

Alexandre Dumas. The Count of Monte Cristo. From Chapter 102, "Valentine"

Madame de Villefort had no longer any doubt; all was over—she had consummated the last terrible work she had to accomplish. There was no more to do in the room, so the poisoner retired stealthily, as though fearing to hear the sound of her own footsteps; but as she withdrew she still held aside the curtain, absorbed in the irresistible attraction always exerted by the picture of death, so long as it is merely mysterious and does not excite disgust. Just then the lamp again flickered; the noise startled Madame de Villefort, who shuddered and dropped the curtain. Immediately afterwards the light expired, and the room was plunged in frightful obscurity, while the clock at that minute struck half-past four. Overpowered with agitation, the poisoner succeeded in groping her way to the door, and reached her room in an agony of fear.

The darkness lasted two hours longer; then by degrees a cold light crept through the Venetian blinds, until at length it revealed the objects in the room. About this time the nurse's cough was heard on the stairs and the woman entered the room with a cup in her hand. To the tender eye of a father or a lover, the first glance would have sufficed to reveal Valentine's condition; but to this hireling, Valentine only appeared to sleep. "Good," she exclaimed, approaching the table, "she has taken part of her draught; the glass is three-quarters empty."

Then she went to the fireplace and lit the fire, and although she had just left her bed, she could not resist the temptation offered by Valentine's sleep, so she threw herself into an arm-chair to snatch a little more rest. The clock striking eight awoke her. Astonished at the prolonged slumber of the patient, and frightened to see that the arm was still hanging out of the bed, she advanced towards Valentine, and for the first time noticed the white lips. She tried to replace the arm, but it moved with a frightful rigidity which could not deceive a sick-nurse. She screamed aloud; then running to the door exclaimed,—"Help, help!"

Define Each Word

flicker: _____

stealth: _____

plunge: _____

obscurity: _____

grobe: _____

Write the Correct Word from the Vocabulary

1. The mortgage crisis in the US and the debt crisis in Europe have _____ the world into a financial recession.
2. When Peter lost his eyesight, he would _____ his way across the house, stumbling on walls and tables along the way.
3. Ninjas are known to approach a target using great _____, and thus they avoid detection until it is too late.
4. Professional athletes sometimes grow old in _____; for example, Sandy Consuegra, an all-star pitcher with the Chicago White Sox, passed away among family and close friends in Miami.
5. The lone light bulb in the kitchen _____ eerily as the thunderstorm threatened to cut off the electricity.

Comprehension and Discussion: Answer Each Question in Complete Sentences

1. How does Madame de Villefort consummate “the last terrible work she had to accomplish”? What words in the narrative indicate the method she uses?

2. Why does the maid exclaim “Help, help!” when she notices Valentine’s “white lips” and the arm hanging out of the bed that moved “with the frightful rigidity which could not deceive a sick-nurse”? Do you think the maid will admit that she fell asleep when she first walked into Valentine’s room? Why or why not?
