

Accustomed As We Are

— farewell speech at an office party

Dear Brian

I'm writing to congratulate you on your farewell speech at the office party last week. Very funny and with pinprick accuracy, just the sort of thing we all needed. These rituals are usually an awful chore and a bore but you breathed new life into the one last week. At best there's a real community spirit in our office, almost a family feeling and parties are a time for bringing it alive.

You will lucky, I suppose, to have that joke about funerals handed to you on a plate. Who could have guessed that Bob would have a family bereavement last week, and that you'd be able to make those hilarious — if, Brian, slightly macabre! — remarks. It's always a nuisance when someone is away from the office for a family funeral, not just because of the work left undone, but also because it encourages unhealthy thoughts about transience and all that. Don't let anyone tell you that your remarks were a in bad taste, they were exquisite Bryan, exquisite.

Was it luck or was it crafty cleverness on your part that enabled you to get hold of old Paul's confidential self-appraisal papers? They were deplorably and analytical and naval-gazing, and also of course uncharacteristically frank and self-aware, and you were quite right to read out the juiciest bits. The office would be sheer chaos if people let it all hang out all over the place, and then thought they could hide behind the mask of confidentiality. Old Paul himself wasn't exactly chuffed, as you can guess, but everyone else thought that this part of your speech was absolutely necessary as well as gorgeously funny.

we also appreciated the way you put your secretary in her place she makes a delightful sacrificial victim I must say and I am sure all the other girls got the point which reminds me of your lesbianism joke splendid Brian splendid utaked for a reminder all the females staff what their role in life is but the same time made it absolutely clear the chap that the chaps are really all that interest in them and certainly couldn't care less if they sometimes seem to be resistant to our charms your amark was timely and masterly as well as typically subtle ignore the feminist back it will soon die down then there was your handicapped people joke The single family parent joke the people round the office getting decrepit joke your Geoffrey Boycott story the Chosen the Chosen profanities all tremendously good the climax for me and I think for everyone else as well but particularly those of us in more responsible positions was your crack about equal opportunities policies everyone in the office knows and everyone knows that everyone in the office knows but no one in the office dares blurt out that equal opportunities policies are a disaster area the silliest thing since the Sermon on the Mount it was refreshing and invigorating to have them ridiculed so unambiguously by yourself particularly this was lovely since it was you who

shared the committee which drafted our looney policy in the first place you mustn't let yourself be worried by criticisms of our from some of our bleeding colleagues the types you like to look at the Guardian after a days work in the real world what you said needed saying it it was an absolutely entire inspired touch may I add to imply that you have no confidence in the in the ability of our new colleague whose job is to steer the offices equality policies on race your remark about her was one hundred percent libraries of course no doubt about it but no one will dare object you did it so delicately all in all I appreciate that you played the game you didn't let the side down making speeches at office parties is one of the rituals which we senior people have to go through from time to time somehow we have to remind the other ranks what and where ultimate reality is and yet also to let them think they can take one or two slight liberties can transgress on occasions over certain Lines it's terribly difficult to get it right to hit the right balls to the right boundaries as ladies Strauss or du archimed probably said I shouldn't be surprised but nice one Brian you were really elegant All good wishes Brian you were really elegant all good wishes at the threshold of your new job you'll go places I'm sure reference is the symbolic function of ritual is to relate the individual through ritualistic acts to a social order to heighten respect for that order to revisify that order within the individual and in particular to deepen acceptance of the procedures used to maintain continuity order and boundary and which control ambivalence to Wards the social order from ritual in education by basil burnstein a Shell Elvin and RS Peters in philosophy philosophical transactions of the Royal Society of London be 1966 251 772 49 36 2 any man's death diminishes me therefore never send to know For Whom the Bell told from devotions by John Dunn 1571 to 1631