

Section 1

#1: Opening sequence (first three sentences)

Strengths:

- Your opening creates a clear picture with specific actions like "trotted along" and counting steps, which helps readers imagine the scene
- The description "ancient sycamore tree" and "moss covered, tangle of gnarled roots" uses lovely visual details

Unnatural sentence flow → The phrase "One, two, three.. I counted how many steps" feels a bit jumbled because you start with the counting sounds before explaining what you're doing. This makes readers pause and reread. The two ideas would work better if you combined them more smoothly, perhaps saying when or why you're counting as you go.

Exemplar: *Cheerfully, I trotted along the cracked cement path to the forest, counting each step—one, two, three—until I reached the ancient sycamore tree in the clearing.*

#2: Dialogue exchange about Elisa's appearance and life

Strengths:

- Your dialogue feels natural and realistic, especially the awkward pauses and simple questions like "So...What have you been up to?" which show the tension between old friends
- The detail about the diamond ring "that glitters like a million stars" adds a visual image

Missing emotional depth → After thirteen years apart, your characters' conversation feels quite flat and surface-level. When Elisa reveals she's married, there's no reaction from the narrator—no surprise, happiness, or even curiosity about why they lost touch. Real people who haven't seen each other for over a decade would likely have stronger feelings or more questions. The dialogue jumps from topic to topic without showing what either character is thinking or feeling underneath their words.

Exemplar: *"I've been married to a nice guy." Elisa flashed her diamond ring that glittered like a million stars. My breath caught. Married. While I'd been here, counting steps to our old tree, she'd built an entire life. "That's... that's wonderful," I managed, though my voice came out smaller than I intended.*

#3: Description of Elisa's entrance

Strengths:

- Your use of "spidery woods" creates an effective, slightly eerie atmosphere
- The physical details like "black leather boots" give readers something concrete to picture

Confusing description → The phrase "a slender body with the face I knew better than my own, sitting on top" is quite awkward and unclear. Bodies don't have faces "sitting on top"—faces are part of bodies. This strange wording pulls readers out of the story because they have to work out what you mean. Also, saying you know her face "better than my own" after thirteen years apart doesn't quite make sense, since people change significantly over that time.

Exemplar: *Then black leather boots emerged from the dark, spidery woods, followed by a slender figure whose face, though older, I recognised instantly.*

■ Your piece tells an interesting story about two old friends reconnecting, and you've chosen a nice setting with the sycamore tree creating a sense of returning to the past. However, the writing would benefit from showing us more of what's happening beneath the surface. Right now, your characters talk but we don't learn much about their thoughts or feelings—why did they lose touch for thirteen years? How does the narrator really feel about Elisa's sudden appearance? Your story has potential emotional power that isn't fully realised yet.

Additionally, some of your sentences need smoother connections between ideas. Notice how your dialogue moves very quickly from one question to the next without pauses for reactions or inner thoughts. Try adding moments where your narrator processes information or remembers something from the past. Also, think about making the reunion feel more meaningful—after thirteen years, wouldn't there be some uncomfortable silences, difficult questions, or mixed emotions? Your ending mentions smiling "for the first time in thirteen years," but we haven't seen enough sadness or tension earlier to make this moment feel earned. Consider building up the emotional journey throughout the piece so the ending has greater impact.

Overall Score: 39/50

Section 2

Cheerfully, I trotted along the cracked cement path to the forest. ~~One, two, three.. I counted~~ [Counting each step—one, two, three—I made my way until I reached] ~~how many steps it took to get~~ to the ancient sycamore tree in the clearing. As I nestled myself in between the moss covered tangle of gnarled roots, I heard the unmistakable sound of boots stepping on dry leaves. Alarmed, my head snapped up. My heart drummed in my chest. Then black leather boots emerged from the dark, spidery woods followed by a slender ~~body with the face I knew better than my own, sitting on top~~ [figure whose face, though older, I recognised instantly].

#1 "Elisa?" I spluttered, eyes wide.

Elisa stared and gave me a weak smile.

"Hey?" she mumbled with a slight wave.

"It's been thirteen years."

"I know."

My fingers fidgeted and Elisa's eyes looked anywhere but ~~me~~ [at me].

#2 "You've changed[," Elisa mused, tilting her head.}] Elisa mused tilting her head.

~~"I really can recognise you except for your chestnut coloured eyes."~~ ["I can barely recognise you except for your chestnut-coloured eyes."]

"So...What have you been up to?"

"Nothing much. You?"

Before answering, Elisa sat down next to me. Just like old times.

"I've been married to a nice guy."

Elisa ~~flashes~~ [flashed] her diamond ring that ~~glitters~~ [glittered] like a million stars.

"So [,] what made you like him[?]"

"He is gentle and super funny."

"How did you meet him?"

"He was the barista and I was the customer."

#3 We carried on chatting under the shade of the sycamore tree as the gentle gusts of wind blew our hair into our faces. We smiled. For the first time in thirteen years.