

THE BITTER SWEET

by

Buffy Aakaash

Buffy Aakaash
3935 South Americus St.
Seattle, WA 98118
206-619-9021
Buffsters@me.com

CHARACTERS

REX

Early 40s in the present

DEREK

Early 30s in the present, a movie actor

SETTING

A quiet, upscale, urban bar.

TIME

The present.

THE BITTER SWEET

(The sound of rain outside. REX and DEREK sit at a table, drinking, with a candle between them. DEREK holds up his drink in front of his face, trying to figure it out, almost as if to read the ice cubes. REX holds a toothpick over the candle. When DEREK puts his drink down, REX douses the burning toothpick in DEREK's drink.)

What did you do <i>that</i> for?!	DEREK
You've hardly said anything.	REX
I said a whole bunch.	DEREK
I asked you about your screening.	REX
And?	DEREK
You described it. Vaguely!	REX
It was a vague event!	DEREK
International film screenings are not vague events!	REX
Rex...	DEREK

DEREK picks up his drink again and stares at it. REX grabs the drink out of DEREK's hand and dumps it in DEREK's lap. DEREK jumps up.

DEREK
Okay! That was unnecessary. I'm leaving!
Pause.

REX
Don't leave.
Pause. DEREK lingers.
I was so happy for you! It was all about you, you know? It was about YOUR body. YOUR sex! Plastered all over the screen. All over the world horizon!

DEREK
So you came here to stargaze.

REX
Come on, Derek! You went to Cannes, but you're far from being a star!

DEREK
Oh.

REX
Is that what you want? To be a star?

DEREK
I don't know what I want. So what are we doing?

REX
Maybe we should...

DEREK
What?

REX
Go?

DEREK
Where?

REX
Your place. My place. Somewhere... you know...

DEREK
I don't think so, Rex...

REX
Oh...

DEREK

I mean... June and I are happy, you know?

REX

You are?

DEREK

We really are.

REX

Well... That's good... Good to hear.

DEREK

Yeah.

REX

And you're... just the two of you?

DEREK

Yeah... we found it to be... necessary... I think we're finally gonna get married.

REX

That's great!

DEREK

It is! You know. Eight years ago --

REX

Eight years! (Pause.) I haven't even seen June since then. Remember? That night?

DEREK

Rex...

REX

When we swam together? June had gone to bed.

DEREK

It was cold.

REX

We were burning up. And remember? It was raining for days. And you stood out there looking at the horizon and promised me the sun was coming out.

DEREK

Please stop.

REX

I couldn't believe you. And then it did. It stopped. And there was this insane rainbow with more colors than any rainbow I've ever seen --

DEREK

Stop it.

REX

Shining on those yellow flowers. Waving in the wind. The ones June thought were bittersweet? But I knew they weren't. Because I grew up there. Then, later by the fire... After we all ate fresh elk meat together... You and I... I remember it like yesterday... We--

DEREK

Look, Rex, it's not like I have any judgments about you--

REX

Judgments?

DEREK

About the whole "polly" thing... or... You are still "polly", aren't you?

REX

Polly?

DEREK

But it didn't work for June and me.

REX

I don't really know what that's all about anymore.

DEREK

Loving multiple people because one person is never enough? Variety is the spice of life? Commitment is really only the result of a psychotic break?

REX

I never said that.

DEREK

Monogamy is a tool of the patriarchy!

REX

No.

DEREK

That's what you told me.

REX

You must have misunderstood. Listen. I just came here tonight to find out if it was real... What we had.

DEREK

Well, we didn't have anything really. It was an evening.

REX

What we did, though... that evening. In New Mexico.

DEREK

And...? Was it real?

REX

I think it was.

DEREK

When did you figure that out?

REX

As soon as I saw you...

DEREK

And you dumped my drink in my lap?!

REX

Christ! I just wanted to wake you up. Lighten up a little.

DEREK

Let me tell you something. That night? It was just a memory--

REX

Our memory... and now our memory is all over the big screen... from here to France and beyond!

DEREK

That was just a character I played!

REX

But that story was all about us... It was our sex, our history... and you put it all out there... you used it.

DEREK

What? The 40-something guy who's never been fucked?

REX

I just want you to admit it!

DEREK

And the younger man who breaks him in!

REX

That's not what it was about...

DEREK

It's a tired old story!

REX

You fed me when I was hungry.
Silence.

DEREK

Oh god, Rex. We were out in the middle of nowhere and I killed an elk with my bare hands. So what?

REX

It sure impressed June!

