

Lady Plangent's Pearls: A Lisette Rivers Holiday

by

Brian Sands



Hit Comics, No. 24, p. 14, courtesy c3c Yahoo Group

The "Guesthouse Potpourri" stood tucked away in a side street off the main promenade. Lisette Rivers was returning to her room after a morning walk before breakfast. When she rounded the corner and the guesthouse came in sight, she saw that it was roped off by "Crime Scene" tape. *What on earth ...?* She quickened her pace. It seemed that even on holiday she could not avoid being involved in a crime of one sort of another.

As she drew closer, Mandy the guesthouse maid appeared running from a side lane. "Oh Miss, something terrible has happened. Lady Plangent's been robbed! Of her jewels!

Lisette looked at her watch. "It must have taken place within the hour. Everything was quiet when I took my walk."

Crime in the peaceful seaside town of Corby's End was not unknown. Lisette remembered only too well the "crumbling mansion affair" in which she was involved, its history written up in her notes back at the office of L & C Associates (Corporate

Crime Our Specialty). Lisette, or Lisa as she often preferred to be called, was the L in the business name. Her partner Chèrie Chalmers was the C in the equation. Chèrie was away on one of her regular trips to France and Spain. There were no pressing cases, so Lisa had decided to close the office. Their administrative assistant Sophie Brush would check incoming mail every second day and otherwise have the time off for herself.

Lisette was enjoying the holiday, but the sudden robbery put her into investigative mode, so she allowed Mandy to conduct her on to the guesthouse where the inevitable police enquiry was about to take place.

"As far as we can understand from what you say, Lady Plangent, the robbery took place around eleven o'clock last night when everyone had gone to bed."

Detective Inspector Hereward Fysshe tapped a staccato rhythm on the tabletop and frowned at the elegantly coiffed woman sitting opposite, a frown more in thoughtfulness than in pique. His assistant, Detective Sergeant Poppy Chipps took up the interrogation.

"The reason why it was not reported until this morning is that you were securely bound and gagged all night. The maid found you at ten this morning when she brought your breakfast and you did not answer to her knock. So that was the situation?"

"It was horrible," said the coiffed lady. "I couldn't move or make a sound, and the gag was so tight!"

"Can you describe the intruder?" asked D. I. Fysshe.

"No ... No I can't. I think it was a man, but he was dressed all in black and wore a balaclava over his head."

"What did he take? Describe the jewels," said D. S. Chipps.

"No not jewels. My favourite pearls," said Lady Plangent. "They don't seem like much, a single string in a narrow case with a black velvet cover. I placed them at the back of the top drawer of the bedside table under my, hum, undergarments."

Lisette, who had been sitting to one side, asked a question. "Was the room disturbed by the search?"

"No my girl," replied Lady Plangent, her face showing faint puzzlement. *Probably over my presence here*, thought Lisette.

Lisette continued: "The robber must have known exactly where to look."

"I suppose so. Does that help?" Lady Plangent's attitude suggested that it did not.

D. I. Fysshe interposed: "We shall see." He turned to D. S. Chipps. "We'll make our report back at the station over your wonderful coffee. I think it will not be long before this case is solved," he added with a sidelong glance in Lisette's direction.

Then to Lady Plangent he said: "You have no need for concern over Miss Rivers' presence. She has assisted us in our enquiries in the past and is absolutely reliable."

"Lady Plangent," said Lisette, "if it is not too upsetting, will you describe in detail how the robber bound you?"

The woman took a deep breath and commenced her description, faltering at some points from the memory so recent and vivid.

"I was made to lie on the floor, on my face. The thief told me to place my hands behind my back and ... when I did so ... he bound them very tightly with a thin piece of cord. See, the marks are still on my wrists ... When he had my hands bound together he tied my ankles and then used a lot of rope to bind my legs together and fix my arms to my side. When he had done that ... I was unable to move, as I said before. He then took silk scarves from my suitcase and used them to gag me. He stuffed my mouth ... tied another scarf in between and tied another scarf over my face ... I couldn't get it out or make a sound that people would hear from other rooms ... So I had to lie there for hours until the maid found me."

