

## Section 1

### #1: Opening paragraph

#### Strengths:

- Your opening creates a strong mood through smell, using "burnt sugar and moldy paper" to help readers feel the atmosphere of the coffee shop.
- The description immediately makes readers curious about why this place is important to the characters.

**Telling instead of showing:** → You write "an odor which had once been familiar" but don't explain what this means for the character experiencing it. Who finds it familiar? Why does it matter? Showing the character's reaction (perhaps a pause, a memory flashing, or a physical response) would help readers understand the emotional weight of this moment rather than simply being told it was familiar.

**Exemplar:** *The scent of burnt sugar and mouldy paper hung heavy in the air. Anya breathed it in and her steps slowed—this smell used to mean home.*

**#2: "She pulled a small, torn paper bag out of her handbag—a thick, formal handbag that didn't seem to be made for carrying drips. She placed the bag in the middle of the table, between their mugs."**

#### Strengths:

- The detail about the handbag not being made for "drips" suggests Anya's put-together, professional character.
- The action of placing the bag between the mugs creates tension, as readers wonder what's inside.

**Unclear meaning:** → The phrase "didn't seem to be made for carrying drips" is confusing. What are "drips"? Do you mean drops of coffee, or something else? Readers might puzzle over this word choice when they should be focusing on the important moment of the handover. Clear, specific language would keep readers engaged with the story's emotions.

**Exemplar:** *She pulled a small, torn paper bag from her handbag—an expensive leather bag that looked too formal for carrying crumpled packages.*

### #3: Final two paragraphs

#### Strengths:

- The image of Ben filling the chip with sugar is powerful and symbolic, showing his desire to fix what's broken.
- Your ending leaves readers with a bittersweet feeling, which matches the story's mood about relationships ending.

**Rushed pacing:** → The ending moves very quickly from Anya leaving to Ben's final action. You write "Then, slowly, he spilled loose sugar the cheap, white crystals into the tiny crevice of the porcelain railing" but there's a grammar error here ("sugar the cheap" needs fixing), and more importantly, the moment feels hurried. Readers need more time to sit with Ben's emotions. What does he think as he does this? Does he remember when they bought the lighthouse? Slowing down this moment would make the ending more powerful.

**Exemplar:** *Then, slowly, he poured the loose sugar into the tiny crack in the porcelain railing. The crystals caught the light as they fell. He knew it wouldn't really fix anything, but his hands kept working anyway, filling the space grain by grain.*

■ Your piece tells an emotional story about two people whose relationship has changed, and you use objects (the lighthouse and the sugar) effectively as symbols. The dialogue feels natural and reveals character differences well—Anya's focus on success and efficiency contrasts with Ben's artistic nature. However, your story would benefit from deeper exploration of the characters' feelings. Right now, you tell readers what happens, but you could show more of what the characters think and feel inside. For example, when Ben holds the lighthouse, what memories does it bring up? When Anya talks about being practical, does she feel any sadness, or is she truly unbothered? Additionally, your descriptions sometimes use complicated phrases that slow readers down (like "claiming practical dominion over the space"). Simpler, clearer descriptions would keep the story moving. Also, focus on sentence structure—some sentences have grammar problems or awkward word order that make them harder to understand. Your setting details are good, but think about connecting them more to your characters' emotions. Why does the foggy window matter? What does the lukewarm coffee tell us about their relationship? Making these connections clearer would strengthen your story's impact.

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**Overall Score: 43/50**

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## Section 2:

The scent of burnt sugar and ~~moldy~~ [mouldy] paper hung heavy in the air, an odour which had once been familiar.

**#1:** Anya came in precisely six minutes behind schedule, although the precision was only revealed in the swift, practiced motion of her left wrist, checking the time on the expensive, minimalist watch before she even lifted her head. There was no apology, ~~smoothing the single, gloved hand down the smooth, perfectly fitting sleeve of her trench coat~~ [as she smoothed one gloved hand down the sleeve of her perfectly fitting trench coat].

Ben was already sitting ~~in~~ [at] their corner table, the one facing the window that fogged over in the damp autumn air. Two black coffees ~~that had been ordered~~ [sat on the table,] lukewarm, and the way he fiddled with the sugar packets—tearing the edges away but never dumping the contents out—spoke a different story from the six minutes they'd been instructed to wait.

~~I was held up getting off the train platform~~ ["I was held up getting off the train platform,"] Anya said, her ~~own~~ voice sharp with a no-nonsense tone that sliced through the low hum of the coffee shop. She didn't sit ~~herself~~ down immediately, though, instead placing her stylish, black leather briefcase ~~over~~ [on] the third seat, claiming practical dominion over the space.

