

## An Englishman in New York

[It is Big Joe's birthday party, but the action opens with a preamble whereby Bella, Joe's wife, enlists the help of a Private Eye because she has heard rumours that someone might be planning to kill her husband. The performance opens with Narrator sitting at a portable typewriter (stage right), trilby pushed back on his head and cigarette hanging from his lower lip. The small table he is sitting at contains only the typewriter, a small desk lamp and a brimming ashtray. Centre stage back is a window frame and stage left is a door frame. There is a small screen behind the table behind which hides the Private Dick (PD). To be ready for their entrances the characters are in the wings as follows:- Stage Left - Joe and Larry; Stage Right - Baines, Harry, Sabine and Claudia.]

NARRATOR        It was just another no-fun, humdrum evening in [your town], a seedy area just down the street from the Bronx. Outside my dreary office the streets were humming, but the sweeping van would soon cure that. I was killing time before going home. Home! Hah! If you call that hovel a home. The thrill of making mental bets on drops of rain running down the window pane was wearing thin. I reached for another cigarette but the packet was empty. Damn, I thought, another visit to [your local supermarket] costing me a fortune in parking fees. That just about put the lid on my day. I stood up and stretched.

[The screen is removed revealing the identically dressed real PD who stands up and stretches. From this point on the narrator retreats to another desk dressed the same as the original just off the stage and the real PD does what is appropriate.]

I decided to call it a day.

PD                    You're a day

NARRATOR        That didn't make me feel any better. I still felt like I'd spent the day rammed into my own filing cabinet. I'd just pulled on my raincoat when someone knocked on my door.

PD                    Come in - it's open

NARRATOR I shouted. Why did they always come when you'd just got used to the idea of going home? Well, whoever it was would get pretty short shrift tonight, and no mistake.

PD Come in!

NARRATOR I shouted again. Then I saw her. Wow, what a dame. Bella could move when vertically better than most broads could ever do when they were lying down.

BELLA Hi

NARRATOR Bella purred.

PD Hi What can you do for me?

NARRATOR I decided to charm her with my sophisticated repartee.

BELLA Don't you mean 'What can I do for you?'

PD I know what I mean

NARRATOR I could go on like this all night.

BELLA Are we going to go on like this all night?

NARRATOR I knew I was going to have to watch this one.

PD That's OK by me, doll

NARRATOR I drawled.

BELLA Wipe your chin. You're drooling.

NARRATOR I found a cigarette in the ashtray and offered it to her

PD Smoke?

BELLA No, it's not lit.

NARRATOR She was quick, I had to give her that.

PD Mind if I do?

BELLA Not at all. Mind if I throw up?

NARRATOR Brains as well as beauty - I liked that.

PD So, are we going to sweet talk each other all night, or shall we get down to business?

NARRATOR Bella was impressed by my dominant tone, I could tell.

BELLA                    When you're ready to stop pissing about - I suppose we could.

PD                        I presume you're not here to admire the decor?

BELLA                    No, I need a man...

NARRATOR              At last - my luck was changing

BELLA                    ...to find out who's trying to kill my husband.

PD                        What?

NARRATOR              I could tell this wasn't going to be your usual missing cat type job. I have a nose for that sort of thing.

BELLA                    I said

PD                        I heard what you said

NARRATOR              I lit another cigarette and then realised that I looked pretty damn stupid smoking two cigarettes at once. I offered one to the dame.

BELLA                    I don't.

PD                        How did you know what I was thinking.

NARRATOR              There was more to this doll than met the eye - and what met the eye was quite a knock out, I can tell you.

BELLA                    Look - if you're not interested

PD                        I'm more than interested

NARRATOR              I wasn't going to let this chick go so easily

BELLA                    Well, why don't you just concentrate on what I'm saying

NARRATOR              She pulled off her long black gloves in what I can only describe as a highly suggestive manner. The last time I saw a chick pull gloves off like that I was in the front row with her feather boa around my neck.

BELLA                    May I?

PD                        Sorry?

NARRATOR              I was mesmerised by those black gloves

BELLA                    May I sit down?

PD Sure - yes, you must excuse my manners. Won't you please sit down?

NARRATOR I pulled the chair out from behind the desk, wiped it carefully with my kerchief before indicating that she should sit

BELLA Thank you.

NARRATOR I perched nonchalantly on the edge of my desk [*He slips off the edge*]I lounged nonchalantly against the filing cabinet.

