

Section 1

#1: Opening paragraph (from "Maya walked through the door..." to "...death of her most admired family member.")

Strengths:

- Your opening successfully establishes atmosphere through sensory details like "dark, cold basement" and "small lamps that lined the walls," which help readers visualise the setting.
- The backstory about Maya's grandmother is woven naturally into her thoughts as she walks, showing rather than simply telling us what happened.

Weakness: Point of View Inconsistency → Your narrative shifts unexpectedly between third person ("Maya walked," "she thought") and first person ("I noticed," "I pulled"). This happens when Maya discovers the chest, where you suddenly write "I noticed a key" instead of "she noticed a key." This jarring shift confuses readers about who is telling the story. The change occurs without warning and makes it unclear whether Maya is narrating her own experience or if someone else is watching her. You need to choose one perspective and maintain it throughout the entire piece.

Exemplar: *She noticed a key sticking out from under the chest. She pulled tight, and with a glow, it unlatched.*

#2: Discovery scene (from "As she reached the bottom..." to "...It was all a lie...")

Strengths:

- Your description of the chest creates anticipation with details like "brown chest lined with grandeur" and "borders were etched in gold curves."
- The revelation that the photograph shows an orphanage delivers an effective twist that connects to the grandmother's cryptic final words.

Weakness: Rushed Emotional Response → The moment Maya discovers she was adopted is the most important revelation in your story, yet you've given it only one sentence: "It was all a lie..." This massive, life-changing discovery deserves much more attention. Readers need to experience Maya's shock, confusion, hurt, or disbelief. Does her heart race? Do her hands tremble? Does she feel betrayed or simply stunned? Without showing her reaction, the emotional impact falls flat. The scene jumps too quickly from opening the chest to the flashback without letting readers feel the weight of this discovery.

Exemplar: *It was all a lie. Maya's hands began to shake as she stared at the photograph, her grandmother's smiling face now seeming like that of a stranger. How could the woman who raised her have kept such an enormous secret?*

#3: Flashback section (from "July 5th, 1943" to the end)

Strengths:

- Your flashback provides context for the photograph and shows the grandmother's perspective, revealing her intentions were protective rather than malicious.
- The detail about "having a banana for once is considered luxury" effectively illustrates the orphanage's poverty.

Weakness: Unclear Narrative Voice → In this section, you've switched to the grandmother's perspective, but it reads like her internal thoughts rather than a proper scene. The grandmother thinks about posing for an advertisement and planning what lies to tell the children, but readers don't see any actual dialogue or action happening. We don't witness the photographer giving instructions or the grandmother interacting with young Maya and her brother. The section feels like a summary of events rather than a lived moment. Without concrete details of what's actually occurring—what the orphanage looks like, how the children behave, what the photographer is doing—the flashback lacks impact.

Exemplar: *The photographer adjusted his camera and called out, "Move a little to the right, Mrs Chen. Perfect! Now put your arms around the children." I placed my hands on their small shoulders and forced a smile, already wondering what story I would tell them when they were older and started asking questions.*

■

Your piece presents an intriguing mystery about hidden family secrets, and the dual timeline structure shows ambition in your storytelling. However, the content needs more development to reach its full potential. The biggest issue is that your scenes feel rushed—particularly the crucial discovery moment, which deserves far more space to explore Maya's emotional reaction. Additionally, your writing would strengthen considerably if you maintained a consistent point of view throughout. The sudden shifts between third person and first person disrupt the reading experience and make it difficult for readers to stay immersed in the story.

To improve the substance of your writing, focus on expanding key emotional moments rather than summarising them. For instance, when Maya discovers the photograph, spend time showing her physical and emotional reactions—does she sit down heavily, does she read the sign on the building

multiple times, does she search the chest for more clues? Also, consider adding more specific details to your flashback scene. Instead of telling us what the grandmother was thinking, show us the actual moment: the sound of the camera, the weight of the children beside her, the photographer's instructions. These concrete details will make both timelines feel more vivid and real, giving your story the depth it needs to truly affect your readers.

Overall Score: 41/50

Section 2

The Photograph

Present Date, September 7th, 1982

Maya walked through the door of her new house – 91 Coral Avenue – and thought ~~of~~ [about] what to do. 'I could make some breakfast', she thought, [.] 'Or maybe get some shed work done.' Then Maya looked down at the dark, cold basement ~~were~~ [where] the only light illuminating the room ~~were~~ [was the] small lamps that lined the walls, staring smugly at whoever dared to step down there. 'Uh-oh. Cleaning.[.]' Maya thought. As she walked down the dimly-lit corridor, she thought of all the events that had happened to her in the last 24-hours – the news of her grandmother's sickness. [.] ~~The~~ [the] last ~~word~~ [words] of her grandmother – 'May the secrets reach you, and may you not be clouded by lies forever': [.] ~~The~~ [the] peaceful – or was it? – death of her most admired family member. [, and] ~~The~~ [the] funeral where Maya's hands couldn't stop shaking. [, followed by] ~~The~~ [the] will ~~read-out~~ [being read out] – the mansion to Maya.

#1 As Maya crept down those corridors, terrified to make a sound, her mind dawned on the thought – what secrets could her grandmother be talking about. [?] As she reached the bottom of the staircase after lots of rattling of the railing and creaking of the steps, she met a brown chest lined with grandeur. The borders were etched in gold curves, its lock ominous and secretive. † [She] noticed a key sticking out from under the chest. † [She] pulled tight, and with a glow, it unlatched. † [She] stuck it in the lock and was about to turn the key when a thought drifted across ~~my~~ [her] mind. 'What if this isn't meant for me?' ~~Realising I was hesitating~~ [Realising she was hesitating] too much, † [she] turned the latch without another thought and the chest gleamed open.

#2 But the gleam drifted away almost immediately because it wasn't gold, or jewellery, or anything else that others would consider valuable. It was a photo. But to anyone in ~~my~~ [her] situation, it would be more valuable than any necklace or bar of gold in the world. Because on the picture ~~was~~ [were] three people outside a building with white paint peeling off the top, [that] ~~reading~~ [read] 'Manhattan

Orphanage'. The woman in front was ~~my~~ [her] grandmother. And the two children were ~~me~~ [Maya] and ~~my~~ [her] brother... It was all a lie...

#3 July 5th, 1943

'Move a little bit to the right. A bit back-[—]No, no, too ~~back~~ [far back]. A bit forward... perfect. We need you to say promising things to support our company, like, how I got two wonderful children, or something. Just anything to promote our ~~band~~ [business].' Reluctantly, I agreed. I was already thinking of what story I would tell these kids when they were ~~elder~~ [older] and more curious, so they wouldn't make me tell them about this orphanage. Maybe ~~there~~ [their] parents died in a car crash. Or their parents didn't want them. Something like that. But if it meant I could help these kids grow to become amazing people, I would make up any story and pose in any advertisement. No kid deserves to live in a filthy orphanage where having a banana for once is considered luxury. I just hope they wouldn't figure out the truth before they ~~are~~ [were] ready for it.