

## Section 1:

### #1: Opening Scene (Paragraphs 1-4)

**Strengths:** Your atmospheric opening effectively establishes mood through sensory details like "early light spilled across her bedroom floor like warm syrup." Your pacing builds tension gradually with the reveal of the shadow's strange behaviour.

**Weakness:** Limited character grounding → While Maya's physical environment is well-described, we learn very little about Maya herself. Your piece introduces her in a vacuum without establishing who she is beyond this strange experience. Phrases like "She stepped out of bed and stretched" give actions without revealing personality or background.

**Exemplar:** *Maya sat up slowly, blinking as early light spilled across her bedroom floor like warm syrup. The Year 9 science project she'd stayed up until midnight finishing sat completed on her desk—everything in her meticulously organised room in place, everything familiar. But something tugged at the edge of her awareness, a quiet wrongness she couldn't quite name.*

### #2: School Scene (Paragraphs 6-7)

**Strengths:** Your subtle testing scenarios create believable opportunities for Maya to observe the phenomenon. The detail that "No one around her seemed to see it" effectively increases isolation and tension.

**Weakness:** Underdeveloped social context → Your school setting feels generic rather than specific. The interactions lack distinctive dialogue or meaningful exchanges that might reveal how this phenomenon affects Maya's relationships. Phrases like "Not her friends, not her teachers" miss opportunities to show rather than tell through specific interactions.

**Exemplar:** *At school, she tested it in quiet moments—lifting her hand during Ms. Parker's chemistry lecture, turning her head whilst Jess chatted about weekend plans at lunch—and every time, the shadow reacted just a second too late. "Are you even*

*listening?" Jess asked, frowning when Maya kept glancing at the floor. "Sorry, just distracted," Maya mumbled, unable to explain that her own shadow wasn't obeying the laws of physics.*

### **#3: Resolution (Final Three Paragraphs)**

**Strengths:** Your ending creates an eerie balance between acceptance and unease. The line "It was her shadow—and it was *watching* her, just as much as she was watching it" effectively conveys the unsettling reversal of observer and observed.

**Weakness:** Rushed psychological development → The final emotional shift happens too abruptly without fully exploring Maya's psychological journey from fear to this strange acceptance. The statement "that strange, quiet balance was enough" feels unearned without showing her internal struggle to reach this point.

**Exemplar:** *She didn't speak to it. She didn't have to. After hours of cycling through terror, disbelief, and desperate rationalisation, Maya had arrived at something unexpected—curiosity. It wasn't a hallucination or a voice in her head. It was her shadow—and it was watching her, just as much as she was watching it. Something had changed between them, some boundary crossed. For now, that strange, quiet balance was enough. Tomorrow, perhaps, would be different.*

■ Your piece effectively creates a compelling premise with strong atmospheric elements and an intriguing central mystery. However, it would benefit from deeper character development so readers connect more with Maya beyond her strange experience. Additionally, the narrative arc needs more emotional scaffolding—we need to understand Maya's internal journey from fear to acceptance. Your dialogue could be expanded to reveal character and advance the plot simultaneously. Consider adding more specific details about Maya's life and personality to ground the supernatural elements. Also, explore the psychological implications more thoroughly—how might this experience change her worldview or self-perception? The ending feels somewhat abrupt; consider extending it to provide more resolution or hint at future developments. Finally, ensure each scene serves multiple purposes: advancing plot while also revealing character and theme.

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**Overall Score: 43/50**

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## Section 2:

Maya sat up slowly, blinking as early light spilled across her bedroom floor like warm syrup. Her room held the stillness of a painting — everything in place, everything familiar. But something tugged at the edge of her awareness, a quiet wrongness she couldn't quite name.

She stepped out of bed and stretched, feeling the cool air nip at her bare arms. As she turned toward the window, her eyes caught something that made her freeze.

Her shadow.

It wasn't following her.

It stood there, shaped like her, but just slightly behind — out of rhythm. When she turned her head, it delayed. When she stepped left, it hesitated. The movements were close, but off, like watching a video buffer and lag. A chill uncoiled in her spine, slow and steady.

She blinked and looked again. It adjusted, catching up to her, suddenly perfect — like it knew it had been caught.

#1 At breakfast, she didn't mention it. What would she even say? Her mom rushed between coffee and emails, her little brother kicking his legs under the table, spilling milk like usual. Everything normal. But as Maya stood to leave for school, her eyes fell on the floor again.

The shadow was still off. No one else noticed.

#2 At school, she tested it in quiet moments — lifting her hand during class, turning her head during lunch — and every time, the shadow reacted just a second too late. No one around her seemed to see it. Not her friends, not her teachers. Just her.

By the end of the day, she couldn't shake the feeling that it was more than just weird sunlight or a trick of the eye. It felt intentional. Like it was trying to keep her attention.

After school, instead of walking home, she turned ~~toward~~ [towards] the public library. The air outside was sharp with the early bite of autumn, and she pulled her sleeves over her hands as she walked.

Inside the library, the air smelled like dust and old paper — quiet, calm, comforting. She searched the ~~catalog~~ [catalogue] for anything she could think of: "shadow delay,"

"shadow not matching movements," "visual illusions." She flipped through books about light, human perception, even folklore.

Most of it made no sense, or felt like stretching — myths about spirits stuck to people, superstitions about shadows being tied to memory, or reflections of hidden thoughts. One line caught her attention though, from a worn psychology text:

"In some rare cases, the brain registers time and movement unevenly during heightened self-awareness, resulting in a sensation of being slightly 'out of sync' with one's own reflection or shadow."

It was the first explanation that didn't sound like fantasy — but it didn't feel like enough. Because this wasn't a *sensation*. She could *see* it. Over and over. And no matter what science or superstition tried to say, the simple truth stuck with her:

Only she could see it.

By the time she got home, the sky was draining into soft purple. In her room, she stood in the center of the floor and watched as her shadow crawled along the wall behind her — just a fraction too slow, like it didn't want to be seen moving on its own.

#3 She didn't speak to it. She didn't have to. It wasn't a ~~hallucation~~ [hallucination] or a voice in her head.

It was her shadow — and it was *watching* her, just as much as she was watching it.

And for now, that strange, quiet balance was enough.