

The Clinging Woman

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.

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
30 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.

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

His embarrassment was acute. "You shouldn't have," he said with a nervous smile. "You really shouldn't. That's not necessary. I only did what anyone would have done."

40 She was calm and tranquil, not at all his idea of a failed suicide. "But no one else did," she said.

"Won't you come in? Have a drink or something?"

"Oh, no, I couldn't think of it. I can see you're just going out. I only wanted to say thank you very, very much."

45 "It was nothing."

"Nothing to save someone's life? I'll always be grateful to you."

He wished she would either come in or go away. If this went on much longer the people in the other two flats on his floor would hear, would come out, and another of those bravest-deeds-of-the-year committee meetings would be convened. "Nothing at all," he said desperately.
50 "Really, I've almost forgotten it."

Ruth Rendell, *The Fallen Curtain and Other Stories*, 1976.

COMPRÉHENSION

① Tick the correct answer.

Does the story take place

in town?

in the country?

Justify your answer with two quotations from the text.

1. ...

2. ...

2 How many characters actually appear in this passage?

Who are they? 2 LIGNES...

3 What time of the day does the story take place?

...

Justify your answer with three elements from the text.

1. ...

2. ...

3. ...

From line 1 to line 22.

4 What did the man see when he looked out of the window? 2 LIGNES...

5 1. What were his first two interpretations of this scene ?

a) ...

b) ...

Pick out three words from the text to justify the second interpretation.

a) ...

b) ...

c) ...

2. How did the man realise that the second interpretation was wrong?

2 LIGNES...

3. Pick out three words or expressions which indicate that the situation was really serious.

a) ...

b) ...

c) ...

4. "The girl wasn't even a real girl, but a dummy." (l. 13)

Choose the correct definition of the word "dummy".

a) A stupid-looking person.

b) An object that looks like a person.

c) A man dressed like a girl.

From line 23 to the end.

6 Answer the three questions in your own words.

1. After the event, how did the neighbours behave towards the man?

Why? 4 LIGNES...

2. How did he feel about his new "status"? Why? 4 LIGNES...

3. L. 47: "He wished she would either come in or go away."

What does this sentence reveal about his feelings towards the girl's visit? 40 WORDS...

EXPRESSION

Answer one of the two questions. (300 words)

- ❶ Some people are prepared to do anything to become famous. What about you? Justify your answer.
- ❷ What does the word “hero” mean to you? Illustrate your answer with specific examples.

TRADUCTION

Translate from “His embarrassment” (l. 37) to “she said.” (l. 41)