

Bitter, Sweet, and Beautiful
(Sample pages)

by
John Hillis

John Hillis
5516 Stairs Place
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3K 2C8
(902) 422-7226
truefauxfilms@gmail.com

EXT POOL NIGHT - VERY LATE

ARCHIE (63), tall and fit from years of physical labour, floats naked on his back in a civic outdoor pool, making just enough movement to stay gently above water ...

FADE OUT.

INT KITCHEN MORNING

Archie is putting the remnants of breakfast in the fridge. His wife AGNES (59), a greying, tired woman looks after some dishes at the sink.

ARCHIE

Busy day?

AGNES

The usual.

ARCHIE

When do you have to go to the airport?

AGNES

Not 'til 9 Archie.

ARCHIE

She's coming on her own?

AGNES

Yes.

INT VANCOUVER AIRPORT DAY

SARAH, (14), and CHARLIE, (34) stand just before the security check-in line.

Sarah, with a small knapsack on, fusses with her boarding pass.

CHARLIE

Just a few days. I'll sort things out here, then be on a plane right after you.

SARAH

I could stay with you.

CHARLIE

You'll be fine.
(pause)

CHARLIE(cont'd)

It's lawyers, and banks. Between your mother's stuff and a few deals that I'm closing.

Sarah is slowly losing her composure.

Charlie hugs Sarah.

SARAH

I don't know anyone there.

CHARLIE

They're your grandparents.

(pause)

Just a few days.

Charlie looks at Sarah's boarding pass.

CHARLIE (cont'd)

Look, you've got to go through.

Look for gate 19. Just ask for help.

Charlie steers her into the line for the security check.

Sarah walks past a sign that reads PASSENGERS ONLY and looks back.

Charlie smiles encouragingly as she gets taken up with the flow of the line.

EXTERIOR BACKYARD MORNING

A worn house in a low-income neighborhood

Agnes emerges from a squeaky back-door carrying a basket full of wet laundry.

She hangs linens and pyjamas that appear stained from repeated soiling.

Her neighbor SYBIL(34), a slightly overweight black woman, comes out into her yard, placing her garbage in the bin and looks over the fence.

SYBIL

Archie keeping you busy?

A look of shame briefly passes across Agnes's face.

AGNES

Yeah.

SYBIL
 Jesus, you spend your life on them
 sheets.

AGNES
 Just once a day.

SYBIL
 You need a hand?

AGNES
 He's good today.

As Sybil heads back into her house Agnes looks up.

AGNES (cont'd)
 Maybe just have a peek.

SYBIL
 I'll look in.

AGNES
 Great, back door will be open.

Agnes finishes hanging the laundry.

INT FRONT HALL MORNING

Agnes puts the laundry basket away in the front hall and
 stands at the bottom of the stairs.

AGNES
 Archie.
 (pause)
 Archie!

Agnes appears agitated.

AGNES
 Archie!

A DOOR is HEARD being OPENED.

ARCHIE (O.S.)
 Christ! What!

Agnes relaxes a little.

AGNES
 I'm off. I'll be back this
 afternoon. Wait for me and we'll go
 for a walk.

AGNES(cont'd)

(pause)

Archie.

Archie appears at the top of the stairs.

ARCHIE

Fine. Christ go.

Archie turns back down the hall.

AGNES

Take your pills.

A DOOR is SHUT upstairs.

As Agnes collects herself to leave she looks up the stairs and then at the coat rack mounted by the door. She removes a hat from one of the pegs and places it under a pile of stuff on the top shelf of the closet.

Shutting the closet door she quietly leaves the house.

INT AIRPLANE DAY

Sarah sits in the window seat of an airplane, listening to ALTERNATIVE INDIE POP on her MP3 player.

Sarah plays with a camera cell phone on her lap. Pointing it out the window at the bright bank of clouds she takes a picture and then leans back with her eyes closed.

INT KITCHEN DAY

Sybil enters the kitchen through the back door.

SYBIL

Archie.

With no answer she moves into the hallway.

INT HALLWAY DAY

SYBIL

Archie.

ARCHIE (O.S.)

What the hell do you want.

Sybil turns back towards the kitchen.

SYBIL
A million dollars and my pick of
men.

INT KITCHEN DAY

Archie's legs stick out from under the sink.

ARCHIE
Then get your ass out and work.

SYBIL
Living next to you is job enough.

She sits at the table.

SYBIL (cont'd)
You need anything?

ARCHIE
Peace and quiet.

SYBIL
I bet Agnes says the same.

Sybil picks up the plate and glass on the table and takes them to the counter beside the sink. Archie pokes his head out from under the sink.

ARCHIE
Leave those.

SYBIL
You going to get them

Archie's head goes back under the sink.

