

The Tangled Web

by Dulcie McCartney (October 2007)

Cast of Characters (in order of appearance)

NARRATOR	Wayne	
JUSTINE	Aiyana	Magdalena's daughter
MAGDALENA	Barbara	Justine's mother
GILES	Ian?	handsome young man
ANNE	Gial	The maid (who is in love with Giles)
MRS BAGLEY	Noni	Magdalena's cook
AUNT STELLA	Jill	Frederick's wife
UNCLE FREDERICK	Kevin	Magdalena's brother-in-law
JAMES	John	Former suitor of Justine

Props/Costumes

JUSTINE	Necklace with large jewels, safe.
MAGDALENA	Pearl ring (+ two other rings)
JAMES	An abstract painting, "Green Rods"
ANNE	Apron with large pocket and a dusting cloth. Tray of savouries.
MRS BAGLEY	Decanter of sherry. Two sherry glasses.
GILES	Eye magnifier gadget to examine the necklace.

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Scene One

NARRATOR The scene is a large rambling house in the outer northern suburbs of Sydney in the early part of the last century. The gardens are a mass of blooms and the deep red rose climbs over the pergola at the front gate. The wide verandas which surround the house offer shelter from the summer heat. French windows lead into a large living room where Magdalena, the mother, reclines on a large settee. Her daughter Justine, sits demurely in the straight chair while a handsome young man, Giles, languors against the mantelpiece, his eyes on Justine.

JUSTINE Oh Giles, you simply must come to our Christmas party. You will come, won't you? Mama, you must tell him to come.

MAGDALENA Giles is welcome of course. He is a distant cousin and all members of the family are welcome.

JUSTINE Do come and meet the others Giles.

GILES I will come . . . to be with you.

JUSTINE *(jumping up and clapping her hands)* Splendid! And I will wear my necklace - my beautiful, wonderful necklace. Until I am married I am only allowed to wear it at Christmas time. It is very valuable and it is a sort of dowry.

GILES I shall look forward to it. I must go now. *(He gives a slight bow to Magdalena and slips out through the French windows.)*

JUSTINE Oh Mother, isn't he handsome! And he is coming to our Christmas party and that will make it special. Not just people like old Aunt Stella and Uncle Frederick. Giles might even take me to the New Year's Party and I should be the envy of all the girls around here.

MAGDALENA I thought you were fond of that boy James. He's a very steady lad.

JUSTINE Oh Mother, he was too dull. But yes, I was fond of him. We used to sing together in the church choir and sometimes James and I used to sing just for fun. (*Justine sings*)

*Come lasses and lads,
Take leave of your Dads,
And away to the Maypole, Hey.
For every fair,
Has sweethearts there,
And the fiddlers standing by.*

(*pause*)

Yes, I was fond of him, but he went away.

MAGDALENA He quarrelled with his father who wanted him to go into the army.

JUSTINE All the girls said he was a cowardly custard.

MAGDALENA Justine, that was not very kind and rather childish. Anyway, Mrs Bagley met his mother at the butchers. James has made good and he's back home.

JUSTINE Is he?

Oh well never mind. Giles is so handsome.

Mother, may I try on the necklace now, please?

(*Without waiting for her mother's permission, Justine runs to the safe, set in the wall.*)

I don't know why it is kept in here as it is so easy to open. 1 2 3 to the right. 1 2 3 to the left.

NARRATOR Justine opens the safe and pulls out the necklace, unaware, that Anne, the parlourmaid, is hovering in the hall, just outside the door.

JUSTINE Look mother.

(*Justine fastens it round her neck and dances around the room.*)

MAGDALENA Oh, Justine. You are just a child! But you must grow up. The necklace will be yours when you marry.

JUSTINE (*Justine drops to her knees beside her mother.*)

Oh Mother, do you mind my having this valuable necklace, when Father just gave you that ring?

MAGDALENA Oh course not dear. Your father knew he was very ill and that I was a semi invalid and he wanted you to have the necklace as a dowry.

(Magdalena holds up her hand displaying three rings.)

See, he gave me these - my wedding ring, my engagement ring and this special ring. It is beautiful in its own way and very special to me. Now put the necklace away.

(Justine puts the necklace back in the safe and locks it.)

Where are Aunt Stella and Uncle Frederick?

JUSTINE They are taking a walk in the garden before lunch.

MAGDALENA I will get upstairs now. Anne has been dusting that hall for far too long. I shall tell her to finish up and help Mrs Bagley with lunch.

NARRATOR Minutes after Magdalena and Justine have left the drawing room, Anne creeps in, quietly closing the door behind her and tiptoes to the safe.

ANNE Now is my chance. I know how to open the safe for I've seen Miss Justine do it. She doesn't need a dowry, she'll find a husband anyway. Giles loves me, and we have been lovers, but he says he can't marry me because he has no money. I'll take the necklace to him and we can be married and buy a little shop. No-one will suspect him. Oh I love him so!

1 2 3 to the right. 1 2 3 to the left.

