

Loose Change

Word Work

Language in Use

“must have.../can’t have”

Refer to lines 19 – 21 and lines 144 – 145 and find the two sentences which are used to make deductions.

The modal verb “must” (“I must have been staring to recall them so clearly.”) is used to express an idea we are not absolutely sure about, but we are guessing or assuming that it has happened, will happen or is the case. In this sense, **must have is the past tense form of must**. Look at the following examples:

- 'It **must** be at least a week since they left Tashkent.'
- 'You **must** be Anna. Laylor has told me so much about you.'
- 'My **must** have upset the authorities. They were arrested.'
- She must be **cold**. She has been sleeping in the open air.

Note that the negative of **must be** or **must have** is **can’t be** or **can’t/couldn’t have been**. (“Couldn’t she have gone to the police?”)

Here, again, we are making an assumption about something. Look at the following examples:

- 'Laylor **can’t be** very happy with her parents in prison.'
- 'It **can’t be** time to leave already. She hasn’t finished her tea.'
- 'That **couldn’t have been** Laylor’s boyfriend who came in to the café because he looked too young.'
- 'She **can’t have left** the café. She only went to get some serviettes.'

May/might + perfect infinitive are also used in speculations about past actions.

Look at the example below:

- Her grandmother may/might have been hungry. = *(it is possible that her grandmother was hungry)*.

Watch out! Must (deduction) vs. may / might

The difference is best seen by examples:

Imagine we have 4 keys on a key ring and we know one of the keys opens the door. We begin by picking up one and saying: “This may/ might be the key” (*perhaps this is the key*). However, after trying 3 keys unsuccessfully, we will pick up the fourth and say: “This must be the key!” (*no other choice*)

Similarly, when considering a past action: “He may have come by plane” (*there are other alternatives*). But “Laylor must have come by plane” (*there are no other ways to make this journey*)

EXERCISES

Written activity

A- Read the underlined sentences/ phrases from the text and rewrite them using **may, might, must or can't in the past**:

1) She had an accent but I couldn't tell then where it was from; I thought maybe Spain.

2) ...a light briefly came on in those dull eyes to reveal that she was no more than eighteen.

3) A student perhaps.

4) Was that the Balkans? I wasn't sure.

5) Perhaps there was something tender-hearted in my face.

For further practice

A – Consider these situations and use the verbs in brackets to write sentences with **must have** and **can't have**. The first is done for you.

1. This portrait wasn't here last time I came to the gallery. (*it / buy / recently*)

It must have been bought recently.

2. I wonder why Laylor's brother was so upset. (*He / eat / all day*)

3. Her grandmother was sleeping in doorways. (*She / money*)

4. She had three packets of sugar. (*She / sweet tooth*)

B – Consider these situations and use the words in brackets to write sentences with **may** or **might**.

1. Laylor didn't answer me. (*She / not understand*)

Speaking activity

Jump to conclusions

Re-read the ending of *Loose Change* and decide why you think the narrator decided to push “...through the revolving doors and threw myself into the cold.”

Use a modal verb + have + past participle, e.g.

For example:

- She **might have decided** to leave because...
- She **must have thought** ...