BELLA Finished are we?

NARRATOR Don't you just love a girl who shows such obvious concern for her fellow man? I nodded to indicate I was ready.

BELLA I want you to... [*she dissolves into tears*]

NARRATOR Now I don't mind telling you, one thing that I've always found very difficult to deal with and that's a dame in tears. It's unnatural. If the good Lord had intended a man to cope with crying dames he'd have given us absorbent shoulder pads.

PD There now, er, there, there  
He pats her ineffectually on her shoulder

BELLA No, no, here, here [*sliding his hand nearer to her bosom*]

NARRATOR This dame was a fast worker, but I was quicker.

PD Excuse me lady - but I never mix work and pleasure

NARRATOR More's the pity.

BELLA I'm so sorry

NARRATOR But she still held my hand where it had been put,

BELLA I'm just so...

NARRATOR I knew what she was, all right.

PD Don't you think this is a job for the regular cops?

BELLA They're no help.

PD So you've been in touch with them already.

BELLA Dumb cops. If you can't park it, they ain't interested.

PD You'll have to fill me in a bit better than that, lady. Oh, and can I have my hand back - I'm getting cramp.

NARRATOR I resumed my seat opposite her - with a bit of luck I should get a good view up her skirt.

PD Why don't you just tell me all about it?

BELLA No, I've got a better idea. Why don't you come to the party tonight - you can see for yourself. I've heard a rumour that someone is planning to kill my husband and I need you to protect him.

NARRATOR Well, this was certainly a change from lost cats.

PD Want to fill me in, doll?

BELLA Call me 'doll' again and I will certainly will. No - I've been away from home long enough; come to the house at 10 tonight and I'll fill you in then.

EXIT BELLA AND PD STAGE LEFT

NARRATOR It was a date; but, as usual I was late. Wouldn't you just know it? My first date with someone who didn't look like she should wear a collar and lead, and I was late. The party went ahead without me. By a simple narrative device, we turn the page and find ourselves at the party.

ENTER BELLA STAGE LEFT AND BAINES STAGE RIGHT.

NARRATOR RETURNS TO HIS SEAT.

BELLA Is everything ready, Baines.

BAINES Certainly, Madam, exactly as you ordered.

BELLA The champagne on ice?

BAINES The rather inferior sparkling white wine is chilling satisfactorily, Madam.

BELLA I beg your pardon, Baines?

BAINES I am most frightfully sorry, Madam, but it causes me great anguish not to serve real champagne.

BELLA                    That is none of your business, Baines, and don't you forget it.

BAINES                  My humblest apologies, Madam.

BELLA                    Now be ready to admit our guests.

BAINES                  Yes, Madam.

ENTER BIG JOE STAGE LEFT

BELLA                    You OK, Joe?

EXIT BELLA STAGE RIGHT

JOE                      Baines, old man, how's ya doin'?

A LOOK OF PAINED HORROR CROSSES BAINES' FACE

BAINES                  My physical condition is perfectly satisfactory, thank you for enquiring, sir.

JOE                      Don't ya just love that accent? Say it again for me, Baines.

BAINES                  I would really rather not, if you don't mind, sir.

JOE                      *[getting threatening]* Baines! If I ask you to do something, you do it! OK?

BAINES                  Certainly, sir. My physical condition is perfectly satisfactory, thank you for enquiring, sir.

ENTER HARRY STAGE RIGHT

JOE                      Yeah - I just love it. Now, don't you forget your place, Baines. You may think yourself a cut above us Yanks, but remember what's in my little safe, eh?

BAINES                  I am fully cognisant of the contents of your safe, sir.

JOE                      Ya what? Oh, never mind - just get on with your job, will ya?

BAINES                  Certainly, sir. Now, if you will excuse me?

EXIT BAINES STAGE RIGHT

HARRY                  May I have a word with you, Joe?

JOE                      Now? Tonight? It's my birthday party, Harry. What's so important it can't wait?

HARRY As your lawyer, and, I hope, your friend, I think it's something that you should know about.

JOE Piffle, Harry. Let it wait until tomorrow.

HARRY But...

JOE Tomorrow, Harry. Didn't you hear me?

EXIT JOE STAGE LEFT. ENTER BELLA STAGE RIGHT - DRESSED FOR A PARTY

BELLA You look upset, Harry, are you all right?

HARRY Oh - what a surprise. What did you hear?

BELLA Nothing, Harry, no need to be so jumpy.

