



Halloween English Lesson

The Guest in Room 13

Level B2

75–90 minutes

Reading · Idioms · Past modals · Narrative tenses · Speaking · Writing

PART 1 · READING

The Guest in Room 13

Read the story. The expressions in bold appear in Part 2.

Clare Bennett had never believed in ghosts. As a journalist, she had spent fifteen years exposing fake psychics and **debunking** miracle cures, so when her editor asked her to spend Halloween night alone in “Britain’s most haunted hotel”, she laughed.

“It’ll be the easiest article I’ve ever written,” she said. “Creaky floorboards, a few draughts, and a hotel owner desperate for publicity.”

The Blackwater Inn stood on a cliff above a grey, restless sea in Cornwall. By the time Clare arrived, the rain had been falling for hours and the last bus had already left. The owner, a thin man called Mr Pengelly, handed her an old brass key.

“Room 13,” he said. “Nobody has slept there since 1952. Not all night, anyway.”

“How convenient,” Clare replied, smiling politely.

The room was cold and smelled of damp wool. Above the fireplace hung a portrait of a stern woman in a black dress, and whichever corner Clare stood in, the woman’s eyes seemed to follow her. She **put it down to** clever painting and unpacked her laptop.

At eleven o’clock, she heard footsteps in the corridor. They were slow and heavy, and they stopped right outside her door. Clare held her breath. When she finally opened the door, the corridor was empty, but there were wet footprints on the carpet. They led to the end of the corridor and stopped at a solid wall.

*Someone must have spilt water, she told herself. Or Mr Pengelly can’t have been as subtle as he thinks. All the same, **the hairs on the back of her neck stood up.***

At midnight, the lights went out. In the darkness, Clare **made out** the faint sound of a piano playing downstairs. It was a sad, old-fashioned waltz. She was certain the hotel didn’t have a piano; she had walked through every room on the ground floor when she arrived.

Grabbing her phone, she crept down the stairs. The music grew louder with every step. Then, just as she reached the door of the lounge, it stopped.

Inside, she found a piano covered with a dust sheet. Clare lifted the sheet. The keys were thick with dust, untouched for years. There wasn’t a single fingerprint on them.

For the first time in her career, Clare **jumped out of her skin.**

She ran back to the reception desk, where Mr Pengelly was calmly drinking tea by candlelight.

"Very impressive," she said, trying to sound braver than she felt. "The footprints, the power cut, the piano. You must have spent a fortune on the special effects."

Mr Pengelly looked at her blankly. "Special effects? Miss Bennett, the power cut is the storm. It **knocked out** the whole village twenty minutes ago."

"And the piano?"

"That piano hasn't been played since my grandmother died." He paused. "She was a wonderful pianist. Her portrait hangs in your room."

Clare **put two and two together**, and her blood ran cold.

"Well," she said after a long silence, "I think I'll **call it a night**."

She didn't sleep, of course. She sat in her car until sunrise with the doors locked and the engine running, writing the most honest article of her life.

When it was published a week later, bookings at the Blackwater Inn tripled. Mr Pengelly sent Clare a thank-you card. Inside was a cheque, and a note:

"My grandmother sends her regards. She says you have excellent taste in music, and that you might have stayed for the second waltz."

Clare never cashed the cheque. But she did notice one detail, and it still keeps her awake at night: the card had arrived in an envelope addressed in old-fashioned handwriting, and it had been posted from the Blackwater Inn two days before her article came out.

PART 2 · IDIOMS AND PHRASAL VERBS

Match the expressions

Match each expression from the story (1–8) with its meaning (A–H). Write the letter in the box.

☐ 1. debunking	A decided to stop what you are doing and go to bed
☐ 2. put it down to	B was suddenly extremely frightened or shocked
☐ 3. the hairs on the back of her neck stood up	C managed to see or hear something with difficulty
☐ 4. made out	D showing that a belief or claim is false
☐ 5. jumped out of her skin	E understood a situation by connecting the facts
☐ 6. knocked out	F explained it as the result of something
☐ 7. put two and two together	G stopped something (e.g. a power supply) from working
☐ 8. call it a night	H she had a sudden, creeping feeling of fear

Reading between the lines

Choose the best answer (a, b, c or d).

1. Why did Clare accept the assignment?

- ☐ a She secretly believed in ghosts.
- ☐ b She expected the story to be easy to dismiss.
- ☐ c She wanted a holiday in Cornwall.
- ☐ d Mr Pengelly had invited her personally.

2. What does “Not all night, anyway” suggest?

- ☐ a The room is usually fully booked.
- ☐ b Previous guests left before morning.
- ☐ c The room is being repaired.
- ☐ d Guests refuse to pay for the room.

3. Why was Clare surprised by the piano music?

- ☐ a It was extremely loud.
- ☐ b She recognised the tune.
- ☐ c She believed the hotel had no piano.
- ☐ d Mr Pengelly was playing it.

