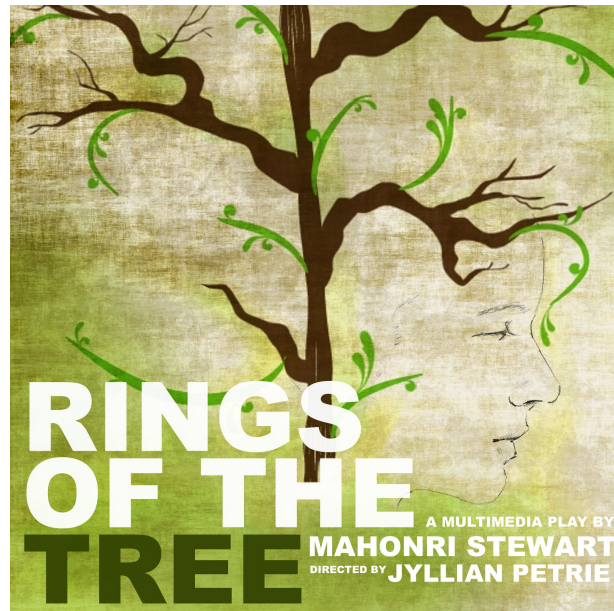


PERUSAL SCRIPT



A Multi-Media Play
by
Mahonri Stewart



Newport, Maine

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RINGS OF THE TREE

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LBT ORDER # 3310

Production History

Rings of the Tree first premiered, in its traditional, non-multimedia version, at Utah Valley University's Blackbox Theatre in Orem, UT on September 6, 2007. It had the following cast and crew:

CAST — 9 (4 f, 5 m)

Diana Applesong: Jamie Denison
Truman Nibley: Jordan Cummings
Colin: Mahonri Stewart
Echo: Sarah Preston
Jacquelyn Lyons: Penny Pendleton
Roman Lyons: Daniel Whiting
Felicity Pope: Bryn Dalton Randall
Lane Knight: Bryce Bishop
Manchester Lyons: Matthew P. Davis

CREW

Executive Producer: D. Terry Petrie
Producer: Mahonri Stewart
Director: Sarah Stewart Waugh
Stage Manager: Tiffany Shaw Taylor
Assistant Stage Manager: Karolynne Crook
Costume Designer: Anne Ogden Stewart
Costume Construction: Anne Stewart, Karla Summers, Kristi Summers, Anna-Marie Johnson, Mandy Lyons, Carol Ogden, Betty Layton
Fight Choreography: Amos Omer
Set Design: Daniel Whiting and Sarah Stewart
Original Music: Nathaniel Drew
Publicity: Mahonri Stewart and James Arrington

Zion Theatre Company and Imminent Catharsis Media then premiered the multimedia version of *Rings of the Tree* at the Off Broadway Theatre in Salt Lake City, UT on February 3, 2012, with the following cast and crew: (This multimedia/stage version, which was performed in 2012, is based more on Mahonri Stewart's screenplay version of the story, rather than the original stage play in 2007. It is essentially the same story, but there are key differences between the two versions.)

CAST

Diana Applesong: Jaclyn Hales
Truman Nibley: Danor Gerald
Colin: Lawrence Fernandez *Echo*: Heather Jones
Jacquelyn Lyons: Shona Kay
Roman Lyons: Tanner Harmon
Felicity Pope: Anna Daines Rennaker
Lane Knight: Shea Potter
Manchester Lyons: Blaine Quarnstrom
Film Extras: Jyllian Petrie, Anna-Marie Johnson, Jason Sullivan, Adam Argyle, Brian Grobb, Anne Betts,

Chase Ramsey, Jacob Porter, Celia Grant

CREW

Director: Jyllian Petrie

Multimedia Directors: K. Danor Gerald, Jyllian Petrie

Executive Producers: Mahonri Stewart, K. Danor Gerald

Producer: Nathaniel Drew

Stage Manager: Anne Marie Betts

Cinematographers: Charles Unice; Danor Gerald; Brian Paul; Jason Nacey; Jason Falasco; Denver Riddle; Tyson Maughan; Jyllian Petrie; Bryan Juber

Costumer: Anna-Marie Johnson

Sets/Props: Jason Sullivan

Lighting Design: Joe Fox/Mike James

Makeup Design: Jessica Harmon

1st Assistant Director (Film Portions): Allie Barr

Production Manager: Penny Pendleton

Original Song "Rings of a Tree": Kristen Jensen and Nathaniel Drew

Original Music Composition/Mixer: Nathaniel Drew/Lawrence Fernandez

Fight Choreographer: Adam Argyle *Poster Design:* Trevor Robertson *Horse Wrangler:* Tony Hutcheon

Stunt Double: Tony Hutcheon

The screenplay version of *Rings of the Tree*, upon which the multimedia version is based, won the LDS Film Festival Award for Best Screenplay in 2011.

RINGS OF THE TREE by Mahonri Stewart. RUN TIME: 2 hours. CAST SIZE: 9 (4 f, 5 m) Diana Applesong is a Victorian woman who has experienced tragedy after tragedy in her mysterious life. Eventually, after dealing with so much grief, she cloisters herself and her servants into her mansion, cutting herself off from the world. However, a group of young, life-loving explorers stumble upon her secretive existence and set off a chain of events that places her face to face with that which she is most afraid of—love. Yet, not all is as it seems in the romantic mystery-fantasy, as plot twist after plot twist brings Diana's story to a riveting conclusion. **ORDER #3310**

MAHONRI STEWART is an award winning writer and educator. He has written over two dozen plays, most of which have been produced throughout the U.S. and Europe, including productions in Los Angeles, Scotland, and Switzerland. In 2004, his premiere play *Farewell to Eden* won the Kennedy Center's American College Theater Festival's National Playwriting Award (Second Place) and their National Selection Team Fellowship Award. Since then he has received numerous other awards and honors and continues to expand his writing into various mediums, including screenplays, comics, poetry, and novels. He received his MFA degree in Dramatic Writing from Arizona State University. He received his bachelors degree in Theatre Arts from Utah Valley University. He's a former Playwright in Residence at the Noorda Regional Theater for Children and Youth.

Dedicated to my sister Sarah Stewart Waugh

Sarah was Rings of the Tree's original director and the one who tapped my shoulder and introduced me to the lovely Woman of period drama and romance.

Also dedicated to my brother Mark Stewart.

*Mark, like a Timelord,
briefly whisked me into the world of fantasy and wonder.
I haven't lost the taste of it since.*

Rings of the Tree

Act One

SCENE 1— *Screens dot the stage, which throughout the production show various images, locales, etc. They light up showing various outdoor images of a large, Victorian estate. We see on the screens COLIN on horseback approaching the house. COLIN enters. He is not a bad looking man, perhaps even handsome, and he carries a kind of over confidence in everything he does. He is also keenly intelligent and always exudes a strong presence. He is wearing the high fashions of the Victorian era. Coming out to meet him are three servants, JACQUELYN, MANCHESTER, and ROMAN LYONS. MANCHESTER is JACQUELYN's and ROMAN's father, thus considerably older than both of them, JACQUELYN and ROMAN being in their early to mid-20's. They calmly walk towards COLIN.*

ROMAN. I'll take your horse to the stable, sir.

ROMAN exits. MANCHESTER approaches COLIN, while JACQUELYN follows.

MANCHESTER. Very good to see you again, Mister Colin.

COLIN. Has Miss Diana been alerted to my arrival?

MANCHESTER. I told her myself just moments ago.

COLIN. And she did not come out to greet me?

MANCHESTER. Jacquelyn will show you the way, sir. Won't you, Jacquelyn?

JACQUELYN. Yes, Father.

JACQUELYN escorts COLIN and the screens change to show them traveling down the halls of the Applesong Mansion.

COLIN. I appear as I ought to?

JACQUELYN. Quite so, sir.

COLIN. I know how your mistress is particular.

JACQUELYN. You know her well, sir. You have been her longest associate.

COLIN. Associate? After all this time, I would hope that I have earned the title of "friend."