HARRY I'm sorry, Bella, it's just that sometimes Joe...

BELLA Tell me about it. I'm married to him, remember?

HARRY Oh, what a waste.

BELLA Now, Harry, let's not start all that again.

HARRY It's so difficult, Bella.

BELLA I don't know what Joe has got on you, Harry, but I'm sure he's got something. He seems to have something on most people.

HARRY I...

BELLA No; I don't want to know. The less you know around here the better.

HARRY Sorry, Bella.

BELLA You've nothing to apologise for, Harry. Anyone who gets trapped in Joe's web deserves nothing but pity, in my opinion.

HARRY Mmmm.

ENTER BAINES STAGE RIGHT

BELLA Ah, Baines.

BAINES Yes, ma'am.

BELLA Is everything ready, Baines?

BAINES           It is ma'am.

BELLA            Are all the dips out?

BAINES           *(disdainfully)* Dips!

BELLA            Well, whatever you call them.

BAINES           Yes, ma'am, the hours d'ouvres are mantled and placed in apposite positions for the convenience of your guests.

BELLA            Very good, Baines. You may go.

BAINES           Thank you, ma'am.

EXIT BAINES STAGE LEFT

HARRY           What did he say?

BELLA            Beats me, but he seemed happy enough. Look, here comes friend Larry.

ENTER LARRY STAGE LEFT

BELLA            Larry... Dahling.

LARRY            Bella. You're looking particularly beautiful tonight.

BELLA            Oh, you smoothy.

HARRY            If you'll excuse me, Bella, I think I shall go and find somewhere quiet to throw up.

EXIT HARRY STAGE RIGHT

LARRY            Well, what's the matter with our legal eagle?

BELLA            Seems to have had some sort of a run in with Joe.

LARRY            Nothing different there, then?

BELLA            You'll never forgive our father, will you?

LARRY            Why should I? What did he ever do for me, apart from make me into a lacky in what should have been my own business?

BELLA            OUR business, Larry.

LARRY            Yeah, well, whatever. It doesn't alter the fact that I have to grovel down in front of that husband of yours every day of my life.

BELLA Just be patient, Larry, our time will come.  
LARRY Be patient? I've done nothing but be patient. I'm fast losing patience with being patient. Give me strength!

LARRY RUSHES OFF STAGE RIGHT AS JOE AND SABINE ENTER STAGE LEFT

BELLA Larry! Don't do anything stupid! Larry!  
JOE Don't do anything stupid? Larry? If he didn't do anything stupid then he'd never do anything at all.  
BELLA That's not fair Joe. Especially as we all know the only reason you married me. And who is this little girl?  
JOE Bella - meet Sabine. Sabine - Bella.  
SABINE Hiya, Bella.  
JOE Sabine is a singer down at the Blue Canary; you know - that new nightclub on the waterfront?  
BELLA Singer, eh? Is that the new name for it?  
SABINE New name for what, Joe?  
BELLA Ah - brains as well as beauty I see. You're a very lucky man, Joe.  
JOE Yeah, ain't she a cracker?  
BELLA If that's what you want to call it - I suppose so. I'll see you later, Joe.

EXIT BELLA STAGE LEFT

SABINE I don't think she likes me, Joe.  
JOE Now don't you worry your pretty little head about that, baby. Now, have you got your passport for me?  
SABINE Sorry, Joe, I haven't.  
JOE Baby, baby - I keep telling you; I can't arrange this little holiday for us without your passport. You do want a holiday with Daddy, don't you?  
SABINE Oh, of course I do, Sweetie, I'll get it to you as soon as I can.

JOE                    That's my little baby - you know? I was starting to think that baby didn't want to go on holiday with her Joe. You seem to be always putting it off.

SABINE                I'm sorry, Joe. I'll get it as soon as I can.

JOE                    Just be sure that you do, baby. You don't want to make Daddy angry now, do you?

ENTER CLAUDIA STAGE RIGHT

CLAUDIA              Joe! I want a word with you.

JOE                    For Heaven's sake, Claudia, won't it wait? It's party time.

CLAUDIA              Life is one long party for you, isn't it Joe? No - now.

JOE                    OK. OK. Off with you, baby, this is grown-ups talk.

DISMISSES SABINE WITH A SLAP ON THE BUM. EXIT SABINE STAGE RIGHT

JOE                    Now - what is it?

CLAUDIA              Your latest?

JOE                    What of it?