SYBIL
You still hungry?

ARCHIE
No, I'm fine. You know when Agie's
getting back?

SYBIL
Early afternoon.

Sybil fusses with the dishes.

ARCHIE
Don't be turning the water on.

Archie looks out from under the sink.

ARCHIE (cont'd)
You want a game of crib?

SYBIL
Not interrupting am I?

ARCHIE
I'll be finished in a turn or two.
It's up to you.

SYBIL
Sure. Where's the board.

ARCHIE
Same place you left it.

Sybil turns to the hallway.

ARCHIE (cont'd)
Hang on.

Sybil pauses.

ARCHIE (cont'd)
Okay, turn the water on.

SYBIL
You sure?

ARCHIE
I asked. I get wet, my fault.

Sybil runs the tap.

Archie wiggles out of the space under the sink and stands up.
He's sweaty and a little dirty.

ARCHIE (cont'd)
Right as rain.

SYBIL
Could use some of that in this
heat.

Archie reaches over and turns the tap off as Sybil heads into
the livingroom, loosely shakes her top, fanning herself.

SYBIL (o.s.)
You cleaning up or do I have to
play you in that condition?

Archie smiles as he puts his tools away.

INT AIRPORT MONTAGE EVENING

Sarah walks through the Halifax airport terminal searching for the way out of arrivals.

She makes a wrong turn and recovers.

She descends an escalator and passes through frosted sliding doors.

INT ARRIVALS AREA NIGHT

Agnes, folds her in her arms. Sarah, standing stiffly, does not return the embrace.

AGNES
It's good to see you.

Sarah steps back from Agnes. She looks at the ground as Agnes strokes her shoulder.

AGNES
You've had a long flight.

Sarah says nothing.

A passenger pushes past the two of them and Sarah starts and shies away.

Agnes looks around at the commotion.

AGNES (cont'd)
Let's get your bag.

Agnes takes Sarah's shoulder and leads her to the luggage carousel.

EXT AIRPORT BUS EVENING

Sarah and Agnes sit together. Sarah has her phone out and is looking at images of her mother.

INTERCUT

CELL PHONE SCREEN

Sarah and her mother, RUTH (34), a gaunt woman wearing a head scarf.

Ruth in a park.

Ruth and Sarah, taken with Sarah holding the phone, at a farmers market.

Ruth in a garden.

BACK TO SCENE

INT. AIRPORT BUS EVENING

A look of sadness crosses Agnes's face as she looks at the phone screen.

AGNES
We'll miss her.

Sarah looks at Agnes without speaking.

Agnes pulls a few strands of hair from Sarah's face.

AGNES (cont'd)
It's been a long time since you've
seen us.

No response.

AGNES (cont'd)
Well, things change.

Agnes stares at Sarah.

EXT BUS MONTAGE EVENING

As the bus travels from the airport to downtown Halifax the highway turns to suburban and inner-city landscapes.

In the city it drives past a large playing field and fenced in outdoor pool.

Through the reflection in the bus window Agnes is seen watching over Sarah then turning to look outside.

INT. HOUSE NIGHT

Agnes and Sarah enter the house.

AGNES
(quietly)
Archie. Archie.

She looks into the livingroom which is empty.

AGNES (cont'd)
He's gone to bed. You'll see him
tomorrow. Lets get you sorted out,
you must be tired.

She leads Sarah into the livingroom.

INT. LIVINGROOM NIGHT

Agnes moves to the couch and begins to make it up with sheets
that had been left out.

AGNES
You can sleep here. There's a
bathroom upstairs, just on the
right. I'm in the back room,
grandpa is in the one on the left.

Sarah is staring at the couch and Agnes.

Agnes looks at the couch and then at Sarah.

AGNES
Well its not much, but...

She gives Sarah a hug.

AGNES
Get some sleep and we'll see what's
what in the morning.

She gives one last adjustment of the bedding.

AGNES
I'll let you get settled, I'm just
in the back room if you need
anything.

She waits a beat for Sarah to say something and leaves with
the silence.

Sarah drops her bag beside the couch and simply stares at it.

INT. HOUSE - LIVINGROOM NIGHT

Sarah, curled up in a fetal position, is lying awake on top of the sheets, still dressed in her travel clothes.

She hears the SOUNDS of STUMBLING coming from the hall.

INT HOUSE - HALLWAY NIGHT

Archie, dressed in a worn undershirt and loose pajama bottoms, moves slowly and without focus from the closet to the front door.

He pauses to look around.

The pegs mounted on the wall are all empty.

Archie looks at them and gets agitated and mumbles to himself.

ARCHIE (cont'd)
My hat. Where's my hat?

Sarah gets off the couch and walks to the hall entrance.