(She lifts out the necklace)

How beautiful it is! It will make me very happy!

(Mrs Bagley's voice is heard from the distance.)

MRS BAGLEY Anne! Will you get a move on! I need you in the kitchen.

ANNE I must hurry. I'll put the necklace into this big pocket in my apron and the dusting cloth on top of it. I will then meet Giles after lunch as usual and give him the necklace.

(Anne quickly closes the safe door and hurries out of the room.)

NARRATOR A few minutes after Anne has left the drawing room, Aunt Stella and Uncle Frederick appear through the French windows.

STELLA Now is our opportunity while they are all getting ready for lunch.

FREDERICK (*hesitating*) Should we really do this?

STELLA (*impatiently*) We have talked this out Frederick. Come on, don't lose your nerve now!

FREDERICK It is stealing!

STELLA They won't suspect us. They know we our setting out on our voyage to Europe next week. We can take the necklace to Amsterdam and sell it.

FREDERICK But suppose . . .

STELLA We will be gone before they even miss it. And Magdalena won't want a family scandal. Come on Frederick, your father left you out of his will. You are entitled to something.

FREDERICK Yes, you are right.

1 2 3 to the right. 1 2 3 to the left. Open Sesame! My God, it's empty! Do you mean to say they've hidden it?

STELLA Your sister-in-law . . .

That's what she's done – she's hidden it. I never did trust her. Deceitful, that's what it is!

FREDERICK (*Frederick slams the door of the safe shut.*)

Let's get out of here. (*He bundles Stella out of the window.*)

Scene Two

NARRATOR Scene 2. It is after lunch the same day. Giles emerges from the summerhouse as Anne hurries towards him. They embrace.

ANNE Oh Giles, you've come as you promised you would. You love me don't you?

GILES I do love you Anne. But my beloved, we must be cautious, for I cannot marry you. I have no money.

ANNE Oh but Giles, now you are rich. Look. *(She reaches into her copious pockets.)* This is for you so you can be rich and marry me.

GILES Good God Anne. How did you get it?

ANNE I have seen Miss Justine open the safe many times. I learnt it by heart. We're rich. Now we can get married!

Anne holds up the necklace and as she tries to put it over her head, Giles reaches out to take it. It drops to the stone floor. As Giles stoops to pick it up, he says:

GILES I knew a gem dealer once and he gave me this gadget.

Hmm . . . it feels very light.

(He holds the gadget to his eye and examines the stones.)

It's a fake!

You can't trust anyone!

ANNE You mean Giles, it's worthless? A fake?

I don't think Justine knows that.

But that old witch Magdalena . . . you really can't trust anybody!

Oh, what will we do Giles?

GILES Here, put it back into your pocket and try to put it back into the safe when no one is looking.

ANNE But you still love me don't you?

GILES Of course. I'll think about what we should do.

Scene Three

NARRATOR Scene 3. It is still the same day but now it is the early evening. Magdalena is in her customary place on the settee as Mrs Bagley enters with a decanter of sherry on a tray.

MRS BAGLEY Good evening Ma'am.

Stella and Frederick enter through the French windows.

MAGDALENA Some savouries Mrs Bagley?

MRS BAGLEY Coming Ma'am.

Anne will you stop your daydreaming and bring in the savouries?
That girl must be in love . . .

Justine rushes in as Anne puts the tray on the sideboard.

JUSTINE Oh Mother, I want to see the necklace again. I may wear it, mayn't I?
(Justine rushes over and opens the safe. Aghast, she steps back.)
It's gone. The safe's empty. Oh Mother!

NARRATOR In her distress Justine rushes towards her mother bumping into Anne. The necklace falls to the floor from Anne's apron pocket. They all stare at it.

STELLA So that's where it went! The thieving little rubbish had stolen it!

FREDERICK Hush dear.

GILES *(Entering and picking up the necklace)* She is no more dishonest than the rest of you. The necklace is worthless. It's a fake.

JUSTINE Giles, I thought you had eyes for only me.

ANNE We have been lovers. Giles, I will help you work and buy a business. Giles will marry me, won't you?

(Giles takes her in his arms.)

GILES Yes, I think I'm only fit for honest living.

JUSTINE Oooohh . . .

Enter James carrying a picture.

JAMES Justine, I have made good and have returned to claim you.

JUSTINE You've made your fortune?

JAMES No, but I have found myself. I am an artist. *(He holds up a picture.)*
My masterpiece - Green Rods. Some day it will hang in an Opera
House and be worth a fortune.

No, the other way up dear. *(As Justine takes it.)*

JUSTINE I have no dowry, but you still love me?

JAMES I have always loved you, Justine.

MAGDALENA *(Rising from the settee.)* Take this ring Justine. This is your dowry.
Your father knew he would not be here to protect you, so he entrusted
to me this valuable pearl ring to give to you.

*'Tales from the Vienna Woods' is played as the three couples waltz
around the stage and Magdalena and Mrs Bagley toast them with a
glass of sherry.*

THE END