

BECHDEL

Written by

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EXT. CLUB - NIGHT

HEIDI, 40s, phone in hand, stands next to the entrance of a bustling club. From inside, the boom of heavy dance music, all bass and synthesised percussion.

She is furiously texting someone, irritation in every thumb movement.

The BOUNCER on the opposite side of the door looks over with a quizzical expression.

This might have something to do with the fact that she is dressed as Wyatt Earp, complete with handlebar moustache and a large Stetson.

She gives him a tight smile and returns to her message. He, foolishly, takes this as an invitation to converse.

BOUNCER
(chirpily)
Let me guess. You always get your man.

Heidi hits send, looks up. Her tone is terse.

HEIDI
What?

The Bouncer is suddenly unsure of himself.

BOUNCER
The get-up.

He tries his joke again.

BOUNCER (CONT'D)
You always get your man.

HEIDI
That's the Mounties, mate.

The Bouncer sniggers.

BOUNCER
Okay, you always moun-

She interrupts him.

HEIDI
Piss off.

The bouncer throws his hands up in surrender.

BOUNCER

Jesus. I was only making
conversation.

Before Heidi can dispute this, the door of the club flies open and JENNA exits. She's around the same age as Heidi, but has strayed from the Western theme, preferring a shimmery mini-dress, bunny ears and a large pink sash reading "Bride-to-Be". She's clearly drunk and appears to be holding an inflatable penis of unlikely dimensions.

JENNA

There you are! We've been looking
all over for you.

Heidi looks unconvinced.

HEIDI

I've been texting you for twenty
minutes.

JENNA

Oh, babe. Lisa took my phone off
me. I kept trying to call Mark.

HEIDI

(confused)
I thought his name was Robbie.

JENNA

My fiancé's name is Robbie.

No further information seems to be forthcoming, so Heidi plows on.

HEIDI

I was just trying to tell you I was
going.

Jenna looks as if someone has shot her dog.

JENNA

No! You can't!

HEIDI

(lying)
I'm flagging. You guys can go on
without me...

JENNA

Is this about the.... (*she
indicates the costume*)

HEIDI
(flash of anger)
You said fancy dress, Jen.

Jenna giggles.

JENNA
Yeah, but...

Heidi isn't in the mood.

HEIDI
It's fine. I just... want to go
home. I'll see you on Monday.

Jenna shrugs.

JENNA
Okay, babe. You do you.

They have an awkward hug.

HEIDI
(firmly)
Be safe.

JENNA
Not if I can help it!

Jenna saunters back into the club. Heidi watches her go, then trudges off. Her spurs rattle against the concrete.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUS STOP - NIGHT

The queue for the night bus is a rogue's gallery of the tired, the pissed and the vaguely demented. A pair of teenagers are locked together at the mouth, as an older woman watches in disgust but utterly fails to look away. A man in a trenchcoat smokes furiously beneath an incongruous pair of sunglasses.

And then there's AUSTIN, 40s, in a rumpled tux, its bow tie unfastened. His hair looks as though it might have been neatly slicked back at some point in the evening but has begun to rebel.

Someone has written the word 'WANKER' on his forehead in lipstick.

He doesn't seem to care.

Heidi joins the back of the queue just in time for the bus's arrival.

The doors open and the motley crew begin to board.

CUT TO:

INT. BUS - TOP DECK

Heidi reaches the top of the stairs and slides into a seat. The top deck is reassuringly empty, with the exception of Austin, a couple of rows back.

The bus pulls off, haltingly, and they ride in silence.

Austin looks over briefly. As if feeling his attention, Heidi turns, but he has already looked away.

When he feels it's safe, he looks back.

This time, Heidi turns in time and they briefly lock eyes uncomfortably. Austin has a sudden realisation and brushes his hair over the lip-sticked tattoo on his forehead.

The bus reaches the next stop and they both, distracted, jolt in their seats.

It breaks the moment and they return to ignoring one another.