CLAUDIA              I remember the days when you were happy with real women.

JOE                    And what do you mean by that?

CLAUDIA              Let's face it, Joe - is she old enough to leave her mother?

JOE                    If you must know - she's 21.

CLAUDIA              If you say so - but that's not what I want to talk about. What's this about Larry never becoming a full partner?

JOE                    What of it? I never promised that he ever would, did I?

CLAUDIA              Come off it Joe. When Bella's father died he left the business to you, Bella and Larry.

JOE                    Hold on a minute there, Claudia. He left the business to Bella for me to run. You know damn well that our father-in-law knew that Larry doesn't have the brains or the guts to run this business.

CLAUDIA            Yeah - well - I'm sure he meant Larry to take his share of the profits. I'm sure Larry was never meant to be your gofer.

JOE                 Claudia, honey? Your Larry is very lucky to be a gofer. Still, he keeps you warm for me, doesn't he?

CLAUDIA            Why you....

SHE RUSHES AT JOE WHO PUSHES HER AWAY AND ONTO THE FLOOR

EXIT JOE STAGE RIGHT - ENTER LARRY STAGE RIGHT

LARRY              Claudia - what's happened? Are you all right?

CLAUDIA            I'm fine, Larry. Don't upset yourself.

LARRY              It was Joe, wasn't it? Joe hit you?

CLAUDIA            Only because I was having to fight your battles for you - again.

LARRY              Why that low down, despicable....

CLAUDIA            Yeah, yeah. Call him all the names you like, Larry, you're good at that.

LARRY              But enough's enough!

EXIT LARRY PURSUED BY CLAUDIA STAGE RIGHT

ENTER JOE SABINE AND HARRY STAGE RIGHT ENTER BAINES STAGE LEFT, PASSING LARRY AND CLAUDIA ON THEIR WAY OUT

BAINES             Everything is in readiness, sir.

JOE                 Thank you Baines. Get back and make sure all our guests get drinks.

BAINES             Very well, sir.

BAINES TURNS TO GO

JOE                 Oh - Baines.

BAINES             Yes sir?

JOE                 Come here, will you?

ADDRESSES SABINE AND HARRY

Just watch this - it's better than having a performing dog.

TO BAINES

Give us a dance Baines.

BAINES I beg your pardon, sir?

JOE I said - give us a dance.

BAINES If you don't mind, sir, I really would rather not.

JOE [*mimicking*] 'I really would rather not.' Baines! If I say dance - you dance. OK?

BAINES Very well sir.

BAINES DOES A LITTLE DANCE

JOE That's better. Now go.

BAINES Very well, sir.

JOE [*Putting an arm around Harry's shoulders and leading him away STAGE RIGHT*] Now THAT'S the way to keep your staff where they belong.

EXIT JOE AND HARRY STAGE RIGHT

SABINE Excuse me! Mr Baines?

BAINES Yes, Madam?

BAINES RETURNS WIPING A TEAR FROM HIS EYE

SABINE Does he always treat you like that, Mr Baines?

BAINES Only when there is company present, Madam.

SABINE Why do you put up with it?

BAINES A question I often ask myself, Madam.

SABINE It's demeaning.

BAINES Those who are forced to beg cannot always choose the life that they have to lead, Madam.

SABINE Oh, Mr Baines. I'm so sorry.

BAINES Thank you, Madam. I find your condolences provide me with a modicum of comfort.

SABINE You're English, ain't ya?

BAINES I do have that honour, Madam.  
SABINE Where are you from?  
BAINES A little town called [local town]. There is no reason why you should have heard of it.  
SABINE Really? Do you like me, Mr Baines?  
BAINES I have no opinion on the matter, Madam.  
SABINE Do you like what I'm wearing?  
BAINES Your costume has a certain appeal, Madam.  
SABINE What about my jewellery?  
BAINES Very nice, Madam, and no doubt very expensive.  
SABINE What? Oh, yes - Joe has bought it all. All except this, that is.

SHE SHOWS HIM, BRIEFLY, A LOCKET, BAINES LOOKING STUNNED  
DASHES FROM THE ROOM STAGE LEFT

ENTER HARRY STAGE RIGHT

HARRY Sabine, my dear.  
SABINE Yeah, Harry?  
HARRY You don't have to keep it up with me, you know.  
SABINE What ever do you mean, Harry?  
HARRY Never mind. Look - have you sorted your passport out yet?  
SABINE A little man is making me another one.  
HARRY Do you think that is wise?  
SABINE I have no option, do I?  
HARRY Want me to hang on to yours?  
SABINE You better had. Joe loves rooting through my drawers.  
HARRY You can't put him off forever, Sabine. He knows you've been singing on the cruise ships. He'll know you must have had a passport for your jaunts to the Caribbean and beyond.  
SABINE I can distract him when I want to.

