

The Clinging Woman



Part 1

The girl was hanging by her hands from the railings of a balcony. The balcony was on the twelfth floor of the high-rise block next to his. His flat was on the ninth floor and he had to look up to see her. It was half-past six in the morning. He had been **awakened** by the sound of an aircraft flying dangerously low overhead, and had got out of bed to look. His sleepy **gaze**, descending from the blue sky which was empty of clouds, empty of anything but the bright **vanishing** arrow of the aircraft, alighted – at first with disbelief – on the hanging figure.





Part 2

He really thought he must be dreaming, for this sunrise time was the hour for dreams. Then, when he knew he wasn't, he decided it must be a stunt. This was to be a scene in a film. There were cameramen down there, a whole film unit, and all the correct safety precautions had been taken. Probably the girl wasn't even a real girl, but a dummy. He opened the window and looked down. The car park, paved courts, grass spaces between the blocks, all were **deserted**. On the balcony rail one of the dummy's hands moved, **clutching** its anchorage more tightly, more desperately. He had to believe then what was **obviously** happening – unbelievable only because melodrama, though a frequent constituent of real life, always is. The girl was trying to kill herself. She had lost her **nerve** and now was trying to stay alive. All these thoughts and conclusions of his occupied about thirty seconds. Then he acted. He picked up the phone and dialled the emergency number for the police.

The arrival of the police cars and the **ultimate** rescue of the girl became the **focus** of gossip and speculation for the tenants of the two blocks. Someone found out that it was he who had **alerted** the police and he became an unwilling hero. He was a modest, quiet young man, and, disliking this limelight, was relieved when the talk began to die away, when the novelty of it **wore off**, and he was able to enter and leave his flat without being pointed at as a kind of St. George and sometimes even congratulated.



About a fortnight after that morning of melodrama, he was getting ready to go to the theatre, just putting on his overcoat, when the doorbell rang. He didn't recognize the girl who stood outside. He had never seen her face.

She said, 'I'm Lydia Simpson. You saved my life. I've come to thank you.'