"Was it the maid who untied you?" Lisette asked. "no one else?"

"Yes. It was the maid."

* * *

"You asked to see me, Miss?"

Mandy the maid was standing in Lisette's room. It was evening. The hall clock outside chimed ten.

Lisette observed the maid intently. "Yes, Mandy, I did. Thank you for coming so promptly ... I asked you to come unobserved because there's something very important I want you to do for me. It will help the investigation."

Mandy curtsied politely. *An interesting touch,* thought Lisa. *I didn't know they did that any more. I wonder what she's hiding?*

"I'll do whatever you wish," said Mandy.

"Good" said Lisette. "I hope you won't think it's too strange, but I want to reconstruct the robbery because there's something not right about Lady Plangent's version. However, I can't do the reconstruction on my own."

Lisette walked to the bedroom closet, opened it, and reached to the top shelf above the racks of clothes. From there she pulled down several coils of medium thickness cotton rope and turned to Mandy.

"Mandy, I want you to tie me up exactly the way you found Lady Plangent. Do you think you can remember how she was tied?"

Mandy nodded vigorously. "I think so Miss." A faint smirk flitted across the maid's face. "You can rely on me."

"Good," said Lisa. *She shows no surprise.* "Now ... Lady Plangent was found lying on the floor on her side?"

"Yes, Miss. Her hands were tied behind her."

Lisette knelt and lowered herself face down to the floor. She raised her arms behind her back and presented her crossed wrists to the maid. Mandy chose the shortest of the pieces of cord.

"Lady Planchette was tied so tightly that marks were left on her wrists. So I'll do the same, Miss."

Mandy began to tie Lisette's wrists together, twisting the cord three times about them. "Please Miss, let your hands relax ... That's right, your fingers too."

As Lisette complied, Mandy tightened the cord firmly, tied off a doubled knot, and pulled hard to make it secure. The maid then bound Lisette's legs together at the knees as well as the ankles, and used more cord to tie her arms together at the elbows. Lisette had found the cord in the room the previous day. It had apparently been used for packing. From her new point of view there seemed to be an almost endless supply of it, as additional cord was passed around her body below her bosom and above, pressing her arms tightly into her back.

"How does that feel Miss?"



Clues Detective Stories, March 1937

"It's very tight."

Lisette struggled experimentally, rolling from side to side and arching her back.

"That's how lady Plangent was tied ... Do you want me to untie you, or loosen the ropes?"

Lisette struggled for a few seconds more then subsided. "No that's all right. They're not cutting off circulation ... You're quite sure Lady Plangent was tied this way?"

"Oh yes Miss. It's not something I'd forget, seeing her ladyship all tied up. It gives me the shivers to see you tied up just like she was."

Lisette thought that Mandy was being a little too blasé about it to be telling the complete truth.

Walking to the dresser, Mandy selected several silk scarves from the top drawer. She approached Lisette, gesturing with the scarves meaningfully.

"Miss, when do you want me to come back and untie you?"

She began to fold one scarf into a long narrow band.

"In the morning is best," said Lisette. "The same time Lady Plangent was found. Unless I get free in the meantime."

"Is that the experiment, Miss?" Mandy was tying a thick knot in the middle of the silken band. "To see whether Lady Plangent could really have freed herself or not?"

Lisette nodded. "Yes. It's part of the experiment."

Mandy spoke matter-of- fact. "Lady Plangent couldn't get free could she? So I have to make sure you can't either."

Hanging the scarf with the knot over her shoulder, Mandy wadded up another scarf and went down on her knees beside Lisette. She stuffed the wad into Lisette's mouth, making sure that all the thick silk went in behind the captive's teeth. She then tied the scarf with the knot in between Lisa's jaws, making certain that the knot fitted perfectly in the middle so that it filled the front of Lisette's mouth just behind her teeth. Finally she tied another scarf over the lower part of Lisette's face just under her nose and bound it tightly. This created a broad layer of silk that covered the lower half of Lisette's face just under her nose.

