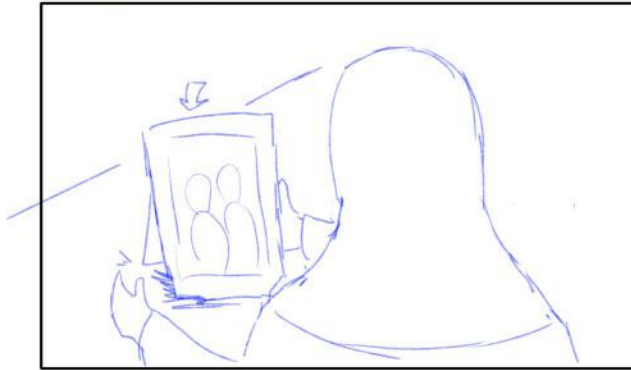
K: "Y'know, ... time you took." (see script)
Latiff walks away
Kartini slumps against wall for support

17.



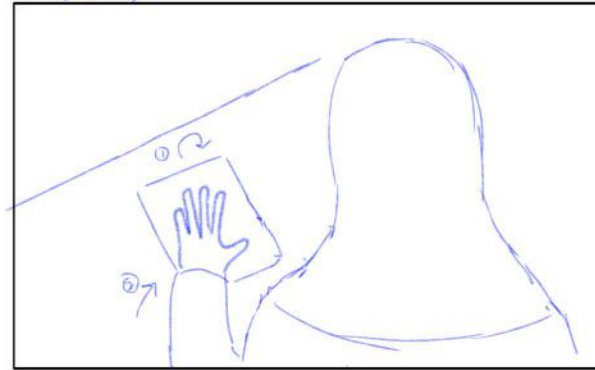
Cut back to the bedroom, with
Hasnah. Over-the-shoulder shot of
her holding the old photo of her & Onar

17. (cont.)



She gingerly sets the photo down

17 (cont.)



She turns it over & places her hand on top of it

18.



CUT

CU on Hasnah - she closes her eyes

18 (cont.)



CUT

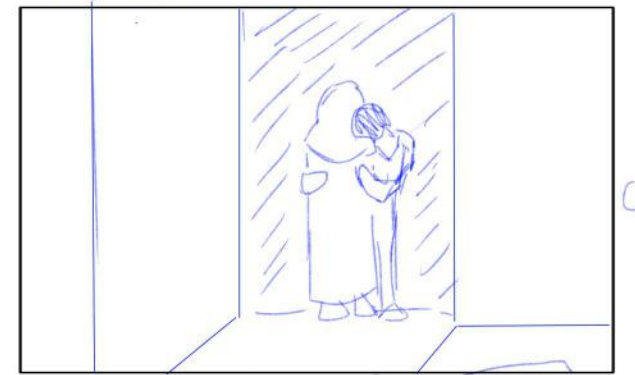
The door to her left opens - she hears it & turns to look

19.



Kartini at the door, dejected.

19 (cont.)



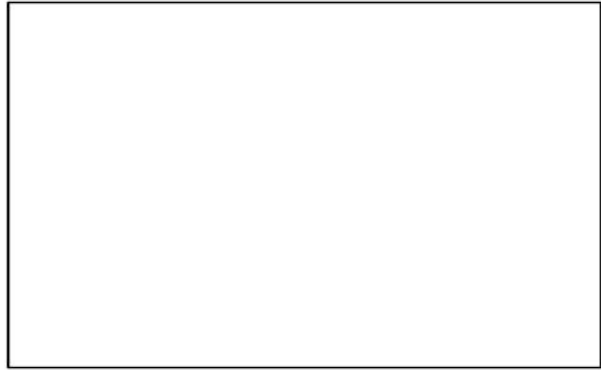
CUT.

Hasnah goes over to hug Kartini.

20.



Continuation of shot 2 -
entire scene (see page 4 of
script) Ryan & Shu



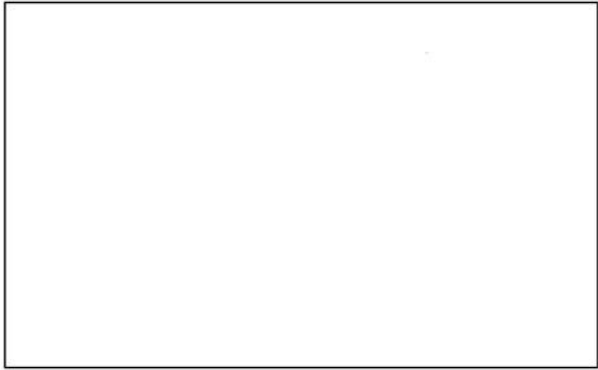
21.



WT

WT

Night-time. Match framing of
end of shot 4.
Shu walks up to same door Lotiff
stopped at.



22.



END

Kartini & Hasnah at the door.
They bring Shu in & close
the door behind them