"Don't worry," Ben replied, pushing one of the coffees over to her. His grin was too wide and too gentle, ~~half~~ too enthusiastic, as though he needed the reassurance that this meeting was still at ease. "The usual. Still drinking that rocket fuel?"

Anya scanned the surface of the coffee quickly, then took a sip. She ~~winceed~~ [winced,] barely at all, placing the mug down again with a hard clink. "It's fine. I don't care. I just don't have time to sit around for a real pour-over anymore. Too wasteful."

**#2:** She pulled a small, torn paper bag out of her handbag—a thick, formal handbag that didn't seem to be made for carrying drips. She placed the bag in the middle of the table, between their mugs.

"So. The handover," she said.

Ben's eyes softened immediately, focusing on the bag as if it glowed. He reached out a hand slowly, drawing out the object.

It was a small, white-painted porcelain lighthouse, perhaps six inches high, ~~faded robin's egg blue dominating~~ [with faded robin's egg blue dominating the surface,] delicate ceramic that glowed almost translucent in the café light, and one of the small railings at the top beacon was chipped, the chip showing beneath the glaze the dull ~~gray~~ [grey] clay. Ben's thumb travelled over the chip almost as if in a caress.

"Is he okay, then?" Ben whispered, not looking at Anya.

"He's fine," said Anya, suddenly pulling out her phone and scanning an email. "He's up in the loft. It was just lying in the loft on the filing cabinet, and to be blunt, the movers were charging by box. I didn't feel like arguing over three extra boxes of old~~.~~ stuff."

Ben balanced the lighthouse carefully and placed it on the white linen napkin next to his coffee cup, as if protecting it from the filth of the table.

"Right. Stuff," Ben murmured. He sat, watching a pigeon peck half-heartedly at crumbs against the window. "I managed to get into that shared space finally. They required someone in the annex. It's fantastic light for ~~the~~ watercolour painting."

Anya did not even glance up from her phone. "That's terrific, Ben. But are they paying you? Really paying you? The market for anything that isn't digital is just collapsing. You really need to be future-proofing. I told you, if you'd invested ~~on~~ [in] that investment pitch three years ago, you could have scaled up. You need to be aggressive."

~~"Aggressive,"~~ ["Aggressive,"] he said, ~~practicing~~ [practising] the term. He picked up the lighthouse again, spinning it so that the chip was facing him. "Maybe I don't have to build on a larger scale. Maybe I just want to create things that function."

Anya finally put down her phone, letting out a soft whoosh, a sound ~~more~~ [of] irritation ~~than~~ [rather than] exhaustion. She picked up her warm coffee and finished the rest of it in one swift gulp.

"It's impossible, Ben. You were always ambitious. You always had your sights on building the whole city, not just painting the postcards," she said sharply. She leaned across the table and slapped the porcelain lighthouse—not hard, but with a defining finger, near the splintered railing.

"Do you ~~recall~~ [remember] when we bought this? At the seaside? You had to fix that chip at the time, but I used to say to you, 'Leave it. It's history. It proves we were there.'"

Ben looked at the piece of porcelain she'd ~~caressed~~ [touched], then at her eyes. His was an open face, but distant.

"It proves something else, now," he replied, his voice ~~well-nigh~~ [nearly] overwhelmed by the espresso machine.

Anya shoved back her chair and stood up. The abrupt, jerky motion sent the packets of sugar crashing to the floor.

"Well, I have a call at the top of the hour. Thanks for taking me in. And thanks for taking that. Saves me a trip to the charity store."

She looked down at the table, seeing the lighthouse on the napkin. She did not look at Ben again. She just picked up her briefcase, shrugged into her trench coat, and headed for the door, moving through the narrow café aisle with the intent speed of someone who is running late ~~on~~ [for] a plane.

**#3:** Ben sat quietly. He put his hand out, cradling the lighthouse in both hands. He slowly untangled the torn sugar packets he had been fiddling with earlier and began to scoop the spilled crystals onto the napkin. He held the chipped lighthouse close to his face, inspecting the delicate crack.

Then, slowly, he ~~spilled loose sugar the cheap, white crystals~~ [poured loose sugar—the cheap, white crystals—] into the tiny crevice of the porcelain railing, trying, perhaps, to fill the void. He didn't look up until ~~the café door closed behind the sound of~~ [he heard] Anya's ~~shutting~~ car door ~~; racing~~ [race] away.

Don't ask why the names suck...