

1. LOGLINE

Ah Girl, 7 years old, has to choose to live with either her Mum or Pa after her parent's divorce. Despite torn between her parents, she will be separated from her 6 years old sister, Ah Tian. We walk through her journey together with through her perspective.

2. SYNOPSIS

Ah girl, 7 years old, and her younger sister, 6 years old, have been living with their paternal grandparents ever since their parents were separated. Their parents have been separated for 5 years and they decided it is time for them to sign for their child's custody after they are legally divorced.

The protagonist is asked to make a decision to be either living with her mum or dad, and she knows ultimately that she will be separated from her sister. Both parent give her different things in life – her father is a low income earner and is hardly able to afford his children any material comfort but more often than not, he is always there for them unlike her mum, who is able to provide material needs. She neglects her children once she finds a new relationship.

Both sisters struggle with the effects of a dysfunctional family caused by the volatile relationship between parents, as well as the superficial relationship between Ah Girl's mum and paternal grandmother. With so much going on at home, it causes both sisters to feel out of place in school whenever family matters are concerned. Ah Girl's struggle intensifies when she sees her parents' love life progress with someone new as she observes how they interact with their new partners.

We walk together the journey with Ah Girl of what she sees and experiences when making this very tough decision at a very young age in the world of adults.

3. TREATMENT

1990s.

On the first day of Primary School, parents wait outside the classroom excitedly watching their children, but we notice AH GIRL (7) doesn't have anybody to wait for her. She sits quietly on her own. The form TEACHER is calling out their names one by one. When the teacher calls out "Priscilla", no one answers. She calls it again. Still no answer. The teacher reads out the full name, "Priscilla, Ang Geck Geck". Ah Girl now realizes she is actually "Priscilla". She only knew her Chinese name until this moment. Everyone laughs at her for not knowing her name.

We see Ah Girl at home on Saturday morning. She lives in a small flat with her GRANDMOTHER (mid 60s) and her younger sister. AH TIAN (5), who's chubbier, tomboyish, the very opposite of Ah Girl. They draw together, and then start to fight playfully over a broken crayon.

The phone rings. Ah Girl looks very happy and picks up the phone, listens then puts it down. She's excited. She runs to the bedroom where she starts to pack her and her sister's clothes. With their bags packed, the two girls, run into their DAD (early 30s), as he returns home from a night shift, looking exhausted. He doesn't say much to the girls as they leave the house. Grandma yells to Ah Girl to ask her Mum for allowance money because she hasn't paid for more than three months.

They meet their MUM (early 30s) downstairs in the Void Deck (Ground Floor) of their high-rise apartment (HDB) block. She's beautiful and well-dressed, but has a sense of melancholy. Ah Girl is very happy to see her, Ah Tian is less enthusiastic.

Mum brings them to a supermarket to buy toys and McDonalds for food. This is clearly her regular routine to spoil them. She asks Ah Girl about her results from a school test, and even though they are fairly high, she can't hide her dismay. Ah Girl is disappointed in her mother's reaction. She wants to please her. During this discussion, Ah Tian eats French Fries and doesn't say much. Suddenly, Ah Girl pops up the question of why her name is Priscilla. Mum pushes the blame to her Dad for not telling Ah Girl.

The children go back to Mum's one room HDB flat all by herself. She cooks dinner for the kids. Mum stares at the kids while having dishes and Ah Girl feels something is not right. Mum asks them, "Do you want to live with Mum or Dad?"

Ah Girl says nothing. Ah Tian says "Dad" straightaway. Ah Girl stares at Ah Tian for being so honest with her answer.

That night, Ah Girl is awakened in her bed (which she shares with Ah Tian) by cigarette smoke from outside the bedroom.

In the living room, she sees her mum smoking, drinking wine and pouring another glass. She silently goes to sit beside her Mum. Mum starts crying "Do you want to be with me or your Dad?", she asks again. Ah Girl doesn't know how to answer and tries to talk about something else. Mum drunkenly falls asleep on the sofa. Ah Girl takes the wine and tries out of curiosity. It's so sour she spits it back in the glass.

The next morning, Ah Girl watches as her Mum dresses for work. She wears a smart dress and puts on her make-up. Ah Girl enjoys watching this.

Before she goes to work, Mum drops the kids home back to Grandma's flat, Grandma curtly asks for some money from Mum at the door. Mum doesn't speak to Grandma, but passes her some notes from her handbag, which Grandma takes without thanks.

