

Invite to a Death

by Steve Finan

"You are cordially invited to a celebration of the imminent death of David Keys", said the poster on our office wall. "It's the Big C," the poster continued, in a slightly smaller typeface so I could fit all that had to be said in A4 size. "Although you probably all know that anyway. David will be leaving the company when he dies, which is probably wise as dead people are even more useless than accounts office staff, and would love to buy you all a drink to say goodbye". And then there were time and date details, which always help.

I was tired of not speaking about what was happening to me. I was tired of people not commenting on the fact I was strangely bald after the chemotherapy (failed chemotherapy) and, laughably, never mentioned long-term plans to me.

So getting it all out in the open was as good a plan as any. It could hardly make things any worse! Although, from another point of view, crawling away and dying quietly is, in many ways, not as scary as public knowledge and discussion and the display of emotions that death inflicts on everyone. We don't handle death very well, we British. We like to pretend it doesn't happen. And those of us who rudely happen to be dying are seen as having committed a social boo-boo by allowing this to happen. It's like being caught speeding. Everyone does it, but being caught doing it is very bad form.

But then, when you are about to shuffle off this mortal coil, somehow social acceptance fades away a bit.

I'm the joker of the pack in our office, although I think a lot of my humour is too subtle for my colleagues. They never seem to "get" it. Ha ha.

So my posters went up around the office. In all the departments where I had acquaintances. And, as you might expect of a repressed people like us, no-one mentioned it. Not even the two women who I knew from experience were most likely to laugh at my witticisms and who might, you would have thought, been a little more able to talk to me.

You'd think some of them would have managed to say SOMETHING about what was, I know, a clever and worldly way to handle a difficult situation. I suppose they felt sorry for me, as well they might, but didn't know how to address the situation without showing too much emotion.

Then my boss called me in to his office next morning and asked nicely (because everyone is polite to the dying) if I was sure this "celebration thing" was the right thing to do.

I was sure.

Did I think people might be a little uncomfortable with it?

More uncomfortable than me, did he mean? Ha ha.

I wasn't doing this as another of my bad taste, crazy jokes was I?

Well, I was trying to see a fun, if not funny, side to it. I was known as the office joker, after all. So, yes. Ha ha.

As will happen in offices, I think my boss relayed part of this conversation to my colleagues. Just edited highlights. Most of which seemed to centre on the notion that I was putting up these posters as some sort of joke.

It created "an atmosphere". A lot of the time, when people can't match my witticisms with clever repartee of their own, they tend to turn away and pretend to have pressing work to do. I found, as you might imagine, that it was impossible to speak to people about the night out.

People now seemed to be even more offended by my imminent death than they'd been while I was quietly dying.

Loudly dying, it seems, is an even greater social boo-boo.

I'd put up the posters on the Tuesday advertising the "do" for the Friday. No sense in hanging about till my tumour got too big to carry about eh? Ha ha.

The "atmosphere" didn't improve all week and, to be frank, I wasn't expecting a huge turnout. I left the office five minutes early, with a cheery "See you all in the pub then"

No-one came.

There is something of the 1970s sitcom about a party invite that everyone ignores. But it's a very sad thing to have to sit through. I

stayed two hours, nursing my pint, tumour and disbelief that they'd all been so stupid. Ha ha. I was doing them a favour, I was making a joke of dying so they could all handle it better. They'd miss me when I was gone. I was as sure as sure can be that they'd miss me, it's people like me who make workdays bearable.

All my colleagues had done was be embarrassed by a social situation they didn't know how to cope with. I had no doubt that by Monday, they'd all have viable somewhere-else-to-be excuses.

But it wasn't nice. I've no life partner to take out my death-angst on. I hadn't found a lucky enough girl yet. Ha ha.

I'm sure you'll allow me a little wallow here, but I wanted people to know, to realise, I'd died. I didn't want to just slope off for a couple of months and then next be heard of in a newspaper's deaths ad. If they couldn't come and celebrate it with me, at least they could notice the event had happened.

I decided to die, seeing as I was dying anyway. And to die in the office.

It was punishment for the rest of them not coming to celebrate with me.

I spent a long time deciding how to do it. Electrocution might endanger others. Shooting was just too messy, as was opening a vein. Hanging was a bit too dramatic and jumping out of the window would take me away from the work situation. Poison sounded the best option. With a bit of luck, they'd all think it was the cancer that was doing the job. Ha ha.

What's the best poison though? Well a drugs overdose is the thing. Painless and easy. I reckoned about 200 paracetamols would do the trick. I crushed them up, after a pain-in-the-neck trip around several chemists and supermarkets to buy enough.

Monday dawned and I couldn't wait to see my colleagues' faces. It'd be one last laugh. Ha ha. They'd feel so incredibly guilty at leaving me to "party" alone and realise how much they'd miss me. I mixed the powdered pills into a pint of water and chugged down the, frankly disgusting, mix in the toilets.

Here we go. Ha ha. I made it back to my seat and looked around at my colleagues and noticed, quite amazingly ha ha, that they were all looking at me and there was a