Lisette bore the indignity stoically. She was not too uncomfortable, although she knew that would change with time. She was more interested in observing Mandy's reactions to tying up another woman.

Mandy giggled.

She's enjoying this!

"That should hold everything in place. You can breathe through your nose, Miss, so it won't matter if I make this good and tight. That's just how Lady Plangent looked, with her cheeks bulging and her face all hot and flushed. I'll make sure you're not disturbed until the morning."

Mandy picked up a "Please Do Not Disturb" sign from where it lay on the dresser and left the room with scarcely a backward glance. She locked the door from the outside. Lisette heard the click of her high heels receding in the distance.

* * *

Bound at the ankles and my legs. Hands tied behind my back. My arms trussed in against my body. Gagged, both in my mouth and over my mouth. The thief made sure Lady Plangent couldn't get free by herself, so she had to wait until the morning, just as it will probably be for me.

Lisette flexed her fingers and searched unsuccessfully for the knots. But she found she could not turn her hands in any direction without the cords cutting painfully into her wrists. She struggled for a long time but that only made the cords tighter as her limbs swelled with the exertions.

She gave up struggling and attempted instead to call for help. But the gag remained in place and all the sound she could make was a faint mewling that would not be heard outside the room.

She listened to the steady ticking of the bedside clock, its face ghostly lit by the small bed lamp that Mandy had left switched on. Her eyes followed the slow passage of time symbolized by the hands. She was exhausted and fell into and out of sleep, her body growing more cramped and aching as first the minutes then the hours crept by.

With the coming of early morning Lisette woke groggily. A door slammed somewhere a door somewhere. There followed the clattering of a tea trolley as somebody wheeled it along the passageway past her door. She tried to call out. The gag made scarcely a sound. Her jaw ached. Her lips and face felt swollen and hot, her mouth dry.

Several more hours passed agonizingly until a few minutes after the clock showed ten the lock rattled as the key was inserted and Mandy walked in, quickly closing the door behind her. The maid looked down at Lisette where she lay in a miserable bundle at her feet.

"Time to rescue you," said Mandy, again with that knowing smirk on her face.

Mandy propped Lisette up against the bed end and began to untie the gag that bound her face until, with the two creased scarves off, she gently removed the wadding from Lisette's mouth. Lisette is unable to speak for a long time as Mandy undid the knots and the coils of cord from her body one by one.

Mandy spoke. "I bet that feels better."

"W- water."

The maid had thought of that need and produced a small water bottle from which Lisette drank gratefully.

"Thank you ... That's a lot better," Lisette managed to say through swollen lips.

"Is the experiment a success? I really don't know how you could stand it, Miss. I'd be in hysterics after the first minutes of being tied up like that, and you've been bound and gagged all night! I'm not good at tying up and I thought you'd get loose easily."

Little liar, thought Lisette. Aloud she said: "I'm all right, thank you. Leave me alone now."

When Mandy had gone, Lisette took a long hot bath and reviewed the situation.

The maid Mandy is right about one thing, being tied up would have been a terrible ordeal for someone like Lady Plangent. However ... Mandy tied me very capably and I could not get free. But at the same time I was reasonably comfortable as long as I lay still and waited to be rescued, even for twelve hours. Mandy knew what she was doing, and she did it very well. She was practiced at it. Was it Mandy, then, who tied up Lady Plangent?

Lisette remembered seeing at the interview that Lady Plangent's bare arms had been scarcely bruised. She inspected her own arms ruefully. There was faint bruising just above her elbows, and one wrist bore a weal. *That's because I struggled, as much to impress Mandy as anything. Does that mean, then, that Lady Plangent allowed herself to be bound? An ordinary woman would have struggled a little as it was being*

done and so sustained bruising, and panicked and struggled throughout the night. Yet Lady Plangent was relatively uninjured.

