

A different kind of show

The Adventures of David Berry and the U of A Frats



Weather is a harbinger, and as the sleet came down on Friday night, I was glad I worked an umbrella into my costume. Three feet left of a bus that had just thrown up two dozen Playboy bunnies and Ninja Turtles into the maw of the Deke house, I walk with baby steps to avoid slipping on the slush. Deke Halloween parties are the stuff of legend, or at least would be if Hercules had spent more time drunkenly groping: could I do this?

No—not at first, anyway. I’m so new to this I have a can of Black Label stashed in my coat pocket: in my city, parties are BYOB. Fortunately, there’s a Kappa Alpha kegger eight houses down, a chance to wet feet where the men are clever and the women don’t expose too much skin. A three-meter swan dive into Modest Mouse and a keg you pump yourself is how I start the night.

“Literary Society” is, of course, the proper English term for frat. They distinguish themselves with a bookcase on the east wall and costumes that aren’t store-bought. Half past nine, though, and you only need one shoe off to count the revelers. Most sit around a fold-out table, three paces from the beer. Quarters fly, then cards come out: when you pull a six, everyone drinks, if I remember the rules correctly.

Dude in a bathrobe—“Fuck, this’ll do”—explains that the party will buck up soon. Half the house has been drinking since six, of course, but not everyone can throw away a night so recklessly. We make small talk over the books in the corner; ten minutes and getting out-Roald Dahled later, it’s time to brave the Dekes. Let’s see those fuckers top *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar and Six More*.

Back to the sleet, the haunted house on the hill awaiting Quarter past ten and no lineup outside—I thought these guys knew how to party. “\$35,” the pledge manning the door tells me. “Oh, no, right, \$25.” Guy looks like he used to play bench for the Morinville Varsity volleyball team, but at least he’s got his social pecking order straight—I hand him my ID and my OneCard, but I still smell pitstick smeared on gym lockers.

Seems tame, through the doors: my friends had houses like these, though never the foresight to lay cardboard down on the hardwood. Two choices: left to the maze, right to the basement. It’s clear from the jumpsuits guarding the door that I have as much chance of getting in the maze as whispering sweet nothings into their diamond-studded ears tomorrow morning. So downstairs it is, past three guys cleverly disguised as frat boys and a teetering brunette with butterfly wings.

I didn’t know this place existed. The Dekes have cleverly figured out how to stuff the remains of my 18th birthday into their basement. Squire’s, Ezzie’s and The Union Hall in residence; it’s a house and they have their own fucking liquor reps, peddling vodka water across from the foosball table. The antechamber is nothing, though: through a non-descript doorway is pulsing, gyrating, grinding. A DJ booth on the side, elevated stage on the other, a bar across the way: what the hell do they do with this room on Tuesdays?

Elbowing through to the bar, I don’t even get an option: Dekebräu from a pitcher from a keg, and on your way. Shame, too: for the first few hours, you can’t even taste the alcohol in the punch; I bet these guys do a mean BBQ.

The dance floor is a dance floor, remarkable only because I keep reminding myself I’m in a basement. These mating dances are two pieces of fabric from being mating, but at least they’re honest: fucking after talking is still just fucking if you don’t call the next day, so why pay retail? Love is for storybooks and Internet dating: these costumes are about the moment on the hips.

All the same, back to the sleet: they don’t want me here any more than I want to be there, and intellectual voyeurism is four parts peeping Tom in the land of grinding, tans and abs. Literary society beer is beer all the same, and at least I won’t hear “My Humps.”

Back through the door, six clever men admonish me for ever leaving in the first place. “We knew you’d come crawling back,” they say, only more cleverly. “Our penises are bigger than theirs,” remains unspoken, but it’s understood all the same. Their party has grown, though cute, chatty girls remain this country’s most precious resource: the four lady Ghostbusters might as well have come dressed as targets.

