Past Modals of Deduction

Part 1: The Mystery

The Case of the Missing Keys

*"I arrived at Mark's apartment this morning, but he wasn't there. The door was unlocked, and his coffee was still warm on the table. He **must have left** in a hurry. I saw his car keys on the counter, so he **can't have driven** to work. Maybe he **might have gone** for a quick jog, or he **could have stepped** out to help a neighbor. He usually takes his phone everywhere, but it was lying right next to his coffee. He **must have forgotten** it!"*

Grammar Explanation

We use these structures to guess or deduce things about the past based on current evidence.

Structure	Usage	Certainty
Must + have + Verb - pp	Almost certain something happened.	90-100%
Might / Could + have + Verb - pp	Possible, but not certain.	40-50%
Can't + have + Verb - pp	Certain something was impossible.	90-100% (-)

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Practice Exercises

Exercise 1: Multiple Choice

1. Sarah looks very sad. She (must have / can't have) _____ failed her exam.

2. The streets are wet. It (must have / might have) _____ rained, but I'm not sure.

3. He didn't answer his phone. He (could have / can't have) _____ been asleep.

4. You only ate breakfast an hour ago! You (can't have / must have) _____ been hungry again so soon.

Exercise 2: Sentence Transformation

1. **I'm sure** James stole the cookie.
James _____ the cookie.

2. **It's possible** that they forgot about the meeting.
They _____ about the meeting.

3. **I am certain** she didn't see you at the mall.
She _____ you at the mall.

Exercise 3: Deduce the Situation

Read the situation and write a full sentence using a past modal:

Situation: You see a broken window and a baseball on the floor inside a house.

Deduction:

_____

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