Grandma is waiting to pick Ah Girl up from school. As she leaves the school, Ah Girl watches all her friends dash to the ICE CREAM MAN who sells his wares from a stall attached to his motorbike. Ah Girl asks Grandma for some money but is rejected immediately. Grandma says there is ice cream at home. When they reach home, Ah Girl runs to open the refrigerator and finds there is no ice cream inside. Grandma scolds her when she questions her about it.

In the morning, Grandma prepares a simple breakfast for Ah Girl to eat before she goes to school. Grandma gives her 50 cents for her to buy a bowl of noodles at lunch, and she packs white bread for her recess time.

In school, Ah Girl watches jealously as her friends eat hot noodle soups and chicken nuggets during recess. She put aside the half eaten white bread and goes to one of the food stalls. She takes out the money from her pocket and passes the stall vendor all the coins she has.

School bell rings. Ah Girl runs to the Ice Cream Uncle with Ah Tian and passes him into a \$2 note (she'd saved up four 50 cent coins). Even though she's very hungry, she shares the ice cream with Ah Tian, happily.

Returning to the flat, she sees a wall along the corridor where they live has been vandalised with graffiti that reads "O\$P\$" (a loan sharks' message that means "Owe Money, Pay Money"), with her Dad's full name and unit number. She knows her dad is in debt again.

The next morning before school, when there is hardly anyone around, she takes some leftover paint from a container and repaints the wall. Because of her height, she has to keep jumping to reach the graffiti and paint over it. Just as she's finishing she hears the lift door open and she runs back home as she is afraid that neighbours might spot her.

After another weekend spent with Mum, the girls are brought back home again by Mum. This time Dad is at home, relaxing. They exchange quick glances but don't say a word to each other. Ah Girl says goodbye to Mum.

They both have brand new toys that they open. Ah Tian starts playing with her Lego and toy gun that comes with rubber arrows and she lets Dad join in. Ah Girl is engrossed making a new necklace from beads. She behaves coldly towards Dad when he tries to engage with her. Dad has a way to make playing with Lego look fun so Ah Girl slowly joins in with him and Ah Tian. Dad teaches them how to build a house and tells them what colours works best together. We see Ah Girl watching the Dad carefully.

Later, they go with Dad to hair salon and wait for him get a hair cut. Ah Girl notices how little money he has in his wallet when it's time to pay.

At a bookshop, Ah Girl wants to get a crayon and pencil set but doesn't want to ask Dad. Dad goes ahead to get it anyway. Ah Girl is touched by her Dad's gesture.

At home, she treasures her new set of crayons and pencils and keeps it in her own 'safebox'.

During recess at school, Ah Girl goes to the field at the back of the school and catches spiders with the rest of the boys in the class. We see that she has a bold aspect to her personality that she mostly keeps hidden.

When recess time is over, Ah Girl runs to the bookshop and collects all the erasers from the BOOKSTORE AUNTIES.

Ah Girl sells erasers at a higher price to make money in class and gets caught by her teacher. The teacher asks her for her parents' phone number and she says that she doesn't live with them. The teacher then asks for her Grandparents to come and see her. Ah Girl is not very concerned.

At Kindergarten, Ah Tian is having art and craft lesson in school. All the student's do their drawings quietly. Ah Tian walks to the front and sticks her drawing on the board with a magnet. Ah Tian's drawing creates lot of curiosity and her teacher's expression changes. The topic for the drawing is "My Family".

Grandma comes to visit Ah Girl's teacher. She speaks to her in English and Grandma just keeps smiling and nodding her head, she doesn't really understand what's being said. Ah Girl just watches. At the end, teacher tells Grandma that Ah Girl needs a haircut. Ah Girl has refused to let Grandma cut her hair because she doesn't want to be laughed at by her friends. She wants to keep her hair long. She says that she will tie her hair up, but grandma insists that it is too troublesome to keep long hair in school.

Grandma brings Ah Girl to a barber shop instead because it is cheap. Even though Ah Girl tries to explain to Grandma that it is for boys and men, Grandma refuses to listen, even when the BARBER says he only cuts male hair. Grandma keeps asking him, and eventually he relents.

Later, at home Ah Girl stares into the bathroom mirror feeling frustrated and sad. Her hair is very short.

Back in school, one of the boys that she likes comments that Ah Girl looks like a boy now. He goes to play with the other long-haired girls.

At night in bed, Ah Tian is crying. Ah Girl asks her why she is crying and she explains to Ah Girl that her classmates laugh at her in school and there is one particular student who keeps pointing finger at her. Ah Girl then gives her the spider that she caught in school to console her and asks her to scare anyone who bullies her. Ah Girl pats Ah Tian till she falls back asleep.

