

Metropolitan

Sec. 1

As Erin sits in the lobby of the emergency room, waiting for their name to be called by one of the attending nurses, they can't help but think that they're a bit of a sight to behold in comparison to their surroundings. The Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania's emergency room lobby is... understated, to say the least. The hospital as a whole is an odd amalgamation of different architectural styles, the result of addition after addition being added on rather haphazardly as the need arose over the century or so the hospital has been open. The emergency room is in one of the worst looking parts of the structure, Erin thought, a bit best described as a beige box with some windows, with the ER entrance barely visible behind where ambulances come to unload. The inside is not much better, they observed, there are some windows out onto the ambulance bay, but they don't show much, and the room is rather small and drab, with a few TVs, a lot of chairs, and a interior design best described as "linoleum chic." In contrast to this drab, but fairly put together interior, Erin sat there soaking wet, aggressively shivering, covered in a mix of towels and blankets, and being looked over by the police and firemen that brought them to the emergency room. They hoped that their presence wasn't disturbing the others waiting with them, but unfortunately judging by the way that Erin would catch the other patients staring every now and again, it was easy to conclude that Erin was, in the very least, a curious sight to see late at night in the ER.

Sec. 2

Some 300 odd yards from the entrance to the emergency room at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania lies a section of the Northeast Corridor, or more accurately, the former mainline of the Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington Railroad, and old component of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Roughly a kilometer or so north of this spot lies the Zoo Interlocking, which connects the Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington Railroad to the PRR Main Line out to Western Pennsylvania and to the Connecting Railroad, which traversed Northern Philadelphia to reach tracks to New Jersey and New York. The PRR was a beast of a railroad, and the Zoo Interlocking still is a beast of a junction, still handling all passenger rail services that go through Philadelphia, and forming a part of Amtrak's Northeast Corridor, which now stretches from Washington D. C. all the way down to Boston, with a variety of commuter, regional, and express high-speed services offered by Amtrak and assorted public agencies which handle commuter rail services in their assigned areas, all having taken over from the old grand private railroads of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

With Amtrak being relatively expensive, commuter railroads take over the important tasks of transporting people cheaply and slowly along stretches of the Northeast corridor, providing rush hour service for commuters and additional services at other times. While many of these services are not connected-it is currently impossible to travel from Washington to Boston

only on commuter trains, due to a few small gaps in between systems, there is an unbroken string of lines stretching all the way from Delaware to New Haven, more or less. It is because of this unbroken string that I was able to get from Philadelphia to New Haven one fall Thursday night, riding alone on a string of trains that provided service late at night.

I was travelling to New Haven that night to attend IvyQ, a conference of queer ivy league students. I was travelling by trains because I had missed the bus my school had provided for those attending the conference-I had a full schedule of classes from 9am to 8pm, and with the bus leaving before my last class let out, I had to find my own way to Yale. And thus I ended up in an NJ Transit train one night, sitting in an old Comet EMU with my bags, reading a copy of Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*.

The experience of travelling by rail on local trains late at night is quite fascinating, mostly because the services are more well used than you might initially think. While I was the first one to board my car, by the time we had made a few additional stops I found that the car was rapidly filling with people, and the car soon filled with the noise of late night travelers talking to each other, even to strangers, or reading, or listening to music. While I found myself listening to a few of the more interesting conversations between strangers, for the most part I was completely engrossed by the memoir I was reading. I had finished the companion memoir, *Are You My Mother?*, a few days before taking this trip, and the previous year I had read all of the *Dykes to Watch Out For* anthology that I had purchased at Giovanni's room with my ex.

I remember being somewhat disappointed by *Fun Home*. It was good, but I found *Are You My Mother?* to be the much more relatable memoir, and I took issue with how Bechdel seemed to avoid harsh criticism of her father, instead chalking up his abuse of minors to him choosing to remain in the closet.

Still, it was a nice trip. I think about it often.

Sec. 3

After the nurse called them in, Erin sat in the triage room answering the questions as the nurse asked them.

"What happened?" the nurse asked.

"Do I have to talk about it?" Erin asked, "Can't you just treat me? I fell in a river, that's all you need to know."

"Alright, if you don't want to talk about everything with me, that's fine, we can get you cleaned up first." The nurse paused, before saying "But I want you to talk to a psychiatrist afterwards."

"That's fine." Erin said, "I can do that."

Sec. 4

I saw the musical version of *Fun Home* for the first time roughly a month ago. I had heard about it a while ago, in fact it's basically the reason I read the memoir in the first place. I was dating someone at the time, or rather, we had gone on a date, and while we were fooling around back at their dorm they mentioned a song from the musical, specifically "Changing My Major," and told me about the memoir and the musical, and after that I decided to read the memoirs.

