

## Section 1:

#1 "I climbed over the gate – rust and bits of weathered metal hanging onto the edges of the points where a lone crimson balloon strung. Hues of navy blue mixed with the red as the sun sunk below the horizon."

### Strengths:

- Your sensory details create a vivid picture of decay and abandonment through concrete imagery like "rust and bits of weathered metal"
- The colour imagery effectively establishes an eerie atmosphere with the crimson balloon against the darkening sky

**Fragmented Opening Description** → Your first sentence tries to pack too much information into one structure, making it difficult to follow. The phrase "hanging onto the edges of the points where a lone crimson balloon strung" becomes confusing because readers must track what "hanging" refers to whilst also processing where the balloon is positioned. This creates unnecessary mental work for your reader. The verb "strung" also feels incomplete—balloons are typically "strung up" or "tied" rather than simply "strung."

**Exemplar:** *I climbed over the gate, its rusted points jutting upwards, bits of weathered metal clinging to the spikes. A lone crimson balloon hung from one of them, swaying slightly.*

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#2 "Children laughed, their smiles harmonizing with the music of the Beatles. Their saucer eyes glinted with a peaceful calm. The golden poles, newly painted, gleamed ethereally."

### Strengths:

- Your flashback sequence provides effective contrast between past joy and present decay
- The specific reference to the Beatles grounds the memory in a particular time period

**Unclear Sensory Logic** → The phrase "their smiles harmonizing with the music" presents a logical problem because smiles are visual, whilst harmonising is auditory. Smiles cannot literally harmonise with music—this mixing of senses doesn't work clearly here. Additionally, "saucer eyes" suggests surprise or fear rather than the "peaceful calm" you're trying to convey, creating confusion about the children's emotional state.

**Exemplar:** *Children laughed, their voices blending with the Beatles playing overhead. Their wide eyes sparkled with pure joy, reflecting the gleam of newly painted golden poles.*

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#3 "A single horse on the carousel...facing the wrong way. Its painted head was turned toward me. Its glassy eyes seemed to follow me, watching, waiting, as if it remembered those children too—children who might never have left."

### Strengths:

- Your revelation of the wrongly-facing horse creates genuine tension and unease
- The suggestion that children "might never have left" effectively implies darker undertones without stating them explicitly

**Repetitive Structure Pattern** → Your sentences here follow the same pattern repeatedly: "Its painted head..." followed by "Its glassy eyes..." This repetition makes the rhythm feel mechanical rather than building genuine suspense. Additionally, the phrase "watching, waiting" is a common pairing that weakens the impact. The dash before "children who might never have left" also interrupts the flow when a smoother transition would maintain tension more effectively.

**Exemplar:** *A single horse on the carousel faced the wrong way, its painted head turned toward me. Those glassy eyes tracked my movement, as though remembering the children who had played here—children who might never have left.*

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■ Your piece shows strong atmospheric writing with effective sensory details that bring the abandoned carnival to life. The contrast between the joyful memory and the unsettling present works well to create tension. However, your writing would benefit from clearer sentence structures that don't force readers to work too hard to understand what's happening. Additionally, focus on varying your sentence patterns more throughout—notice how several sections rely on similar structures one after another, which can make the rhythm predictable. Also, check your sensory descriptions to ensure they make logical sense; mixing sight and sound carelessly can confuse rather than enhance your imagery. Finally, strengthen your verb choices in places where phrases feel incomplete or vague, particularly in your opening description where "strung" leaves readers uncertain about what's actually happening with the balloon.

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**Score: 42/50**

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### Section 2:

#1 I climbed over the gate – rust and bits of weathered metal hanging ~~onto~~ [on] the edges of the ~~points~~ [spikes] where a lone crimson balloon ~~strung~~ [was tied]. Hues of navy blue mixed with the red as the sun ~~sunk~~ [sank] below the horizon. My breath caught. The place had never been walked into for years, the smell of rotting timber engulfing me with an embrace. The merry-go-round still had faint bits of gold. The fake horses still had their matching flowered saddles. The streaks of red still decorated their hooves. I closed my eyes.

#2 Children laughed, their smiles ~~harmonizing~~ [blending] with the music of the Beatles. Their saucer eyes glinted with a peaceful calm. The golden poles, newly painted, gleamed ethereally.

Reality snapped back.

The music was gone. The laughter was gone.

**#3** But the carousel was still moving. Wait, what? My heart skipped a beat.

Slowly...too slowly...each horse turning with a groan, as if waking from a long, unhappy sleep. The faintly golden poles no longer gleamed—they looked dull, scraped, as though something had climbed them with sharp fingers.

A cold shiver tiptoed down my spine.

The crimson balloon trembled on its string, though there was no wind.

And then I noticed it.

A single horse on the carousel...facing the wrong way.

Its painted head was turned towards me.

Its glassy eyes seemed to follow me, watching, waiting, as if it remembered those children too—children who might never have left.

The music box inside the carousel clicked once... twice...

and began to play a tune.

Not the Beatles.

Something slower.

Something that made my heart hammer like it was trying to escape.

I took one step back.

The carousel creaked to a stop.

Then a soft whisper brushed my ear, even though no one was behind me:

"You're late."