

# The Hero

by Rose Scollard



MUSEUM OF THE ARTS  
"THE HERO" BY R. SCOLLARD  
THEATRE WORKS '25  
T. VAN HEYST

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## *The Hero*

premiered with Theatre Network Sept 11 - 29, 1985  
launching the theatre's season with two other plays  
under the title *Uneasy Pieces*.

I

### Cast and creative team:

Malory	William Davidson
Nicola	Judith Haynes
Ida	Valerie Pearson
Director	Stephen Heatley
Sets and lighting	Daniel Van Heyst
Costumes	Heather Redfern

## Characters

NICOLA                    *a young woman, thirtyish*  
IDA CUDGEL            *Nicola's cleaning lady*  
MALORY                 *Nicola's prospective fiancé*

*[A penthouse suite, decorated all in white. There are sliding windows to a balcony at which white draperies billow. Except for a few cleaning items, a vacuum cleaner, a duster, etc., and Ida's coat hat and purse, there is no clutter and the room has an ethereal, almost ceremonial look.*

*The curtain rises on IDA, a doughty, energetic woman of middle age. She is standing on the sideboard adjusting a huge white banner she has just hung. On the banner is a linear drawing of the "mistress of the animals", a tall goddess-like figure with outstretched arms. In each hand of this figure is clutched a wild beast: a stag on the right, a panther on the left. On the wall under the banner a dagger is mounted. Its long blade gleams murderously.]*

IDA:

There now, let's hope you stay put. *[Her work completed, she gets down from the sideboard onto a chair and from there to the floor. She regards her handiwork.]* Not exactly love's young dream, are you? *[Humming to herself, she replaces items on the sideboard: a white runner, two candlesticks, two long stemmed glasses and an empty decanter. When she's finished, the sideboard looks like an altar. The phone rings and she answers it.]* Nicola Martin's residence, Ida Cudgel speaking.... No. But she should be back any minute.... Oh, it's you Malory.... Yes it has been a while.... Oh, pretty good, considering the ailments I've come through. What with my back and my bladder.... Bladder.... distended.... She didn't say she was expecting you. But she's fixed the place up special.... Ten minutes?.... I'll tell her.... Arnold? I'm divorcing the lunatic. He's lived off me long enough.... Yes.... Yes, I will. For sure. Bye now. *[Hangs up phone.]*

*[She continues humming and tidying and putters off into the kitchen. After a moment or two there is the sound of someone at the door and NICOLA MARTIN enters. She is young slender and corporate looking. She places the bag she is carrying on the table and extracts a bottle of red wine.]*

NICOLA:

Ida, I'm back.

IDA:

Oh, hi Nicky. I've done everything you said.

NICOLA:

*[Opening wine.]* It looks great. You got the banner hung, too. Good.

IDA:

I know you said to wait, but I ran out of things to do.

NICOLA:

It's fine. Looks wonderful, doesn't it?

IDA:

I dunno. I wouldn't want it presiding over my romantic evening.

NICOLA:

Well, this isn't a romantic evening, Ida. So set your eager little heart at rest.

IDA:

If you say so.

NICOLA:

What does that mean?

IDA:

Malory called.

NICOLA:

What did he want?

IDA:

Just to say he'd be here in ten minutes.

NICOLA:

Rats!

IDA:

You weren't expecting him?

NICOLA:

No.

IDA:

But all this fuss. I thought it was for him.

NICOLA:

Well it isn't. Look, I think that will be all for this week, Ida. I left your envelope on the table.

IDA:

*[Gathering coat and purse.]* Okay. I'll just put away the cleaning things.

NICOLA:

I'll take care of it.

IDA:

But what about Malory?