Archie is looking at the pegs and touching each one mumbling the whole time.

SARAH
What?

Archie angrily spins towards Sarah.

ARCHIE
Where is it? Did you steal my hat?
Where'd you put it?

He takes a step towards her and then veers to the door, missing the door handle in his attempt to grab it, and stumbles.

Sarah moves to his side.

SARAH
What hat?

Without looking up, Archie pushes her aside while he mutters angrily. Sarah falls into the wall with a thud.

ARCHIE

I've got to go, where's my hat.
Everything's missing. They're
hiding it. I have to keep an eye on
everything.

Sarah turns to go upstairs.

SARAH (cont'd)

Gran!

Archie looks around in confusion and grabs Sarah by her
shoulders.

ARCHIE

Who are you? Where's my fuckin hat.
I'm watching you, you can't hide
it. I'll find it and I'll beat you
when I do you little shit.

He shakes her while she shouts up the stairs.

The two tumble to the floor.

ARCHIE

Agie! Agie!

SARAH

Gran!

Agnes appears at the top with a concerned look.

AGNES

What is it?

Archie turns his attention to Agnes, letting go of Sarah who
slides away from him.

ARCHIE

It's gone. Where is it?

Agnes heads straight for Archie, giving Sarah a quick look
and touch of concern on her shoulder as she passes.

Agnes bends down beside Archie.

AGNES

What's going on Archie?

ARCHIE

Who's that? What's she doing here?
I need to go. I got to walk Louie.

Archie pushes away Agnes' hand when she tries to stroke his
head.

ARCHIE
My hat's gone. I've got to walk
Louie.

AGNES
It's here, somewhere

ARCHIE
It's not, I've looked. It's stolen.

AGNES
We'll find it. In the morning Hon.
In the morning, it's still night.

Gently Agnes wraps her arms around Archie and he slowly begins to relax.

ARCHIE
He needs his walk. Someone stole my
hat.

Sarah watches, unsettled but transfixed as Agnes calms Archie.

AGNES (O.S.)
It's not stolen, we'll find it, but
wait for morning, and you can walk
Louie. He's still asleep.

ARCHIE (O.S.)
In the morning?

Agnes starts to help Archie up.

AGNES
Now, let's get upstairs. Aw Jesus.

Agnes looks down and realizes Archie has defecated while he was sitting.

AGNES
Sarah, go upstairs and get a pair
of pajamas out of the dresser in
Archie's room.

Sarah looks on in disgust.

AGNES
Second door on the left. In the top
drawer on the right you'll find
pajamas, doesn't matter which.

Agnes looks up at Sarah who's staring at Archie.

AGNES
Go. Just leave them in the
bathroom.

SARAH
Is he OK?

AGNES
He's fine. Go on, we'll be up in a
jiff.

Sarah heads upstairs.

Agnes sits with Archie for a moment.

ARCHIE
Going to walk Louie in the morning.

AGNES
Yeah, we'll walk Louie in the
morning.

Agnes is stroking Archie's head and patting his knee.

AGNES
But now we need to get you cleaned
up. You gonna help me up young man?

ARCHIE
Where are you going?

AGNES
We are going upstairs.

ARCHIE
I'll come with you.

AGNES
I'd like that.

ARCHIE
Agie?

AGNES
What is it Hon?

ARCHIE
I need to get up early to walk
Louie.

AGNES
Well then, I'll get you up, don't
be worrying about that.

ARCHIE
I'll need breakfast Agie.

AGNES
Well then I'll make you something.
Let's get you to bed.

Sarah returns to the top of the stairs.

ARCHIE
Going upstairs with me Agie?

AGNES
I'm right here with you Hon.

The two head upstairs. There is a stain on Archie's backside and on the floor where he sat.

Archie looks at Sarah and smiles fondly as they pass her on the stairs.

ARCHIE
Agie.

He reaches gently for Sarah's face on the way by.

ARCHIE (cont'd)
We going swimming tomorrow?

Archie holds his look on Sarah as he passes.

Sarah watches the two make their way slowly upstairs.

Agnes looks over her shoulder.

AGNES
I'll be down in a bit to look after that. You get some sleep.

Sarah heads back to her bed.

INT LIVINGROOM NIGHT

Sarah pulls her phone out of her knapsack and presses speed dial.

SARAH
Dad.
(pause)
Dad, I can't stay here.
(pause)
No. You don't get it. It stinks.

SARAH(cont'd)

Grampa shits himself.

(pause)

You gotta come.

(pause)

Now Dad! No!

(pause)

I don't care! Come get me now!

Sarah slams the phone shut and lies on her side.

Sarah opens the phone and calls up images of her mother on the video screen. She begins to cry.

FADE OUT.