The following day, Ah Girl is punished by Dad for teaching Ah Tian the 'wrong' thing to scare the friends off, and selling erasers in school. She thinks she has done nothing wrong and takes the chance to question her Dad about why he no longer wants to be with Mum. Dad takes a stick and hits Ah Girl's leg as punishment. Ah Tian cries. Dad looks at her and laughs it off.

Sometime later, the phone rings again. This time Ah Girl packs her bag and is ready to go down and see Mum again along with Ah Tian. Unexpectedly there is another MAN (early 30s) with her. Mum's boyfriend is very friendly towards the girls. However, Ah Girl doesn't like him.

At Mum's flat, the boyfriend takes off his shirt. He has a lot of tattoos and walks around like it's already his home. He orders Mum to fetch him things like a maid. Mum indulges him. She tells Ah Girl that he comes from a rich family and he has left the family for her because they despise her as a divorcee and won't accept her. In order to break them apart, the family stopped giving him money and now he has to find a job to take care of her. Ah Girl tries to accept him.

At dinner, Ah Girl feels that all the attention is given to the boyfriend. Mum no longer serves her anymore like she used to. She can tell Mum is happier now because of him.

At night, Ah Girl usually stay up late to watch TV with Mum while Ah Tian is asleep. This time, the boyfriend performs an implied sexual act on her mum's thigh in the living room, making Ah Girl confused but she just forces an awkward smile.

The next day, the boyfriend fights over the TV remote controller with Ah Girl. Instead of protecting Ah Girl, Mum scolds her. To please Mum, Ah Girl tries to be polite to the boyfriend. That night, Ah Girl cries in the room.

Back at home, Ah Girl picks up a flyer on the floor near the letterbox – announcing a drawing competition for kids. Her eyes light up. She asks Grandma, "Where is Block 765?" Grandma replies, "How would I know, I can't even take a bus myself". Ah Girl marks the calendar and tries to call Mum to bring her there over the weekend but Mum is too busy to talk with her.

The day of the competition arrives. It starts in two hours away and Ah Girl knows it is too late. Just then, Dad comes back home from work. He sees her looking sad and asks her what's wrong.

The Taxi is going around and around the estate, the DRIVER is lost while Dad is looking for the right direction from the pamphlet given by Ah Girl. Ah Tian is also with them.

Ah Girl looks how the meter is jumping from \$2.40 to \$10.00. She feels bad and tries to look out for the right block too.

Hidden behind some blocks, the eventually reach a newly renovated park, crowded with a lot of children and parents. Ah Girl walks to the small registration booth area with Ah Tian. Dad waits for them near a provision shop. After they've registered they all sit on the floor and Dad leans against a pillar. He looks tired, but Ah Girl is very thankful to him for bringing her there. Dad guides her what to draw, and buys her drinks and snacks to eat.

Ah Girl takes out a lot of books to use them as drawing references and the brand new colour pencil and crayon set that her Dad bought for her previously.

Later she brings her elaborate colourful picture into the tent for submissions and notices other finished works on displays – they are all much better than hers. She goes back and tells Dad that her work isn't eligible, she didn't use crayons, and she just wants to go home now. Leaving the park she's happy, she had a good time with her father and her sister

Later, Dad brings home a Michael Jackson CD. He puts it on and dances to the music. Ah Girl tries to imitate her father.

Sometime later, Ah Girl and Ah Tian attends a schoolmate's birthday party in a private house. Both of them have never been to such a big house with such a big garden. Ah Girl plays on an old two-

seated swing, with kids sitting on each side. She stands in the middle of the two seats and starts to swinging them. Suddenly, her leg gets stuck in a gap in the swing. She screams in pain.

We see her walking to school sometime later with a limp.

Her Grandma brings Ah Girl to an old flat in a run-down estate. There is an altar in the living room with red lights. The floor is old marble tiles. We hear a robust voice near the door. An OLD MAN with a fierce demeanor appears. Apparently, he is a “Tui Na” master, an expert in ancient Chinese pressure points. He presses hard on Ah Girl’s leg and she cries out in pain. He forces her to walk. It looks agonizing, but she’s made to do it.

Weeks later, Ah Girl’s leg isn’t better. At home she crawl on the floor all the time to avoid the strain of walking. Grandma calls Ah Girl’s mum to inform her about Ah Girl’s situation hoping she will bring Ah Girl to go to the hospital. After Grandma hangs up the phone, she looks upset and tells Ah Girl that her Mum is useless. Soon after that, the phone rings again and Grandma picks up. It’s Mum again.