NICOLA:

I'll take care of that too. *[Picks up vacuum and looks pointedly and humourously at Ida.]* There's really no need for you to hang about. *[Exits.]*

IDA:

*[Puts on coat.]* Sheesh! Romance. Spare me the thrilling details. Give me a free-for-all with some beersoaked Palooza, any day. *[Exits.]*

*[NICOLA enters in a robe. While she is making a few minor adjustments to the room, her attention is caught by something on the balcony. She looks out for a minute or two and we get the feeling she is in rapport with something outside. She then closes the curtains and exits again. A minute later we hear the shower running. IDA re-enters.]*

IDA:

Nicky! I forgot my envelope! *[Hears shower, shrugs, collects envelope. She is about to leave when a thump on the balcony gets her attention.]* What was that? *[A loud whirring sound like wings beating and some indeterminate muttering noises.]* Pigeons, I bet. Bloody pests. All right you little bastard. *[She whips the curtains open, sees what is outside, closes them with a yelp and staggers back clutching at her breast.]* Holy.....! That just about goitered me. *[She thinks a minute, pulls herself together and, braced for confrontation, opens curtains purposefully. She shakes a duster at whatever is without.]* Here, you, beat it! Scram! Get outa there! I said get outa there, you scabby lump! *[She stops flapping and looks through the window.]* The tits on that thing! Come on now, buggger off. *Off.* Aghh! Snarl at me will you? I'll fix you. *[Exits and returns with broom. There is a furious battle off, in which she is defeated. She goes to sideboard and pours herself some wine.]* Don't think you're going to stay there. Nicola won't put up with you. You can count on it. She's not going to have any great feathery blot on her perfect landscape. *[Takes a long swig and nods self-righteously, hesitates and goes back to the window peering thoughtfully.]* I wonder. Nah. It couldn't be. I mean, look at the size of it. I never hear of one that big. But what else could it be? Anyway, even if it is, it's not mine. Mine's just a little guy. *[Pauses.]* I'd better do it, though. Go through the motions. Just to be safe.

*[Locating her purse, she pulls out a mask, a sharp-faced, furry animal like a weasel or a fox. She puts the mask on and weaves slowly towards the window making gestures of propitiation with her hands and stumbling through a rough dance-like figure as she approaches. She is muttering something under her breath, scarcely audible, incantation like. She finishes, looks out at the creature, then takes off her mask.]*

IDA:

Well, you're not mine. I knew you weren't. No, you've got to be someone else's. But whose? Look at you -- scaly legs, giant wings, tits like a stripper. You couldn't be Nicky's! Things are getting out of hand you. *[Closes curtain as doorbell rings again.]* I'm coming. Keep your pants on.

*[She lets MALORY in, a handsome, swashbuckling type, loose limbed, beautifully dressed, holding flowers.]*

MALORY:

It's great to see you, Ida. Hey the place looks...unusual.

IDA:

Nicola gets the credit.

MALORY:

Hmm. It looks so different. Ceremonial, you know what I mean?

IDA:

She did change things round a bit.

MALORY:

The room seems to float, the way she's done it.

IDA:

I dunno. I like things more down to earth myself.

MALORY:

I like it. Do you think she's guessed what I'm up to?

IDA:

I dunno. What are you up to?



MALORY:

*[As if on cue takes a small box from his pocket, pulls out a sparkling ring and turns it in the light.]* What do you think?

IDA:

*[Takes it from him, admiringly.]* When I can see again, I'll tell you.

MALORY:

*[Looking around.]* Candles, wine. Do you think she knows?

IDA:

She did say this evening was special.

MALORY:

Isn't that just like her?

*[Flutter of sound from the balcony.]*

MALORY:

What was that?

IDA:

Nothing. You were saying?

MALORY:

Well I've been planning this for weeks, trying to gauge exactly the right moment and there she was planning right along with me. *[Looks at banner.]* This is new.

IDA:

I just finished hanging it.

MALORY:

Fierce looking lady, isn't she. Like a goddess, or something. I feel as if I'm bringing flowers to a shrine. It's close in here. We should open a window.

IDA:

*[Blocks his way and takes flowers from him.]* Here we should get these in water. There's a vase in the kitchen. Why don't you go and get it. *[He goes out and she peers anxiously through the curtains.]* Oh go away, will you? *[MALORY returns with the vase filled with water and she thrusts the flowers back at him.]* Good. Now why don't you arrange them.