As I said before, as a text memoir *Fun Home* didn't do much for me, but as a musical, it almost did too much. I had heard some of the songs before, and I had a rough idea of what to expect, but in person it was much more powerful than I expected.

I was seeing it with a group of friends, and we went out for ice cream afterwards. I'd say it was a good experience, but frankly it was rather rough. I remember standing outside the theatre, with a friend I had gone with, and she was crying, and I wanted to cry, but I couldn't cry for some reason. Since going on estrogen, what, 2 years ago, I've generally felt more in-tune with my emotions than I did before, but here while I desperately wanted to express myself I found myself standing there, unable to feel anything in any sort of visceral sense.

I couldn't comfort someone, and they couldn't comfort me.

I hated it.

Sec. 5

Erin stood on the edge of Schuylkill Banks Boardwalk, gripping the cold steel of the railing that separated them from the cool, black, polluted waters of the Schuylkill at night. They breathed in deeply and exhaled into the cool night air. They enjoyed the feeling of the slight chill on their arms, the sensation of being out at night. They hopped the railing, standing on the other side, with nothing between them and the river, and a barrier between them and the world.

They moved carefully to mount the ladder that was mounted on the boardwalk. The ladder was meant to help people get out of the river-it provided something for someone to grab onto and use to get up to the boardwalk, a safety feature to help save someone who went over the railing accidentally. Ironically it was this very safety feature that allowed Erin to slowly dip themselves into the swift waters of the Schuylkill river.

As they entered the water, they felt their breath be sucked out of their lungs by the chill of the passing water. When they had nearly fully immersed themselves, they sat there, hanging onto the ladder before they made the decision to let go, and flow with the water surrounding them.

The Schuylkill quickly took hold of Erin, and carried them off downstream, under a series of bridges. Erin thought the experience was oddly peaceful, and enjoyed giving up their stresses to the river, dissolving into the flow.

They were not sure how long they were in the water, but soon enough they found themselves being plucked from the river by a police boat, and brought to the ER.

Sec. 6

When I was still in high school, I ran cross country from my freshman to my junior year. It was a popular sport at my school, and while I wasn't very good, I stuck with it both to keep in shape and to keep my dad satisfied. One of our regular exercises during our after-school practices was to go on steady runs throughout our city. We'd all warm up on the track, then split into informal groups based more on friend groups than performance and set off to run through the city. It was one of the few things I enjoyed about cross country.

One day during my junior year, I set off with one of my friends on one of these runs. He was a much better runner than me, and a much worse navigator, and soon against my advice we found ourselves much farther away from our school than we intended, and we had to race back to avoid facing the wrath of our coach for returning from our run late.

As we approached the school, we ran along a road commonly taken by teachers leaving the school, and soon enough a history teacher at my high school flew by in his old red van. As he did, he leaned out of his window and shouted, "Grow a haircut hippie!" at me, a reference to my long hair that I had begun growing out the previous semester. It was an odd experience, but I knew that teacher was rather odd, so I thought little of it.

A day or two later, the same teacher approached me in the school after my practice had finished, while I was waiting for my mother to pick me up from the school. I was still in my running clothes, and he asked to hug me.

I thought that the request was odd, but I hugged him, and while we were hugging he told me that it was his birthday. I was never sure what to think of that. I haven't told many people.

Sec. 7

I don't think of that last memory often. It comes up occasionally, and when it does I usually consider whether or not I should tell someone at my high school about it, but so far I have not.

That memory came up again when I was in the theatre, witnessing two actors perform a scene from *Fun Home* where Alison's father picks up an underage student of his and drives him around town for a bit. While it is never outright stated or depicted, the implication is that Alison's father molested the student, just as he molested a few other underage boys.

I wonder why that teacher at my high school asked me for that hug. Nothing else ever happened, and I was in his class my senior year. Was it a joke? Was it something he did with other students? Was, or rather is, he a man similar to Bruce Bechdel, someone who, had he grown up in a more positive environment, been out as gay? He had mentioned living in New York for a while, what did he do there?

I'll never know. But I do know, that when this memory came up again this time, I just wanted to float away in the Schuylkill, to dissolve into the river.

I have a history of self-harm, a rather short one. It started this past semester. I went to the ER on the last day of finals. It was the second time I had harmed myself, and the first time I had really done any damage. When under stress, I still get those urges. But that time, I resisted, and went to stay the night at a friend's dorm.

Sec. 8

When writing this I stumbled upon a digital obituary for Bruce Bechdel, written by a family member of his and posted to a website that lets you search for gravesites. It contains a few pictures of Bruce, as well as one of his grandkids, and it's morbidly fascinating to see an actual photo of the man.

The obituary denies the idea that Bruce committed suicide, and only mentions *Fun Home* in passing.

What an odd world we live in.