

Section 1:

#1 (Opening paragraphs): Strengths: Your introduction effectively establishes an ordinary setting before introducing the supernatural element. Your description of the light "stretching across Ezra's bedroom floor in long streaks" creates vivid imagery. Weakness: Underdeveloped protagonist characterisation. → There's limited information about Ezra beyond his physical actions, making it difficult for readers to connect with him emotionally. Phrases like "rubbing sleep from his eyes" show what he's doing but reveal little about who he is or why we should care about his journey. Exemplar: ***The morning light stretched across Ezra's bedroom floor in long streaks, promising another ordinary day in his otherwise extraordinary life. He swung his legs over the side of his bed, rubbing sleep from his exhausted eyes after another night of vivid dreams that had plagued him since childhood—dreams where shadows moved of their own accord.***

#2 (Middle section describing the shadow's strange behaviour): Strengths: Your use of gradual escalation creates excellent tension. The progression from "hesitated" to actively moving independently builds suspense naturally. Weakness: Lack of worldbuilding context. → The supernatural element appears without any contextual framework or hints about the world where this is happening. Phrases like "the unsettling anomaly persisted" acknowledge something unusual is occurring but don't provide any clues about whether this happens in a world where magic exists or if this is unprecedented. Exemplar: ***Throughout the day, the unsettling anomaly persisted. In a world where Ezra had always been taught that magic was merely the stuff of children's tales, his shadow hesitated at his feet, watching him rather than obeying him—challenging everything he thought he knew about reality.***

#3 (Concluding interaction): Strengths: Your ending with dialogue and the shadow's gesture creates an effective cliffhanger that leaves readers wanting more. Weakness: Insufficient connection to the prompt's quest element. → The piece ends just as the potential "quest" might begin, without establishing what Ezra's goal might be or what obstacles he'll face. The shadow puts its finger to its lips saying "Shhh" and Ezra wonders "what?" but there's no indication of a larger purpose or journey ahead. Exemplar: ***Ezra exhaled shakily, realising this wasn't just some weird trick of the light. His shadow was trying to tell him something—perhaps something that would send him on a journey far***

beyond the confines of his ordinary life. Whatever quest lay ahead, Ezra sensed the first hurdle would be understanding what his shadow needed him to know, and why it needed to keep it secret.

■ Your piece shows promise with its intriguing concept of a shadow with independent will, but it needs further development to fully address the prompt about a hero on a quest. You've created an excellent inciting incident, but the narrative stops just before the quest begins. Consider extending the story to show Ezra discovering what his shadow wants and embarking on a specific mission. Additionally, you could strengthen your protagonist by giving Ezra more personality traits and background. Also, try establishing clearer stakes—what happens if Ezra ignores his shadow or fails at whatever task it's trying to communicate? Your atmospheric descriptions work well, particularly when describing the shadow's movements. With some expansion of the story arc to include an actual quest with defined goals and obstacles, this could develop into a compelling fantasy narrative.

Overall Score: 41/50

Section 2:

The Shadow's Secret

The morning light stretched across Ezra's bedroom floor in long streaks, promising another ordinary day. He swung his legs over the side of his bed, rubbing sleep from his eyes, and caught a glimpse of his shadow on the wall—except, it wasn't quite right. #1

It was supposed to move with him, but there was a delay. A fraction of a second where it hesitated, as though considering its next step before following through.

Ezra frowned. Strange. He stood and stretched, watching as the shadow lagged behind, mimicking his movements only after he had completed them. When he reached for his toothbrush, the shadow's arm stayed limp at its side before jerking up abruptly.

Maybe he was just tired.

Throughout the day, the unsettling anomaly persisted. His shadow hesitated at his feet, watching him rather than obeying him. And then, sometime after lunch, it did something no shadow should be able to do—it reached for something. #2

Not in response to Ezra's own movement. No. His shadow lifted its hand toward an apple on his desk.

Ezra froze. His heart thumped like a drum in his chest.

The shadow's fingers brushed the fruit.

And the apple rolled.

Panic surged through Ezra like a bolt of electricity, but it was mixed with something else—curiosity. He leaned closer, staring down at the silhouette.

And then, it moved again.

Slowly, deliberately, the shadow waved at him.

Ezra swallowed.

"Uh. Hi?" he whispered.

The shadow raised a single finger to where its lips would be, if it had a mouth.

Shhh.

Ezra exhaled shakily. This wasn't just some weird trick of the light. His shadow was trying to tell him something.

But what? #3