MALORY:

Me?

IDA:

It's your offering.

MALORY:

Yes. Offering is the word. Have you ever noticed how other men are with her, fawning and panting around her as though they don't quite measure up? But Nicky and I -- we're on a different plane altogether... Well, you know how it is between us.

IDA:

I knew long before I met you. Mr. Perfect. Your reputation preceded you.

MALORY:

*[Laughing, delighted at the appraisal, but determined to tease IDA.]* So did Nicky's. I heard what a man-eater she was.

IDA:

Nicky? Get away with you!

MALORY:

But it's true! I tell you, Ida, I still can't open a closet around here without half expecting to find....

IDA:

*[Glances nervously at window.]* What?

MALORY:

The bleaching bones of former lovers. *[Laughs and sets flowers at the altar.]* Uh, were you finishing up here?

IDA:

Oh, I'm all finished. *[There is an awkward silence. Having left herself with no excuse to stay IDA cast her eyes about the room looking for something to cling to. ]* As a matter of fact, it's been a long day. I was hoping for a drink before I left. *[Sits down and looks at him expectantly.]*

MALORY:

Oh, well let me get it for you. What do you like? Sherry?

IDA:

Rye. A double, straight up.

MALORY:

One double rye coming up. It *is* stuffy in here. I'm going to open the window.

IDA:

*[Leaping to her feet and blocking him.]* No.

MALORY:

Why not?

IDA:

It's, uh, the sun. It's blinding at this time of day.

*[Fluttering and muttering sounds from without. The sound seems to have taken on a slightly mellifluous quality. But there is a decidedly ominous note to it.]*

MALORY:

*[What the hell is that? Opens curtains and falls back.]* Holy.... Will you look at that thing!

IDA:

I wouldn't get too close. It can get pretty snappish. *[Goes to liquor cabinet and finishes making her drink. She also pours one for Malory.]*

MALORY:

Intriguing looking beast..

IDA:

Gives me the creeps.

MALORY:

No, no. There's something noble about it. Expressive. *[IDA hands him his drink and then flaps at the creature outside.]* Hey, don't do that. It'll fly away.

IDA:

That's the idea.

MALORY:

But we want it to stay till Nicky's here. I'm sure she's never seen anything like this.

IDA:

I wouldn't bet on it.

MALORY:

What do you think it is?

IDA:

Beats me.

MALORY:

That long auburn hair. The feet like burnished brass. *[Suddenly alert.]* Did you see that?

IDA:

*[Alarmed.]* No! What!

MALORY:

The way it's moving its lips, you'd swear it's trying to speak.

IDA:

Oh, God!

MALORY:

It's singing. I can almost make out the words.

IDA:

Come away from there. You don't want to listen to that.

MALORY:

I must listen to it. I somehow feel a lot of things will clear up. Things between Nicola and me

IDA:

I thought everything was perfect.

MALORY:

There are always unresolved questions. Even in the best of relationships.

*[NICOLA enters. She is dressed in white, belted at the waist in gold, and her hair is piled up and casually pinned to her crown. She looks a little put out.]*

NICOLA:

Malory, I wasn't expecting you. Still here Ida?

IDA:

*[Darkly.]* I thought I should stay, under the circumstance.

MALORY:

Nicky, wait till you see this! *[Drags her to window.]*

NICOLA:

Oh, yes.

MALORY:

You knew it was there?

NICOLA:

Yes. It belongs to me.

MALORY:

What?

IDA:

Nicky, Are you out of your mind? Malory, Nicky and I need to talk a minute.

MALORY:

Sure.

IDA:

*[Pulling NICOLA to the other side of the room.]* Come over here.

*[MALORY whistles under his breath and looks out at creature nonchalantly but he is very much interested in what the women are saying and gradually, unconsciously, eases closer to them.]*

IDA:

You haven't been wearing your guise.

