

## Section 1:

### #1: Opening paragraph ("The attic was colder than she remembered... Not since the funeral.")

#### Strengths:

- Your opening creates immediate atmosphere through sensory details like "dust hung in the air like fog," which helps readers picture the scene clearly.
- The short, punchy sentence "Not since the funeral" builds tension and hints at backstory without explaining everything at once.

**Weakness: Vague emotional connection** → Your piece doesn't show us why Nora avoids the attic or what the funeral means to her specifically. When you write "colder than she remembered," we don't understand what memories make this place difficult for her. The phrase "Not since the funeral" drops important information but doesn't connect it to Nora's feelings or actions in the moment. This makes it harder for readers to care about why she's returning now.

**Exemplar:** *The attic was colder than she remembered—colder than the day they'd stored James's belongings here, when she'd sworn never to return.*

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### #2: The discovery and flashback transition ("She flipped the photo over... JULY 1982")

#### Strengths:

- Your use of fragmented sentences like "No name. No memory" creates urgency and mirrors Nora's racing thoughts effectively.
- The physical reactions—trembling fingers, racing pulse—show rather than tell us that Nora is frightened.

**Weakness: Abrupt time shift** → Your writing jumps suddenly from present-day Nora to the past without preparing readers for the change. The section heading "JULY 1982" appears without transition, and we lose track of Nora in the attic. You've written "She dropped the photo" and then immediately moved backwards in time, which creates confusion about whether we're still with Nora or watching the past unfold. The connection between seeing Liam's name and remembering the summer needs clearer bridging.

**Exemplar:** *She dropped the photo, her mind already pulling her backwards—back to that blistering summer of 1982, when the creek shimmered and everything changed.*

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### #3: The revelation and ending ("And now, all these years later... She wasn't alone.")

#### Strengths:

- Your final line "She wasn't alone" creates effective suspense by implying danger without showing it directly.
- The realisation that something was "watching" in the original photo adds a chilling layer to the mystery.

**Weakness: Rushed conclusion** → Your piece ends too quickly after building tension throughout. You've spent paragraphs developing the mystery of James's disappearance and Liam's strange behaviour, but then "The attic creaked. She wasn't alone" finishes everything in two short sentences. This doesn't give readers time to feel the full weight of Nora's discovery about "the shape behind them." The ending needs more space to show Nora's reaction to realising something dangerous was there all along, or what happens next in the attic.

**Exemplar:** *The attic creaked above her head. Nora's eyes snapped upwards, the photograph still clutched in her shaking hand. Another creak—closer now. Whatever had watched them that summer had followed her home.*

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■ Your piece demonstrates strong horror atmosphere and suspenseful pacing, but it would benefit from deeper emotional grounding. Whilst you've created an eerie mystery around James's disappearance and the mysterious Liam, we don't fully understand what this loss means to Nora or how it's shaped her life. Additionally, your writing sometimes tells us information ("something about him felt wrong") rather than showing us through specific details what makes Liam unsettling. The structure works well with the flashback, but smoother transitions would help readers follow the time shifts more easily. Also, consider expanding your ending to give the revelation more impact—right now, it feels like the story stops just when the tension peaks.

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**Score: 42/50**

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#### Section 2:

#1 The attic was colder than she remembered. Dust hung in the air like fog, swirling with every step. Nora hadn't been up here in years. Not since the funeral.

She tugged open a warped drawer in the old cedar chest. Inside, a stack of yellowed papers, brittle with age. Beneath them—something else. A photograph.

She held it up to the light.

Four children. A summer day. A tyre swing. Her brother, James, grinning. Her best friend, Lessie, mid-laugh. Nora herself, arms flung wide. And—

She froze.

The fourth child. Back turned. Bare feet. A blur of motion. No name. No memory.

But something about him felt wrong.

**#2** She flipped the photo over. "Liam. July 1997." Her breath caught. That was the summer James disappeared. Her fingers trembled. The air felt heavier. She stared at the boy's face. No—at the space around him. The shadows behind the swing. The way the trees seemed to lean in. She blinked. Looked again. Just trees. Just memory. But her pulse was racing. She remembered the scream. Not James'. Not hers. A different voice. Thin. High. Wrong. She dropped the photo. It landed face-up. Liam stared out from the paper. Still. Waiting.

JULY 1982

That summer had been blistering. The creek shimmered with heat, and the ~~tire~~ [tyre] swing became their kingdom. James dared them to fly. Lessie kept score. Nora kept up. Then Liam appeared. He didn't speak. Just watched. James said he was a cousin. Nora didn't ask questions. She remembered the way he stood at the edge of the woods, unmoving, like he was listening to something only he could hear. The day before James vanished, Lessie brought her dad's camera. "Say cheese!" she'd shouted. The shutter clicked. James climbed the tree. Higher. Higher. "You can't catch me now!" he'd called down. Nora had laughed. Then—silence. A splash. A scream. Not James'. Liam's. She remembered turning. Seeing the boy's face twist. Not in fear. In something else. Then he ran. Into the woods. Gone. They never found James. Never found Liam. Just the photo. Just the shadow in the trees. **#3** And now, all these years later, Nora finally saw it. The shape behind them. Tall. Watching. She hadn't remembered it before. The attic creaked. She wasn't alone.