

## Stage 8

# Cambridge Lower Secondary Progression Test

## Insert



Text for **Section A**, an extract from *Neverwhere* by Neil Gaiman

*While trying to find his way home, a young man called Richard encounters the Marquis<sup>1</sup> de Carabas.*

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De Carabas grinned to himself like a hungry panther sighting a lost peasant child. He knelt down, and took a small metal object from a pocket, which he pushed into a manhole cover at the edge of the alley and twisted. The manhole cover came up, easily; the Marquis put away the metal object, and took something out of another pocket that reminded Richard a little of a long firework or a flare. He held it in one hand, ran his other hand along it, and the far end erupted into scarlet flame.

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‘Can I ask a question?’ said Richard.

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‘Certainly not,’ said the Marquis. ‘You don’t ask any questions. You don’t get any answers. You don’t stray from the path. You don’t even think about what’s happening to you right now. Got it?’

‘But—?’

‘Most important of all: no buts. Now, time is of the essence. Move.’ He pointed into the depths revealed by the open manhole cover. Richard moved, clambering down the metal ladder set into the wall beneath the manhole.

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Richard wondered where they were. He walked nervously, worried that he’d stumble in the darkness and break his ankle. De Carabas strode on ahead, nonchalantly, apparently uncaring of whether Richard was with him or not. The crimson flame cast huge shadows on the tunnel walls.

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De Carabas put the flare down on the ground, where it continued to sputter and flame, and he began to climb up some metal rungs set into the wall. Richard hesitated, and then followed him. The scarlet light from below was flickering, and then it went out. They climbed in total darkness.

‘So, are we going back?’ he asked.

‘Eventually. And when we get into daylight, don’t look down.’

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It was daylight (*how was it daylight? a voice asked, in the back of his head. It had been almost night when he entered the alley, what, an hour ago?*), and he was holding on to a metal ladder that ran up the outside of a very high building (*but a few seconds ago he was climbing up the same ladder, and he had been inside, hadn’t he?*), and below him he could see...

Tiny cars. Tiny buses and taxis. Tiny buildings. Trees. Miniature lorries. Tiny, tiny people. They swam in and out of focus beneath him.

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Richard froze on the ladder. His hands clamped tightly to the rungs. His eyes hurt, somewhere behind the eyeballs. He started breathing too fast, too deeply. ‘Somebody,’ said an amused voice above him, ‘wasn’t listening, was he?’

‘I...’ Richard’s throat didn’t work. He swallowed, moistening it. ‘I can’t move.’

35

‘Of course you can move. Or, if you don’t you can stay here, hanging on to the side of the wall.’ Richard looked up at the Marquis. He was looking down at Richard, and still smiling; when he saw that Richard was watching him he let go of the rungs with both his hands, and waggled his fingers at him.

Richard let go of the rung with his right hand and moved it up eight inches<sup>2</sup>, until it found the next rung. Then he moved his right leg up one rung. Then he did it again, with his left hand. After a while he found himself at the edge of a flat roof, and he stepped over it, and collapsed. 40

Richard pulled himself up into a sitting position. They were on the roof of an old building, built of brown stone, with a tower above them. From far below he could hear the wail of a police siren, and the muted roar of traffic. 45

The Marquis prodded Richard gently with his square-toed black boot. ‘Right,’ he said. ‘We better get a move-on, hadn’t we?’ He strode off across the roof and Richard got to his feet and followed, keeping well away from the side of the building. The Marquis opened a door in the side of the tower, and they went down a poorly lit spiral staircase.

It was now completely dark, and Richard stumbled as he reached the last of the steps and found himself looking for a step that wasn’t there. ‘Mind your head,’ said the Marquis, and he opened a door. Richard banged his forehead into something hard, and said ‘ow’, and then stepped out, through a low door, shielding his eyes against the light. 50

Richard rubbed his forehead, then he rubbed his eyes. The door they had just come through was the door to the broom cupboard in the stairwell of his apartment building. It was filled with brooms, and dusters, and an elderly mop, and a huge variety of cleaning fluids, powders and waxes. It had no stairs at the back of it, that he could see, just a wall, on which a stained old calendar hung, quite uselessly, unless 1979 ever came back round. 55

### Glossary

<sup>1</sup>Marquis: a nobleman

<sup>2</sup>eight inches: about 20 centimetres

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