NICOLA:

Ida, I'm way beyond that.

IDA:

But Nicky, you have to do it. Every morning, every day, if you want to keep things like that out of your life.

NICOLA:

I don't want to keep her out of my life.

IDA:

Five minutes a day, that's all it takes to banish these things. A five minute orison every morning. Or at night, if you prefer. Except I don't like thinking of things like that at night.

NICOLA:

I stopped all that nonsense months ago.

IDA:

But why? No, don't tell me. I don't want to know why. Nicky, listen to me. Get rid of that thing, right now, and get on with your romantic evening.

NICOLA:

This is *not* a romantic evening.

IDA:

Oh yeah? Well tell him that. He's got a ring.

NICOLA:

A ring!

IDA:

With a rock the size of Gibraltar. You don't think he's bent on romance?

NICOLA:

Well he can just get unbent. That's not what all this is about.

MALORY:

What's what about?

NICOLA:

There's no reason why you shouldn't know. That creature out there is my emanation.

*[IDA moans slightly.]*

MALORY:



Your....emanation.

NICOLA:

I suppose you find that word offensive.

MALORY:

No. well....no. I find it unexpected....You don't hear it used much.

IDA:

Not in polite society, you don't.

MALORY:

So that creature out there is....yours.

NICOLA:

Yes. She is.

MALORY:

I, uh, suppose this makes me sound a bit unworldly, but I've never actually seen one before, an emanation, I mean.

IDA:

It's not something a man would expect to see.

MALORY:

Other women I've known were very prim about this sort of thing.

NICOLA:

*[Opening the curtains wider and straightening them.]* It's a typical attitude.

IDA:

It's the right attitude. A man shouldn't be burdened with such things.

MALORY:

But all the secrecy. As though there's something distasteful about it.

IDA:

You don't think *that's* distasteful?

MALORY:

I won't say it doesn't have its ominous aspects.

NICOLA:

You seem ambivalent about her.

MALORY:

I find it....well, the face....it's so....

NICOLA:

*[Teasing.]* Beguiling?

MALORY:

Well yes....in a menacing sort of way.

NICOLA:

Menacing!

MALORY:

And the breasts....beautiful. But I find them more sepulchral than erotic.

NICOLA:

Sepulchral! Malory!

MALORY:

Okay, you're right. I am ambivalent. Attracted and repelled at the same time.

NICOLA:

You've been taught to be repelled without really knowing what it is. It's your conditioning.

MALORY:

I suppose it is. As you say, I don't know much about it.

NICOLA:

It's simple. An emanation is the embodiment of the things that a woman casts out of her personality. The things that society expects you to repress. You're supposed to banish them in a certain ritualistic manner.

MALORY:

Yes. The orison. I have heard of that. And you wear something like a mask when you do it.

NICOLA:

A guise. It is like a mask.

MALORY:

I had no idea emanations were so substantial.

IDA:

They aren't, if you do what you're supposed to.

NICOLA:

She wasn't always like that. Until a short time ago she was a shabby lurking sort of thing. The feathers were lacklustre, the breasts all shrivelled up. All those years I did my orisons, and she would fade away. But I always felt bad afterwards. I'd look in the mirror and I'd see the same lacklustre quality in me. Then...I let her stay once for a few days. I was busy, had a disorganized week, just didn't do anything on a regular basis. It was amazing how she filled out.

MALORY:

Bigger, you mean?

NICOLA:

Just filled out. And, this is what was crazy, I seemed to be filled out too. Seemed to be more *there*. After that I went longer and longer between orisons, and I felt better and better.

MALORY:

I think you've left it a little too long this time.

NICOLA:

It was the voice that won me over in the end. It told me things. Made sense of all my new feelings.

IDA:

But that's what they do. They play on your sympathy. Mine is always whimpering and wanting to snuggle up. You just have to steel yourself. I feel bad afterwards too.

NICOLA:

What I'm telling you is I've stopped doing them altogether.

IDA:

But that's madness! You know what could happen!

