

Act One

A room in MCLEAVY'S house. Afternoon.

Door left with glass panel. Door right. A coffin stands on trestles. MCLEAVY, in mourning, sits beside an electric fan.

FAY, in a nurse's uniform, enters from the left.

FAY. Wake up. Stop dreaming. The cars will be here soon. (*She sits.*) I've bought you a flower.

MCLEAVY. That's a nice thought. (*Taking the flower from her.*)

FAY. I'm a nice person. One in a million.

She removes her slippers, puts on a pair of shoes.

MCLEAVY. Are those Mrs McLeavy's slippers?

FAY. Yes. She wouldn't mind my having them.

MCLEAVY. Is the fur genuine?

FAY. It's fluff, not fur.

MCLEAVY. It looks like fur.

FAY. (*standing to her feet*). No. It's a form of fluff. They manufacture it in Leeds.

She picks up the slippers and takes them to the wardrobe. She tries to open the wardrobe. It is locked. She puts the slippers down.

You realize, of course, that the death of a patient terminates my contract?

MCLEAVY. Yes.

FAY. When do you wish me to leave?

MCLEAVY. Stay for a few hours. I've grown used to your company.

FAY. Impossible. I'm needed at other sickbeds. Complain to the Society if you disagree with the rules.

She picks up his coat, holds it out for him to put on.

You've been a widower for three days. Have you considered a second marriage yet?

MCLEAVY (*struggling into his coat*). No.

FAY. Why not?

MCLEAVY. I've been so busy with the funeral.

FAY. You must find someone to take Mrs McLeavy's place. She wasn't perfect.

MCLEAVY. A second wife would be a physical impossibility.

FAY. I'll hear none of that. My last husband at sixty came through with flying colours. Three days after our wedding he was performing extraordinary feats.

She takes the coathanger to the wardrobe. She tries to open the wardrobe door, frowns, puts the coathanger beside her slippers.

You must marry a girl with youth and vitality. Someone with a consistent attitude towards religion. That's most important. With her dying breath Mrs McLeavy cast doubt upon the authenticity of the Gospels. What kind of wife is that for you? The leading Catholic layman within a radius of forty miles. Where did you meet such a woman?

MCLEAVY. At an informal get-together run by a Benedictine monk.

FAY takes the flower from his hand and pins it on to his coat.