

## Section 1

#1: "A snap of twigs behind me, the rustling of a bush. I yelp, swivelling around on my heels, glancing at the empty darkness. Nothing. I lick my dry lips, still staring at the bush and slowly turn back to face the rusty slide. It all feels too quiet. It all feels too dark. It all feels wrong."

Strengths: Your opening immediately establishes tension through sensory detail—the snap of twigs and rustling bush create immediate unease. The repetition of "It all feels" works effectively to build a sense of mounting dread, emphasising the protagonist's growing anxiety.

→ **Abrupt shift in narrative momentum** Your piece moves from external action (the sounds and physical reactions) to internal reflection without a clear bridge between them. The transition from "I yelp, swivelling around" to the repeated "It all feels" statements loses the urgency of the initial moment and flattens the tension.

Exemplar: *Instead of repeating the same structure three times, you might write: "It all feels too quiet, too dark, and fundamentally wrong—as though the playground itself holds its breath."*

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#2: "My mind pauses, like when you plunge your head underwater and everything is muffled and silenced and all you can think of is how unsettling it is, to have the buzzing world around you suddenly go completely quiet. I get my mind out of the water and answer my own question."

Strengths: Your underwater metaphor is evocative and creates a strong sensory connection to the character's disorientation. The comparison between external silence and internal confusion demonstrates thoughtful layering of experience.

→ **Overextended comparison affecting clarity** The underwater metaphor stretches across multiple clauses, and the phrase "I get my mind out of the water" mixes literal and figurative language in a way that confuses rather than clarifies. Your reader must work too hard to understand what's happening.

Exemplar: *"My mind pauses—like plunging underwater, where everything muffles into unsettling quiet. I surface, and answer my own question."*

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#3: "And then suddenly, the silence fades away. There's chattering and laughing and yelling. There's sunlight and cloudless blue skies and the distant aroma of old books and oranges. The slide is no longer rusty, but a bright red. A young child, no older than 3, clambers onto the slide and wonders if he can go down it backwards or if that would get him in trouble."

Strengths: Your shift into memory is vivid and multisensory—you weave together sight, sound, and smell beautifully. The specific detail of "old books and oranges" grounds the memory in authentic childhood experience.

→ **Sudden tonal and temporal transition creating disorientation** Your shift from present-tense anxiety to past-tense memory happens without warning, and the reader must pause to understand whether this is flashback, dream, or hallucination. The lack of a clear signal makes the transition feel accidental rather than intentional.

Exemplar: *"Then, as though pulled backwards through time, the silence shatters. Chattering and laughter flood in. Sunlight blazes across cloudless blue skies..."*

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■ Your piece demonstrates genuine strength in sensory writing and emotional introspection. However, your overall narrative journey relies heavily on shifting between present anxiety and fragmented memories without giving your reader clear signposts. The core idea—someone visiting a childhood playground at night and experiencing the weight of lost time—is compelling, but your piece would benefit from more deliberate structural choices that help your reader follow the emotional arc. Additionally, some of your sentence constructions become tangled when you layer too many ideas together. Your strongest moments occur when you allow single images or sensations to breathe, rather than rushing to connect them through comparison. Consider revising the transitions between the "now" and "then" sections, and break apart some of your longer sentences so each thought has room to land clearly.

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**Score: 43/50**

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## Section 2

A snap of twigs behind me, the rustling of a bush. I yelp, swivelling around on my heels, glancing at the empty darkness. Nothing. I lick my dry lips, still staring at the bush and slowly turn back to face the rusty slide. It all feels too quiet. It all feels too dark. It all feels wrong.

Why am I here anyway? My mind pauses, like when you plunge your head underwater and everything is muffled and silenced and all you can think of is how unsettling it is, to have the buzzing world around you suddenly go completely quiet. ~~I get my mind out of the water and answer my own question.~~ [I surface and answer my own question.]

Because I can't sleep.

I take in a deep shaky breath of cold air and I scratch my hands nervously.

The silence here is worse than underwater. You can't even hear the murmurs of the world. The only thing you can hear is the faint whistling of the wind, which you wouldn't hear at all if you didn't try to. I realise I'm looking down at my fidgeting hands and pull my head back up.

And then suddenly, the silence fades away. There's chattering and laughing and yelling. There's sunlight and cloudless blue skies and the distant aroma of old books and oranges. The slide is no longer rusty, but a bright red. A young child, no older than 3, clambers onto the slide and wonders if he can go down it backwards or if that would get him in trouble. He does it anyway. He laughs in delight, crawling off the slide and climbing back onto it. That child is me. I rub my eyes, but the tiredness has faded away into the sunlight. I smile and reach out for the slide.

But then the sunlight flickers once, twice and then gets engulfed by the night's shadows. My hand is on the rusty surface of the slide and I shied away from it, looking down at my dirty hands. I sigh and move on to the swings.

The wind is subtly pushing one of the swings forward and backwards and it creaks and groans, the wires slowly making faint snapping sounds like brittle ice. The sunlight is back and a boy runs onto the swings. He grabs hold of the wires, eagerly waiting for his brother to push him. His brother half-heartedly pushes the boy, watching him swing forward and backwards and forwards again. As the boy grows older and the yellow paint on the swings fade, he learns to push himself, using his feet to kick him off the ground, but that isn't enough for him. He tries to go on the swing standing up, but his feet on the swing push him back, making the swing topple upside down and sending the boy landing on his arm. He starts to bawl his eyes out. I blink, looking down at my slightly crooked arm. It had healed at an angle because I kept on rubbing it against things to scratch it. A cold breeze hits me in the face, and the sunlight slides away. I inhale deeply. Maybe when the moments are really happening, you don't realise how much you'd want to go back in the future, you don't cherish them. You don't realise that in 40 years, you might be thinking of those times and wishing the ebony black of the night would fade back into blue and the moon and stars would slither away and turn to sun and warmth. I think that's enough for tonight. I slip my hands in my pocket and make my way home, smiling.