NICOLA:

I want it to happen.

MALORY:

What could happen.

IDA:

Look, Nicky. Why don't you just sit down for a minute. Malory will get you a drink and....

NICOLA:

Come on, Ida.

IDA:

I've heard stories.

MALORY:

Like what?

IDA:

There was this woman once.

NICOLA:

Old wives' tales.

IDA:

She was like you. It went very badly for her.

MALORY:

Listen, Nicky. I think Ida's right. We should sit calmly and talk this over.

NICOLA:

There's nothing to talk over.

MALORY:

But don't I have a say in this?

NICOLA:

To be blunt about it, no. It's a private ceremony.

MALORY:

I came here with a ceremony of my own in mind.

NICOLA:

I heard. It's just that it's a very important event for me. You should leave if you can't handle it.

MALORY:

If I knew what it was I'm supposed to handle.

NICOLA:

It's very simple. *[There is a sound, slightly musical and eerie.]*

MALORY:

There is it, the singing again.

NICOLA:

Yes. It's nearly time.

MALORY:

I'd love to know what she's singing about.

NICOLA:

Oh, it's an old story restored to its true form.

MALORY:

You know what she's singing about? Well tell me.

NICOLA:

If you're sure.

MALORY:

I'm sure. Go ahead.

*[Lights dim and a baleful golden glow suffuses everything. There is a melodic background sound, unobtrusive, like waved lapping or pines whispering. NICOLA listens for a moment or two, then begins to recite in a subdued but clear voice.]*

NICOLA:

The song is of a woman, a goddess I think,  
wise and beautiful, with a terrible aspect.  
It was difficult to look on her, so awesome was her beauty.  
Men found it damaging and looked aside  
when they came before her.

For many years she languished, lonely and unloved,  
ruling her kingdom by the sea.

Then at last one came to her,  
a warrior and a hero.  
was bathing,  
wrestled with her in the laughing surf,  
matched her strides along the damp shore.

Side by side they swam together.  
Side by side they rested  
on the sea worn rocks.

Warmed by the sensuous sun,  
her body stirred to this hero among men.

All unsuspecting, languid with longing,  
Gladdened by his power she set aside her strength.  
Then in a manner all unforeseen to her,  
Treacheroously, infamously her lover did use her,  
"I do this for you," he murmured.  
"In the name of our love."  
And when he arose she was chained to the rock.

MALORY:

That's plain wrong. I know that story and it didn't happen that way.

IDA:

I knew you wouldn't like it.

MALORY:

In the first place it was a girl, not a goddess. A princess, perhaps, but without all those powers.  
And as for chaining her to the rock, that can't be the way you heard it.

NICOLA:

Through the long days he kept her there.  
Through the wave-beaten nights he did not leave her.  
I will not forsake you," he said,  
I will be ever beside you,  
I will teach you what it means to be beloved by me."

Worn down at last by the waves and his pleading  
She gave up her bright godhead  
Relinquished what he asked.  
At long last she pleased him,  
Slender and frail, clinging to the cold rock,  
She moved him.

"Let me go now," she pleaded.



"There is one more ordeal," he told her.  
"One last thing."

The dawn broke, fetid and unwholesome.  
The hero looked to the east  
anxiously peering.

Then what he awaited stirred in the waters,  
Broke up dangerously through the oily sea,  
All he had cast out in once emanation.  
Raging and fearsome she towered above him  
Dimming the light and spoiling the sea.  
The hero drew his sword on his misshapen foe.  
In the grey half-light they struggled for mastery.  
So bloody was their battle the sun would not witness it.

Then weak and worn, dangerously discouraged,  
Brought by his adversary almost to the death,  
Once last mustering of his strength made the hero,  
One last great lunging blow he dealt to his assailant,  
Groaning she fell back, he saw her life blood oozing.  
Mortally dispatched she sank into the foam.

The sun came out then, shone on the hero,  
Stringent and clear, the water anointed him.  
Assuaged, he turned, ready for his trophy,  
Turned as in a dream to where his beloved,  
Free at last of her pride, her wisdom, and her vigour,  
Gleamed like a prize on the black rock.

