

Section 1:

#1 (Opening paragraph through car journey) **Strengths:** Your writing creates excellent tension through physical details like "fingers drummed against his leg" and "stomach performed a peculiar flip." You've also established Thomas's character beautifully with the hidden stuffed dragon detail.

Weakness: Inconsistent narrative focus → Your opening moves between different aspects of Thomas's anxiety without developing each one fully. The invitation detail feels disconnected from the packing description, and then you shift to appearance concerns. Phrases like "his mother had already packed" and "Thomas stood frozen before the mirror" jump between topics without smooth connections.

Exemplar: *The invitation had sat there for three days, and each time Thomas saw it, his stomach flipped. Now, with his packed bag waiting by the door, he stood frozen before the mirror, still uncertain about this first sleepover.*

#2 (Arrival at Alex's house through blanket fort activities) **Strengths:** You capture Thomas's physical anxiety well with "heart raced at such speed" and show his gradual confidence building through activities.

Weakness: Confusing character details → Your writing introduces Jake without explanation when you've been discussing Alex throughout. The phrase "Jake and his mum greeted him warmly" creates confusion about who Thomas is visiting, making readers question the story's basic setup.

Exemplar: *As they pulled into Alex's driveway, Thomas's heart raced so fast he was certain it showed through his shirt. Alex and his mum greeted him warmly with handfuls of cinnamon biscuits.*

#3 (Night-time restlessness through morning discovery) **Strengths:** Your sensory details like "smelt of bleach" and "lavender perfume and burnt sausages" create vivid imagery that helps readers experience Thomas's homesickness.

Weakness: Unclear story resolution → Your ending mentions Thomas seeing "the same stuffed dragon in his grasp" but then says he spotted something that caught his attention. The phrase "At least he wasn't the only one who slept with stuffed toys" suggests Alex also has one, but this discovery isn't clearly shown.

Exemplar: *In the morning, Thomas woke first, still clutching his dragon. As he sat up, he noticed something on Alex's pillow—another stuffed animal, a small bear tucked under the covers.*

■ Your piece tells a relatable story about childhood anxiety and friendship that many young readers will connect with. The emotions feel genuine, and you've chosen an experience that most children either have had or will have. Your descriptive language creates vivid pictures, particularly when describing Thomas's nervousness and the breakfast scene. However, your story needs clearer structure and smoother connections between ideas. Additionally, you should develop the friendship theme more fully by showing how Alex helps Thomas feel comfortable, rather than just describing activities. Also, the discovery about Alex's stuffed animal needs clearer presentation since this seems to be an important moment for Thomas feeling accepted. Furthermore, consider expanding on how Thomas changes from the beginning to the end of the story. The emotional journey is there, but it could be stronger with more specific examples of Thomas's growing confidence throughout the sleepover.

Overall Score: 43/50

Section 2:

#1 The invitation from Alex had sat on the refrigerator for three days, held by a magnet shaped like a pineapple. Every time Thomas passed it, his fingers drummed against his leg, and his stomach performed a peculiar flip. His mother had already packed his overnight bag, which now waited by the front door like a sentinel. Within its depths lay his toothbrush, pyjamas, and—tucked secretly between his folded clothes—his small ~~stuffed~~ [stuffed] dragon that no one at school knew about.

"Five minutes until we leave," called his mother from the kitchen. Thomas stood frozen before the mirror, adjusting and readjusting his hair. He rehearsed his greeting to Alex's parents for the sixth time, then checked the zipper on his bag for the fourth. His palms left damp prints on the fabric. Outside, the afternoon sun stretched long shadows across the cobblestones, signalling the approach of evening—the first he would spend away from his own bed. With a shaky breath, Thomas hopped into the brown car and waited with silent trepidation for his mum to drive him ~~off~~ [over] to Alex's house.

The car journey passed in a blur of houses and trees. Thomas's leg bounced rhythmically against the seat while scenarios played through his mind: What if Alex's dog didn't like him? What if he spilt something at dinner? What if he couldn't fall asleep? Yet alongside these thoughts ran

others—of midnight snacks, of sharing secrets in whispers, of being treated like one of the older kids at last. Thomas found car rides soothing, the gentle rocking and engine noise creating a lullaby. But today, the familiar sounds were a constant reminder of the approaching moment, amplifying his ~~everlasting~~ [overwhelming] anxiety.