JACQUELYN. Friend then.

COLIN. You're unhappy here.

JACQUELYN. Pardon me?

COLIN. I know that she's been very fair to you.

JACQUELYN. You are so certain of that, sir?

COLIN. You can make no progress in this house. No movement. While my life, it's been nothing but movement. I find that a little philosophy distracts the mind.

JACQUELYN. I have a little too much time to think as it is, sir. I would prefer a little more action.

COLIN. I can see that. I can relate to that. I can't dwell too long upon any one thing, or I could be dwelling upon it forever.

DIANA enters or appears on a ladder, having just grabbed a book from one of the screens full of the images of books, as if it were a bookshelf. DIANA is an absolutely stunning woman of a

timeless kind of beauty, wearing the clothing of Victorian high fashion. She has the bearing and carriage of a queen or a goddess, and is not easily intimidated, nor frightened. But there is a kind of sadness that sits in her eyes at most times. DIANA looks at the spine of the book she has just reached.

DIANA. Hm. I actually have not read this one. Curious.

JACQUELYN enters with COLIN. COLIN calls up to DIANA.

COLIN. Diana!

DIANA. Colin. It has been some time. Thank you, Jacquelyn.

(JACQUELYN exits.)

Is this a social call?

DIANA begins to climb down, with book in hand.

COLIN. You know my need for variation. Thought that England was the place for me at the moment. I had such a frightful time in Russia.

DIANA. You are always welcome.

COLIN. Am I?

DIANA. To the point, Colin, to the point.

COLIN. The point, the point! I said this was a social call.

DIANA. Then socialize.

COLIN. Did I do something to upset you?

DIANA. I—I am sorry, Colin. I did not mean to be rude.

COLIN. Well, you know that I see you as flawless, even in the face of your flaws.

DIANA. Doting, always doting.

COLIN. Does that bother you?

DIANA. Would it change your behavior if it did?

COLIN. Well, I am pretty stuck in my ways.

DIANA. Stuck. Yes, we're both stuck, aren't we?

At this, DIANA stands and walks to a window. COLIN walks over to her.

COLIN. So severe. Too severe.

DIANA pulls away.

DIANA. And you are too bright.

COLIN. Thus we go together like day and night.

DIANA. It will take more than dash and daring, Colin

COLIN. What will it take then?

DIANA. Colin . . .

COLIN. I am serious.

DIANA. I am done.

COLIN. I am different. You know that.

DIANA retreats to an ornately carved chess board. This frustrates COLIN. DIANA fingers the queen piece.

DIANA. Shall we play a game? Chess?

COLIN. Diana . . .

DIANA. You said I was severe. A game will lighten me considerably, I think.

COLIN. Something out of doors then. Croquet?

DIANA. Croquet.

They move to another point on the stage, and the screens change to create classic British gardens, where they begin playing croquet. JACQUELYN reenters, watching DIANA and COLIN playing. MANCHESTER enters, approaching her.

JACQUELYN. Miss Applesong and Colin went to play croquet in the Garden.

MANCHESTER. Mister Colin to you.

JACQUELYN. Oh, Father must we play act even in private?

MANCHESTER. We always maintain our . . .

JACQUELYN. Always? Must our family always?

MANCHESTER. Always.

JACQUELYN turns to leave.

MANCHESTER. Where are you going?

JACQUELYN. Out. Today is supposed to be my day off.

MANCHESTER. What are you going to do?

JACQUELYN. Miss Applesong may do what she likes, but I will not be fenced in.

MANCHESTER. Who knows what you find to do out there for so long.

JACQUELYN. The world is an awfully large place, Father, and I will willingly waste my time in it.

JACQUELYN exits, brushing off ROMAN, as he approaches from the opposite direction. ROMAN approaches his father.

MANCHESTER. I've been grateful to you, Roman. At least I have one child who shares my ideals. I worry so much. Your mother was like her.

ROMAN. Mother hadn't the stomach to do what we must do.

MANCHESTER. Speak respectfully of your mother.

ROMAN. Wherever she is, we're better off without her.

MANCHESTER. I never was and never will be better off without her.

MANCHESTER exits then ROMAN exits. DIANA and COLIN are still playing croquet as they continue their discussion.

DIANA. It is flattering, Colin, truly it is, but every time you ask you already know my answer.

COLIN. I more than anybody know the lonely life you lead here.

DIANA. Oh, don't bring up such sentiment with me, Colin. You know that such emotions were burned out of me long ago. They are not convenient for those like us.

COLIN. Marry me, Diana. I am the only one else who understands your plight.

DIANA. And thus I also thought you understood my decision. Please, respect it.

COLIN. Your concerns, your fears, they do not apply to me.

DIANA. Colin, I know that it may all seem that the stars are aligned in a favorable match for us—but I can't. Not now.

COLIN. Not *now*? Is there a glimmer of hope for me yet then?

DIANA. If you can hope beyond hope, perhaps.

COLIN. I knew I could crack you someday.

DIANA. Do not misunderstand me, Colin . . .

COLIN. Of course. Hope beyond hope.

COLIN hits the colored ball through the loops, and hits the stake. COLIN and DIANA exit.

SCENE 2 — *One the screens we see time passing within the garden and ECHO enters, sitting at a garden table. ECHO is a beautiful woman who appears quite young. She is exceptionally well dressed in the highest of Victorian fashions. ECHO exudes confidence and a lust for life in all its glory. ROMAN enters, bringing tea.*

ROMAN. Your father was here yesterday.

ECHO. So I heard.

ROMAN. More tea?

ECHO. Thank you.

(ROMAN pours the tea. He puts in two sugars and cream.)

You know how I like it.

ROMAN. I know you well, Miss Echo.

ECHO. Always at hand when I'm around.

ROMAN. A distinct pleasure I reserve for myself, Miss Echo.

ECHO. I once thought it was because you didn't trust me. That you were keeping a close eye on me.

ROMAN. I hope you disabused yourself of that notion.

ECHO. I did. I have a good memory.

ROMAN. And thus you remember my declaration of love for you.

ECHO puts aside her tea and walks through the estate's gardens. ROMAN follows her, trying to catch up.

ECHO. You were twelve years old at the time. You could hardly expect me to take you seriously.

ROMAN. On the contrary, my lady. You could have depended upon that declaration for the rest of your natural life.

ECHO. There is nothing natural about my life, Roman.

ROMAN. Miss Echo—Darling Echo . . .

ECHO turns and confronts ROMAN.

ECHO. I do not approve of this house of illusions, Roman, so I will not create any smoke and mirrors for you either.

ROMAN. You do not need to . . .

ECHO. I am out of your reach.

ROMAN. No—but—I love you.

ECHO. You could never fathom me enough to love me.

ROMAN. Please, hear me out . . .

ECHO. Mr. Lyons, I did not come here to have this conversation. I have come here to see Diana, and thus I would appreciate it if you did your job and fetched her for me.

ROMAN bows severely and, without another word, turns and exits to fetch Diana. As the sun begins to set, DIANA walks through her gardens to find ECHO sitting at the base of a magnificent, old tree which has appeared on one of the screens. ECHO is sitting, watching the sunset. DIANA sits besides ECHO, her coolness contrasting ECHO's heat.

DIANA. Thank you for waiting.

ECHO. Patience is a luxury that we both can afford. I love this old tree.

(DIANA doesn't even look at the tree, but continues staring forward.)

But you long for the sunset.

(Pause.)

Diana, I'll get right to the point of my visit. I want you to finally promise me to never see my father again. I have warned you and I will warn you again . . .

DIANA. You once told me that I hide myself within my walls, Echo. Yet you hide something behind those eyes. I am not a chess piece, be it your pawn or your father's queen.

ECHO. You misunderstand me. I wish to be your ally.

DIANA. I have no allies.

ECHO. You may think you are goddess in this Olympus of yours . . .

DIANA. And what does that make you, a demi-goddess? A nymph? An illegitimate heir of Zeus?

ECHO. You need friends.

