Look for both **past simple and past continuous** tense verbs in the passage! Have fun hunting!

## **Once Upon a Times**

## **Mystery at the Midnight Masquerade**

A hush fell over the opulent ballroom as the clock struck midnight. The glittering masks that had disguised identities throughout the night were now discarded, revealing a spectacle of surprise and revelation. Amongst the swirling gowns and flamboyant suits stood Eleanor Thorne, her emerald eyes wide with shock. Moments ago, the priceless ruby necklace adorning her neck, the fabled Heart of Cairo, was gone. Panic coiled in her stomach like a serpent.

Just minutes before, Eleanor had been lost in conversation with Viscount Beaumont, a charming rogue with a penchant for scandalous whispers. Now, his face ashen under the chandelier's glow, he stammered excuses about fetching champagne. Had he been responsible? Or was it the enigmatic woman in the crimson domino mask who'd materialized beside them just as the music changed to a haunting waltz?

Memories flickered through Eleanor's mind. She recalled the masked figure slipping past them, brushing against her with an almost imperceptible touch. Had something felt different then? A tug on the chain, a hidden clasp undone? Her fingers grazed the bare neckline, a phantom ache where the ruby pendant used to nestle.

Determined, Eleanor scanned the throng, her gaze seeking telltale bulges beneath opulent cloaks or nervous hands fiddling with hidden pockets. The orchestra's melody swelled, drowning out hushed whispers and nervous coughs. The air thrummed with a palpable tension, suspicion clinging to every silk-clad figure.

Suddenly, a commotion erupted near the grand staircase. A portly gentleman, his face contorted in fury, accused a young woman in a sapphire mask of picking his pocket. Chaos erupted, fingers pointed, accusations flew. In the pandemonium, a figure slipped through a side door, a flicker of crimson disappearing into the moonlit night.

Ignoring the rising tide of hysteria, Eleanor pushed through the crowd, her mind racing. The sapphire mask flashed through her memory, the same woman who'd brushed past her earlier. Was it all a carefully orchestrated distraction? A calculated misdirection while the true prize vanished?

With a surge of adrenaline, Eleanor sprinted after the crimson ghost, her determination fueling her steps. The moon cast long, eerie shadows, the cobblestones slick with dew. Just as she rounded a corner, a glint of ruby caught her eye – the Heart of Cairo nestled in the crook of a shadowy figure's elbow. The chase was on, a masked waltz under the pale winter moon, the fate of the priceless jewel hanging in the balance.

The mystery unravels tomorrow, dear reader, as Eleanor confronts the thief and unveils the secrets hidden beneath the masks. Join us then, as the final act of this midnight drama unfolds...