*[The singing stops. There is a moment's silence as the lights return to normal. NICKY comes out of the rather ethereal mode she was in while translating the song and turns to MALORY.]*

NICOLA:

Well?

MALORY:

As you said, it's an old tale. But the way I heard it the maiden was rescued from the monster, not severed from it. You're saying the monster was part of her?

NICOLA:

A part the hero found repellant and cut away.

MALORY:

I prefer the version I heard.

NICOLA:

I didn't expect you to understand. The message is just too unsettling, if you're a man.

MALORY:

Message! Look, it's simple. You've allowed things to get out of balance and it's given you a distorted view of the situation. All you have to do is get your guise, or whatever you call it, and send that thing packing.

NICOLA:

That's not white what I had in mind.

MALORY:

Well perhaps you'll tell me what you do have in mind.

NICOLA:

*[Softly.]* Incorporation.

IDA:

You can't be serious!

MALORY:

You're going to merge with that thing?

NICOLA:

*[Lights candle.]* At first, when you stop saying the orisons, the emanation doesn't have all that much appeal. Then, as time passes, it becomes more...significant. And of course the more significant it becomes, the more indispensable it becomes. Eventually there comes a point when you don't want to be separate from all that power.

MALORY:

And you've reached that point.

IDA:

I've heard of women who tried this and the results were not pleasant.

NICOLA:

I'd rather be whole than pleasant.

MALORY:

I want to know what happens when you merge with that thing.

IDA:

She'll be different.

NICOLA:

Not different. Stronger.

MALORY:

*[Takes her arm but she pulls away.]* You know, Nicky, assertiveness can be very interesting in a woman. In you it's very appealing, but you only want to take it so far. Beyond a certain point...

NICKY:

Beyond your comfort level you mean.

MALORY:

I'm simply trying to express my feelings about this, Nicola!

NICOLA:

I know what you're trying to express. That age-old desire to have women in their proper place, clinging and virginal and....muzzled!

MALORY:

That's ridiculous.

NICOLA:

You don't want a woman, you want some kind of clinging....damsel.

MALORY:

*[Laughing it off.]* Nicky.

NICOLA:

A damsel in distress, with all the repellant things in her nature neatly cut away, waiting to be rescued and carried off and protected for ever after.

MALORY:

Nonsense!

NICOLA:

Well personally, I'm not much interested in happy ever after. I want to take what's mine and I mean to do just that.

MALORY:

I don't think so.

NICOLA:

*[Looking out at the creature.]* She's mine! All the power, the insight...even the ugliness -- I have a right to it.

MALORY:

No!

NICOLA:

Why not.

MALORY:

Because this is the way it's always been.

NICOLA:

Not always. There was a time. ...

IDA:

*[Looking out.]* It's coming down off the railing!...It's going to come in here!

NICOLA:

I want it in here.

MALORY:

Well I don't! *[There is a great fluttering and flapping without, mingled with muttering sounds that galvanize him to action. He opens cupboards and drawers. ]* Where is it?...Where do you keep it? Your guise, Nicola!

IDA:

Yes Nicky, your guise. You must use it.

*[NICOLA looking on in an astonished, almost amused manner doesn't answer. At last MALORY finds what he is looking for in sideboard drawer. It is a medusa like mask with lolling tongue and snaky hair. A terrible visage.]*

MALORY:

Oh God!

NICOLA:

Guises aren't supposed to be pretty.

MALORY:

You'd better use it. Do what has to be done. *[Holds out mask to her.]*

IDA:

He's right, Nicky.

NICOLA:

You're asking me to banish the source of my vitality.

MALORY:

That hideous bundle of feathers?

NICOLA:

So now it's hideous.

*[Dismissing him NICOLA turns to window and stretches out her arms in a votive manner. ]*

MALORY:

I'm not going to let you do this.