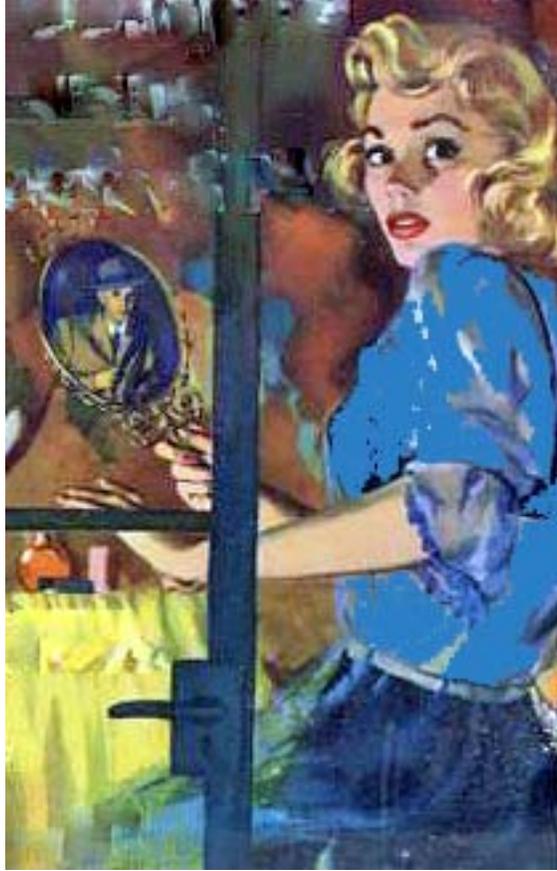
Ideas were arranging themselves in Lisette's mind. They led to further questions that centred on the maid. *I need an opportunity to talk to the girl again, thought Lisette. I should also have a look in her room.*

Lisette's opportunity came later that evening after dinner. As she left the group and passed through the foyer to the stairs she overheard the receptionist speaking on the phone to someone. "No I'm sorry, it's Mandy's day off. We're shutting up the office now but I can leave a message."

Back in her room, Lisa waited until all was quiet. When she was fairly certain that she would not encounter any of the other guests in the corridor, she made her way to the rear wing where the maids' quarters were established. She was still wearing the clothes she had on at dinner, a light blue top, lacy and semi transparent, and a darker slimline skirt.

Having done a reconnaissance earlier, she went straight to Mandy's room and tried the door. It opened with a faint click. The first thing she saw when she entered was a suitcase that lay on the floor by the dresser. An assortment of slips and other underclothes spilled from it untidily. As she searched the suitcase Lisette saw that Mandy's tastes revealed more than might be expected of someone on a maid's income. The slips and underclothing were of fine silk and satin. The suitcase was itself lined with satin.

Lisa probed with her fingers along the lining where at the very back she felt a ridge made by something that had been slipped inside. At this point the lining was not stitched – it had instead been pulled away – and in the cavity she found a flat velvet case. She opened it, inspected the contents, closed it with a faint snap, and replaced it. *Mandy's in it up to her neck. I thought as much.*



Detail from *Bedrooms Have Windows*, by Erle Stanley Gardner writing as A. A. Fair, Dell Books

She began to replace the things in the suitcase and had just taken up a hand mirror when Lisa was startled by a sound at the door. She saw the figure of a man in hat and overcoat first in the mirror before looking up and seeing him in person.

Lisette scrambled hastily to her feet, but the man was across the room and upon her before she could call for help. One of his arms wrapped around her, pinning her own arms to her sides as she tried to fend him off. His other hand covered her mouth and within seconds she was barely conscious.

Through the blood pounding in her head Lisette was vaguely aware that the man was tearing off a piece of silk from one of Mandy's slips. Quickly the cloth was stuffed into her mouth and another strip from the same garment was then used to hold the gag in place. It was tied not only around Lisette's mouth but also over her nose, making her fight for breath. She was pushed to the floor. The man's knee pinned her down between the shoulder blades and within seconds her arms were pulled behind her and her wrists bound together with a thinner strip of silk. At greater leisure Lisette's captor tied her ankles together.