4. What made the piano particularly disturbing?

- ☐ a It was badly out of tune.
- ☐ b It was locked.
- ☐ c It was in Clare’s room.
- ☐ d The dust on the keys was undisturbed.

5. What does Clare realise when she “puts two and two together”?

- ☐ a The woman in the portrait is the pianist.
- ☐ b Mr Pengelly lied about the storm.
- ☐ c How the special effects worked.
- ☐ d She is staying in the wrong room.

6. Why does the final detail keep Clare awake?

- ☐ a The cheque was very large.
- ☐ b Bookings at the hotel tripled.
- ☐ c The card was posted before the article appeared.
- ☐ d The handwriting was her own.

Past modals of deduction

We use **modal + have + past participle** to make deductions about the past.

must have We are almost certain it happened. *Someone must have spilt water.*

might / could have It is possible that it happened. *You might have stayed for the second waltz.*

can't / couldn't have We are almost certain it did not happen. *He can't have been as subtle as he thinks.*

Complete each sentence with *must have*, *might have* or *can't have*.

1. The footprints were still wet, so someone _____ walked down the corridor recently.
2. Mr Pengelly _____ played the piano. He was at reception the whole time.
3. I'm not sure who wrote the card. It _____ been Mr Pengelly, or someone else entirely.
4. The keys were thick with dust. The piano _____ been played for years.
5. Clare didn't sleep at all. She _____ felt exhausted the next morning.
6. The storm _____ caused the power cut, but it could also have been a trick.

Narrative tenses

Put the verbs in brackets into the correct narrative tense: *past simple*, *past continuous*, *past perfect* or *past perfect continuous* (active or passive).

1. By the time Clare arrived, the rain _____ (fall) for hours.
2. When she reached the bus stop, the last bus _____ (already / leave).
3. While she _____ (unpack) her laptop, she noticed the portrait.
4. At eleven o'clock, she _____ (hear) footsteps in the corridor.
5. Nobody _____ (sleep) in Room 13 since 1952.
6. She realised that the card _____ (post) two days before her article came out.

PART 6 · SPEAKING

Believe it or not?

Discuss these questions with your teacher or partner.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Do you think some places can genuinely be haunted, or is it all in our minds? | ☐ Describe a time when something strange happened that you couldn't explain. |
| ☐ Why do people enjoy being frightened by films, stories and haunted houses? | ☐ How is Halloween celebrated in your country, and has it changed in recent years? |
| ☐ How would you have reacted if you had been in Clare's position? | ☐ Some people say Halloween has become too commercial. Do you agree? |
| ☐ Is it ever acceptable for a business to invent a ghost story to attract customers? | ☐ Which is scarier: a story that is explained at the end, or one that is left open? Why? |
| ☐ Should journalists always remain sceptical? Can scepticism go too far? | ☐ If you could spend a night in any famous haunted place, where would you choose? |

CHALLENGE Speak for at least one minute on each question. Use three expressions from Part 2 and at least one past modal of deduction.

PART 7 · WRITING

B2 First writing task

Choose **ONE** task. Write 140–190 words.

OPTION A · STORY

The House at the End of the Street

Write a story for an English-language magazine. Your story must begin with this sentence:

"Nobody had warned me about the house at the end of the street."

OPTION B · ARTICLE

Do You Believe in Ghosts?

A website has asked readers to send in articles. Explain whether you believe in ghosts and describe a strange experience that you, or someone you know, has had.

Try to include:

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ At least two past perfect forms | ☐ At least two past modals of deduction |
| ☐ Three expressions from Part 2 | ☐ An engaging title and a twist or strong ending |

Title: _____

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 25 horizontal lines.

Word count: _____ / 140–190

Answer key

Remove this page before giving the worksheet to students.

Part 2 · Idioms and phrasal verbs

1 – D

2 – F

3 – H

4 – C

5 – B

6 – G

7 – E

8 – A

Part 3 · Reading comprehension

1 – b

2 – b

3 – c

4 – d

5 – a

6 – c

Part 4 · Past modals of deduction

1. must have
2. can't have
3. might have (*could have / may have also correct*)
4. can't have
5. must have
6. might have (*could have / may have also correct*)

Part 5 · Narrative tenses

1. had been falling
2. had already left
3. was unpacking
4. heard
5. had slept
6. had been posted (*passive*)

Part 3 · Teaching notes

Ask students to justify each answer with evidence from the text, e.g. Q2: "Not all night, anyway" implies guests have tried but left before morning; Q6: the card was posted two days *before* the article came out, so whoever sent it knew in advance, which is impossible to explain rationally.

Parts 6 & 7 · Speaking and writing

Open answers. Assess writing against the B2 First criteria: Content, Communicative Achievement, Organisation and Language. Look for accurate narrative tenses, at least two past modals of deduction, three target expressions, and 140–190 words.