Ah Girl is pushed into the hospital in a wheelchair. Mum goes to the register counter to get a queue number. Ah Girl looks around and Mum comes back looking really annoyed that she has to do this. Ah Girl just keeps quiet and listens to her ranting about Grandma, and that it’s Grandma who should be doing this, and that she’s the cause of the injuries because she wasn’t looking after Ah Girl properly. Finally, she’s interrupted by a nurse who calls out for Priscilla. Ah Girl takes a moment to realise it’s her.

She goes to a room almost bare except full of weird machines that she has never seen before. It’s an X-Ray room. It is so quiet. Ah Girl is afraid of these machines. There are so many people walking in and out of the room. She keeps looking out for her Mum to make sure she is somewhere near. There is a glass door through which she can see her Mum and a male nurse.

Later, Ah Girl lies quietly on a cold bed. She is told not to move. She wears a green patient gown.

Then she is pushed out in a wheelchair along a long corridor to another room. Mum is waiting for her. She sits still in the wheelchair with very little or few words. She knows Mum is upset so she doesn’t want to annoy. Her mum keeps checking her watch while her pager can’t stop beeping.

Mum and Ah Girl get out of a cab. She brings Ah Girl to a place to an unfamiliar coffeeshop, and Mum leaves her there, telling her to say she’s with her sister if anyone asks. She is left in the care of the owner of the coffeshop, who she doesn’t even know. She feels very uncomfortable.

She rests her head on the table and looks at her watch. She has waited for almost an hour. Ah Girl looks really tired. Mum finally arrives back, and is very friendly to the coffeeshop owner. Ah Girl is desperate to go home.

The next hospital appointment is due and, Dad cannot find Ah Girl’s birth certificate. Dad looks frustrated because he is going to be late. Dad calls Mum on the phone to find out if she knows where it is. This is the first time Ah Girl has ever seen Dad talking to Mum. Dad starts off the conversation cursing and swearing. Ah Girl feels really bad that they are quarreling over her problem. But there is nothing she can do about it.

In the hospital: Dad and Ah Girl sit in chairs outside the clinic waiting for Mum. We see that Ah Girl has a cast on her leg. Dad struggles to keep awake and eventually sleeps. His phone is ringing in his hands but he doesn't wake up. Ah Girl sees it's a familiar number. It is Mum.

Ah Girl sees her mum and boyfriend Sam from afar. She waves to her Mum. She does not want to wake Dad up. She hops towards her Mum with difficulty.

Mum passes the birth cert to Ah Girl and says goodbye. Ah Girl sees her walking hand in hand away from her with her boyfriend. She turns back and hops towards her dad. Dad is wide awake now. He says, "She came with a man?"

Grandma comes to pick up Ah Girl from school with Ah Tian. The cast has cartoons on it and is signed by some of her classmates. Ah Girl walks slowly with her crutches. Grandma used to walk slower than Ah Girl. Now it's the other way around. Sometimes Grandma will turn back and slow down her steps to check on Ah Girl to make sure she can manage. On the other hand, Ah Tian walks side by side with Ah Girl. She will occasionally bend over to check out the drawing on her cast.

At home, Grandma passes an amulet for Ah Girl to wear. Grandma showers Ah Girl because she can't bathe herself because of her cast.

Soon, it is the day to remove the cast. Dad brings her to the hospital. In the room, Dad stands besides Ah Girl who is on a bed sitting up with her leg lying straight. A Doctor takes a sharp rounded electric blade and Ah Girl looks really afraid that the blade might cut through her leg. As the doctor turns on the power, the blade starts rotating itself loudly. Ah Girl's face turns as white as a sheet.

Afterwards, at home, Ah Girl washes her scaley leg. She is happy that she can walk freely and she doesn't have to depend on anyone anymore. She walks out of the kitchen and plays with Ah Tian. Ah Girl turns and looks at her Dad in the kitchen talking to her Grandma, squatting on the chair and making her laughs while she washes the dishes. She looks at Ah Tian, who continues to play with her toy car. Ah Girl is thinking...

The phone rings. Mum. Ah Girl doesn't look as pleased as she used to as she picks up the call. Mum is crying. The boyfriend has cheated Mum over money and lied to her about his famil. He is actually an ex-jail bird.

Ah Girl starts packing her toys, books and clothes in a big case while Ah Tian watched. She unlocks her safe-box and keep all her favourite things in her bag. Ah Tian's eyes start to get red. She passes Ah Tian her favourite sticker book. Then she takes Dad's Michael Jackson album and tells Ah Tian not to tell her Dad. Ah Tian follows Ah Girl behind from the bedroom to the living room then to the door.

Mum helps Ah Girl to take some of her belongings. This isn't a weekend visit. Ah Girl is going to live with Mum now. Ah Tian runs to the corridor and chases after Ah Girl. She waves goodbye, Ah Girl waves back too.