DIANA. You all die, you all shrivel in the heat of the sun. There is no crutch which I can lean upon in this world, they are all broken. Even you, Echo.

ECHO. Really, Diana . . .

DIANA. Next time you choose to visit me, Echo, play some games with me, engage in frivolous conversation. But do not think you will be able to use my secret, intimate thoughts and feelings in any of your schemes.

As DIANA retreats from her, ECHO stands looking after her. ECHO then turns to the tree. As a gentle breeze picks up and rustles the leaves within the tree, ECHO closes her eyes, enjoying the wind with a smile.

The lights black out on ECHO while DIANA dashes through the halls, coming to a room with the projections of a large fireplace. She goes to the fireplace and moves a secret panel, behind which is a lock. She pulls out a key, which is hanging around her neck and unlocks the door. There is an ornately carved box within it, which DIANA quickly takes out. She opens it and relief finally pushes out her worried expressions. We do not see what is in the box, but it is obvious that whatever she was looking for was still in the box.

DIANA is about to put the box back, when MANCHESTER approaches DIANA from behind. DIANA cries out in surprise upon hearing him, but turns to discover MANCHESTER.

MANCHESTER. Are you afraid that she's after it?

DIANA. I don't see how she would know that I have it. But—it's just the kind of thing that she would want.

MANCHESTER. Do you truly think Miss Echo is so dangerous?

DIANA. I do not know what to think of her. *(DIANA places the box back into its place.)* In hiding it, I'm protecting her. I'm protecting everyone.

DIANA locks the container and shuts the panel. The lights and images turn off to blackness.

SCENE 3 — *In the blackness there is a sound in the distance that is difficult to identify at first, very*

different from the sounds we have heard so far. A modern car suddenly appears on the screens, speeding past and disappearing down the road. The car leaves the forested area and approaches the Applesong Mansion, the only house within sight. Four individuals enter: TRUMAN NIBLEY. TRUMAN is a handsome man, probably in his late twenties or early thirties. TRUMAN has a confidence and an intelligence that exudes from him. He is neither loud, nor flashy, but watchful and observant. LANE KNIGHT. LANE is a relaxed, fun loving personality, although not always perhaps the brightest bulb in the bunch. What he lacks in sophistication, he more than makes up for in good nature. FELICITY POPE. FELICITY is exceptionally modern, fashionable, and socially aware. She is also intelligent, not in the bookish sense, but in a way that shows street smarts and a quick wit. And finally, to our surprise, we see . . . JACQUELYN. Yet, instead of the Victorian servant's outfit we are accustomed to seeing her in, JACQUELYN is now dressed in modern clothing. Her taste in modern outfits show a sense of the rebellious, with all such necessary accoutrements. The three others look to JACQUELYN. JACQUELYN leads her three companions through the house, holding a candelabra for light. She places the candelabra and lights some kerosene lamps, etc. to bring more light into the room.

FELICITY. This is ace, Jackie! No electricity at all?

JACQUELYN. No electricity at all, except for the servant's quarters. Bit gobsmacked, are you?

LANE. I still think she's feeding us codswallop.

JACQUELYN. Believe what you want, Lane, but in this house, there isn't a single bit of electricity, wireless or otherwise—not a single modern convenience. Charles Dickens could be transported here himself and never know it was the 21st century.

FELICITY. Wicked.

LANE. Oi. This place is giving me the heebee-jeebies.

FELICITY. Come on, Lane, you think it's haunted?

FELICITY spooks LANE from behind, which makes LANE jump.

LANE. Shove off.

JACQUELYN. Haunted—that's not too far off.

LANE. We're trespassing, ain't we?

JACQUELYN. Of course not, Lane. I live here, don't I? I invited you.

LANE. Then why are we here at three o'clock in the bloody morning, Jackie? Crikey, that's a bit subversive, in't?

FELICITY. The better question is what kind of nutter lives in a place like this? Some eccentric billionaire?

LANE. An old lady with a load of cats? A mad scientist?

FELICITY. A vampire?

LANE. All right, I'm already creeped out, aren't I? Shut it about the vampires.

JACQUELYN. Remember the deal. Not too many questions.

FELICITY. You're killing us with curiosity, Jackie.

JACQUELYN. You lot wouldn't believe me, if I told you.

FELICITY. Why not give us a chance?

TRUMAN has been taking it all in quietly, walking about the room, observing and investigating

everything. The others pick up on this. JACQUELYN approaches TRUMAN, with a specific and special interest in him. She analyzes his reaction.

JACQUELYN . You've been quiet, Truman.

FELICITY . Nothing new there.

JACQUELYN . What are your thoughts?

TRUMAN . When we went through those huge gates, past those massive walls, I didn't know what was on the other side. People have been wondering about what's behind these walls for so many years. And here I am, seeing the mystery. Nobody was right, nobody knew what this place was.

FELICITY . Nobody except for you, Jackie.

JACQUELYN . And now you all know as well.

TRUMAN . I felt as if I had stepped into some kind of portal or something. All of those kilometers of forest—a buffer to this house. This house.

LANE . Listen to him, it's like it's his birthday.

TRUMAN . I feel like a time traveler, that we went through some sort of worm hole—like Alice's rabbit hole. I expect to run into the Cheshire Cat or the Queen of Hearts any moment.

FELICITY . I'm expecting more of the likes of the Mad Hatter.

JACQUELYN . Ah, don't expect anybody more than Tweedle Dum and Dee. They're about as much as you lot could comprehend. Except maybe Truman, of course. Truman could meet the Jabberwocky and the creature would have to defer to him.

LANE . Please, just don't let it be a vampire. I didn't like the comments about the vampire.

FELICITY . Why, Jackie? Why does the owner do this?

JACQUELYN . Not too many questions, or we leave right now.

To their uncomfortable surprise, a figure enters the room, with a candle or kerosene lamp of his own. It is MANCHESTER, in his Victorian clothing.

MANCHESTER . Your guests will be leaving right now, regardless, Jacquelyn.

JACQUELYN . Father!

FELICITY and LANE almost bolt in surprise upon seeing MANCHESTER, but TRUMAN puts a calm, steadying hand upon each of them. They remain as MANCHESTER hovers around all of them.

MANCHESTER . I have been wandering the streets, searching for you. You were supposed to come home this morning.

JACQUELYN . I am an adult, Father, you don't need to . . .

MANCHESTER . You dare—you dare bring outsiders here! After all that the Mistress has done for us. This is a most base betrayal of her trust!

JACQUELYN . Trust? She doesn't trust anyone, Father, not even you. Thus the walls, thus the woods, thus the secrets.

MANCHESTER . You shame me, you shame all of us! Do you want to be thrown out of here?

DIANA emerges from the shadows, in her full Victorian splendor, to the surprise of the new arrivals.

DIANA . I think that's exactly what she wants.

DIANA circles them, inspecting them. When DIANA comes to TRUMAN, she takes a special interest in him. TRUMAN's reaction is similar, as the two of them feel an inexplicable connection to each other.

TRUMAN. If we've done something wrong, we're sorry.

DIANA. You should not be the one apologizing, sir.

TRUMAN. Please, don't blame Jackie. She has lived such a secretive life—we kept goading her to let us in on whatever she did. We pressured her. I take full . . .

DIANA. You are very quick to take on someone else's burden. What is your name, stranger?

TRUMAN. Truman. My name is Truman Nibley.

DIANA. Truman.

DIANA comes closer to TRUMAN, continuing her analysis. TRUMAN never breaks his gaze with her, bravely standing for his friends. JACQUELYN is growing increasingly uncomfortable by this situation, not particularly liking the silent connection that has been building up between TRUMAN and DIANA.

JACQUELYN. Miss Diana, I . . .

DIANA. Are you a laborer, Mr. Nibley? Or perhaps a captain of industry?

TRUMAN. Pardon?

JACQUELYN. She wants to know if you have a job.

TRUMAN. Yes. I work as a manager for a department store.

DIANA. What if I told you, I could pay you five times your current wage?

This catches TRUMAN off guard. He looks to his friends and then back at DIANA incredulously.