The man had just completed his work when the door opened and Mandy entered the room. The girl took in the situation at a glance and hissed angrily. Then, speaking in a low voice, she began to berate the man.

"A fine mess you've got us in! Hench, I told you the girl was suspicious. Now you've made matters worse by doing this, and you've ruined one of my best slips!"

"I couldn't find anything else and I had to act fast," said the man named Hench aggrievedly. "She was looking through your things. If she's found ..."

Mandy crossed swiftly to the suitcase and rummaged inside it. She stopped, her shoulders relaxed, and she turned, a satisfied smirk on her face.

"You interrupted her before she had time to search properly. But now we have the problem of what to do with her."

"We can't leave her here," said Hench. "She'll be found, and maybe before we can get away from here."

Mandy glared down at their helpless captive. "I've an idea! We'll put her in the old cottage. They won't find her for days, long enough for us to get out of the country."

"Yes. Yes, that's a good idea."

Mandy poked Lisette in the side with her foot. "You'd better make that gag tighter. We can't risk any noise."

As the man loosened the gag in order to re-tie it, Lisette began to struggle frantically. Her only hope was to raise the alarm somehow, to grasp the opportunity before it was lost. Hench clapped a hand roughly over her mouth, stifling her cries, a move that made Lisette struggle even more violently.

"Hurry! Help me! She's a little wildcat!"

Mandy joined in and it was all over. Between them the girl and her associate overcame Lisette's resistance and completed the job. The cloth that had covered her nose and face was now tied very tightly in between her jaws, pushing the wadded silk deeper. An additional strip, torn by Mandy herself from the remnants of her own slip, was bound fiercely across her mouth from nose to chin. Lisette gave up struggling and lay still, shivering and breathing heavily.

Mandy took the lead. Hench followed, carrying Lisette easily in his arms. They left the guesthouse by a side door, one of the tradesmen's entrances to a storeroom adjoining the kitchen, and moved silently between decorative shrubs to a small car. Lisette was folded into the boot where she lay on her back looking up helplessly at her captors.



Detail from *Femforce*, "The Missing Masque," No. 119, p. 7, by Paul Monsky, art by Ed Coumts, AC Comics, 2003. Colour by Brian Sands

"Enjoy the ride," the man taunted.

The lid of the boot closed upon her, plunging her into darkness. A led light began to glow red as the key turned in the ignition and the car eased slowly down the driveway and out on to the main road.

During the journey, Lisette lay still and did her best to relax in her bonds. Struggling was useless she knew. She only hoped that they would reach their destination soon so that she would be out of the confines of the boot. In the dull glow of the lamp she saw only the metal sides of the boot. It was not reassuring. A plaid rug on which she lay helped to cushion her body against the metal under seal. She looked down at herself in a dazed interest at the ropes bound so tightly about her torso. They pushed her breasts up so that it looked as if they were about to spill from her half-cup bra and the pretty Spanish top she wore.

She felt the car turn, and a moment later they were bumping over a rough surface. *We've left the sealed road*, she said to herself. We must be in the country somewhere by now.

The car came to a halt and after a period of waiting that must have been two or three minutes, the boot was opened. Lisette was lifted out and carried in the man's arms up some wooden steps to a porch and from there into a house. Mandy walked ahead and opened a door through which they all passed.

They were in a small room, unfurnished except for a wooden chair and a low table beneath the window, which was shuttered. The floor was of stained and dusty wood, uncarpeted. Mandy picked up the chair and set it down in the middle of the room.

"We'll tie her into this chair," she directed Hench.

Between them Mandy and Hench lowered Lisette onto the seat and undid the bonds that trussed her body. Her arms, still bound at the wrists, were looped over the narrow back of the chair – its top came just below shoulder height – and some of the rope that had been used to lash her elbows was now looped several times about her waist and around the chair. Lisette's ankles were left tied, but anchored to one of the chair legs for good measure.

Mandy stepped back and looked down at their handiwork, a curious smile on her face.

"Miss Rivers, we can take off your gag now. This place is way out in the countryside and there isn't a neighbour for miles, so it's pointless to scream or call for help.