#2 As they pulled into Alex's driveway, Thomas's heart raced at such speed that he was certain it must be visible through his crimson shirt. His stomach tightened into knots. ~~Jake~~ [Alex] and his mum greeted him warmly with handfuls of cinnamon biscuits. The entrance of the towering house had polished wood floors and a graceful banister that curved up towards the second-floor gallery. Thomas managed a ~~trifling~~ [tentative] smile.

After showing Thomas around the house, the friends built a blanket fort and played Nintendo. With every new activity he tried, there seemed to be a beacon of confidence rising from Thomas's chest. However, when the lights went out, he stared at the unfamiliar ceiling and clutched his pillow from home. The shadows looked different there. Night fell swiftly, bringing with it a chill that seeped into his bones and a quiet that felt almost tangible.

#3 As soon as Alex ; [] slipped into his bed like cheese in a pizza pocket, he dozed into an unfathomable sleep. Thomas stayed awake, fidgeting with his blankets that smelt of bleach, his eyes wide and agitated.

As he stared out the rattling window, the damp street was windswept, a stretch of empty pavement under the glow of the stubborn ~~street~~ [streetlight]. The moon hung low and full, casting an ethereal glow over the silent landscape. Shadows danced in the flickering lamplight, creating an eerie, almost enchanting atmosphere. Downstairs, the dripping of the tap in the kitchen kept ~~perturbing~~ [disturbing] Thomas, each ~~patter~~ [drop] a ~~final~~ [gentle] countdown to the moments he ~~bid~~ [would bid] farewell in the morning, which was six hours and 26 minutes away, according to Alex's wristwatch on the nightstand. Every now and then, his eyelids drooped and fluttered in exhaustion, but something was keeping him awake.

Using his left arm, he reached down to his overnight bag, and rummaged through its contents, until he pulled out his beloved ~~stuffed~~ [stuffed] dragon by the tail. It smelt of his mum's lavender perfume and his dad's burnt sausages on school mornings. Thomas squeezed it tight, burying his nose into its silky surface. At last, he dozed ~~off~~ [off] into a soothing sleep.

In the morning, Thomas woke up first, still clutching his stuffed toy dragon. He ~~fleetingly~~ [quickly] tucked it under his jumpers, and was about to shake Alex awake, when he spotted something that caught his attention. ~~It was the same supple stuffed dragon in his grasp.~~ [On Alex's pillow lay a small stuffed bear, tucked carefully under the covers.] Thomas gasped in both awe and belonging. At least he wasn't the only one who slept with stuffed toys!

He clambered down the steep steps, feeling electric energy ~~dissolve~~ [flow] from the tip of his frizzy hair to the dirt in his nails. He mounted the kitchen stool, and his jaw dropped so low it nearly created a new floor level as he was served ~~with~~ [] a lip-smacking breakfast. In front of him was a plate of fluffy, sun-kissed pancakes, drizzled with sweet maple syrup and topped with fresh, tart berries. Alongside it ~~a~~ [was a] cup of rich, fragrant hot chocolate. The sizzling sound of smoky, crispy bacon, paired with perfectly seared, savoury eggs and buttery toast wafted through the bustling kitchen and swirled in Thomas's nostrils like a cyclone of his favourite nourishments.

By the time he finished his breakfast, patting his stomach in satisfaction, Alex ambled down the stairs, rubbing his eyes and groaning. In an instant, a duplicate of Thomas's meal appeared before his eyes, and he ate slowly, cautiously. Thomas felt the urge to ask ~~him~~ [] if Alex needed some help with his meal, which he kindly accepted.

When it was time to bid farewell, Thomas almost didn't want to leave. All that ~~diversion~~ [adventure] had left bubbles in the pit of his stomach, but they felt contenting, like a new memory had been ~~twisted~~ [woven] to recall forever.