TRUMAN. Five times? You—you want to hire me?

DIANA. I am being quite serious. I could either have you arrested for trespassing—or I could offer all of you a job.

They are all shocked.

MANCHESTER. Now, Miss Diana, certainly you wouldn't . . .

DIANA comes over to LANE and FELICITY, inspecting their clothing, with more than a little disgust.

DIANA. Of course you would have to get out of those garish clothes and into something more proper—I do not fathom what they have done to fashion out there.

FELICITY. Miss, er, Miss . . .

DIANA. Applesong. I am Diana Applesong.

FELICITY. I'm not sure we understand what you're suggesting here. Are you truly—?

DIANA. Once I know that you can be trusted, you could visit the outside world every weekend, but you could not mention anything that goes on here. And you are most certainly not to mention any of the outside world's doings to me. All of your food, your lodging and other expenses will be provided here, and you will have full use of the grounds, the stables and the house, when you are not working.

LANE. Did she say five time our current wage? Good value! I'm in!

TRUMAN. What's the catch?

DIANA. Catch?

TRUMAN. You don't know us.

DIANA. But now you know me. And that alone is more than unsettling to me.

TRUMAN. You want to silence us?

DIANA. If you accept, you do not mention what happens here to the outside world. I have a strong sense of —privacy. And I've always been willing to pay handsomely for that privacy. I am being perfectly plain with you.

JACQUELYN. And what about me?

DIANA. What about you, my dear?

JACQUELYN. You won't need me anymore, with so many new servants.

DIANA. Do I not?

JACQUELYN. Let me go.

DIANA. You have always been free to go.

JACQUELYN. You don't need me.

DIANA. I do need you.

JACQUELYN turns away, and swiftly exits.

MANCHESTER. But, Miss Applesong . . .

DIANA. I do not have to justify my decisions to you, Manchester.

MANCHESTER. Yes. Of course. You are in full dress, Miss Applesong. Were you not in bed?

DIANA. There are often thoughts that keep me up at night. Manchester, find our guests some rooms. It is late, we will sort this all out in the morning.

Exit DIANA.

LANE. What. The. Bloody. Hell.

Black out.

SCENE 4 — *DIANA is sitting before an easel, painting the morning landscape, which painting appears on one of the screens. Gradually she hears a sound in the distance which she can't distinguish. She peers into the distance and is shocked to see a distant airplane on one of the screens.*

DIANA. My word . . .

(DIANA stares at the foreign object for a moment.) No—no. (DIANA forces herself to look away and bring herself back to her painting. But, in a moment of indecision, DIANA paints the airplane into the skyline of the picture.)

No!

DIANA smears the image of the airplane, and throws down her brush, turning away from the painting. TRUMAN enters the scene and approaches DIANA.)

TRUMAN. Miss Applesong . . .

DIANA. Mr. Nibley, I gave you explicit instructions to get into different clothing!

TRUMAN. I—I am sorry, Miss Applesong.

DIANA. You are never to come to me in such apparel! Do you understand?

TRUMAN. Yes, of course. Immediately.

TRUMAN turns to leave, but DIANA stops him.

DIANA. I—I am sorry, Mr. Nibley. Please, come here.

TRUMAN turns back to her and comes to her. He notices the painting)

TRUMAN. You are a very talented woman, Miss Applesong.

DIANA. I have had a good deal of time to myself, Mr. Nibley. One is able to cultivate many talents that way.

TRUMAN. I see.

DIANA. You have had a lot to think about.

TRUMAN. Yes.

DIANA. And?

TRUMAN. Can we take a walk

DIANA. Certainly.

TRUMAN and DIANA start walking through the forest or the estate's gardens, which appear on the screens. They are silent at first. TRUMAN then barrels into the conversation.

TRUMAN. When a woman cloisters herself in her own private corner of the world, it means that she is hiding something. Usually not very nice things, not very pleasant things.

DIANA. Well, once you think a thing through, you are direct, Mr. Nibley.

TRUMAN. Then, please, respond with some direct answers.

DIANA. It's more complicated than that—but, yes, you are right. My life isn't very pleasant at all.

TRUMAN. And then, with the wave of your hand, tossing money into our lap, you try buying our silence. Our silence about what?

DIANA. That is none of your concern.

TRUMAN. If you want me to be a part of this household, it certainly is!

DIANA. I did not say that I wanted you to be a part of this household. Not like that. Not like . . .

TRUMAN. Not like an equal, you mean? Not trusted, not a confidante? Just, "Yes, Mum. Thank you, Mum. Whatever you say, Mum."

This creates an uncomfortable silence, as DIANA mulls this over.

DIANA. What a different world you must live in.

TRUMAN. I will not—I repeat, I will not allow myself to become part of something corrupt. If you're some sort of crime lord, or drug dealer, or spy . . .

DIANA. Pardon me?

TRUMAN. I am a man of morals, Miss Applesong. I will not compromise those principles no matter how much money you give me.

DIANA. Mister Nibley, you completely have the wrong idea about me.

TRUMAN. Do I? I hope so.

DIANA. Although I am glad to hear that you are smart enough and— good enough to think of these things. But let me assure you, in protecting myself as I do here, yet I try to harm no one in this world.

TRUMAN. Protect yourself? Are there—are there people who want to hurt you?

DIANA. Not in the sense you are thinking. The world out there is turbulent. A sea of troubles, Mister Nibley. It will swallow you, bruise you, cut you, suck out your breath, draw out your blood . . .

TRUMAN. Miss Applesong . . .

DIANA. This house, Mister Nibley, can be a protection to us. A fortress.

TRUMAN. Do you need help?

DIANA. Well, as you can see, it's a large estate. It takes quite the toll on Manchester and his two children . . .
TRUMAN. Do *you* need help?

DIANA. I—I am a very strong woman. Impervious.

TRUMAN. What has hurt you so much?

DIANA stops walking and looks at TRUMAN, analyzing him. TRUMAN picks up on this immediately and, in a genuine, unrehearsed moment, takes her hand. TRUMAN does not let go and DIANA does not resist the touch.

DIANA. Mr. Nibley, I . . .

TRUMAN. I know you don't really know me, Miss Applesong, but—you seem like you're in some sort of trouble. I would like to help.

DIANA. The problem is, Mister Nibley, that I am always the one most capable of helping others.

TRUMAN. But you can't help others while you are locked away here.

DIANA. Exactly.

TRUMAN. I don't know what has happened to you. Maybe you're right—perhaps I can't understand what has happened to you.

DIANA. I do not think you can.

TRUMAN. But you have to understand that I will strive to be worthy of whatever trust you choose to bestow upon me. I'll give you some time to think.

TRUMAN gently lets go of her hand, bows—adapting himself to this new world—and exits. DIANA looks after him and then exits in the opposite direction.

SCENE 5 — *ROMAN and COLIN walk into a room within Diana's mansion. ROMAN checks the door behind them, to see if they're alone, and then quietly closes it. He turns to COLIN and nods.*

COLIN. This better not be another fruitless treasure hunt, Roman.

ROMAN. No, sir—I don't think so.

COLIN. You don't think so?

ROMAN. You can't expect perfection.

COLIN. I would settle for competent.

ROMAN. Records, sir. Not from my father—he's rather careful about that sort of thing. His paper shredder in the servants quarters is well used. But I found some old diaries—from Diana's father.

COLIN. And?

ROMAN. There was still more of it. It was preserved

COLIN. I knew it.

To their surprise, they hear whistling.

Since when did your father whistle?

ROMAN. He doesn't.

To the shock of both of men, LANE enters, dressed in Victorian servants' attire. Unlike the dress of the other men, LANE's clothing has lace at neck and the hands. When LANE enters, there is a stunned silence all around. This was the last thing any of them were expecting.

LANE. Erm, hello.

ROMAN. What in blazes?!

In a sudden, swift movement, ROMAN pulls out a gun and points it at LANE.

LANE. Oi!

ROMAN. Who are you?

LANE. Don't shoot!

ROMAN. Who are you?!

LANE. My name's Lane! Lane Knight!

