

Section 1

#1: Opening paragraph – "The photograph lay there – hidden by cascades of dust, never touched, never moved. Sunlight spilled into the attic like honey on a dewy morning."

Strengths:

- Your sensory language creates a vivid picture of the attic setting, particularly with the honey simile for sunlight
- The pacing draws readers in gently, establishing atmosphere before introducing character action

Unclear Time Marker → Your opening date "24/12/15" creates confusion because readers cannot tell if this means 2015 or 2024. Since your story references a 2001 event and describes an adult Amelia reflecting on childhood, the year needs clarification. Without this, your timeline feels muddled and readers struggle to understand how much time has passed since the disappearance.

Exemplar: *Present day – 24th December, 2015 or Present day – 24th December, 2024*

#2: Flashback transition – "September 1st, 2001. Amelia grinned as the golden leaves of the Maple tree in her backyard flew in the air."

Strengths:

- The clear date stamp helps readers recognise the shift from present to past
- Your autumn imagery reinforces the warmth and happiness of the memory

Abrupt Scene Shift → Your transition into the flashback happens too suddenly without a connecting sentence. You jump straight from Amelia examining the photograph to being inside the memory itself, which can disorient readers. A brief bridging sentence would help readers understand they're entering Amelia's recollection rather than watching a separate scene unfold.

Exemplar: *She remembered that day as clearly as if it were yesterday. September 1st, 2001—Amelia had grinned as the golden leaves...*

#3: Mother's disappearance moment – "High pitched ringing screeched in the air from the house, ear piercing enough to deafen you. It was gone as quick as it came."

Strengths:

- The mysterious ringing sound creates tension and foreshadows something wrong
- Your short sentences build urgency in this crucial moment

Underdeveloped Mystery → Your pivotal moment—the mother's disappearance—lacks sufficient detail to feel believable or emotionally powerful. The "high pitched ringing" appears and vanishes without explanation, and your description of the mother simply walking inside feels too ordinary for such a

life-changing event. Readers need more sensory details or emotional reactions from young Amelia to understand the strangeness of this moment and why it led to a permanent disappearance.

Exemplar: *High-pitched ringing screeched from inside the house, sharp enough to make Amelia clap her hands over her ears. Her mother's face changed—her smile fading as she tilted her head, listening. "Stay here, sweetheart," she said, her voice suddenly tight. She hurried through the glass doors, leaving them ajar.*

■ Your piece shows genuine emotional depth, particularly in how you capture Amelia's lingering grief over her mother's disappearance. The contrast between the joyful autumn memory and the painful present creates emotional weight. However, your central mystery—the disappearance itself—needs more substance to feel satisfying. Currently, the mother walks inside and simply never returns, which feels incomplete. Consider adding small details that make the disappearance feel more unsettling: perhaps young Amelia noticed something unusual about her mother's expression, or heard muffled sounds from inside, or found the back door open later. Additionally, your present-day reflection could benefit from showing us more about how this loss shaped Amelia's life beyond just sadness. What specific ways did living with her "awful aunt" change her? How does she honour her mother's memory in daily life? These concrete details would transform your story from a snapshot of grief into a fuller portrait of loss and resilience.

Score: 43/50

Section 2:

~~Present day — 24/12/15~~ [#1 Present day – 24th December, 2015]

The photograph lay there – hidden by cascades of dust, never touched, never moved. Sunlight spilled into the attic like honey on a dewy morning. Boxes filled to the brim with old books stood in the path of Amelia Salvatore to the single piece of frozen time. She slowly approached it, cautiously placing ~~her each~~ foot [each foot] on creaky floorboards.

Her dark hair swept over her shoulders as her curious eyes scanned the image. She ran her thumb delicately over it with a faint ~~a~~ smile. She saw a girl, in her teen years under an autumn tree, with a large smile plastered across her face. She had brown swirls, pulled back into a messy bun and grey eyes that glinted with pure innocence – unaware of the scene about ~~unfold~~ [to unfold].

~~September 1st, 2001.~~ [#2 She remembered that day as clearly as if it were yesterday. September 1st, 2001.]

Amelia grinned as the golden leaves of the Maple tree in her backyard flew in the air. Her mother, a young woman in her late thirties who had a smile so bright that it could light a room, held a camera – the lens slightly dusty but fitting right in her hands. She was taking pictures of young Amelia with the leaves

caught in her hair, stifling giggles. It was the afternoon every daughter imagined with their mother. Nothing could go wrong. Nothing could ruin this perfect capture in time, right?

A sudden gust had swept through the yard that day, scattering the leaves and laughter alike. Amelia's mother lowered the camera, her smile faltering just slightly. ~~High-pitched ringing screeched in the air from the house, ear-piercing enough to deafen you. It was gone as quick as it came.~~ [#3 High-pitched ringing screeched from inside the house, sharp enough to make young Amelia wince. It vanished as quickly as it came.] She hesitated, then handed Amelia the camera with a wink. "Keep smiling, I'll be right back." Then she walked through the glass doors to their home, leaving just a space for wind to fly in.

Amelia had waited. She had twirled beneath the tree, capturing her own blurry shots, imagining her mother's return with hot cocoa and more laughter. But the minutes stretched. The wind grew colder. She never came back.

Present day.

Tears rolled down Amelia's cheeks, her breathing a breath heavier. That day. The day her mother disappeared. The day she moved in with her awful aunt, with the memories of the interrogating voices in the court flooding her mind. And how it was left a cold case, never resolved. She would never know where her mother was. She would never know what it would be like if her mother was still alive. She didn't even get to say goodbye, not even an 'I love you'. The memories of her childhood ~~was~~ [were] lost with her mother. Amelia sat in the attic, the photograph trembling in her hands. The silence around her was thick, broken only by the soft hum of the wind outside—like an echo of that long-lost afternoon.

She closed her eyes.

In the darkness behind her lids, she saw it again: the golden leaves, the laughter, the warmth of her mother's voice. It wasn't much, but it was hers. A fragment. A flicker. A truth that time couldn't erase.

She placed the photograph inside her coat pocket, close to her heart. It wasn't closure. It wasn't justice. But it was something.

A promise.

That she would remember. That she would live. That she would carry the light of that smile into every shadowed corner of her life.

And as she descended the attic stairs, the floorboards creaking beneath her, Amelia Salvatore didn't look back.

She didn't need to.

The memory had already followed her down.