



Cambridge Lower Secondary Checkpoint

ENGLISH

0861/02

Paper 2 Fiction

April 2024

INSERT

1 hour 10 minutes

INFORMATION

- This insert contains the reading text.
- You may annotate this insert and use the blank spaces for planning. **Do not write your answers** on the insert.



This document has **4** pages. Any blank pages are indicated.

Text for Section A, an extract from *The Night Circus* by Erin Morgenstern

A man in a grey suit has been watching an entertainer Hector Bowen, with the stage-name Prospero, who has just finished performing a magic show.

After the performance has concluded, the man in the grey suit navigates the crush of patrons in the theatre lobby with ease. He slips through a curtained door leading to the backstage dressing rooms unnoticed. 5

He raps on the door at the end of the hall with the silver tip of his cane.

The door swings open of its own accord, revealing a cluttered dressing room lined with mirrors, each reflecting a different view of Prospero.

His tailcoat has been tossed lazily over a velvet armchair. The top hat which featured prominently in his performance sits on a hatstand nearby. 10

'You hated it, didn't you?' he asks without turning away from the mirror, addressing the ghostly grey reflection. He wipes a thick residue of powder from his face with a handkerchief that might once have been white.

'It is a pleasure to see you too, Hector,' the man in the grey suit says, closing the door quietly behind him. 15

'You despised every minute, I can tell,' Hector Bowen says with a laugh.

He turns and extends a hand the man in the grey suit does not accept. In response, Hector shrugs and waves his fingers dramatically in the direction of the opposite wall. The velvet armchair slides forward while the tailcoat floats up from it like a shadow, obediently hanging itself in a wardrobe. 20

'Sit, please,' Hector says.

'I cannot say I approve of such exhibitions,' the man in the grey suit says, taking off his gloves and dusting the chair with them before he sits.

Hector tosses the powder-covered handkerchief onto a table littered with brushes and tins of greasepaint. 25

'Not a single person in that audience believes for a second that what I do up there is real,' he says. 'That's the beauty of it. Have you seen the contraptions these *magicians* build to accomplish the most mundane feats? They are a bunch of fish covered in feathers trying to convince the public they can fly, and I am simply a bird in their midst. The audience cannot tell the difference beyond knowing that I am better at it. Can I get you a drink?' 30

'No, thank you,' the man in the grey suit says. 'I found your performance curious, and the reaction of your audience somewhat perplexing. You were lacking in precision.'

'Can't be too good if I want them to believe I'm as fake as the rest of them,' Hector says with a laugh. 35

'Your letter said you had a proposition for me.'

'I do, indeed!' Hector walks over to a door mostly hidden by a long, standing mirror. 'Celia, dearest,' he calls into the adjoining room before returning to his chair.

A moment later a small girl appears in the doorway, dressed too nicely for the chaotic shabbiness of the surroundings. All ribbons and lace, perfect as a shop-fresh doll save for a few unruly curls escaping her braids. She hesitates, hovering on the threshold, when she sees that her father is not alone. 40

'It's alright, dearest. Come in, come in,' Hector says, beckoning her forward. 'This is an associate of mine, no need to be shy.'

She takes a few steps closer and executes a perfect curtsy, the lace-trimmed hem of her dress sweeping over the worn floorboards. 45

'This is my daughter, Celia,' Hector says to the man in the grey suit. 'Celia, this is Alexander.'

The man in the grey suit gives her a polite nod.

'I would like you to show this gentleman what you can do,' Hector says. He pulls a silver pocket watch on a long chain from his waistcoat and puts it on the table. 'Go ahead.' 50

The girl's eyes widen.

'You said I was not to do that in front of anyone,' she says. 'You made me promise.'

'This gentleman is not just anyone,' Hector replies with a laugh.

'You said no exceptions,' Celia protests.

Her father's smile fades. He takes her by the shoulders and looks her sternly in the eye. 55

'This is a very special case,' he says.

The girl nods gravely and shifts her attention to the watch, her hands clasped behind her back.

After a moment, the watch begins to rotate slowly, turning in circles on the surface of the table.

Then the watch lifts from the table, floating into the air and hovering as though it were suspended in water. 60

Hector looks to the man in the grey suit for a reaction.

'Impressive,' the man says. 'But quite basic.'

Celia's brow furrows over her dark eyes and the watch shatters, gears spilling out into the air.

'Celia,' her father says.

She blushes at the sharpness of his tone and mumbles an apology. The gears float back to the watch, settling into place until the watch is complete again, hands ticking the seconds forward as though nothing has happened. 65

'Now that is a bit more impressive,' the man in the grey suit admits.

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