COLIN lunges toward LANE and, in a trained, swift, and unflinching manner; he grabs LANE's arm, twists it behind his back, and pins him to a wall.

COLIN. (To ROMAN) Put the gun away, you idiot. I'll take care of this.

(To LANE)

How did you get in here, Mr. Knight?

LANE. It's not what you think! We—we're supposed to be here!

COLIN. We?

Enter TRUMAN, in Victorian clothing. TRUMAN upon seeing his friend in danger, rushes to COLIN and pulls him off and then they scuffle and fight. LANE grabs ROMAN and, as they also fight, LANE takes the gun. We hear someone running towards the room, and MANCHESTER bursts in, horrified by the sight.

MANCHESTER. What is happening here? Mister Nibley, get off Mister Colin! Mister Knight, let go of my son!

LANE. Your son? Well, sir, your son just went all aggro and pulled this bloomin' gun on me!

LANE and TRUMAN let go of COLIN and ROMAN. There is a moment, as they all catch their breath, where they dust off and assess each other. MANCHESTER comes over to LANE and takes the pistol.

MANCHESTER. Roman, why do you have this?

ROMAN. To protect Miss Diana.

MANCHESTER. You know as well as I do that Miss Diana does not need this kind of protection!

Enter JACQUELYN and FELICITY in period clothing.

JACQUELYN. What's all of the commotion?

TRUMAN. It's all under control now. It was a misunderstanding.

COLIN. Manchester, what are these people doing here?!

MANCHESTER. They are guests of Miss Diana. In fact, they are prospective employees.

COLIN. What? After all of this time, she just recklessly . . . ?

MANCHESTER. I understand your concerns, sir. If you and Roman can follow me, I will give you all the details.

MANCHESTER exits the room, with ROMAN following, but before he exits, COLIN grabs TRUMAN by the arm and whispers into his ear:

COLIN. Good work, boy, you caught me by surprise there. Be careful, though. If you ever choose to pick a fight with me again, I'm afraid you have a few handicaps that give me the upper hand.

Colin lets Truman go. The two of them exchange angry glances, and then Colin gives a dark smile. TRUMAN turns away, trying to cool off. Exit Colin.

LANE. Not so much as a "sorry, mate."

FELICITY. Well, boys, that's a way to make a first impression.

Exit FELICITY, LANE, and TRUMAN. The house fades away from the screens, and then is replaced by the gardens, including the beautiful, old tree from previous scenes. Appearing with the gardens is Diana. Enter Colin.

DIANA. I am assuming you have met the new help.

COLIN. What do you think you are doing?

DIANA. I am still trying to figure that out myself.

COLIN. You are playing a dangerous game.

DIANA. And who exactly is my opponent in this game?

COLIN. When are you going to trust me?

DIANA. When you earn that trust!

COLIN. *(Pause.)* And these new additions? You trust them, do you?

DIANA. No.

COLIN. Then who? Who do you trust, Diana?

DIANA. Trust is a myth. We are all myths, stories we tell each other to give reassurance and some semblance of comfort against the terrible winds of tragedy that we all know are coming.

COLIN. For once, have some optimism . . .

DIANA. Optimism! What do you or I have to look forward to, Colin?

COLIN. Everything! We have an endless future of possibilities.

DIANA. No. Everything we touch will turn to ash.

Exit DIANA. Then, in frustration, exit COLIN.

SCENE 6 — *We are now in the servant's quarters. The servant's quarters aren't like the rest of the Applesong estate; they are afforded every modern convenience and thus are a distinct contrast to DIANA's home. LANE, TRUMAN, and JACQUELYN are in the Common's Room, which appears on the screens, entertainment center complete with a large screen, high definition television, athletic equipment, pool table, video games, etc. JACQUELYN is showing TRUMAN the channels on the big "screen" television. LANE eyes the jacuzzi.*

LANE. Will you take a look at this thing! Miss Applesong may be living in the stone age in this part of the house, but she certainly lets her servants live it up!

FELICITY enters and eyes Lane humorously.

FELICITY. You look like a prat.

LANE. That's not my fault. Why do we have to wear these bloomin' monkey suits?

TRUMAN. Very nice.

LANE. And why does Truman look so much better than I do?

JACQUELYN. Truman always looks better than you do.

LANE tugs at his collar.

LANE. This itches. My collar's tight.

FELICITY. Whinge, whinge, whinge . . .

LANE. And why am I wearing lace?! Truman's doesn't have any lace!

Lane plops on a bean bag. FELICITY rounds up and forms the balls on the pool table on one of the screens. She grabs a stick and breaks the formation.

FELICITY. Never thought I would be a servant. I was going to go corporate, you know. Be a liberated woman and all that rot. Now I'm going to be—wait. Don't tell me I'm going to be changing chamber pots! Tell me that they have indoor plumbing!

LANE. *(Tugging at the lace)* I'm wearing lace. Blimey, I can't believe I'm wearing lace!

JACQUELYN notices TRUMAN sitting in a corner. She walks and sits next to him. She takes his hand, which he withdraws.

JACQUELYN. Are you all right?

TRUMAN. We're losing our freedom, aren't we? If we take this job, our lives will revolve around this place. And who knows what kind of life that will be?

JACQUELYN. Believe me, it's not usually that dramatic.

TRUMAN. That's the first time that I've ever been in the same room with a live gun. I was all set to join up, especially after . . .

JACQUELYN. After what?

TRUMAN. Especially after talking to Miss Applesong. But—we really don't know what we're getting into.

FELICITY. Yes, but isn't it worth whatever it is? We're set. Is that a loss of freedom or did we just escape the vicious system out there.

JACQUELYN. Diana's been good to my family.

TRUMAN. So if it is so good, Jackie, why do you want to leave?

JACQUELYN. Maybe I'm just a bit of a drama queen.

TRUMAN. Be straight with us, Jackie. If you can just walk out the door anytime and never come back, why don't you?

JACQUELYN. *(Pause)* I'm sorry, mates. I should have never brought you here. Father just texted me. He wants us back at the house. There's something important going on.

They all "travel" to the house, as the screens change to the main building. In the room DIANA, COLIN, ROMAN, and MANCHESTER are already situated.

MANCHESTER. We have everyone now, Mum.

DIANA. I heard there were dramatic happenings this morning, Truman.

TRUMAN. Our most sincere apologies, Miss Applesong.

DIANA. It is probably best to establish a few things. Colin and his daughter Echo are the only two others who know of my life here. They are welcome at any time and are to be treated as guests, as long as they adhere to same rules and conventions peculiar to the household.

(To COLIN)

And that doesn't include attacking the hired help.

COLIN. My sincerest apologies. Hopefully, we can put all of that unpleasantness behind us.

DIANA. You are to serve Mister Colin and Miss Echo as you serve me.

TRUMAN. I haven't made up my mind to serve anyone yet.

DIANA. I—I am sorry, Truman. I thought after our—discussion last night . . .

TRUMAN. We are still undecided.

FELICITY. Not all of us are undecided. If it is still all right, Lane and I have made our own decisions.

DIANA. Then you two are staying?

FELICITY. Yes, Mum.

LANE. Biting my arm off, Miss Applesong.

(DIANA looks confused by the statement.)

Uh, roaring to go—hunky dory—really excited to be here, Mum!

DIANA. I see.

(It is evident that DIANA is less concerned about FELICITY and LANE, as she focuses on TRUMAN again. She comes to him and tries to engage his eyes, which TRUMAN averts.)

Your friends see the wisdom in accepting my offer, Truman. Why do you delay?

COLIN. Frankly, Diana, I see no point in trying to persuade any of them to stay.

LANE. Who's he to speak against us? He doesn't know us from Adam.

COLIN. To the contrary, I do. Do you even realize whose house you have come under, Mister Knight? Do you realize the power of those who stand before you?

FELICITY. Now aren't we high and mighty?

COLIN. High, yes. Mighty, yes.

FELICITY. Just because Miss Applesong wants to live hundreds of years ago, mate, it doesn't mean you ought to. We're all equals here.

