

Section 1:

#1: Opening paragraph "The hinge on the old chest groaned in protest as Elias forced it open. Dust motes danced in the single shaft of light filtering through the attic's grimy window. He sneezed, waving a hand in front of his face."

Strengths:

- Your sensory details work well here—the groaning hinge and dancing dust motes help readers picture the scene clearly
- The actions feel natural and paint a believable moment

Vague Character Motivation → Whilst you've created a nice atmosphere, we don't understand why Elias is in the attic or what he's looking for. This makes it harder for readers to care about what happens next. Think about adding a sentence that hints at why this search matters to him. Is he looking for something specific? Does he feel pressured? A small clue would help readers connect with Elias straightaway.

Exemplar: *"The hinge on the old chest groaned in protest as Elias forced it open—his last chance to find something worth keeping before Mark sold the house. Dust motes danced in the single shaft of light filtering through the attic's grimy window."*

#2: Mark's characterisation and dialogue "Elias, the movers are charging by the hour. My flight is at five. If you wanted it, you should have taken it when Mom first asked.' ... Mark, still in the doorway, sighed. 'Seriously? That old thing? We fished that out of the creek.'"

Strengths:

- Mark's impatience comes through clearly in his words and body language
- The contrast between the two brothers feels realistic and creates tension

One-Dimensional Portrayal → Mark seems only impatient and dismissive throughout most of your piece. Whilst this creates conflict, it makes him feel more like a plot device than a real person. Real people have mixed feelings, especially in moments involving family memories. You could show earlier hints of his softer side—perhaps a brief hesitation before checking his watch, or a flicker of recognition

when he first sees the compass. This would make his later moment of connection feel more earned and natural.

Exemplar: *"Mark stood in the doorway, his silhouette framed by the light from the hall. He didn't step inside, but his gaze lingered on the open chest for just a moment before he checked his watch."*

#3: The compass discovery and resolution "It was a compass, brass, and heavy in his palm. The glass was cracked, and the needle spun uselessly, untethered from magnetic north. ... Elias stood alone in the attic. He closed the compass. The brass was cold."

Strengths:

- The compass works well as a symbol linking the brothers' past to their present relationship
- Your ending has a quiet, reflective mood that suits the story

Underdeveloped Emotional Arc → Whilst the compass clearly means something to both brothers, your piece doesn't fully explore what Elias feels about finding it or keeping it. Does this object make him sad? Angry? Hopeful? The physical details are strong, but the emotional layer is missing. When you write "He weighed it in his hand for a moment before slipping it into the pocket of his jeans," we see the action but don't feel what it means to him. Adding even one sentence about his internal reaction would deepen the ending significantly.

Exemplar: *"He weighed it in his hand for a moment, remembering how they'd once believed this battered thing could guide them anywhere. Then, almost without thinking, he slipped it into the pocket of his jeans—a small rebellion against Mark's certainty that nothing here mattered."*

■ Your piece demonstrates solid technical control and creates a clear scene between two brothers sorting through family belongings. The dialogue feels natural, and you've captured the tension between Elias's sentimentality and Mark's practicality effectively. However, your story would benefit from deeper emotional exploration. Right now, we see what happens but don't fully understand what it means to your characters. Consider adding moments where Elias's thoughts reveal why this compass search matters to him personally—is he trying to hold onto childhood? Does he resent Mark's success? Additionally, your ending feels a bit abrupt. After the phone call interrupts their brief connection, you rush through the final actions. Slowing down here and showing Elias's reaction to being left alone would create a stronger emotional payoff. Also, think about Mark's character beyond his impatience.

What does he actually feel about leaving? Even small details—like him pausing at the doorway or glancing back—would add complexity. Finally, your setting is mostly functional; you could weave in more details that connect the attic itself to the brothers' shared history, making the physical space feel as meaningful as the compass.

Overall Score: 41/50

Section 2:

#1 The hinge on the old chest groaned in protest as Elias forced it open. Dust motes danced in the single shaft of light filtering through the attic's grimy window. He sneezed, waving a hand in front of his face.

"Well?"

#2 Mark stood in the doorway, his silhouette framed by the light from the hall. He didn't step inside. His leather-soled shoes were silent on the wooden floorboards, but his impatience was loud. He checked his watch.

"I'm looking," Elias said. He pulled out a stack of vinyl records, blew dust off the top one, and set it aside.

"Elias, the movers are charging by the hour. My flight is at five. If you wanted it, you should have taken it when ~~Mom~~[Mum] first asked."

"She didn't ask. She said 'clear your junk'." Elias grunted, leaning deeper into the chest. His fingers brushed against something small and hard. He pulled it out.

#3 It was a compass, brass, and heavy in his palm. The glass was cracked, and the needle spun uselessly, untethered from magnetic north.

Mark, still in the doorway, sighed. "Seriously? That old thing? We fished that out of the creek."

"You dared me," Elias said, his thumb tracing the crack in the glass. "Said you'd give me your entire comic collection if I got it."

"I was ten. And you never let me forget it." Mark took a step into the room, but stopped short of the dusty circle surrounding the chest. He adjusted the cuff of his blazer. "Does it even work?"

"The needle's loose." Elias gave it a shake. A faint rattle. "But the hinge is still good." He opened the lid.

Mark glanced at it, a brief, tight smile. "The 'North Star.' Right. ~~Figured~~[We figured] we'd never get lost."

"We didn't.[,]" Elias said, quiet[quietly].

Mark's gaze lingered on the compass. His tight smile faltered, becoming something softer, almost genuine. "Yeah," he said, his voice dropping slightly. "We didn't."

His phone buzzed, vibrating sharply in his pocket. The sound was abrasive in the quiet attic. Mark flinched, and the brief connection vanished. He pulled the phone out, his face resetting into a familiar frown as he glanced at the screen.

"Look," he said, his tone already clipped. "I've got to take this. Are you done? Just... put it in one of the boxes. Or don't. It doesn't matter."

Elias watched him turn and walk down the hall. He stopped for a beat at the doorway, his back to the room, before raising the phone. His voice, when it came, was brighter, smoother. "Jenna, hi. Yes, the projections for Q4 are solid. Tell legal to proceed..."

Elias stood alone in the attic. He closed the compass. The brass was cold. He weighed it in his hand for a moment before slipping it into the pocket of his jeans. He looked at the half-empty chest, then back at the empty doorway.

Slowly, he reached up and pulled the string for the single lightbulb, plunging the room into shadow. He closed the chest, the final thud echoing in the small space, and walked out, leaving the dust to settle.