

### Section 1:

**#1: "Wayne nursed his black coffee like a lifeline, the bankruptcy papers still warm in his coat pocket. Jamal, slouched near the window with textbooks spread but unopened, wore the weight of a failed exam like a wet coat."**

#### Strengths:

- Your opening immediately shows us who these characters are through their actions and problems rather than just telling us about them.
- The comparison of Jamal's feelings to "a wet coat" helps readers understand how heavy and uncomfortable his sadness feels.

**Unclear character connection** → Your piece introduces three separate people but doesn't explain why they're all in the same café or if they know each other. The phrase "Alice, seated beside them unknowingly" is confusing because we don't understand what she doesn't know. Are they strangers sitting near each other? Friends? This matters because it changes how we understand the ending when they help each other. You need to make their relationship (or lack of one) clearer from the start.

**Exemplar:** *Alice sat at the next table, a stranger absorbed in her phone, unaware of the two men nearby who carried their own quiet burdens.*

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**#2: "Then, a barista tripped, spilling coffee onto all of their shoes. All three flinched for a split second. Wayne then immediately offered a napkin. Jamal helped by picking up the cup. Alice looked up—for once, really looked, and cleaned it up."**

#### Strengths:

- The accident brings your three characters together in a natural way that makes sense in a café setting.
- You show each person responding differently, which tells us something about their personalities.

**Rushed sequence of events** → This important turning point in your story happens too quickly. You wrote "All three flinched for a split second. Wayne then immediately offered a napkin. Jamal helped by

picking up the cup. Alice looked up—for once, really looked, and cleaned it up" all in just a few short sentences. This moment should be the heart of your story where lonely people connect, but it feels like you're racing to finish. We don't see what they're thinking or feeling. We don't hear what they say to each other. Slow down and show us more details about how this moment changes them.

**Exemplar:** *All three flinched. Wayne's hand moved to his pocket, pulling out a napkin before he'd even thought about it. "Here," he said quietly. Jamal bent down to retrieve the cup, their eyes meeting briefly—a small nod of understanding passing between them. Alice finally looked up from her screen, really seeing the people around her, and knelt to help wipe the floor.*

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**#3: "In that unexpected moment, brief as thunder, they existed together. They all ate their food and walked back to their homes in pure silence."**

**Strengths:**

- The phrase "brief as thunder" nicely captures how quick but powerful the moment was.
- Your ending comes full circle by having them return to silence and separation.

**Missing emotional resolution** → After building up three people with serious problems (bankruptcy, failed exam, loneliness) and bringing them together, your ending tells us "They all ate their food and walked back to their homes in pure silence" without showing us if anything changed inside them. Did Wayne feel a tiny bit less alone? Did Jamal think differently about his situation? Did Alice realise something about her phone habit? You don't need a happy ending, but readers need to understand what this moment meant to your characters. Right now, it feels like nothing happened at all.

**Exemplar:** *They all ate their food in silence, but it was a different kind of silence now—not the lonely kind, but the comfortable quiet of people who had shared something small yet significant. As they walked back to their homes, each carried the memory of that brief connection, a reminder that even strangers could choose kindness.*

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■ Your piece shows good skill in creating a mood and setting. The café feels real with its "steam clung to glass" and "hiss of milk frothers," and you've chosen interesting characters with real problems. However, your story needs more depth in its middle and ending sections. The moment when the coffee spills should be the most important part, but you rush through it in just a few sentences. Take your time there—show us what the characters say, how they look at each other, what they're thinking.

Additionally, your ending needs to show us why this moment mattered. You don't need to solve all their problems, but help readers understand what changed, even if it's something small like Wayne smiling for the first time or Jamal closing his textbook with less dread. Also, clarify at the beginning whether these three people are strangers or know each other, because this confusion makes the whole story harder to follow. Think about the first paragraph where you introduce everyone—could you add one sentence that explains their relationship? Finally, your story would benefit from showing more of what's happening inside your characters' heads, not just what they're doing with their bodies.

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**Overall Score: 41/50**

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## Section 2:

**#1** Wayne nursed his black coffee like a lifeline, the bankruptcy papers still warm in his coat pocket. Jamal, slouched near the window with textbooks spread but unopened, wore the weight of a failed exam like a wet coat. Alice, once a headmistress, now spent her days scrolling endlessly, thumb twitching, eyes glazed with habit more than interest. Outside, rain snaked down the windows in rivulets, trapping them in the amber warmth of the café: steam clung to glass, the hiss of milk frothers punctuated murmurs and clinks of porcelain, the scent of cinnamon and espresso heavy in the air. Wayne caught Jamal's glance as the boy sighed—recognition in weariness. ~~Alice, seated beside them unknowingly, chuckled~~ [Alice, seated at the neighbouring table—a stranger to both men—chuckled] at a cat video of a cat playing random notes on a piano, the sound oddly loud in the hush. Wayne envied the simplicity of her laughter; Jamal resented its ease. She didn't notice either. In their silence, Wayne thought of starting over, Jamal of ~~just hoping good luck in his test~~ [hoping for better fortune in his next exam] and Alice ~~playing a thinking game~~ [replaying a puzzle game] for the third time ~~in a day~~ [that day]. **#2** Then, a barista tripped, spilling coffee onto all of their shoes. All three flinched ~~for a split second~~ [simultaneously]. Wayne ~~then immediately~~ [quickly] offered a napkin. [, his voice quiet but steady: "Here, let me help."] Jamal helped by picking up the cup. [, meeting Wayne's eyes with a brief nod of acknowledgement.] Alice looked up—for once, really looked, and cleaned it up[—and knelt beside them to wipe the spill, her phone forgotten on the table]. **#3** In that unexpected moment, brief as thunder, they existed together. ~~They all ate their food and walked back to their homes in pure silence.~~ [They returned to their tables and ate their food in silence, but it was a different silence now—less isolating, softer somehow. When they eventually left the café and walked back to their separate homes, each carried something new: Wayne felt the faint warmth of human connection,

Jamal's shoulders sat a little lighter, and Alice slipped her phone into her pocket, noticing the rain-washed streets for the first time in weeks.]