COLIN. Miss Pope, I am certain that you feel such, and I commend your sense of self worth—but there is much more going on here than you understand.

DIANA. I wish to keep them here, Colin.

COLIN. Do you think they would be able to truly bear up under the truth of their situation here? Do you think they could understand?

TRUMAN. Understand what?

DIANA looks at TRUMAN. She is about to confide something, before COLIN interrupts.

COLIN. Don't set yourself up for another heart break, Diana.

FELICITY. Miss, I don't understand what this bloke is talking about, but you'll find us bright and capable. You can rely on us.

COLIN. She cannot rely on you! You don't understand, she can't rely on anyone! Only I can help her. I am the only one in the world who knows what her life means.

For the first time in this scene JACQUELYN approaches DIANA. Wordlessly she takes DIANA's hands, and looks her in the eyes. A silent understanding happens between the two of them, and DIANA simply nods.

DIANA. Thank you, Jacquelyn.

(Pause. She then turns to MANCHESTER)

Manchester, can you fetch Roman's pistol to your daughter?

LANE. Not the gun again!

MANCHESTER obeys and hands JACQUELYN the gun, which to this point he had kept in his own safe keeping.

COLIN. Surely, Diana, you don't mean to . . .

LANE. Why are we getting out the gun again?!

DIANA. Do not worry, Mister Knight, none of you are in danger.

FELICITY. I must say, Miss Applesong, this is all becoming—alarming.

JACQUELYN inspects the gun and makes sure everything is in order.

DIANA. It will be clear soon. Are you ready, Jacquelyn?

JACQUELYN nods.

LANE. I'm still wondering why we have a bloomin' pistol in the room!

DIANA makes a signal, at which JACQUELYN raises the gun on COLIN. COLIN looks legitimately shocked.

COLIN. Wait!

TRUMAN. Jackie, no!

TRUMAN tries to stop JACQUELYN, but is unable to get to her before she fires the gun at COLIN. COLIN is shot, slams into a wall, and then slumps to the ground.

DIANA. Now shoot me, Jacquelyn.

FELICITY. What?!

JACQUELYN now fires at DIANA and she, too, is knocked to the ground by the force of the bullet. There is a stunned silence.

TRUMAN. Jackie, what have you done?

COLIN slowly rises from where he fell. While TRUMAN, LANE, and FELICITY are flabbergasted, MANCHESTER and ROMAN don't seem particularly surprised. JACQUELYN smirks at COLIN.

COLIN. I'll wager you enjoyed that.

JACQUELYN. You better believe it.

COLIN notices the bullet hole in his jacket.

COLIN. Blazes, girl, do you know how much this jacket cost? A wretched hole right in the breast.

Again, to everyone's shock, DIANA rises as well.

DIANA. Thank you, Jacquelyn.

DIANA stoops down and picks what remains of the bullet, which looks as if it slammed against

something it could not penetrate—which is exactly the case. There is a stunned silence as the three newcomers let what just occurred sink in.

LANE. Somebody better tell me what just went on there.

TRUMAN. Haven't you figured it out yet, Lane? It's brilliant.

FELICITY. What's brilliant?

TRUMAN. They can't die. Miss Applesong and Mister Colin are immortals.

Blackout.

SCENE 7 — *DIANA is retreating from COLIN, the gardens appearing on the screens.*

COLIN. So what possible good do you see coming from that shambolic fiasco?

DIANA. I am not accountable to you, Colin.

COLIN. After that episode, you certainly are! Or did you not think that it was not only your cover you were blowing off there?

DIANA finally stops and faces COLIN.

DIANA. How was I supposed to know that Jacquelyn would shoot you, too?

COLIN. So what is it about these people—these children—what is it about them that caused you to suddenly confide in them after two hundred years of secrecy?

DIANA. Call it a—gut feeling.

COLIN. A gut feeling? A gut feeling! Have you gone absolutely gormless?

Enter TRUMAN, running after them.

TRUMAN. Miss Applesong—Miss Applesong!

TRUMAN catches up to them, breathing heavily from the run.

That—oh—whew—that was brilliant! Cracking brilliant!

COLIN. Easily pleased, are we, Mr. Nibley?

TRUMAN. Easily pleased? You may be accustomed to that sort of thing, but for me—well, this rearranges my whole view on the world.

COLIN. Mr. Nibley, you've just caught a glimpse of something you will never be able to understand. Enjoy puzzling about it for the rest of your life.

TRUMAN. And you're not just pulling our leg? They weren't blanks or a trick gun or some rot like that?

COLIN. I could try shooting you with it, if you're not convinced.

TRUMAN. No, no, that won't be necessary. This is—this is monumental. History making.

DIANA. It is certainly not history making, Mr. Nibley. For there will be no record of it. No one must know.

TRUMAN. Yes, yes, of course. Why, you would be—I don't know, a spectacle, a twisted kind of celebrity. Scientists, governments—they would all want to get a gander at you. An ounce of your blood would go for millions of pounds.

DIANA. Then you see our dilemma.

TRUMAN. I certainly see it. I can vouch for all of us, I think. This secret will never leave this house.

COLIN. It better not, Mr. Nibley, for if it is let out, then not even the hounds of hell will be more fearsome to you than my retribution.

DIANA. Colin . . .

COLIN. I am serious. Diana, this thing you have done better not come back and bite us.

TRUMAN. He has a point, Miss Applesong. There is no real reason for you trust us. If we could get the world to believe us, we could utterly ruin the sanctuary you have built here and, well—I am just as puzzled as Mr. Colin is that you took this leap into the dark.

(DIANA looks at TRUMAN with an odd mixture of affection and fear.)

Miss Applesong?

DIANA. I am sorry, Truman. Certain things are just dawning on me.

TRUMAN. I am not sure if I understand.

DIANA. After so many years, I consider myself a good judge of character. All of you passed my scrutiny. Especially you, Mr. Nibley.

TRUMAN. I hope to be able to live up to that trust.

DIANA. Now I didn't say trust . . .

TRUMAN. In either case, I am at your service, now and always.

DIANA. Not always, Mr. Nibley. Only a handful of people among the entire world even have a grasp as to what that word means. But if you can leave Colin and I alone for a moment, I am sure that there is much he wants to discuss with me.

TRUMAN. Yes, Miss.

Exit TRUMAN.

COLIN. What is it, Diana? What is it about them that has brought out this trust so quickly?

DIANA. I already said it is not trust . . .

COLIN. Trust! What else can you call this reckless abandon? It is a trust that not even I, after hundreds of years of friendship, have ever been able to fully gain.

DIANA. You keep secrets from me, Colin.

COLIN. Ridiculous.

DIANA. I recognize a secret. For I know what it's like to keep a secret.

COLIN. I know you. Who else knows you like I do?

DIANA. And yet after such a long time, I feel like I don't know you, Colin.

COLIN. Of course you know me.

DIANA. Oh, yes, I know the flippancies, the subtleties, the blatancies. I know the flirtations, the false emotions. The cunning, the planning, the manipulation . . .

COLIN. Now you are being cruel and unfair—

DIANA. Yes, I know your personality. But I was surprised to realize recently how little I know *about* you.

COLIN. You know everything there is to know about me. You are my dearest friend.

DIANA. How old are you?

COLIN. What?

DIANA. How old are you?

COLIN. You know how old I am.

On the screens, we start to see glimpses of COLIN's and DIANA's past history with each other, including when she was a child, while he looks exactly as he does now.

DIANA. No, I don't. I asked soon after I discovered we shared the same condition, but you changed the subject. I never asked you again after that.

COLIN. Three hundred years old.

DIANA. When I was a child, you told me stories about ancient Rome.

COLIN. They were just stories. I made them up. That's natural when telling stories to a child.

DIANA. How old are you?

COLIN. I am telling you the truth.

DIANA. After living for thousands of years, a man can accumulate a whole world's history of secrets.

COLIN. I haven't lived for thousands of years! I swear to you, this coming October I will be three hundred and nine years old.

