

## *The Bloody Chamber: Part 2*

**(to '...it crashed to with a juddering reverberation, like the door to hell.')**

The narrator and her husband arrive at the castle at dawn. The Marquis must attend to business, interrupting their honeymoon. While he is gone, she discovers an out-of-tune piano in the conservatory – and a library that contains erotic books. When the Marquis finds her perusing these volumes his lust is aroused, and he takes her to the bedchamber. Forcing her to wear the ruby choker round her neck, they finally consummate their marriage.

Later the Marquis is called away on urgent business. Before he departs, he gives her the keys to every part of the castle and encourages her to explore. But then he warns her there is one small key that she must never use; the key to the chamber in the basement of the castle...

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### **Knowledge Check**

*Try to answer these questions from memory:*

**1. In what month do the couple arrive at the castle?**

- (a) January
- (b) March
- (c) May
- (d) November

**2. What is unique about the castle's geography?**

- (a) It is separated from the land
- (b) It is underwater
- (c) It's at the top of a mountain
- (d) It's in the middle of a desert

**3. Who greets the couple when they arrive at the castle?**

- (a) A serving girl
- (b) A washer woman
- (c) The chauffeur
- (d) Nobody

**4. What make of piano does the narrator find in the conservatory?**

- (a) Bechdel
- (b) Becker
- (c) Breton
- (d) Bechstein

**5. The wedding present she finds is a picture of who?**

- (a) Samson and Delilah
- (b) Holofernes
- (c) St Cecilia
- (d) Pope Joan

**6. What is one of the Marquis' defining smells?**

- (a) Russian leather
- (b) Oud wood
- (c) Rose water
- (d) Sweet lavender

**7. To where is the Marquis suddenly called away?**

- (a) New York
- (b) Amsterdam
- (c) Buenos Aires
- (d) Manila

**8. What food does the narrator NOT ask for in this part of the story?**

- (a) Avocado and shrimp
- (b) Coffee and croissants
- (c) Strawberries and custard
- (d) Ice cream

**9. What implement does the narrator find in the hidden chamber?**

- (a) A great wheel
- (b) A rack
- (c) An Iron Maiden
- (d) All of these

**10. Whose body was most recently placed in the bloody chamber?**

- (a) The Romanian countess
- (b) The artist's model
- (c) The opera singer
- (d) The Marquis' mother

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## Understanding and Interpretation

1. What is the importance of the Marquis' castle in the story? Which descriptions of the castle do you think are most notable?
2. The husband's courtship of his wife is sometimes expressed in violent terms. Can you find evidence of this? What point is the author making through the use of violent language and imagery?
3. How does the Marquis treat his wife after consummating their wedding? Why does he treat her in this way, do you think?
4. What do we learn about the Marquis through exploring his office?
5. What happens inside 'The Bloody Chamber'? Why is this an important moment in the story, and in the narrator's own journey?

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## Literary Study: *allusion*

*"All the better to see you."*

For the first-time reader, *The Bloody Chamber* can be overwhelming through all the allusions to people, places, and events that happen outside the story. But, with a little wider reading, and a helpful teacher, the meaning of some of these allusions can be unlocked. For example, the character of the Marquis alludes to the real life Marquis De Sade, an infamous 19<sup>th</sup> century 'libertine' with quite extreme tastes and proclivities. Sade was an erotic writer; his most debauched work, *120 Days of Sodom* was written during his imprisonment in the Bastille. He lived in the Château Sade in Provence, today called the Luberon, which is alluded to in descriptions of the castle at Mont-St-Michel in Brittany, Northern France. Like Carter's villain, the Marquis De Sade was a 'gourmand': he adored fine wine, chocolate, quail, pâté, and all the delicacies of Provence. His books contained lurid accounts of rape, incest and paedophilia, and thousands of copies were burned during his lifetime. His lasting contribution is to the English language: the word 'sadism', referring to sexual cruelty, was coined from his name.

An **allusion** is made when an author makes an indirect reference to an event, place, person without further description or explanation. Rather, because these events are recognizable – even momentous historically, culturally, or politically – readers are likely to know the allusion without further elaboration. Allusions can be hidden inside instances of figurative language such as metaphors and similes. For example, if you tell your neighbour her backyard is "a Garden of Eden", or say "You too, Brutus" when you feel betrayed by your friend, or call your classmate "a regular Einstein" when you read the first draft of their IA, you're using allusions!

Allusion relies on the reader bringing knowledge and experience to the text; recognizing an allusion creates a moment of shared understanding between readers and author. Often, characters in the story are not aware of the meaning of an allusion, creating **dramatic irony**, where the reader knows something the characters do not. Much of the **tension** of *The Bloody Chamber* comes from the reader recognizing the Marquis' true nature before the narrator, and knowing how much danger she is in.

### Activity

Spend some time researching the following **allusions** from *The Bloody Chamber*. Make notes about how they add to your understanding of what's really going on by creating dramatic irony and tension:

Allusion	Explanation
The seventeen-year-old heroine who wears a schoolgirl's serge skirt and flannel blouse ( <i>Colette Claudine</i> )	
Three disappeared wives...	

The narrator imagines herself like ' <i>The Empress Josephine</i> '	
He is ' <i>as rich as Croesus</i> '.	
Paintings and painters: <i>Saint Cecilia</i> ; etchings by <i>Rops</i> ; the artist <i>Fragonard</i> .	
The works of ' <i>Eliphas Levy</i> ' are in the library.	
The Marquis' dining table is reputed to have hosted <i>King Mark and his knights</i> .	
' <i>All the better to see you.</i> '	
The Marquis' last wife: her name is ' <i>Carmilla</i> ' and she sends him a postcard of a ' <i>typical Transylvanian scene</i> '.	
The Marquis' secret key: the narrator says her husband has given her the ' <i>keys to Pandora's Box</i> '.	

## 20-minute writing practice

Write an analytical paragraph about the writer's choice of allusion in *The Bloody Chamber*. How does allusion create tension? What does the allusion allow the reader to discover about the Marquis? To what extent is the direction of the story foreshadowed for the reader? Do any specific allusions create deeper meanings for the reader? How do frequent allusions allow you to immerse yourself in Carter's world? Choose a focus for your paragraph and support your ideas with specific references to the story.

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## Important Character: *The Marquis*

*"Every man must have one secret... from his wife."*



Illustration by Alexa Sharpe

Based on the legendary figure of Bluebeard, the wife-murderer of yore, the Marquis is a deliberately mysterious character. For much of the story he remains a mystery: he is '*much older*' than his seventeen-year-old bride, but his exact age is not given. He is '*as rich as Croesus*', the ancient Lydian king, and lives like a king too – in a castle separated daily from the land by the high tide. He comes from a long line of French aristocrats, but seems to have no living family. A large, leonine man, he shows almost no emotion for much of the story.

An enigma! Though later, the narrator begins to uncover clues as to his character. He is a collector of erotic paintings and pornographic books and is involved in smuggling opium from Laos. And, once the curiosity of the narrator is activated and she ventures into his secret chamber, the Marquis' true self is laid bare in a gruesome tableau.

### Activity

*'The Bloody Chamber reveals that the projection of power is often illusory; it does not lie in an aristocratic heritage, money, or fine clothes and jewels, although people think these things are powerful.'*

Discuss this statement in relation to the character of the Marquis. How does the Marquis project an image of wealth and power that may not be true? What is his true nature? How is it concealed? Have any clues been foreshadowed in the story up till now? Does the story suggest the Marquis may not be as powerful as he seems? Note down the key points of your discussion: