



It Must Have Been...

A village mystery, a missing painting, and the art of speculation

B2

Reading

Grammar

40 min

Lesson Objectives

- Read a detective story about a stolen painting
- Learn vocabulary related to crime and investigation
- Use modals of speculation: must, might, could, can't + have
- Express degrees of certainty about past events
- Discuss theories and possibilities about mysteries
- Write speculative explanations for unusual situations

1 Before You Read

- Do you enjoy detective stories? What makes a good mystery?
- You come home and find your door open. What might have happened?
- How good are you at guessing mystery endings?

2 Reading: The Missing Portrait of Thornfield

On 14 October, the residents of Thornfield woke to find their most treasured possession had vanished. The portrait of Lady Catherine Ashworth was gone.

Inspector Lena Voss arrived at nine. The lock showed no forced entry, meaning whoever took the painting **must have had** a key. One small window was open. "Someone **could have climbed** through," she noted, "but the intruder **must have been** quite small."

She interviewed Gerald Moss, the caretaker. He insisted he had locked up at 10:30 pm. His hands were shaking. He **might have been** anxious from being questioned — or he **could have been** hiding something. Chairwoman Diane Crawford said: "It **can't have been** a random burglar. A stranger **wouldn't have known** the painting was valuable. It **must have been** someone local." The painting was insured for 80,000 pounds but its heritage value was greater.

Three clues emerged: the security camera had stopped working two weeks earlier (**could have been** coincidence or deliberate). A white van was seen at midnight — a neighbour with insomnia saw two figures loading something, but **couldn't have seen** faces in the dark. And Gerald had a large bank loan — he **might have needed** money, but there **could have been** an innocent explanation.

Inspector Voss concluded the thief **must have known** the building intimately. The open window **might have been** a distraction. The van suggested accomplices — one person **can't have carried** the heavy painting alone.

Gerald finally admitted: "I **might have** left the door unlocked on purpose. Someone paid me. They **must have** contacted me by letter — no name, just cash in an envelope." The painting was recovered three days later. The mastermind was never identified. Gerald received a suspended sentence.

3 Vocabulary

Word	Definition	Example
forced entry	breaking in by force	<i>No sign of forced entry.</i>
intruder	someone entering illegally	<i>The intruder escaped.</i>
caretaker	person looking after building	<i>The caretaker locks up.</i>
anxious	worried and nervous	<i>He looked anxious.</i>
chairwoman	woman leading a committee	<i>The chairwoman reported it.</i>
theft	the act of stealing	<i>The theft was reported at 8am.</i>
insured	protected by insurance	<i>Insured for 80,000 pounds.</i>
heritage	valued traditions from the past	<i>Part of our heritage.</i>
burglar	person who breaks in to steal	<i>A burglar broke in.</i>
coincidence	things happening by chance	<i>Just a coincidence.</i>
deliberate	done on purpose	<i>The damage was deliberate.</i>
insomnia	inability to sleep	<i>She suffers from insomnia.</i>
innocent	not guilty	<i>He claimed innocence.</i>
accomplice	person helping commit crime	<i>The thief had accomplices.</i>
distraction	designed to divert attention	<i>The window was a distraction.</i>
suspended sentence	prison not served unless reoffending	<i>A suspended sentence.</i>

Collocations: commit a crime • report a theft • break into • rule out • under suspicion • form a theory • charge someone with • recover stolen goods

4 Grammar: Modals for Speculation

□ In the Text, You Saw...

- must have (~95% certain): "The thief **must have had** a key."
- could/might have (~40% possible): "Someone **could have climbed** through."
- can't have (~95% NOT): "It **can't have been** a random burglar."
- might have (~40%): "He **might have been** hiding something."

We use modal + have + past participle to speculate about past events.

Modal	Certainty	Meaning	Example
must have	~95%	Almost sure it happened	She must have forgotten.
may/might have	~40-50%	Possible	He might have left early.
could have	~40%	Was possible	She could have gone home.
can't have	~95% NOT	Almost sure it did NOT happen	He can't have done it.