Lisa nodded her understanding and Mandy untied the gag. "How are you feeling?"

"How am I expected to feel? I'm cramped and stiff, and I need to go to the bathroom."

"We'll take care of that shortly, but don't get any ideas about making a break for it."

Some time later, the captive was freed from the chair, her legs untied and she was led by Mandy to a small bathroom with toilet in the back of the cottage. Her hands stayed tied but Mandy helped her with a gentleness that Lisette found surprising. Back in the room she was once again tied into the chair.

"You're going to leave me here until you're out of the country?"

"That's right."

"That's a long time to be tied up here. You have to get yourselves to an airport and catch a plane. That could take a day or more.

"I know. But I promise we'll make an anonymous call to the police when we're safe and away, to let them know where you are."

There was a pause. Lisette spoke thoughtfully: "Your gang, that's you, this man Hench, and someone else?"

"Yes. We're a small outfit. That is if you don't count the fence."

"Oh yes. The pearls."

"You're a smart lady ... a good thing we've put you out of action."

"The fence, he or she is the real brains of your outfit, isn't that right?"

"You could say that."

"You've said enough, Mandy," stated the man accusingly. "You don't have to tell her all our plans."

"No. Of course not."

"I'll get the car ready."

Hench left. Mandy picked up one of the silks and bunched it up in her hand.

"Oh no!" Lisette murmured softly.

"You don't imagine we can let anything to chance," said Mandy advancing upon her.

"Please don't leave me tied up like this. It will be days before they rescue me."

"I don't like doing this, but our escape depends on you not being found, and that means making sure you can't call for help. People hike across the fields in this area. Some might even pass close to this cottage, although that won't be until the storm's over. There's a storm building up you know."

Working quickly, Mandy gagged Lisette as she had been before, stuffing the bunched silk into her mouth, tying it in place with another strip, and covering it all with a broader band of the stuff.



Detail from *Tex*, No. 518, Spanish language comic, courtesy c3c Yahoo Group

Mandy had just finished when the door opened and Hench stood on the threshold. Mandy looked up: "What it is?"

"Her Highness wants to see the pearls," the man announced. "Just to make sure, she says."

"So she's come at last. I didn't hear the car."

"The storm."

But can't it wait until we leave? ... Oh all right. They're here."

Mandy turned to her suitcase which had been placed to one side of the door and reached inside to the corner where Lisa knew the velvet case to be. Mandy produced it and held it up for inspection wordlessly.

"That's all I need to know," grunted Hench.

Mandy began to scramble to her feet, startled by the harsh change in the man's voice. But before she could move Hench struck her expertly on the nape of the neck with a cosh he had been carrying behind his back. Mandy fell in a heap upon the floor without a sound.



Detail from *Diabolik*, Italian language comic, courtesy c3c Yahoo Group

Lisette watched helplessly as Hench rolled Mandy onto her face and swiftly bound her hand and foot. He was tying the final knots to a very tight gag on Mandy when a woman in a trench coat appeared in the doorway. It was Lady Plangent. Lisette was not entirely surprised.

"Make sure they can't help each other," said Lady Plangent urgently. "Hogtie Mandy. She's outlived her usefulness. We shan't worry about telling the police."

"Too bad about this one," said Hench with a nod of his head towards Lisette. "She's a pretty little woman. Mandy tried to double-cross us, but this little lady - ."

"Is a private investigator so don't feel sorry for her! In the wrong place at the wrong time, aren't you deary?"

Lady Plangent took Lisette's chin in her hand and forced her head back to glare into her eyes. Lisa struggled and grunted faintly through the gag.

Lady Plangent and Hench her henchman left without a parting word as soon as they had tested the bonds of both women to make sure they were tight and non-slip. Lisette strained to hear their car drive away and an increasingly strong gale began to batter the cottage, the wind shrieking in the eaves.

Lisette and Mandy fought their bonds hopelessly. Lisette looked up miserably at the darkening ceiling. There was no longer light through cracks in the shuttered window. The wind began to howl louder around the cottage as the storm increased in fury. Lisette strained at her bonds with tears of frustration in her eyes. *If anyone's going to find us it won't be until after this storm. Oh god this gag's so tight!*

Forgetting about the agonizing ropes, she turned her attention to the gag distressing her mouth. *If I can only get this off, it will be some relief anyway.* She worked her jaw about, pushing against the wadded cloth, trying to make it bulge out from under the silks that held it in her mouth. The wadding was becoming damp with saliva and was not obstructing her mouth so much.

As she worked, tears stinging her eyes, Lisette was vaguely aware of a door banging in some other part of the cottage. There came a lull in the storm through which the slamming was more evident. *Oh god, if there's storm damage, if the roof comes off,* thought Lisette agitatedly. The silk wadding slipped from her mouth and she managed to push the knotted gag out with her tongue. *There!*

The deep banging sounds ended in a loud crash followed by silence. At the next moment Lisa heard the sounds of heavy feet approaching along the hallway, and voices muffled and indistinct.

"Here," Lisa cried hoarsely. "In here. Help us!"

The door opened and to Lisette's immense relief, not to say surprise, Detective Sergeant Poppy Chipps entered. She wore a trench coat, a large service revolver in her hand. She came to a halt, lowered the gun and called over her shoulder: "She's in here, Sir. There's another woman as well."

Detective Inspector Hereward Fyssh appeared by her side. He too wore a trench coat and carried a service revolver. D. S. Chipps knelt and begins to untie Lisette's feet.

D. I. Fyssh stepped forward and made a short bow. "You never fail to amaze, Miss Rivers. You're always getting into trouble!"

"In this case your escapade has greatly assisted us in our inquiries, as usual," said D. S. Chipps who was now untying the ropes that bound Lisette to the chair.

"We wondered where the maid had gone," continued Fyssh. "She was one of the first to be under suspicion."

Lisette was now free and massaging the pins and needles from her arms. Chipps turned to Mandy and began to untie the maid's gag. Lisa coughed once, twice, and found her voice.

"The- the girl, Mandy. She *is* one of the gang. She tried to double-cross Lady Plangent and her henchman but they tied her up and left her with me. I don't know how we would have survived!"

"We followed you, said D. I. Fyssh succinctly. "Sergeant Poppy, take that woman into custody."

D. S. Chipps helped Mandy to her feet and cuffed her. As Mandy was led away he Detective Inspector continued.

"I guessed that somehow you would get yourself involved. In fact I virtually encouraged it, if you remember that interrogation with Lady Plangent. All we had to do was to keep the guesthouse under surveillance and sooner or later something

would happen. We witnessed you being bundled into the boot of the getaway car. It was easy enough to follow."

"Except that the storm delayed us," said Poppy Chipps returning. "A tree was blown down across the road and cost us valuable time. We decided to stop at this cottage. The 'For Let' sign at the gate told us it was empty, but we reasoned that it was a perfect place to hold you."

"The door was unusually heavy and well bolted for such a simple cottage and it took time to batter it in," said Hereward Fysshe.

Lisette came shakily to her feet. "The gang?"

Fysshe shrugged. "We missed them but they didn't get far in this storm. The coast road is slippery and unsafe in these conditions. They lost control and went off the cliff. We've been notified by the Corby's End Search and Rescue people that Lady Plangent and her associate Hench Offman were found battered and bruised but otherwise unharmed. They have been taken into custody."

"And the pearls?" asked Lisette.

"Lady Planchette's pearls were found in a small suitcase thrown clear as the car fell. They will be examined by an insurance assessor, but we know already that they're fake."

"It was an insurance scam," said Poppy Chipps. "Lady Plangent hoped to get the insurance money then sell the pearls on the black market to make a double profit. We've been investigating her financial affairs for some time. Her accomplice Mandy tied her up to shift suspicion away from her."

"I suspected that," said Lisette. "She was tied up much too comfortably. A real thief would have been more callous."

"Well," said Chipps archly, "You're the expert."

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