

## Section 1

**#1: Opening paragraph** "I hate this place. The land, the house, the garden. Eli would have loved all of this. But I am not Eli. And Eli is dead."

### Strengths:

- Your short, punchy sentences create a strong emotional impact right from the start
- The contrast between "Eli would have loved" and "Eli is dead" clearly shows your narrator's pain

**Unresolved emotional reasoning** → Your opening tells us the narrator hates the new place, but we don't yet understand why they hate it specifically. Is it because the move feels like leaving Eli behind? Because it represents their mum moving forward? The hatred feels stated rather than explained, which makes it harder for readers to connect with your narrator's feelings. Adding a sentence or two about what makes this place feel wrong—perhaps it's too cheerful, or too different from home, or feels like betraying Eli's memory—would help readers understand the narrator's emotions more deeply.

**Exemplar:** *"I hate this place. Everything here is too bright, too new, too ready to pretend our old life never existed. The land, the house, the garden—Eli would have loved all of this. But I am not Eli. And Eli is dead."*

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**#2: Middle section** "I sit down on the steps, head in hands, crying... I choke on my tears just thinking about Eli's laugh."

### Strengths:

- Your writing honestly shows the narrator's difficult emotions without hiding them
- The detail about Eli's laugh is personal and helps readers picture who Eli was

**Scattered focus** → This paragraph jumps between several different thoughts—hating Mum, hating the driver, hating yourself, questioning why you can't move on, and then thinking about Eli comforting you. Each of these ideas deserves more attention on its own. When you move too quickly from one emotion to another, readers don't have time to feel the weight of any single feeling. Try

staying with one emotion longer. For example, if you're writing about hating yourself, spend more time exploring why you feel this guilt. What exactly do you think you should be doing differently? This would make your narrator's pain feel more real.

**Exemplar:** *"I hate myself most of all. Everyone expects me to heal, to smile, to join in with the New Year celebrations. But how can I, when Eli should be here doing all of this instead of me?"*

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**#3: Ending section** "In 1 year, the pain and misery lift, and I feel like the girl I was before... The river, with its lanterns, reminds me of Eli — and that even in the darkest times, he is still with me."

**Strengths:**

- Your discovery of the river and lanterns creates a meaningful symbol for remembering Eli
- The idea of making lanterns as a way to heal shows growth in your character

**Rushed transformation** → Your narrator moves from deep grief to feeling healed in just two paragraphs, which happens too quickly to feel believable. The sentence "In 1 year, the pain and misery lift" is particularly confusing because we're not sure if you mean one year has passed, or if this happens within one year of discovering the river. More importantly, grief doesn't usually lift completely—it changes and becomes easier to carry, but it doesn't disappear. Your ending would be stronger if you showed smaller, more realistic steps in healing. Perhaps the narrator still feels sad but finds the river gives them a place to feel close to Eli, or maybe making the lanterns helps them cry without feeling quite so alone.

**Exemplar:** *"The pain hasn't disappeared—I still miss Eli every single day. But standing by the river, watching my lantern float beside the red one in the reeds, I realise something has changed. For the first time since Eli died, I've found a place where remembering him doesn't hurt quite so much."*

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■ Your piece shows genuine emotion and includes a touching symbol with the lanterns that connects to Eli's memory. The river discovery is a creative turning point in your story. However, your writing would benefit from slowing down and exploring feelings more thoroughly. Right now, you tell us about emotions (like "I hate Mum") without showing us the specific thoughts or memories that create these feelings. Additionally, your paragraphs about grief and then about the transition to the river

jump between ideas quite quickly, which makes it harder for readers to stay connected to your narrator's experience.

To strengthen the substance of your writing, spend more time in the difficult moments. When your narrator sits on the steps crying, what specific memories come to mind? What does the house sound like with Mum cooking alone instead of with Eli? These concrete details will make your writing feel more real. Also, the shift from discovering one lantern to making many lanterns happens very suddenly. Consider adding a paragraph that shows your narrator returning to the river the first few times—what do they think about while making each lantern? How does it feel different from the grief they felt before? This would make your narrator's healing journey feel more gradual and believable. Your final sentences try to wrap everything up neatly, but grief stories often work better when they end with hope mixed with ongoing sadness, rather than complete healing.

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**Overall Score: 41/50**

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## Section 2

#1 I hate this place. The land, the house, the garden. Eli would have loved all of this. But I am not Eli. And Eli is dead.

The house looks alive with preparations for the ~~new year~~ [New Year]. Eli would be helping Mum cook the turkey and bake the bread. He would be running around the house hanging up decorations while singing out of tune 80s songs. Mum has tried so hard to make things as normal as possible, but life will never be the same without Eli.

#2 I sit down on the steps, head in hands, crying. I hate Mum, who made us move on. I hate the driver, who crashed into Dad's car. And most of all, I hate myself. Why can't I move on like Mum has? Why does life have to be so hard? Most of the time, Eli is here to comfort me. ~~To cheer me up and make me laugh.~~ [Eli is here to cheer me up and make me laugh.] I choke on my tears just thinking about Eli's laugh.

Through my tears, I notice something in the distance. I sit straight up at the strange sight. A river. Not just a river. A murky, overgrown river, forgotten and silent. I have never seen a river before, as it's always too dry where we used to live.

Yet I see something else. A paper lantern, caught in the reeds. A red one. Just like the ones Eli used to make. Every single ~~new year~~ [New Year]. Excited about my discovery, I run to the river.

I have never mentioned this before, but I love running. It's what kept me human in the early days of Eli's death. Every time my emotions got out of control, I would run. The wind whipped at my face, sharp and stinging. The splash of the water is soothing, washing away my stress. I watch as the lantern floated peacefully along the stream. A smile played at my lips. ~~#3 In 1 year, the pain and misery lift, and I feel like the girl I was before.~~ [Over time, the pain and misery begin to lift, and I start to feel like the girl I was before.]

The next day, I came back with my own lantern. It looks crumpled next to the other one, but for my sanity, I made another one. And another. Before long, the river was full of lanterns. The smell of the smoke and damp leaves isn't overwhelming anymore. The river, with its lanterns, reminds me of Eli—and that even in the darkest times, he is still with me.