From below, the sound of a fresh batch of passengers joining. Following by the thump of boots against the stairs as someone lumbers up to the top deck.

A large drunk man, JEREMY, red-faced and with an air of unearned confidence, sits directly behind Heidi, despite the plethora of empty seats.

He looks over at Austin, then back at Heidi. Disbelief and amusement flood his face as the bus begins to move again.

He leans forward and taps Heidi on the shoulder.

JEREMY

Here, love... What exactly are you
meant to be then?

Austin looks up, uncomfortable but not sure what he's meant to do.

Heidi just sighs. This isn't new territory. But she tenses nonetheless.

HEIDI
(without turning)
I'm the law.

Jeremy cackles.

JEREMY
That right? Well, you can handcuff
me anytime, darling.

Heidi just stares straight ahead.

JEREMY (CONT'D)
You deaf? I said...

Austin stands and moves up until he's sat opposite them.
Takes off his tux jacket, revealing a fake holster and pistol
at his waist. Wanker. James Wanker.

Jeremy rolls his eyes.

JEREMY (CONT'D)
Your boyfriend's come to protect
you.

Heidi reaches down and produces her own plastic pistol. She
cocks it.

HEIDI
I can look after myself.

JEREMY
I bet you can, love. Bet you have
to, if this ponce is the best you
can do.

Jeremy looks between the two of them, building up a good head
of alpha male annoyance.

JEREMY (CONT'D)
I mean, look at the pair of you.
You've never held a real gun in
your lives.

He leans over Heidi's shoulder, his breath on her neck.

JEREMY (CONT'D)
Now me. I know my way around a
weapon. *(a beat)* I could teach you
if you want. From the looks of you,
you'd love to have something heavy
and solid in your hands.

Austin is almost out of his seat, but a glance from Heidi sits him down again.

She's scared, but she's not having it.

HEIDI
Oh, do fuck off.

It's like a match to gasoline. Jeremy leans back in his seat, ready to soapbox.

JEREMY
Do you know what the problem is with women today?

HEIDI
Do tell.

Jeremy slaps the back of the seat.

JEREMY
No sense of sodding humour.

Austin has had enough.

AUSTIN
Victoria Wood.

JEREMY
What?

AUSTIN
Gilda Radner. Wanda Sykes.

Heidi turns in her seat. This is interesting.

HEIDI
Tig Notaro!

AUSTIN
Yes! Do you know Fern Brady?

The two are talking over Jeremy now.

HEIDI
Oh, she's fantastic. What about Bridget Christie?

AUSTIN
I saw her at Edinburgh a couple of years ago. Absolutely killed.

HEIDI
Well, obviously.

Heidi has moved towards the edge of the seat now, excited.
Austin has done the same.

JEREMY
Jesus Christ.

AUSTIN
And I love Diane Morgan. Not just
Cunk either. She's got real range.

Heidi nods animatedly.

HEIDI
She's our Lucille Ball.

AUSTIN
(eureka)
I was just telling someone that the
other day.

Jeremy is pissed off beyond belief.

JEREMY
(darkly)
Eddie Izzard.

They turn to him, as if they'd forgotten he was there.

HEIDI
What?

JEREMY
No Eddie Izzard? He's a girl now,
isn't he?

The moment lies there, uncomfortably.

HEIDI
She's a genius is what she is.

AUSTIN
And her name is Suzy.

Heidi smiles.

Jeremy explodes.

JEREMY
You're mad, the pair of you. She...
(*annoyed with himself*) he is a
bender. A pervert. And I'll tell
you what, if I ever got my hands on
him...

AUSTIN
She'd flatten you, mate.

JEREMY
You little prick...

Downstairs, a bell rings and the bus pulls to a stop. Both Austin and Heidi, independently, sneak a look out of the window.

And stand.

It's both of their stops.

They exchange shy but delighted glances.

They head towards the stairs, away from Jeremy's bluster.