HARRY Please, be careful. That's all I ask.

SABINE You're sweet.

KISSES HIM ON THE CHEEK AND EXITS STAGE RIGHT. HARRY  
TOUCHES HIS CHEEK AND FOLLOWS HER, BUT LEAVES  
HIS BRIEF CASE

ENTER BAINES STAGE LEFT WHO OPENS HARRY'S BRIEFCASE, PULLS  
OUT A PASSPORT, LOOKS AT IT, SHAKES HIS HEAD,  
RAPIDLY PUSHES THE PASSPORT BACK INTO THE BAG  
AND EXITS STAGE LEFT

ENTER ALL EXCEPT JOE AND BAINES - HAPPY PARTY CHATTER

ENTER PD STAGE LEFT

PD Evening, folks. Sorry I'm a bit late.

HARRY And who the hell are you?

BELLA It's all right, Harry. This is Mr Chandler - he's a private  
dick.

LARRY Thank God for that. I would hate to think he was waving it  
around.

CLAUDIA Larry! You're drunk!

LARRY So? What of it? It's all I'm supposed to be good for, isn't  
it?

SABINE I wonder...

BELLA Shut it, floosy. We may have to be nice to you when Joe is  
around - but I'm not going to waste no niceties on you when  
he ain't.

ENTER BAINES STAGE LEFT. HE APPROACHES BELLA AND WHISPERS  
IN HER EAR

BELLA What was that?

BAINES WHISPERS AGAIN

BELLA Oh, for God's sake, speak up man.

BAINES Very well, Madam. The master is deceased.

BELLA Rubbish. He was perfectly fit when I last saw him.

BAINES            You misunderstand me, Madam. Not diseased - deceased.

CLAUDIA          You mean...

BAINES            Yes, Madam. The master is now the late master.

PD                 And I was apologising for being late!

SABINE            No... [she wails]

PD                 I'd better have a look. Lead on, Brains.

BAINES            Baines, sir.

EXIT PD AND BAINES STAGE LEFT

BELLA             [To Sabine] Can't you put a sock in it?

SABINE            But he's dead.

LARRY             Shall we just have a quick head count to see who's sorry?

HARRY STARTS TO PUT HIS HAND UP - BUT THINKS BETTER OF IT

BELLA             So the business is mine.

CLAUDIA          And I hope you'll be taking Larry on as a partner.

LARRY             She better had.

HARRY             Oh dear.

SABINE            But what will become of me?

BELLA             Frankly, Madam...

ALL                We don't give a damn.

ENTER PD AND BAINES STAGE LEFT

BELLA             Well?

PD                 No he's not.

SABINE            What?

PD                 He's definitely not well.

CLAUDIA          What was it? Heart attack?

PD                 Yup.

SABINE            How awful.

PD                 Someone attacked his heart with a corkscrew, by the look of it.

LARRY           Wow! What a way to go - screwed to death.  
CLAUDIA        Larry!  
BELLA           But you don't mean....  
PD               Yes, doll; murder.  
ALL             No!  
PD               'Fraid so. So you're all going to have to wait here while we investigate.  
ALL             What us? Why? etc  
PD               Well, you're all the likely suspects, aren't you?  
ALL             Rubbish. Preposterous. etc  
HARRY          But what about this lot? [*He indicates the audience*]  
PD               [*Peers at the audience*] Nah! They ain't got the brains. It must be one of you six. Now if you'll walk this way?  
ALL             If we could walk that way...

EXIT ALL EXCEPT NARRATOR

NARR           And so the exciting part of the story comes to an end. Don't you just hate it when a good story turns into some sort of courtroom melodrama? Still, I had nothing better to do that night, and I thought it might be a bit of fun. I led the suspects to another room - no reason, really, it was just a good plot device to allow my readers to have something to eat.

Just then a good idea hit me. I could get out of doing ANY work tonight. Looking around I could see that there were a load of wannabe detectives just drooling for a chance to solve this little conundrum. What the hell - let 'em do it, I say. I could save my energies for the missing cats. We'll be back.

EXIT NARRATOR