

Section 1:

#1 "I walked into the coffee shop, hectic as usual. I came up to the stand. 'A small coffee, please.' She would nod, type in the order, and request me to sit down. I found a seat, and waited, staring at the clock on the wall."

Strengths: Your opening effectively establishes the setting of a busy coffee shop. The short, direct sentences create a quick rhythm that matches the hectic atmosphere you're describing.

Weakness: Unclear time frame → Your use of "would" suggests a routine action rather than a single event. This creates confusion about whether this is a one-time visit or a recurring habit. "She would nod" and "request me to sit down" make it sound like something that happens repeatedly.

Exemplar: *I walked into the coffee shop, hectic as usual. I came up to the stand. 'A small coffee, please.' The barista nodded, typed in my order, and asked me to take a seat. I found a chair and waited, staring at the clock on the wall.*

#2 "But as I peered over my shoulder, the entire thing collapsed. Everything was suspended in calming stillness, the porcelain coffee mug still with steam rising. Even that had stopped."

Strengths: Your description of time stopping creates a striking moment in your story. The visual of suspended steam effectively communicates the frozen moment.

Weakness: Abrupt transition → The shift from normal coffee shop scene to time stopping happens too suddenly without enough build-up or explanation. You mention "the entire thing collapsed" but don't clarify what collapsed or how this connects to the stillness that follows.

Exemplar: *As I glanced over my shoulder, something strange happened. The busy coffee shop scene seemed to freeze. Everything was suspended in an eerie stillness—even the steam rising from my porcelain mug had stopped mid-curl.*

#3 "To my father, hourglasses were special: he cherished them for their infinite loop and how he would calm down from them after a long, tiring day of work. Most nights, he would arrive home at 10. Then my father would stare at the hourglass for hours. He never slept well, but the satisfaction of seeing the grains of sand was enough for him."

Strengths: This reveals important background about the hourglass and adds emotional depth through the father-child relationship. The detail about the father's nightly routine creates a vivid image.

Weakness: Disconnected narrative → This passage about the father appears suddenly without a clear connection to the main storyline. The shift from the coffee shop scene to childhood memories needs a stronger link to help readers understand how these memories relate to the current moment.

Exemplar: *In that frozen moment, memories of my father flooded back. To him, hourglasses were special treasures. After long workdays, he'd arrive home around 10 and unwind by watching sand flow through his collection. "There's peace in this infinite loop," he'd say, his tired eyes finding comfort in the falling grains.*

■ Your piece has an intriguing concept with the time-stopping moment and the personal connection to the hourglass. The coffee shop setting at the beginning creates a familiar backdrop that makes the supernatural element more striking. To improve the substance, you could build up to the time-stopping moment more gradually, perhaps by adding subtle hints that something unusual is about to happen. Also, your writing would benefit from clearer connections between the different parts of your story. The shift from the coffee shop scene to the father's memory needs a smoother transition. You could strengthen your piece by exploring how the main character feels about this time-stopping ability and what it means to them. Adding some dialogue or inner thoughts would help readers connect more deeply with your main character. Try expanding on why the hourglass is important to the character now, not just to their father in the past.

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**Score: 40/50**

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Section 2:

I walked into the coffee shop, hectic as usual. I came up to the stand. 'A small coffee, please.' ~~She would nod, type in the order, and request me to sit down.~~ [The barista nodded, typed in my order, and asked me to sit down.] #1 I found a seat, and waited, staring at the clock on the wall. The hands ticked rhythmically, mesmerising me in their steady tempo. It wasn't until the staff shouted my name that I heard them. I hurried over, nodding apologetically, and sat back down. I glanced down at my coffee, watching the spirals of steam wisp off into the background. It was almost like a dance, the way it moved so confidently. It waved up, to the side, down, left in a hypnotic dance. I sighed, content and happy. As I sipped my coffee, the coffee shop seemed unusually quiet. Every day, when I would come and get a coffee, it would be bustling with activity, a man with a laptop here, a student eating breakfast with her mum over there. ~~But as I peered over my shoulder, the entire thing collapsed. Everything was suspended in calming stillness, the porcelain coffee mug still with steam rising.~~ [But as I peered over my shoulder, I noticed something extraordinary. The busy coffee shop had frozen in time. Everything was suspended in calming stillness, the porcelain coffee mug with steam still rising but not moving.] #2 Even that had stopped. I took out my hourglass. It was, as usual, half full of sand, frozen while some sand was between them. In that moment, I saw what I was blind to before: how my father would smile at me when I was atop his shoulders, young and spirited, and how he would smile at the hourglass

while sand drifted in and out of the two spaces in the same way. ~~To my father, hourglasses were special: he cherished them for their infinite loop and how he would calm down from them after a long, tiring day of work. Most nights, he would arrive home at 10. Then my father would stare at the hourglass for hours. He never slept well, but the satisfaction of seeing the grains of sand was enough for him.~~ [To my father, hourglasses were special treasures: he cherished them for their infinite loop and how they calmed his mind after a long, exhausting day of work. Most nights, he would arrive home at 10. Then he would sit quietly, watching the hourglass for hours. Despite his troubled sleep, the gentle movement of sand grains brought him the peace he needed.] #3