Deke experience has taught me, though: down to the basement, for the real party. A devil fills his drink from a backup keg, but he’s alone except for the twelve-string in the corner and the accretions of smoking on the coffee table. Someone was playing Dave Matthews some time ago, I’ll bet, but now all that remains is some poetry tacked to the wall and a few bad couches: the Kaps have cleverly stuffed the remains of my 19th birthday into their basement. A cigarillo and some Keith’s and I’ll tell you all about why I’m in love with my best friend.

Back on the main floor, the party is as real as it’ll get. An adventurous couple heads up the stairs just before sexy cowgirls, sexy cowboys, a sexy schoolgirl and a sexy Paperbag Princess make their entrance. A few moments later, a gaggle of 40-year-olds burst in like they own place. No costumes, no money for the beer, no clue: rugby players, evidently, friends of a friend, looking for a party. No one told them that just because the girls are legal doesn’t mean it’s any less creepy for you to hit on them. Perched over the keg like a balding eagle, one bellows, “Free beer here! The beer ... here ... is free!” Free for you, fucker: it was \$10 for my cup, but thanks anyway for pouring and turning the living room into Downtown BP’s Lounge after the office towers let out.

Wait a minute: is that “My Humps?” Sure as shit is—the literary society beats the Dekes to the bottom of the well by a solid half-hour. Not long after the lady lumps are but a bad memory, a glass breaks: the first casualty of a drunken evening, and someone has to get the broom. The broom becomes a moot point when, about ten seconds later, the second casualty of the evening goes flying through the banister: the Dahl scholar has just tossed one of the Working for the Weekend crew down a flight of stairs. Presumably they disagreed about the effect Pater had on Wilde’s early novels.

Scuffle, scuffle, break it up: a secondary fight flares, but it too is quelled. The 40-year-olds are scapegoated for the fight, to the objection of no one but themselves. Against better judgment, I follow them out the door: if the literary blood is this boiled, somebody must be dead at the Deke house.

Cept there’s nothing. I still can’t get into the maze, though this time someone calls my sexuality into question when I ask why people are signing the doorman’s abs: you’ll wake up staring at my smoke detector someday, pudding. Downstairs, “My Humps” blasts through the speakers, and the punch now smells like paint thinner and vodka. *Vive la différence*: most bars get cheaper as the night goes on, the Dekes are mixing fruit punch that could get a Greyhound to Calgary and back. Aside from that, the only difference is that grinding has mostly turned to sloppy neck sucking. Mardi Gras beads are a sure sign someone has shown someone else something, but most partygoers seem content to pull it out in private, or at least to get into the corner. There’s no shortage of private spaces around, and surely at least one of the pledges woke up in a bed whose sheets he didn’t stain.

Back to the Kaps for one last hurrah. DJ has packed up, a few intrepid folks are trying to drain the kegs, but the threat of cops has cleaned this one out pretty good: intellectual cowards can’t even deal with the 5-0. Those that remain make fun of what’s transpired, still half-heartedly trying their wordy, tentative dance (credit them for being more subtle than “bend over,” but you can’t fault Deke efficiency in this case). A slightly heavy dude in a band T-shirt crosses the conversation line—never say “orgasm” unless you’re actually in bed, friends—scaring away his conversation partner. Nevertheless, he assures me a little later that, despite his belly and his experience tonight, he “still gets a lot of pussy.” Amen, brother: a few extra pounds and fumbling social graces hasn’t entirely held me back, either.

That’s the cue to exit. Careful steps down the snowy front walk, some flashing lights catch my eye: 5-0 have pulled up outside the Deke house, the frat party last call. No doubt this gives the Kaps a few more minutes of beer and Ghostbusters, their night prolonged by the eternal fuckups who live just down the way.

Cops are still coming, though, Kaps: bookshelves or basement bars, pussy or poetry, it all gets broken up in the end. Sleet has turned to snow, but I have an umbrella and a smile: if you gotta go, you might as well go out happy.