

How the undergrad stole the awards banquet

Tom Howe

The entire faculty down at Rood Hall liked the Awards Banquet a lot . . . but the undergrad, who lived just west of Rood Hall, did not.

The undergrad hated awards banquets, the whole finals season, now please don't ask why, no one quite knows the reason.

It could be his Brunton wouldn't read strike and dip; it could be, perhaps, he was hung over from the trip. But I think the most likely reason of all, was the lack of windows, inside Rood Hall.

But . . . whatever the reason, the compass or the beer, he stood there on Thursday, and he snarled with a sneer . . .

"The potluck is tomorrow, they're making some dishes, out of beans, and cheese and possibly fishes." Then he growled with his undergrad fingers nervously drumming, "I must find some way to stop this banquet from coming, for tomorrow he knew . . .

All the Geograds and docs, would wake bright and early and put on their plaid socks,

And then! Oh the rocks! Oh the rocks, rocks, rocks, rocks, ROCKS. That's all they would talk about was ROCKS, ROCKS, ROCKS! Then the whole department would sit down to their feast, and they'd feast and they'd feast and they'd feast, FEAST, FEAST, AND FEAST!

They'd feast on the sundries that the faculty brought! --- Then the undergrad rendered a sinister thought . . .

The undergrad rendered an awful, sinister thought.

"I know just what to do" the undergrad laughed in his throat, and he swiftly adorned his hat and his coat. And he chuckled and clucked, "What a mean, nasty trick" and he headed toward Rood, and he headed there quick.

He got on his snowmobile and with some old empty sacks, across west campus, the undergrad laid tracks. All the windows were dark, quiet snow filled the air, all the faculty were at home dreaming sweet dreams without care. When he came to the first door he saw from the square.

"Now to get in," the undergrad hissed, and he climbed to the roof, empty bags in his fist.

Then he slid down the venting, with a four-letter word, the only witness to this, was a surprised looking bird. He got stuck only once, for a moment or three, and then found himself inside the old XRD.

Then he slithered and slunk, through the dim lighted hall, and he stole all the rock, the big and the small. Fold samples, and mylonites, feldsaphthoids and schists . . . Carbonates, turbidities, too many to list.

He stuffed them in bags and the sack from his tent, then he stuffed all the bags, one-by-one, up the vent. He slunk to the museum, and stole all the gems, the rare, the fluorescent, the Spelothems.

He cleaned out the museum, as fast as he could, he even took their Petrified Wood. Then he stuffed all his loot up the vent with glee, AND NOW! Grinned the undergrad, I'll take the new XRD!

And the undergrad grabbed the XRD and started toward the door, when he was spotted by a custodian buffing the floor. The undergrad had been caught, by this custodian dude, who was just finishing up with the floors of old Rood.

He stared at the undergrad and said, "Who the hell are you?" And "what are you doing here at quarter past two?" But you know that undergrad was so smart and so slick, he thought up a lie and he thought it up quick. "The department didn't tell you?" the undergrad lied, "there's a copper plate that's misaligned inside. I'm taking it back to my workshop, dude. Then I'll fix it and bring it right back to Rood." And the fib fooled the custodian, and he left with a shrug, his indifference may have been from the booze in his mug.

The last thing he took was Schmidt's overhead projector, no one should have to sit through that 8 AM lecture. And the only thing that he left inside, was a set of markers that were totally dried.

It was quarter past dawn, all the faculty still a-bed, all the alumni still a-snooze, when he packed up his sled. He packed it up with the fossils, and the gems and the rocks, the XRD, the projector and even the clocks. 200 feet up, to the top of the moraine, he drove with his load, like he was insane.

"Poo poo to the doctors, the undergrad was humming, they're finding out now that no banquet was coming. "They're just arriving, I know just what they'll do, their mouths will hang open a minute or two, and then the faculty down at Rood Hall will all cry Boo-Hoo! That's a noise, grinned the undergrad, that I simply must hear!" So he stopped, and the undergrad put his hand to his ear.

And he did hear a sound rising over the snow. It started in low, then it started to grow . . .

But the sound wasn't sad, why, this sound sounded merry, "it couldn't be so," but it was merry, very!

He stared down at Rood Hall, the undergrad popped his eyes! Then he shook, what he saw was a shocking surprise. All the faculty down at Rood hall, the tall and the small, were CELEBRATING! Without any rocks at all. He hadn't stopped the Alumni Banquet from coming, it came! Somehow or other it came just the same.

And the undergrad, with his beer-gut, ice-cold in the snow, stood puzzling and puzzling, "how could it be so?" It came without seminars on carbon sequestration, it came without lectures on zones of ablation . . .

And he puzzled 3 hours, till his puzzler was sore. Then the undergrad thought thought of something he hadn't before. Maybe this banquet means a little bit more?!

And what happened then, well in Rood Hall they say, that the undergrad's heart grew three sizes that day. And as soon as his heart didn't feel quite so tight, he whizzed with his load through the bright morning light. And he brought back the equipment and specimens he had hoarded, and to he . . . He himself! The undergrad . . . a scholarship was awarded.

(Applause) . . .

**Join me next week when I will be reading from my new book, "John Thornton Hears a Who."

Thank you.