**Q5 Write about a time a character was unsure.**

Model Response

Sunlight filtered lazily through the half-open doorway, throwing the green light – reflected from the luxurious garden of number 46 – through into the crowded hallway.

On every surface there were trinkets and knick-knacks, vases and books, doilies and souvenirs. A lifetime of moving from place to place in the army, flying across Europe to reach endless medical conferences, long summer holidays with his beloved Esme. As Mark shuffled through the house in his slippers, every joint aching and knifing, he felt his wife’s voice echo with ghostly realism through the empty house, reminding him to be careful on the stairs, to make sure the rug didn’t slip, to use his stick even though he hated it. Sometimes he almost seemed to see her standing beside him; he could almost feel the touch of her hand gently pressing his. *How could it have been seven years already?* he wondered, trying to find his glasses – crossing from room to room, increasingly agitated, until he belatedly realised they were around his neck. How absurd and foolish he felt – what had happened to the youthful, dapper, careless young man in the photograph by the sofa, posing in his uniform, one arm around his gorgeous wife. They had been on honeymoon, he remembered, picking up the picture, and had spent the whole week swimming and hiking and climbing mountains.

*All gone now*, he thought, ashamed to find his cheeks were wet. Thank God there was nobody to see him – but that was the problem, wasn’t it? Too much time alone, in this huge house, crowded in by memories. But without his memories, what was he? *Just a shell of an old man; just a ghost*, he thought, melancholy stealing in on him.

Banishing the ghosts, he hurried out into the garden, wondering how long the door had been open. *Got to watch that*, he thought, again embarrassed. *Getting careless.* It was easy, with nobody to correct him, laugh at him, gently remind him.

Outside, the garden had seen better days. The grass was too long again, but the very thought of wrestling the mower out of the shed made Mark feel exhausted. Then again, there was the weeding – huge fists of prickly pear and wild poppies strained out of the raised beds, crushing and overshadowing the tulips and roses Esme had carefully planted and lovingly tended. Again, out here, he could almost feel her presence – surely if he turned quickly enough, he wold catch a glimpse of her, pruning shears in hand, humming along to the radio? *I’m sorry I let things get so out of hand*, my love, he told her, regretfully. *It was just too much for me, trying to keep everything neat*.

And that was the crux of the problem, of course – it was too, too much. The cooking, the cleaning, the ironing, the bills – the garden, the shopping, repairing and mending; it was all too much for one person and now, alone and increasingly frail, he was coming unravelled.

On the doormat was another flyer – *Shady Oaks Sheltered Living*. On the front, an old man (although he was younger than Mark, probably decades younger) laughing cheerily with a well-dressed and stylish woman in her thirties in business-wear, holding an imp of a boy in his arms. *Esme wanted children so much*, Mark thought, guiltily, and of course things would have been easier, had they had a family. In a way, though, it was easier – he did not feel a burden to anyone but himself and did not have to worry about keeping the house to pass on to them. If he moved to one of these homes, he would be free of all the anchors the house threw around his neck. *But what about the memories?* he wondered, looking around him at all the things they had bought, carefully assembled, dusted, mended. On the other side of the flyer there was a picture of a nurse holding an armful of flowers, another of a older woman sitting at a piano, smiling thoughtfully. It was not the image he saw in his nightmares – smelly old chairs where dead-eyed pensioners stared silently at gameshows, the incessant smell of boiled cabbage and urine. If he sold the house, he could afford – well, this, certainly, he realised, squinting at the fine print. Maybe somewhere even nicer. Go out treated like a prince! But what about Esme – would she forgive him? Would he still be able to feel her, in some new place?

He turned around, feeling he caught a whiff of perfume, the sound of a low, throaty chuckle. Try and stop me, it seemed to say.

He looked through the open door and tried to imagine what the future might be like.