(At this COLIN comes close to DIANA, intimately touching her face, putting his hand around her waist, bringing his body closer and closer to DIANA's, which is also highlighted by the screens. This surprises DIANA, but she doesn't move.)

And do you know why I kept my age from you all that time ago?

DIANA. Why?

COLIN. I thought you might think you were too young for me. For I loved you even then.

DIANA retreats from this personal position of vulnerability, and creates some distance between her and COLIN. The images of their touches on the screen stop and revert back to the garden.

DIANA. I think it is time for you to leave.

COLIN. You say that I kept a secret from you, Diana? Well, there it is. There is my deep, dark secret.

DIANA. Leave.

COLIN. Diana, did you hear what I said?

DIANA. You are not capable of love.

COLIN. I have lived with this love longer than any man that walks the earth has been alive. Nations have risen and fallen, yet my love has remained constant. And yet again and again, you lock me out.

DIANA. I lock you out for your protection, as much as mine.

COLIN. I am not as fragile as all that. Neither of us is what one would call fragile.

DIANA. I tell myself that lie as well. But I am finally starting to disbelieve it.

DIANA exits. Then COLIN exits.

SCENE 8 — *ECHO pulls FELICITY into the house, nearly bowling over LANE, who looks at them bewildered, shrugs, and then exits. ECHO grips FELICITY by the hands as if she were some preteen BFF. ECHO has dropped some of the period formality and acts enthusiastically modern with this new member of the inner circle.*

ECHO. This is smashing!

FELICITY. What is?

ECHO. Well, you of course! To see Diana actually let other people onto her secret! It's marvelous!

FELICITY. Yeah, it's pretty cool. But, Miss Echo, I've heard a bit about you these last few weeks and I've been wondering—Colin is your Dad, yeah?

ECHO. Yeah.

FELICITY. Then—then are you like them, yeah?

ECHO. Immortal? No, not exactly. My Mum wasn't like my Dad. She was mortal. So you could say I'm a bit of a half breed. Half mortal, half immortal. I'll live for a bleedin' long time, but I'll eventually die.

FELICITY. If you don't mind me asking . . .

ECHO. I don't mind you asking.

FELICITY. How long will you live?

ECHO. From what Dad has told me, about five hundred years seems to be the average.

FELICITY. And how old are you now?

ECHO. I was born in 1895.

FELICITY. Wicked.

ECHO. Yeah. Wicked.

FELICITY. Staying young like that—you must've had some fun times.

Images of FELICITY's exciting life through the years appear on the screens.

ECHO. The twenties took the biscuit. I still get out my flapper dresses every once in a while when I go dancing.

ECHO hikes up her skirts and starts dancing the Charleston.

FELICITY. That's blinding brilliant!

ECHO. People get a kick out of them, asking me where I got such authentic looking costumes. I just tell them that I'm a time traveler.

FELICITY. You've lived through so much. Do you—do you ever get tired of it? Tired of life?

ECHO. Hell no! I aim to live it up. I'm out there in the world, enjoying every last drop of it until I fall dead dancing a few hundred years from now.

FELICITY. And Mr. Colin?

The images on the screens fade away.

ECHO. My father worked hard to get his immortality, so I suppose he has to live with his own consequences.

FELICITY. What do you mean? Wasn't he born with it?

ECHO. Oh, that was just was a passing saying. Don't pay attention to it.

FELICITY. No, what did you mean?

ECHO. I said ignore it.

FELICITY. *(Pause.)* All right. I—I'll get Miss Applesong for you.

DIANA enters the room.

DIANA. No need, Miss Felicity, I am right here. Would you excuse us?

FELICITY. Yes, Mum.

FELICITY exits. ECHO, in a whirl of energy, laughs and grabs DIANA by the hands, twirling

her.

ECHO. I'm so proud of you!

DIANA. Echo!

ECHO. I wouldn't have guessed in a hundred years! I thought I had you sorted, but you're still full of surprises, you stuffy old thing!

(Breaking from the twirl, they both flop onto one of the couches, ECHO laughing. After catching her breath, to her own surprise, DIANA starts laughing as well. ECHO punches her lightly on the shoulder.)

There you go!

DIANA. There I go!

ECHO. Progress!

DIANA. Yes, I suppose. Progress!

ECHO. You must let me take you shopping.

DIANA. Pardon me?

ECHO. I know all the best shops, and I know you've been hoarding all that money! We'll have a ball!

DIANA stands, the mirth of the moment suddenly gone.

DIANA. I think you have misunderstood, Echo. I have only added to the staff.

ECHO stands, becoming serious as well, addressing DIANA in earnest.

ECHO. Diana, you have a chance to start fresh here. This could be a kind of gateway into a whole new life.

DIANA. I have led too many lives already.

ECHO. Diana, I know you don't always trust me. Do you think I don't see that? But I worry about you, I think about you constantly.

DIANA. There is no need. I am best left forgotten.

ECHO. No! There's marvelous things out there, Diana, marvelous joys. Metal vehicles that fly so fast in the air . . .

DIANA. No . . .

ECHO. Devices that can take your portrait in a matter of seconds . . .

DIANA. I do not want to hear it . . .

ECHO. Boxes that people can instantaneously write to each other through from thousands of miles apart!

DIANA. Stop!

ECHO. There is so much you are missing. So much miraculous life that you are missing!

ECHO grips DIANA by the hands. They lock eyes and for a moment, just a moment, it looks like that ECHO may have gotten through to her. But almost as soon as that hope fired up in DIANA's eyes, it is just as quickly extinguished.

DIANA. I am so tired, Echo.

TRUMAN enters the room with COLIN following. ECHO and COLIN exchange uneasy glances.

ECHO. Father.

COLIN. Daughter.

TRUMAN and DIANA are riveted on each other, hardly noticing COLIN and ECHO anymore.

TRUMAN. Mister Colin insisted on seeing you immediately, Mum.

DIANA. Oh, don't call me "Mum," Truman. Coming from you, it makes me sound old.

TRUMAN. Miss Applesong then?

DIANA. Diana.

TRUMAN. *(With a genuine smile.)* Diana.

COLIN. My oh my. It takes me hundreds of years to reach that kind of intimacy and Mr. Nibley reaches it in little over two months.

The two break from their conversation, putting on a sense of formality.

DIANA. You may leave now, Truman.

TRUMAN. Yes, Diana.

TRUMAN darts COLIN a triumphant look before he exits. DIANA looks after him, wistfully. COLIN clears his throat. DIANA looks back, startled.

COLIN. Is this why I am neglected? Is *he* why I am neglected?

DIANA. He has become a—friend.

COLIN. I thought you didn't want friends. I thought you didn't want companionship. I thought you didn't want emotion. Isn't that what this farce is all about?!

DIANA. Colin, I am not sure you are seeing the issues clearly . . .

COLIN. After these centuries of devotion, of loyalty, of love that I have given to you, I am rebuffed again and again! Then this young whelp of a boy comes and steals you from me!

DIANA. He hasn't stolen me. You misunderstand. I couldn't . . .

ECHO. Why couldn't you, Diana? When you were looking after that young man—I haven't seen that kind of light in your eyes for over a hundred years.

DIANA. You know my answer to that, Echo.

ECHO. Oh, yes, yes! You'll lose him, you'll lose him! He will eventually die! Wo, Wo, unto Diana! She might actually feel pain!

DIANA. Do not mock me.

ECHO. You don't think I've known loss, Diana? You don't think I've seen loved ones wilt and die in my hand like crushed lilacs?

COLIN. Don't interfere, Echo!

ECHO. But I will live my life, however long God wills that life to be! I will dance and sing and celebrate it to the grave!

DIANA. But you will eventually reach that grave, Echo. That's the difference between you and me. I will never reach the other side. I will go on forever, losing and losing and never regaining.

ECHO. Then don't focus so much on the old lives—live now! Re-create yourself, give yourself a new birth!

COLIN. No, that is not what she wants, Echo. Not even you understand.

(Back to DIANA)

But I understand, Diana. I know the life you live. Please. Please, I am begging you. For the first time in this eternal parade of years see me for what I really am.

