

Section 1

#1: "I knew something was wrong the moment I stepped through the door. You see, Gran's cottage was never quiet. It always bubbled and chattered—pots clanked, floorboards groaned, the kettle whistled madly to itself."

Strengths:

- You've created a strong contrast between what's normal and what's happening now, which immediately builds tension
- Your use of sound imagery brings Gran's cottage to life with vivid details like "bubbled and chattered"

Unclear narrative purpose → Your opening effectively sets an eerie mood, but it doesn't give readers enough information about why the narrator is visiting or what they expected to find. When you write "I knew something was wrong," we don't yet understand the relationship between the narrator and Gran well enough to feel the full weight of this concern. Adding a sentence that hints at the context—perhaps why the narrator came to visit or what time of day it usually is—would help readers connect more deeply with the situation. The phrase "You see" feels like you're explaining to readers rather than drawing them into the story naturally.

Exemplar: *I'd promised Gran I'd stop by after school, like I did every Tuesday. But the moment I stepped through the door, I knew something was wrong—her cottage was never this quiet.*

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#2: "The smell was the first oddity: instead of Gran's apple crumble, I tasted something violently medicinal, like mouthwash and burned rubber had thrown a party in the kitchen."

Strengths:

- Your sensory description moves beyond just sight to include smell, making the scene more immersive
- The unexpected comparison of "mouthwash and burned rubber" creates a memorable and unsettling image

Confusing sensory mixing → You've written "I tasted something" when describing a smell, which can confuse readers about what's actually happening. Whilst smell and taste are connected, saying you "tasted" a smell in the air isn't quite accurate—you'd smell it, not taste it. This makes the sentence harder to picture clearly. The phrase "thrown a party" also softens the horror of the moment with humour that

doesn't quite match the tension you've built. When you're trying to show something is wrong, mixing in playful language can make readers unsure whether they should feel worried or amused.

Exemplar: *The smell was the first oddity: instead of Gran's apple crumble, a sharp, medicinal stench filled the air—like mouthwash mixed with burned rubber.*

#3: "The living room was in chaos. Gran's knitting, usually wound up as tight as a snake's coil, was sprawled in woolly blue rivers across the sofa. Her slippers—patched, pink, and always perfectly paired—were scattered as if she'd leapt out of them."

Strengths:

- Your specific details about Gran's belongings (the knitting, the pink slippers) help readers understand her character and habits
- The description of disorder contrasts well with the orderliness you've established as normal for Gran

Weak connection between observations → Your writing lists three separate details (the chaos, the knitting, the slippers) but doesn't explain how these clues fit together or what they might mean. When you show us the scattered knitting and abandoned slippers, readers need help understanding whether these suggest a struggle, a hurried exit, or something else entirely. The sentence "The living room was in chaos" tells us your conclusion, but the details that follow don't quite support such a strong word—untidy knitting and misplaced slippers aren't really chaos. This gap between your statement and your evidence weakens the tension. Additionally, phrases like "as tight as a snake's coil" and "woolly blue rivers" are nice images, but they slow down the mystery-solving momentum when readers are eager to find out what happened.

Exemplar: *Gran's knitting lay unspooled across the sofa in tangled blue loops, and her slippers were scattered near the doorway, as though she'd stumbled out of them in a rush.*

■ Your piece creates an engaging mystery that draws readers in with its vivid descriptions and building suspense. The twist ending, where Gran is actually playing a prank, is fun and unexpected. However, your story would benefit from clearer connections between the clues you present. Right now, each paragraph describes something odd, but you don't show the narrator thinking through what these clues mean or how they relate to each other. For example, in the second paragraph, you could have the narrator pause to wonder why the digestive looks "shocked" or what might have caused Gran to drop her tea. This would help readers follow the narrator's thought process.

Additionally, your narrator's emotions shift quite suddenly—going from fearful to relieved to

surprised—without much transition. You could strengthen this by showing physical reactions to fear (perhaps a racing heart or sweaty palms) that build throughout the story. The humming sound you mention in the third paragraph is intriguing but never explained—was it part of Gran's prank? Tying up these loose threads would make your story feel more complete. Also, consider the fourth paragraph where you describe the footprint as "shaped like a rogue potato"—whilst creative, this description makes it harder to picture the actual threat because potatoes aren't frightening shapes. You might instead describe its size or how the mud was still wet, which would add urgency. Your vocabulary is strong overall, but in some places (like "violently medicinal" and "feverish humming"), the word choices don't quite match what you're trying to describe, which can distract readers from the mystery.

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Overall Score: 42/50

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Section 2

~~#1 I knew something was wrong the moment I stepped through the door. You see, Gran's cottage was never quiet. It always burred and chattered—pots clanked, floorboards groaned, the kettle whistled madly to itself. But now, as I set one foot inside, everything was hushed, like someone had pressed a finger to the lips of the whole house. The smell was the first oddity: instead of Gran's apple crumble, I tasted something violently medicinal, like mouthwash and burned rubber had thrown a party in the kitchen.~~ [#2 The smell was the first oddity: instead of Gran's apple crumble, a sharp, medicinal stench filled the air—something like mouthwash mixed with burnt rubber.]

My shoes made sticky little squeaks on the linoleum. I peered around; there was Gran's tea mug, toppled on its side, a chocolate digestive lying beside it as if it had fainted from shock. Gran was nowhere to be seen. That alone was peculiar—she delighted in appearing suddenly, flour dust swirling around her like snowy magic. On the wall, the old cuckoo clock sounded two o'clock and, right on cue, its wooden bird flung out with a creak and a squawk so loud I jumped nearly out of my skin.

~~The living room was in chaos. Gran's knitting, usually wound up as tight as a snake's coil, was sprawled in woolly blue rivers across the sofa. Her slippers—patched, pink, and always perfectly paired—were scattered as if she'd leapt out of them.~~ [#3 The living room was in disarray. Gran's knitting, usually wound up tight, lay unspooled across the sofa in tangled blue loops. Her slippers—patched, pink, and always perfectly paired—were scattered near the doorway, as though she'd stumbled out of them in a rush.] And in the air, somewhere up by the ceiling, a faint and feverish humming, like bees plotting mischief.

I crept to the hallway, visions of burglars in striped jumpers tiptoeing through my imagination. There,

plastered across the doormat, was a footprint. Not Gran's dainty Mary Janes, but a monstrous thing—wet, muddy, and shaped like a rogue potato. It pointed straight towards the stairs.

Swallowing hard, I trailed after it, half-expecting the bogeyman of Gran's bedtime stories to leap out of the broom cupboard. The house seemed to shrink and huddle around me. My hand was clammy as I gripped the banister and inched up, up, up. At the top, the bedroom door was just ajar. A giggle—startling, unmistakably Gran's—floated out. Relief washed over me in a warm, ticklish wave.

But as I stepped forward, something shiny zipped past my ear and stuck to the wall with a rude plop. Gran, perched atop her armchair and armed with a slingshot, grinned at me, cheeks round as puddings. "Caught you!" she chortled. "I knew you'd come snooping. Now, how about some apple crumble?"