

This sad and tragic occurrence began thus:

- 5 THREE PERSONS, IN three different poses, were carrying on an animated conversation on the sixth floor of a large apartment building.

The woman, with plump beautiful arms, was clutching a bed sheet to her breast, forgetting that a bed sheet could not do double duty and cover her shapely bare knees at the same time. The woman was crying, and in the intervals between sobs she was
10 saying:

“Oh John! I swear to you I’m not guilty! He set my head in a whirl, he seduced me—and, I assure you, all against my will, I resisted—”

One of the men, still in his hat and overcoat, was gesticulating wildly and upbraiding the third person in the room:

- 15 “Scoundrel! I’m going to show you right now that you will perish like a cur and the law will be on my side! You shall pay for this meek victim! You reptile! You base seducer!”

The third in this room was a young man who, although not dressed with the greatest meticulousness at the present moment, bore himself, nevertheless, with great
20 dignity.

“I? Why, I haven’t done anything! I—” he protested, gazing sadly into an empty corner of the room.

“You haven’t? Take this, then, you scoundrel!”

- 25 The powerful man in the overcoat flung open the window giving out upon the street, gathered the young man who was none too meticulously dressed in his arms, and heaved him out.

Finding himself flying through the air the young man bashfully buttoned his vest, and whispered to himself in consolation:

“Never mind! Our failures merely serve to harden us!”

And he kept on flying downward.

He had not yet had time to reach the next floor (the fifth) in his flight, when a deep sigh issued from his breast.

5 A recollection of the woman whom he had just left poisoned with its bitterness all the delight in the sensation of flying.

“My God!” thought the young man. “Why, I loved her! And she could not find the courage even to confess everything to her husband! God be with her! Now I can feel that she is distant, and indifferent to me.”

10 With this last thought he had already reached the fifth floor and, as he flew past a window he peeked in, prompted by curiosity.

A young student was sitting reading a book at a lopsided table, his head propped up in his hands.

15 Seeing him, the young man who was flying past recalled his life; recalled that heretofore he had passed all his days in worldly distractions, forgetful of learning and books; and he felt drawn to the light of knowledge, to the discovery of nature’s mysteries with a searching mind, drawn to admiration before the genius of the great masters of words.

20 “Dear, beloved student!” he wanted to cry out to the man reading, “you have awakened within me all my dormant aspirations and cured me of the empty infatuation with the vanities of life, which have led me to such grievous disenchantment on the sixth floor—”

But, not wishing to distract the student from his studies, the young man refrained from calling out, flying down to the fourth floor instead, and here his thoughts took a different turn.

25 His heart contracted with a strange sweet pain, while his head grew dizzy—from delight and admiration.

A young woman was sitting at the window of the fourth floor and, with a sewing machine before her, was at work upon something.

30 But her beautiful white hands had forgotten about work at that moment, and her eyes—blue as cornflowers—were looking into the distance, pensive and dreamy.

The young man could not take his eyes off this vision, and some new feeling, great and mighty, spread and grew within his heart.

5 And he understood that all his former encounters with women had been no more than empty infatuations, and that only now he understood that strange mysterious word—Love.

And he was attracted to the quiet domestic life; to the endearments of a being beloved beyond words; to a smiling existence, joyous and peaceful.

The next story, past which he was flying just then, confirmed him still more in his inclination.

10 In the window of the third floor he saw a mother who, singing a soft lullaby and laughing, was bouncing a plump smiling baby; love, and a kind maternal pride were sparkling in her eyes.

15 “I, too, want to marry the girl on the fourth floor, and have just such rosy plump children as the one on the third floor,” mused the young man, “and I would devote myself entirely to my family and find my happiness in this self-sacrifice.”

But the second floor was now approaching. And the picture which the young man saw in a window of this floor forced his heart to contract again.

20 A man with disheveled hair and wandering gaze was seated at a luxurious writing table. He was gazing at a framed photograph before him; at the same time he was writing with his right hand and, holding a revolver in his left, was pressing its muzzle to his temple.

“Stop, madman!” the young man wanted to call out. “Life is so beautiful!” But some instinctive feeling restrained him.

25 The luxurious appointments of the room, its richness and comfort, led the young man to reflect that there was something else in life which could disrupt even all this comfort and contentment, as well as a whole family; something of the utmost force—mighty, terrific....

30 “What can it be?” he wondered with a heavy heart. And, as if on purpose, Life gave him a harsh unceremonious answer in a window of the first floor, which he had reached by now.

Nearly concealed by the draperies, a young man was sitting at the window, sans coat and vest; a half-dressed woman was sitting on his knees, lovingly entwining the head

of her beloved with her round rosy arms and passionately hugging him to her magnificent bosom....

5 The young man who was flying past recalled that he had seen this woman (well-dressed) out walking with her husband—but this man was decidedly not her husband. Her husband was older, with curly black hair, half-gray, while this man had beautiful fair hair.

And the young man recalled his former plans: of studying, after the student's example; of marrying the girl on the fourth floor; of a peaceful, domestic life, à la the third—and once more his heart was heavily oppressed.

10 He perceived all the ephemerality, all the uncertainty of the happiness of which he had dreamed; beheld, in the near future, a whole procession of young men with beautiful fair hair about his wife and himself; remembered the torments of the man on the second floor and the measures which that man was taking to free himself from these torments—and he understood.

15 “After all I have witnessed living is not worthwhile! It is both foolish and tormenting,” thought the young man, with a sickly, sardonic smile; and, contracting his eyebrows, he determinedly finished his flight to the very sidewalk.

20 Nor did his heart tremble when he touched the flagstones of the pavement with his hands and, breaking those now useless members, he dashed out his brains against the hard indifferent stone.

And, when the curious gathered around his motionless body, it never occurred to any of them what a complex drama the young man had lived through just a few moments before.