DIANA. And what is that?

COLIN. Your salvation.

DIANA. *(Pause.)* I have very much enjoyed this visit. You are always welcome. But now it is time for both

of you to leave. Manchester will see you out.

DIANA exits. There is uncomfortable moment between ECHO and COLIN. ECHO finally breaks the silence after they are sure that DIANA can't hear them.

ECHO. It looks as if you're not going to get your way with her, Father.

COLIN. And what was it you were trying to do in there?

ECHO. Playing my part, of course. If I start being too eager for your cause, then she'll connect us too closely.

COLIN. Well, I think you're playing your part a little too convincingly.

ECHO. You're being an ass, Father. She's obviously not taking the bait. You must make for yourself a new queen. And that all depends on . . .

COLIN. I wanted her.

ECHO. And it appears you can't have her. So focus on the job. You emailed me that Roman had found something.

COLIN. Yes, he has. Her father's diaries. We were certainly right.

ECHO. It's there then?

COLIN. You can become immortal, Echo. Isn't that what you wanted? You can join our Pantheon. Oh, by the way, Roman is under the impression that in exchange for his help, that he will also partake and in doing so he will become the kind of lover that is worthy of you.

ECHO. Oh, Father, don't tell me you have been indulging his sick fancies. The boy's a beast.

COLIN. He's proven useful. Next time that you see him, play along. Chat him up a bit.

(Pause.)

I haven't given up on her yet.

ECHO. When we find what we're looking for, you can create someone who is much more willing.

COLIN. I do not lie to her when I say that I love her, Echo.

ECHO looks over at her father. In a rare moment of affection between the two of them, ECHO reaches out and holds her father's hand. He doesn't let go, but rather grips it tightly. Blackout.

SCENE 9 — *DIANA is onstage, playing the piano forte, organ, or harpsichord. The instrument appears on one of the screens as DIANA interacts with it. After all these centuries, she has become quite an expert. The first piece she plays is quite somber. After a moment, she stops.*

DIANA. Oh dear. I am dreadfully depressing.

DIANA starts another piece, this one more classically upbeat. However, as DIANA plays, the fast nature of the piece brings out more frustration and anger from her than anything else. She plays furiously until she crashes down on the keys and screams. She sits there, crying passionately until TRUMAN enters.

TRUMAN. Diana, Manchester wanted to know whether you would prefer rice or potatoes or . . .

(Seeing her distress)

Diana, are you all right?

DIANA stands and retreats a bit, trying to mask her tears.

DIANA. Quite fine, thank you.

TRUMAN. Right then.

TRUMAN turns to exit, but then reconsiders. He turns back.

Diana, if you need a friend . . . I can be a friend.

DIANA. A friend. It's a commodity I haven't been able to afford for many, many years.

TRUMAN. It's a standing offer, if you should ever need it.

TRUMAN, again, turns to leave. DIANA stops him.

DIANA. Truman . . .

TRUMAN. Yes, Diana?

DIANA. I—why are you here? Is it the money?

TRUMAN. If I thought I would be miserable here, no amount of money would have made me stay here.

And if I felt my place was truly here, no lack of money could drive me away.

DIANA. Then what convinced you? Why would you choose to come into this prison?

TRUMAN. I wanted to help you.

DIANA. Help me? A speeding train couldn't crush me, a famine couldn't starve me, the most potent poison couldn't stop my breath, a dagger made of diamonds couldn't pierce me . . .

TRUMAN. You—you did all those things to yourself?

DIANA, who has been looking away from TRUMAN this whole time, now turns towards him. She hesitates. She then sits, and pats the cushion next to her, inviting Truman to join her. He does so. She looks at him gravely, searchingly, and then finally decides to fully open up to him.

DIANA. I have lived too long already.

(Glimpses from the stories that DIANA is telling about her life appear on the screens as she tells it.)

Truman, I was born in 1705. My parents doted on me—they loved me. But they were not like me. I was able to marry a fine man. His name was Frederick and I loved him dearly. We had twelve children.

TRUMAN. Twelve children!

DIANA. I am very fond of children. I loved each of them fiercely. Oh, and we had children into our sixties.

The few doctors we entrusted with the secret were baffled.

TRUMAN. Uh—I know this may be an indelicate question coming from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as you do . . .

DIANA. You may ask it.

TRUMAN. Women, they only have a certain amount of eggs . . .

DIANA. Mine, like the rest of my body, regenerate.

TRUMAN. Amazing! Well—I mean—I hope I'm not being too prying . . .

DIANA. You are not. Once I realized that—as I'm sure you can imagine, it had its advantages and disadvantages.

TRUMAN. But don't you have any children that are like Echo? If Colin fathers such half immortals, then shouldn't you . . . ?

DIANA. Theoretically. But even with Colin it is rare. I was never lucky enough to have such children who could—tarry with me a little longer.

TRUMAN. But—but didn't anyone notice?

DIANA. Let us just say that we became very good at being secretive. When we went out into public, he often introduced me as his daughter—then after many more years, his granddaughter. But he was my husband. The man I loved and continued to love and still love to this day.

TRUMAN. Diana—I—I can't even fathom your loss.

DIANA. Do you know how many death beds I have been to?

TRUMAN. Too many.

DIANA. After the death of my second husband Victor and all our children through him, I created this place and have remained in the year 1860 ever since, not daring to let anyone onto the grounds except Colin and Echo and the descendants of my servants. Until you three, that is.

TRUMAN. Why did you let us in?

DIANA. I am not sure if I completely know the answer to that myself.

TRUMAN. Diana. I—I'm not a great man. I haven't done anything to distinguish myself. I don't know what I can offer to a two hundred year old immortal that could be of any use to her, except that I believe I have a good heart and that I can be a good friend. If that's of any use to you . . .

DIANA. It is of infinite use to me.

TRUMAN. Then let age spot my skin, and let hair go white, and yet I will be your servant still. And your friend.

DIANA. Truman—I feel so . . . *(DIANA stands and comes closer and closer to TRUMAN, appearing as if she may embrace him. However, at the last moment she turns away.)* I can't do this—not again.

DIANA dashes out of the room, desperately trying to restrain her emotion.

TRUMAN. Diana!

DIANA moves out of the "house," which disappears from the screens and arrives outside at the tree, when TRUMAN has caught up with her. He is struggling for air, as DIANA is faster and fitter than he is, being immortal.

DIANA. You will die!

TRUMAN. Yes, I will. I can't stop that.

DIANA. My life is like the rings of this tree, Truman! Expanding and expanding and never terminating!

TRUMAN. Diana! Please, let us help you. Let me help you!

DIANA. Colin can help me. He understands, I will send for him right now.

TRUMAN comes very close to DIANA. She does not pull away.

TRUMAN. If I were I made of stone or steel, perhaps then I could be immortal, too.

DIANA. And if I were made of flesh, then perhaps I could die happy with you. But that is not how it is.

TRUMAN slowly comes closer to DIANA. She walks away leaning against the tree. TRUMAN gently turns her to face him. She finally meets his gaze again. Hesitantly, carefully, TRUMAN goes in to try and kiss her. It appears that DIANA may turn away. However, at the last moment, she accepts the gentle kiss.

TRUMAN. My standing offer.

DIANA hesitates, but then kisses TRUMAN back, hesitantly. Then again. Then they continue to kiss passionately. Blackout.

14 PAGES IN ACT TWO

REVIEWS:

“*Rings of the Tree* has broad appeal. Folks from 8 to 80, especially feminists and young women will enjoy the play . . . The thought-provoking plot twists and turns make the play interesting and keep the audience fully engaged. This is a play you can’t leave at the theater; you take it home with you. Stewart has a gift for writing dialogue. His conversations are well thought out and go a long way in developing the characters. For an ensemble cast, I found all the characters surprisingly well developed.”

—Nan McCulloch, *AML-List*

“The plot was interesting, unconventional, unpredictable, and definitely trending right now . . . it’s innovative and bold . . . a truly daring show.”

—Paige Guthrie, *Utah Theatre Bloggers Association*