Every night that winter he said aloud into the dark of the pillow: Half-past four! Half-past four! till he felt his brain had gripped the words and held them fast. Then he fell asleep at once, as if a shutter had fallen; and lay with his face turned to the clock so that he could see it first thing when he woke.

It was half-past four to the minute, every morning. Triumphantly pressing down the alarm-knob of the clock, which the dark half of his mind had outwitted, remaining vigilant all night and counting the hours as he lay relaxed in sleep, he huddled down for a last warm moment under the clothes, playing with the idea of lying abed for this once only. But he played with it for the fun of knowing that it was a weakness that he could defeat without effort; just as he set the alarm each night for the delight of the moment when he awoke and stretched his limbs, feeling the muscles tighten, and thought: Even my brain – even that! I can control every part of myself.

Luxury of warm rested body, with the arms and legs and fingers waiting like soldiers for a word of command! Joy of knowing that the precious hours were given to sleep voluntarily! – for he had once stayed awake three nights running, to prove that he could, and then worked all day, refusing even to admit that he was tired; and now sleep seemed to him a servant to be commanded and refused.

The boy stretched his frame full-length, touching the wall at his head with his hands, and the bedfoot with his toes; then he sprung out, like a fish leaping from water. And it was cold, cold.

He always dressed rapidly, so as to try and conserve his night-warmth till the sun rose two hours later; but by the time he had on his clothes his hands were numbered and he could scarcely hold his shoes. These he could not put on for fear of waking his parents, who never came to know how early he rose.

As soon as he stepped over the lintel, the flesh of his soles contracted on the chill earth, and his legs began to ache with cold. It was night: the stars were glistering, the trees standing black and still. He still looked for signs of day, for the greying of the edge of a stone, or a lightening in the sky where the sun would rise, but there was nothing yet. Alert as an animal he crept past the dangerous window, standing poised with his hand on the sill for one proudly fastidious moment, looking in at the stuffy blackness of the room where his parents lay.

Feeling for the grass edge of the path with his toes, he reached inside another window further along the wall, where his gun had been set in readiness the night before. The steel was icy, and numbed fingers slipped along it, so that he had to hold it in the crook of his arm for safety.

Then he tiptoed to the room where the dogs slept, and was fearful that they might have been tempted to do before him; but they were waiting, their haunches crouched in reluctance at the cold, but ears and swinging tails greeting the gun ecstatically. His warning undertone kept them secret and silent till the house was a hundred yards back: then they bolted off into the bush, yelping excitedly. The boy imagined his parents turning in their beds and muttering: Those dogs again! before they were dragged back in sleep; and he smiled scornfully. He always looked back over his shoulder at the house before he passed a wall of trees that shut it from sight. It looked so low and small, crouching there under a tall and brilliant sky. Then he turned his back on it, and on the frowsting sleepers, and forgot them.

He would have to hurry. Before the light grew strong he must be four miles away; and already a tint of green stood in the hollow of a leaf, and the air smelled of morning and the stars were dimming.
Question 1
Read again lines 1 to 16.

List four things that the boy does between going to bed at night and getting out of bed in the morning. [4 marks]

Question 2
Look in detail at lines 23-28 of the extract.

How does the writer use language here to describe the scene?

You could include the writer’s use 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 text is from the opening of a novel.

How has the writer structured the text to interest you as a reader?

You could write about:
- How the writer shifts the focus
- How the writer develops her ideas
- Any other structural features that interest you

[8 marks]

Question 4
Focus this part of your answer on the second part of the source from lines 29 to the end.

“In these lines, the writer successfully captures the scenery of the boy’s actions and makes me worried about what might happen to him”

To what extent do you agree with this statement?

In your response, you could:
- Explain what you learn from the boy’s actions
- Evaluate the extent to which the writer captures the scenery of the boy’s actions and makes the reader worried about what might happen to the boy
- Support your comments with quotations from the text

[20 marks]
Question 5
You are going to enter a creative writing competition.

Your entry will be judged by a panel of professional writers.

Either:

Write a story in which a secret plays an important part.

Or:

Write a description suggested by this photograph:

(24 marks for content and organisation
16 marks for technical accuracy)
[40 marks]