*[NICOLA Moves to sideboard and pours wine into a goblet.]*

MALORY:

We have our powers too. Our rituals.

IDA:

It's true, Nicky. Listen to him.

MALORY:

We're not called upon to use them often. But they're always there, no matter how deeply submerged.

*[NICOLA raises the goblet to the Mistress of the Animals and takes a sip. Then she turns slowly to the balcony.]*

IDA:

Nicky! You don't see the danger!

*[Still holding the mask MALORY takes down the dagger from the wall. ]*

MALORY:

Yes. Our rituals. It was all in the song wasn't it. The other women I've known were very conventional, lovely women, but conventional There could be no opportunity with them, I see it now.

NICOLA:

*[Distracted.]* Opportunity for what?

MALORY:

For testing. For reaching beyond the ordinary. I always felt when I saw you with other men, there was something missing between you. Something puny in them keeping them from being heroes in your eyes.

NICOLA:

"Hero" is hardly the term I'd use.

MALORY:

I always thought I was on a different plane to them. But now I see I haven't measured up, either.

NICOLA:

Measuring up isn't an issue with me.

MALORY:

I want you to know I welcome this chance to prove my mettle.

NICOLA:

*[Uncertain again at his choice of words.] Mettle? [MALORY raises the dagger. ]* What are you doing?

MALORY:

*[Holding the dagger out sword fashion, intones slowly but intensely.]* I challenge you, as I challenge all that question my mastery. I reject you as I reject all that is loathsome and grotesque and unbidden.

NICOLA:

She doesn't answer to you, Malory.

IDA:

Yes. She should banish it herself.

MALORY:



Banishing is not what I have in mind. *[Advances to window.]*

IDA:

You can't kill it!

NICOLA:

Kill it? Malory! *[She grabs his arm and he pushes her roughly aside.]*

IDA:

Too much of her will be cut away!

*[MALORY moves slowly onto the balcony into a maelstrom of sound and activity. NICOLA follows, clutching at him. He pushes her aside. They both disappear from view. There is a great crescendo in sound, a scream from Nicola, then a sudden silence. IDA moans. After a minute or two MALORY backs into the room, bloodstained and disarrayed.]*

IDA:

Not much of a fight, was it.

MALORY:

I wouldn't say that. I would look on it as quite a victory.

IDA:

I'm sure the story will improve. . . .Nicky!

*[NICOLA stumbles into the room, weak vague and very pale. IDA rushes over to her full of concern. MALORY, who has removed his bloodstained jacket hands it to IDA.]*

MALORY:

Here. See what you can do with this. I'll see to Nicola.

IDA:

But she needs...

MALORY:

No, no, she's fine. *[He pulls NICOLA away from IDA who is reluctant to let her go. NICOLA sinks weakly onto the couch.]*

IDA:

Poor thing. She looks so lack lustre. So washed out.

MALORY:

*[Gently rubs her hand.]* She looks just fine. Frail and lovely. *[Gestures to balcony.]* You'd better clean that up. And take down that cursed picture.

*IDA exits, returns with laundry basket and goes with it to balcony. NICOLA seems to have fainted. MALORY strokes her hair lovingly. The light in the room returns to normal and once again the room is light and billowy. NICOLA opens her eyes and looks about her brightly. Her voice is frail, reedy, almost childlike.]*

NICOLA:

Malory. I feel so strange. Did I faint? What happened.

MALORY:

Nothing of consequence.

NICOLA:

Is Ida still here?

MALORY:

She's just finishing up.

*[IDA comes in from balcony with her basket. It is filled with a broken feathery object. She places it on the chair by the sideboard and pulls down the banner. She puts the banner on top of the basket and exits with her load. ]*

NICOLA:

*[Snuggling into MALORY's embrace.]* Hmmm. I feel so light. This is a floating sort of room, isn't it.

MALORY:

*[Approvingly.]* Very feminine.

NICOLA:

I like a room that floats. Don't you?

MALORY:

I do. *[He nods and pulls her close as the lights fade.]*

**THE END**