***The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle by Stuart Turton***

*This extract is from the opening of a novel by Stuart Turton, first published in 2018. A man finds himself alone in the woods with no memory of who he is.*

**Day One**

I forget everything between footsteps.  
  
‘Anna!’ I finish shouting, snapping my mouth shut in surprise.  
  
My mind has gone blank. I don’t know who Anna is or why I’m calling her name. I don’t even know how I got here. I’m standing in a forest, shielding my eyes from the spitting rain. My heart’s thumping, I reek of sweat and my legs are shaking. I must have been running but I can’t remember why.

‘How did—’ I’m cut short by the sight of my own hands. They’re bony, ugly. A stranger’s hands. I don’t recognise them at all.  
Feeling the ﬁrst touch of panic, I try to recall something else about myself: a family member, my address, age, anything, but nothing’s coming. I don’t even have a name. Every memory I had a few seconds ago is gone.

My throat tightens, breaths coming loud and fast. The forest is spinning, black spots inking my sight.  
  
*Be calm.*

‘I can’t breathe,’ I gasp, blood roaring in my ears as I sink to the ground, my ﬁngers digging into the dirt.

*You can breathe, you just need to calm down.*

There’s comfort in this inner voice, cold authority.

***Close your eyes, listen to the forest. Collect yourself.***

**Obeying the voice, I squeeze my eyes shut but all I can hear is my own panicked wheezing. For the longest time it crushes every other sound, but slowly, ever so slowly, I work a hole in my fear, allowing other noises to break through. Raindrops are tapping the leaves, branches rustling overhead. There’s a stream away to my right and crows in the trees, their wings cracking the air as they take ﬂight. Something’s scurrying in the undergrowth, the thump of rabbit feet passing near enough to touch. One by one I knit these new memories together until I’ve got ﬁve minutes of past to wrap myself in.**

It’s enough to staunch the panic, at least for now.  
  
I get to my feet clumsily, surprised by how tall I am, how far from the ground I seem to be. Swaying a little, I wipe the wet leaves from my trousers, noticing for the ﬁrst time that I’m wearing a dinner jacket, the shirt splattered with mud and red wine. I must have been at a party. My pockets are empty and I don’t have a coat, so I can’t have strayed too far. That’s reassuring.

Judging by the light, it’s morning, so I’ve probably been out here all night. No one gets dressed up to spend an evening alone, which means somebody must know I’m missing by now. Surely, beyond these trees, a house is coming awake in alarm, search parties striking out to ﬁnd me? My eyes roam the trees, half-expecting to see my friends emerging through the foliage, pats on the back and gentle jokes escorting me back home, but daydreams won’t deliver me from this forest, and I can’t linger here hoping for rescue. I’m shivering, my teeth chattering. I need to start walking, if only to keep warm, but I can’t see anything except trees. There’s no way to know whether I’m moving towards help, or blundering away from it.

At a loss, I return to the last concern of the man I was.

‘Anna!’  
  
Whoever this woman is, she’s clearly the reason I’m out here, but I can’t picture her. Perhaps she’s my wife, or my daughter? Neither feels right, and yet there’s a pull in the name. I can feel it trying to lead my mind somewhere.

‘Anna!’ I shout, more out of desperation than hope.  
  
‘Help me!’ a woman screams back.

Question 1

From the first four paragraphs, list four things about the narrator.

[4 marks]

Question 2

Look at the bolded section of text. How does the writer use language to describe what the narrator hears?

You could include the writer’s choice of:

• words and phrases

• language features and techniques

• sentence forms.

[8 marks]

Question 3

You now need to think about the **whole** of the source.

This extract is from the beginning of a novel.

How has the writer structured the text to interest the reader?

You could write about:

* what the writer focuses your attention on at the beginning
* how and why the writer changes this focus as the source develops
* any other structural features that interest you.

[8 marks]

Question 4

Focus on the second half of the extract, from ‘It’s enough to staunch the panic’ to the end.

A student said, ‘The writer builds a real sense of mystery in this extract; we share the narrator’s desire to know who he is and why he is in the woods.’

To what extent do you agree?

In your response, you could:

* write about your own impressions of the narrator and his situation
* evaluate how the writer has created these impressions
* support your opinions with references to the text.

[20 marks]