

Section 1:

#1 "The tin lid creaked open with a reluctant sigh, revealing a faded photograph, a tiny silver key, and a bundle of letters tied with fraying string. Holly's breath hitched. "It's... her," she whispered, holding up the photo. A woman in a stiff uniform stared out, unsmiling, her eyes hollow with secrets. "That's Ms. Winters."

Strengths: Your opening immediately creates mystery by introducing intriguing objects. The description of Ms. Winters' photo with "eyes hollow with secrets" effectively sets up the character as someone with a hidden past.

Weakness: Limited sensory details → Your opening focuses mainly on visual elements while missing opportunities to engage other senses. The attic setting could be more richly established through smells, textures, and sounds to fully immerse readers in this discovery moment.

Exemplar: *The tin lid creaked open with a reluctant sigh, releasing the musty scent of forgotten secrets as it revealed a faded photograph, a tiny silver key, and a bundle of letters tied with fraying string.*

#2 "We had opened something far older than a lunchbox. And it was waiting."

Strengths: Your use of short, impactful sentences creates excellent tension. The personification of the mysterious find as something that "was waiting" builds suspense effectively.

Weakness: Unclear narrative perspective → The shift between first person and third person narration is confusing for readers. The story begins with Holly and Naveed being observed by an unnamed first-person narrator, but this perspective isn't established clearly.

Exemplar: *I realised then that we had opened something far older than a lunchbox. And whatever it was had been waiting for us.*

#3 "Ms. Winters stood in the doorway, but she wasn't... right. Her shadow stretched too long across the floor. Her eyes didn't reflect light. And though her mouth didn't move, we heard her voice." "You weren't supposed to find this."

Strengths: Your description of Ms. Winters creates genuine unease through specific details like the unnaturally long shadow and eyes that don't reflect light. The dialogue is simple yet chilling.

Weakness: Rushed revelation → This crucial moment when the supernatural element fully emerges happens too quickly. The children's reactions to seeing their teacher in this terrifying state seem understated given the shocking nature of what they're witnessing.

Exemplar: *Ms. Winters stood in the doorway, but she wasn't... right. Her shadow stretched too long across the floor, twisting unnaturally as if it belonged to something else entirely. Her eyes, dark and empty, didn't reflect the flickering lamplight. I felt my heart hammer against my ribs as Naveed grabbed my arm, his fingers digging in painfully.*

■ Your story shows great promise with its mysterious atmosphere and supernatural elements. The concept of children discovering a hidden past connected to their teacher works well as a foundation. To improve the substance, consider developing the characters' personalities and relationships more fully before throwing them into danger. Currently, readers know very little about your narrator or why these children are exploring the attic. Also, the pacing rushes through potentially powerful moments—slow down key revelations to build tension and emotional impact. You might also clarify the time period of the main story (is this present day?) to create stronger contrast with the 1944 mystery. Try expanding dialogue between the three children to show their unique reactions to each discovery. Additionally, consider what clues readers need early on to understand the supernatural rules of your world without giving away the entire mystery.

Overall score: 42/50

Section 2:

Whispers in the Attic

The tin lid creaked open with a reluctant sigh, revealing a faded photograph, a tiny silver key, and a bundle of letters tied with fraying string. Holly's breath hitched. "It's... her," she whispered, holding up the photo. A woman in a stiff uniform stared out, unsmiling, her eyes hollow with secrets. "That's Ms. Winters." #1

"No way," muttered Naveed, leaning closer. "But she looks... exactly the same."

I took one of the letters. The handwriting was spidery and slanted. April 1944. I cannot keep this hidden much longer. If they find it—

A loud thud echoed beneath the floorboards. We froze.

"That came from downstairs," I whispered. The silence that followed was louder than thunder.

Holly shoved the letters into her backpack. "We're not leaving without answers."

Reluctantly, we moved deeper into the attic. The shadows seemed to press in closer, the air tighter [more stifling] with every step. Then, a door I hadn't noticed before appeared on the far wall—half-rotted, its handle rusted.

The silver key trembled in my fingers.

It slid in with a soft click.

Beyond it, a narrow staircase spiraled down into darkness.

"I don't think this is part of the school," Naveed breathed.

"Maybe it never was," said Holly, stepping forward.

The wind outside had stopped. No rain. No sound. Just the soft rustle of old letters in Holly's bag, and the distant tick of a clock that didn't seem to belong in our time.

We had opened something far older than a lunchbox. #2

And it was waiting.

The staircase groaned under our weight as we descended, the wooden steps sagging like they hadn't held a soul in decades. The deeper we went, the colder it grew—sharp, unnatural, like the air itself was watching us.

At the bottom, the narrow corridor opened into a hidden room.

Old gas lamps flickered to life as we stepped in—on their own.

The walls were lined with shelves of preserved artifacts: ration books, wax-sealed bottles, and a cracked radio humming faintly with static. In the ~~center~~ [centre] stood a writing desk, and on it, a worn leather journal lay open—its last entry still wet, ink fresh.

"They're coming. I can hear them scratching at the walls. If I vanish, tell my story. Let them know she was never one of us."

"Who wrote this?" Naveed whispered.

Holly ran her fingers over the page. "It's signed by Eleanor Fields. That's... the girl from the photo. The one with Ms. Winters."

A low creak echoed behind us.

We spun.

Ms. Winters stood in the doorway, but she wasn't... right. Her shadow stretched too long across the floor. Her eyes didn't reflect light. And though her mouth didn't move, we heard her voice. #3

"You weren't supposed to find this."

My breath caught. "What are you?"

She stepped forward, face unchanged since the photo, voice like dry leaves. "I kept the truth buried. I kept the curse contained."

"But the key—" I began.

"That key opened more than a door," she said, and suddenly the walls of the room shimmered, bending and warping. The shelves cracked, the radio whined. Something behind the brick walls began to stir.

"Now," she whispered, "you have to finish what Eleanor started."

Then the lamps all blew out.

And the real whispers began.