

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...