□ Certainty Scale

must have (almost certain) → may/might/could have (possible) → can't/couldn't have (almost certainly not)
 Think like a detective: strong evidence = must have; some clues = might have; contradicts evidence = can't have.

△ Common Mistakes

- "He must has gone." → □ "He must have gone." (always have)
- "She mustn't have done it." → □ "She can't have done it." (can't for negative deduction)
- "They could has arrived." → □ "They could have arrived." (have, not has)

5 □ Exercise: Read the Clues

1. Door locked, no broken windows. → Thief ___ a key.
→ must have had (strong evidence)
2. She didn't answer phone. Battery sometimes dies. → Phone ___ out of battery.
→ might have run (possible, not certain)
3. He was at cinema 7-10pm. Crime at 8:30. → He ___ the crime.
→ can't have committed (alibi = impossible)
4. Cake gone. Only dog was home. Crumbs on dog's nose. → Dog ___ it!
→ must have eaten (very strong evidence)
5. No noise at night. Light-sleeping neighbours. → Intruder ___ very quiet.
→ must have been (strong evidence)
6. Her bag and coat gone. No meeting on calendar. → She ___ home early.

→ must have gone (strong evidence)

7. Letter posted from Paris. He was in London. → He ___ it himself.

→ can't have posted (he wasn't there)

8. She looked genuinely shocked by the news. → She ___ about it in advance.

→ can't have known (genuine surprise)

6 Comprehension Quiz

1. Why did Voss think the thief must have had a key?

Answer: No sign of forced entry on the lock

2. What did Diane say about the theft?

Answer: It can't have been a random burglar

3. What had happened to the security camera?

Answer: It stopped working two weeks earlier

4. What did Gerald finally admit?

Answer: He left the door unlocked on purpose after being paid

5. 'She ___ forgotten.' (almost certain)

Answer: must have

6. 'He ___ done it. He was abroad.' (impossible)

Answer: can't have

7. Which expresses uncertain possibility?

Answer: might have gone

8. 'She mustn't have seen him.' — Correct?

Answer: No — use can't have for negative deduction

7 Fill in the Blanks

Phrases: must have had • might not have received • can't have committed • must have rained • could have missed • must have been • can't have known • might have travelled

1. The door was locked. The thief ___ a key.

2. She ___ the email. She never replied.

3. He was at the cinema. He ___ the crime.

4. The ground is wet. It ___ during the night.

5. She arrived very late. She ___ the train.

6. Nobody saw anything. The thief ___ very careful.

7. He looked shocked. He ___ about it in advance.

8. They ___ by car or by train. We don't know.

□ **Answers:** 1. must have had • 2. might not have received • 3. can't have committed • 4. must have rained • 5. could have missed • 6. must have been • 7. can't have known • 8. might have travelled

8 □ Speaking & Writing

□ Discussion Questions

1. Who was the mastermind? Give your theory using modal verbs.
2. Have you ever lost something and speculated about what happened?
3. Did Gerald deserve a suspended sentence?
4. If you were Inspector Voss, what else would you have asked?
5. Think of a famous unsolved mystery. What must/might/can't have happened?

□ Example Dialogue

A: Where's Anna? She was supposed to be here an hour ago.

B: She might have got stuck in traffic.

A: Or she could have forgotten.

B: She can't have forgotten! I texted her and she said 'See you at 3.'

A: Something must have come up. Let me call her.

B: She might have had an emergency. I hope she's OK.

✍ Writing Task

You arrive at work: colleague's desk empty, computer on, half-eaten sandwich, jacket on chair, bag gone.

Write 80–120 words speculating:

Use must have, might have, could have, and can't have at least once each.

9 □ Review Checklist

I can now...

- understand a detective story with modal verbs of speculation
- use vocabulary related to crime and investigation
- use must have for strong deductions about the past
- use might/could have for possibilities
- use can't/couldn't have for things I'm sure did NOT happen
- discuss theories and write speculative explanations



Congratulations!

You have completed Lesson 10: It Must Have Been...