As they reach the top, Heidi whips her pistol from its holster and levels it at Jeremy, who, to his own irritation, jolts backwards in his seat.

Heidi smiles and mouths, wordlessly, the word 'Pow!'

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Austin and Heidi are mid-meet-cute now. They walk side-by-side, both bashful but riding the last vestiges of alcohol in their systems.

AUSTIN
You been a sheriff long?

HEIDI
(American accent)
Ever since they put my pappy in the ground...

Austin laughs, then has a sobering thought.

AUSTIN
Please tell me your actual father
is still alive...

Heidi laughs.

HEIDI
Yes.

AUSTIN
Thank god.

HEIDI
(deadpan)
The doctors say he's got months.

Austin shakes his head, laughing.

AUSTIN
So, what was it, really? Party?

HEIDI
(shuddering)
Bachelorette.

AUSTIN
Ah. Very small bachelors.

Heidi holds two fingers inches apart.

HEIDI
Tiny.

AUSTIN
Well, they do say size isn't
important.

He falters slightly - was that too much? Too sexual?

HEIDI
Yes, but they say it in such
squeaky little voices. *(a beat)*
What about you? I take it you're
not actually a secret agent.

AUSTIN
If I was, I wouldn't be able to
tell you.

HEIDI
Fair point.

Austin shrugs.

AUSTIN
Murder Mystery Evening.

HEIDI
Dear God.

AUSTIN
Well, quite. My character died
early, so it was mostly an excuse
for a piss-up and a bit of a nap.

HEIDI
Ah, that explains...

She points in the general direction of the 'wanker' label on his forehead.

Austin rolls his eyes.

AUSTIN
Male friendships are complicated.

HEIDI
This is what I'm told.

AUSTIN
If you ever want to be told how fat you've become, right before being punched in the crotch, gather your best boyhood chums and liquor them up.

HEIDI
I just spent the evening with half a dozen shrieking bridesmaids, all intent on playing Russian Roulette, Herpes Edition.

AUSTIN
Less testicular injury though.

HEIDI
You haven't met Jenna.

Austin stops. Extends his hand.

AUSTIN
I'm Austin, by the way.

Heidi takes it, shakes it firmly.

HEIDI
Heidi.

They don't let go immediately. This is the first touch. It's worth lingering over.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Austin and Heidi continue to walk, growing increasingly comfortable with one another.

They stop for a selfie, making grotesque faces to amuse each other.

Heidi spots a couple on the other side of the street.
SCREAMING AT EACH OTHER. Clearly drunk.

Austin pulls his plastic gun and fires off an imaginary shot.

HEIDI
You're a man of action, I see.

AUSTIN
Mercy killing.

HEIDI
I like the way you think.

She whirls around taking in the late night stragglers. A couple walk awkwardly, hands shoved in each other's back pockets.

She groans.

Pulls her own gun. Lets off a shot.

AUSTIN
Harsh.

HEIDI
But fair, I think.

Austin's turn.

A group of men in shiny suits, all in their 20s, yawping and clapping each other on the back.

One turns and whacks another in the crotch. Austin raises his eyebrows as if to say, 'What did I tell you?'

Then suddenly, he's on the move. Creeping up behind them, performing a clumsy roll behind a lamppost.

Then BANG.

Heidi gives him a slow clap, as he stands and strolls back to her.

HEIDI (CONT'D)
Very stealthy.

AUSTIN
It's the training.

They pause for a moment, staring at each other.

Heidi makes the move. Pulls off her moustache with a flourish. Goes in for the kiss.

It's new. It's a bit awkward. New mouths. Always an issue. But it's perfect.

They pull away, watch each other wordlessly. Heidi replaces the moustache.

Then move on, without saying anything more.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Hand in hand, they reach the corner of a street.

HEIDI

This is me.

AUSTIN

It's late. I can walk you to the house...

He's trying his luck. But not aggressively.

She hesitates. She actually wouldn't mind, but, hey, this is a stranger.

Safety wins.

Austin clocks the hesitation.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

No. You're right. Last thing I'd want to do is to lead the KGB right to your door.

HEIDI

And I've heard talk that the James boys are back in town. I may be called upon to get a posse together.

AUSTIN

Let me know if you need an extra rider. I'm slow but I'm also terrible.

Heidi makes a decision.

HEIDI

Okay, then. So how do we do this?
 Insta? Facebook? Whatever the hell
 Twitter is called this week? *(as if
 suggesting an orgy full of priests)*
 Phone number?

Austin fans his face.

AUSTIN

Good lord. The way young ladies
 talk these days.

They both get out, unlock and exchange phones. Numbers are
 entered, then phones returned.

Now, it's awkward. There's a goodbye to be said, but neither
 is motivated to say it. So, they loiter.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry about that asshole on
 the bus, by the way.

HEIDI

Why, was he with you?

AUSTIN

No, I mean... him. All of them. *(a
 beat)* I apologise on behalf of
 males everywhere.

HEIDI

I'm not sure you've got time to
 apologise for all of them.

AUSTIN

Ah, you know what I mean. Jerks
 like that ruin it for the nice
 guys.

Heidi frowns. That landed weird.

HEIDI

Nice guys?

Austin realises what that sounded like.

AUSTIN

Not like that. I'm not that guy.

HEIDI

Which guy?

AUSTIN
 You know, the 'nice' guy who thinks
 he's owed something for not being a
 complete bell-end.

This has taken a bit of turn. It's harshed the buzz a bit.

HEIDI
 Good. Because they're fucking
 awful.

AUSTIN
 I hope I'm not that.

HEIDI
 So do I.

AUSTIN
 Can I start again?

HEIDI
 It's fine. It's late. We've both
 had a drink.

AUSTIN
 It's just... I really like you.

HEIDI
 It's the moustache, isn't it?

AUSTIN
 Kind of. I like that you don't care
 what you look like.

Austin, you plank.

HEIDI
 What?

AUSTIN
 I mean, that you're not bothered
 about being seeming feminine.

Jesus.

HEIDI
 Dude. What the fuck?

AUSTIN
 Oh God. No. You are feminine, but
 not girly.

Heidi just stares, watching him dig a hole.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
I mean, you're still hot.

HEIDI
Oh, good. As long as I'm hot.

AUSTIN
That's not what I meant.

HEIDI
What did you mena?

AUSTIN
You're hot, but you don't know
you're hot.

Heidi has grown frustrated.

HEIDI
Like 'em shy, do you?

AUSTIN
No.

HEIDI
No, wait. A virgin. Bet you'd love
a virgin. Waiting for you to come
along and teach her about the
world.

AUSTIN
What? No! I... hate virgins!

Heidi turns and walks away.

Austin is left standing, looking as if he'd like the earth to
swallow him.

He stares up at the sky for a moment, then turns and walks in
the other direction.

CUT TO:

INT. AUSTIN'S HOME.

Austin slumps into his flat. Falls onto the sofa. Picks up a
remote, switches music on.

A Radiohead-like dirge begins.

He pulls out his phone and stares at it.

CUT TO:

INT. HEIDI'S HOME

Heidi enters her flat, slams the door behind her.

HEIDI
Siri! FML Playlist Three!

SIRI
Now playing, "FML Playlist Three"

Seriously hardcore metal fills the air.

HEIDI
(over the music)
THANK YOU!

SIRI
No problem.

She flops onto the sofa, screams into a pillow.

Then gets out her phone.

CUT TO:

INT. AUSTIN'S HOME.

Austin is texting furiously. Presses send.

CUT TO:

INT. HEIDI'S HOME

Heidi is doing the same. She presses send.

CUT TO:

INT. AUSTIN'S HOME/INT. HEIDI'S HOME (SPLIT-SCREEN)

Both phone ping simultaneously.

Both open the messages and read. It's a real rollercoaster watching their expressions.

Then both look up and mouth:

"POW!"