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ACT I

SCENE 1

A room on the first floor of a Victorian-built university in the north of England

There is a large bay window with a desk placed in front of it and another desk covered with various papers and books. The walls are lined with books and on one wall hangs a good print of a male religious scene

When the CURRAIN rises Frank, who is in his early fifties, is standing DRC holding an empty mug. He goes to the bookcases and starts taking books from the shelves, hurriedly replacing them before moving on to another section

Frank (looking along the shelves) Where the hell...? Eliot? (He pulls out some books and looks into the bookshelf) No. (He replaces the books) "E", "E", "E", "E", "E"... (Suddenly he remembers) Dickens. (Jubilantly he moves to the Dickens section and pulls out a pile of books to reveal a bottle of whisky. He takes the bottle from the shelf and goes to the small table by the door and pours himself a large slug into the mug in his hand)

The telephone rings and startles him slightly. He manages a gulp at the whisky before he picks up the receiver and although his speech is not slurred, we should recognize the voice of a man who shifts a lot of booze

Yes?... Of course I'm still here. ... Because I've got this Open University woman coming, haven't I?... Teh... Of course I told you... But darling, you shouldn't have prepared dinner should you? Because I said, I distinctly remember saying that I would be late... Yes, I probably shall go to the pub afterwards, I shall need to go to the pub afterwards, I shall need to wash away the memory of some silly woman's attempts to get into the mind of Henry James or whoever it is we're supposed to study on this course... Oh God, why did I take this on?... Yes... Yes I suppose I did take it on to pay for the drink... Oh, for God's sake, what is it?... Yes, well—erm—leave it in the oven... Look if you're trying to induce some feeling of guilt in me over the prospect of a burnt dinner you should have prepared something other than lamb and ratatouille... Because, darling, I like my lamb done to the point of abuse and even I know that ratatouille cannot be burned... Darling, you could incinerate ratatouille and still it wouldn't burn... What do you mean am I determined to go to the pub? I don't need determination to get me into a pub...

There is a knock at the door

Frank #1