

Section 1

#1 - Opening paragraphs (from "Olivia stood at the corner" to "So she stayed quiet")

Strengths: Your piece establishes a clear setting and introduces the central conflict effectively. The simple sentence structure creates accessibility whilst building emotional tension between the characters.

Weakness: Underdeveloped Character Motivation → Your writing presents Olivia's emotional withdrawal but doesn't explore the complexity of her feelings deeply enough. The phrase "her heart had closed up" tells us what happened rather than showing us through specific actions or thoughts. Additionally, the transition between learning about Ben's illness and their silence feels too abrupt—"After that, they stopped talking about it" doesn't capture the gradual process of how couples might actually respond to such devastating news.

Exemplar: *Instead of "her heart had closed up," you might write: "Olivia found herself choosing safer topics—the weather, the grocery list—anything that didn't require her to look directly into Ben's worried eyes."*

#2 - The time-stopping sequence (from "Then suddenly—it happened" to "But Olivia could still move")

Strengths: Your piece creates a compelling supernatural element that serves the story's emotional needs. The imagery of frozen raindrops and the floating umbrella provides vivid visual details that draw readers into this magical moment.

Weakness: Insufficient Setup for Fantasy Element → The sudden shift from realistic fiction to magical realism lacks proper foundation. Whilst "time stopped" creates dramatic impact, your writing doesn't prepare readers for this genre shift. The phrases "Everything froze in place" and "time stopped" appear without any earlier hints that supernatural events might occur, making the transition feel jarring rather than organic to your story's world.

Exemplar: *You could add subtle hints earlier, such as: "Olivia had always noticed strange things during moments of extreme stress—colours seemed brighter, sounds became sharper, as if the world held its breath."*

#3 - Resolution and ending (from "She reached for his hand" to the final paragraph)

Strengths: Your piece provides satisfying emotional closure through the umbrella symbolism. The circular structure, returning to the street corner, creates narrative completeness whilst showing character growth.

Weakness: Rushed Emotional Resolution → The transformation from prolonged silence to open communication happens too quickly to feel convincing. Your writing jumps from "I don't want to be quiet anymore" directly to their renewed closeness without showing the difficult conversations or gradual rebuilding that would realistically occur. The phrase "this time, she was not afraid" suggests complete healing that seems unrealistic given the circumstances.

Exemplar: *Rather than immediate resolution, you might show: "The words came slowly at first—halting sentences about fear, about love, about the time they had left. Some days were harder than others, but they kept talking."*

■ Your piece demonstrates strong foundational storytelling skills with clear character relationships and symbolic elements. The umbrella works effectively as a recurring motif, and your dialogue feels natural when it appears. However, your writing would benefit from deeper exploration of the emotional journey between diagnosis and acceptance. The supernatural element, whilst creative, needs better integration into your story's reality. Additionally, your piece would be stronger if you showed the characters' emotional processes through specific actions and conversations rather than summarising their feelings. Consider expanding the middle section to develop the relationship dynamics more fully. Also, the ending could be more nuanced—healing from grief and fear takes time, and showing that gradual process would make your resolution more believable and impactful.

Overall Score: 44/50

Section 2

#1 Olivia stood at the corner of 7th Street with her husband, Ben. Every morning, they waited for the traffic light to change so they could cross the road. It was something they had done for many years. Olivia held her warm coffee. Ben held the bright red umbrella. ~~She didn't like that umbrella.~~ [She didn't care for that umbrella.] It was too bright for such a grey day. Everything felt quiet and heavy lately. That was how it had been since Ben got sick. The doctor had told them the truth two months ago. Ben had a sickness that could not be fixed. After that, they stopped talking about it. They still ate dinner. They

still walked together. But they said very little. Olivia felt like her heart had closed up. She was scared of losing him. So she stayed quiet.

Rain began to fall. The red umbrella opened with a loud pop. Olivia frowned. She didn't like the way it stood out in the grey street. She thought it was too happy for such a sad time.

The little man on the traffic light turned green. They stepped forward.

Then suddenly—it happened.

A loud screech. A horn. A silver car coming too fast.

And then—time stopped.

Everything froze in place.

#2 The raindrops hung in the air like tiny glass beads. Her coffee cup slipped from her hand but did not fall. The red umbrella floated in the air, upside-down. Even the car in front of them had stopped, its front just a metre away, stuck like a paused movie.

Ben wasn't moving. He stood beside her, frozen like a statue.

But Olivia could still move.

She looked around. The city had stopped. People on the other side of the road were frozen mid-step. The noise was gone. There was no sound. Just silence.

She looked at the red umbrella, still hanging in the air. It reminded her of the first time Ben gave it to her. He had said, "Now I'll never lose you in a crowd." Back then, she laughed. Now, the memory made her eyes sting.

Olivia felt something warm and sad fill her chest. She turned to Ben. His face looked calm but still. Like he had stopped breathing.

She thought about the sickness, the hospital, the way he held her hand during tests. She remembered the way he smiled at her even when he was tired. And she remembered the way she looked away. How she didn't know what to say.

Now, in this still world, she saw it all clearly.

She had been afraid. Afraid of losing him, afraid of saying the wrong thing. So she had said nothing at all.

But now, she wanted to say everything.

#3 She reached for his hand and held it tight.

And then—time started again.

The car screeched to a full stop. Her coffee cup hit the ground and spilled. The umbrella landed beside it with a soft thump. Rain poured down harder. Sounds rushed back all at once—horns, yelling, footsteps, life.

Ben blinked. He looked at her. "Olivia?" he said.

She didn't answer. Instead, she wrapped her arms around him and held him close. She kissed his cheek. His shirt was wet. Her hair stuck to her face. None of it mattered.

Later, they sat on the couch, wrapped in a blanket. The red umbrella stood by the door, dripping water onto the floor.

Olivia looked at him and said, "I don't want to be quiet anymore."

Ben nodded. His eyes were full of tears, but he smiled.

The next morning, they stood again at the corner of 7th Street. It was cloudy. Rain fell softly from the sky.

But this time, Olivia held the red umbrella.

And this time, she was not afraid.