DEREK

June didn't give a rat's ass about it. I can tell you that much.

REX

But really. No one had ever done that for me before. No one's ever done that for anybody. Not in my entire life.

DEREK

Just let it go.

REX

You knew I adored you then... and ... I adored you again when I sat in the dark and saw your naked body up there. How you love to be adored... And you haven't felt this kind of adoration in eight years...

DEREK

Don't flatter yourself! I'd better go...

REX

Don't. You look like you peed yourself.

DEREK

As soon as it dries, then...

REX

Maybe I need another drink.

DEREK

Yeah. You have a pretty bad taste in your mouth.

REX

You're the one with the bad taste. Sputtering bitterness with your every silent, acrid curse.

DEREK

You think after eight years, and barely a peep, you can maneuver your way into my life... For what... A little romp?

REX

Was that really all it was to you? I have a boyfriend. So...!

DEREK

Since when?

REX

I don't need your cock up my ass.

DEREK

Then why did you call me?

REX

It's true... you were in town... your screening was done. I thought I MIGHT GET LAID! So sue me... I'll tell you there are plenty of other places I could have gone, places I go every other weekend, and more often when Monty's out of town.

DEREK

Well, there's still time. The night is young.

REX

And that's so simple... you speaking there from your pedestal of engagement... your monogamous monotony... your nearly perfect fidelity. Go then! Go back to your deluxe single room at the Sorrento. I mean it. Go on!

DEREK

Is that what you think? About how June and I are?

Silence.

You're as scared as I am.

REX

I have nothing to be scared of.

DEREK

You do. I'd never have pegged you for a scaredy cat!

REX

Get real...!

DEREK

You're afraid that maybe I found that evening eight years ago as un-fucking-believable as you did... and what would you do with that? What if we shared that moment of passion as the highlight of our entire erotic history?

REX
Don't try to flatter *me* now.

DEREK
It was, though. Wasn't it?

REX
It was up there.

DEREK
What if it was even bigger for me than it was for you?

REX
That's a lie.

DEREK
How do you know what it meant to me? You wish you could just get laid one more time! But you know neither one of us could do that. Just get laid?
He laughs.
It's a joke!

REX
It was just a night. Right? That's what you told me.

DEREK
I told you we didn't have anything... Because that's all it was. Just that night. And I didn't have to tell you how I felt about that night. Because you saw it. You saw the film. You saw us. And you remembered...
REX grabs his head in his hands, nearly falls off his stool.
Rex? What's wrong? Are you drunk?

REX
Why didn't you call me? All those years?

DEREK
I was busy. I was afraid. Mostly afraid. And then I hid in busy-ness, in my career. In working on things with June.

REX
How is June?

DEREK
Not so good. Actually. We're separated.

REX
I thought you were getting married!

DEREK

I'm sorry. I was so afraid. That's what I do when I'm scared. I lie. Please don't judge me.

REX

What happened?

DEREK

Shooting the film was a big strain. When I went to France alone for the premiere... I was the star... the new meat in town... She knew I'd be in the stew the entire time... and I was!

REX

What do you mean?

DEREK

You know... I got laid a lot. And when I returned, she knew... and... for all our talk of how we could make the polly thing work... well, it didn't. It didn't weather the storm. She tried to call it all off.

REX

That doesn't sound like the June I remember.

DEREK

She couldn't fight the storms any more. She feels like such a loser... I really wanted to make it work...

Pause.

REX

I lied, too. I don't really have a boyfriend.

DEREK

Oh.

REX

Monty's just... a friend. With benefits. I think that's what they call them these days. But it's not working. Nothing has ever worked. Not for eight years.

DEREK

Not since...?

REX

Not since.

DEREK

I didn't think you cared about me, Rex. I had a hard time living with that.

REX

I had a hard time caring about anyone or anything else! Over all these years, my whole interest in that "polly" thing was because of you and June. But you stopped calling me.

DEREK takes REX's hands. Silence.

DEREK

Listen.

REX

What?

DEREK

The rain's finally stopped. It's a sweet sound, the silence after a rain, isn't it?

REX

There you go again! Something good. Out there. Just beyond here. The silence that's really a sound.

DEREK

Maybe I'm right.

REX

You were right then. Maybe there'll be another rainbow.

DEREK

Maybe tomorrow.

REX

Can't expect rainbows at night I guess.

DEREK

Not usually.

REX

But anything's possible?

DEREK

If we can stop talking. How far is your apartment from here?

Silence.

REX

I don't know if I can wait that long.

DEREK

We've waited eight years.

Lights fade.

END OF PLAY