



Christmas in Prague

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OXFORD BOOKWORMS

1

With Audio

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Christmas 1957

*I*t is night, and the fields near the village are white with snow.

The village is quiet, but not everybody is sleeping. Eyes are watching the roads and the fields near the village, because this is Czechoslovakia and the year is 1957. Across the fields, only half a kilometre away, is the Austrian border, but the people of Czechoslovakia are not free to go to Austria. The border guards watch day and night – and they carry guns.

In a house in the village a man and a woman are talking. The woman holds a six-month-old baby boy in her arms. She is excited, but she is afraid, too.



There was a sudden noise and somebody shouted.

Then he moved and began to walk away from Carol down a little street. Carol did not understand it, but she knew one thing – she did not want to lose him.

‘Perhaps he didn’t see me very well. It’s so dark now ... He’s going ... Where is he going? Jan, come back ... Are you ill?’

She ran across the street.

There was a sudden noise and somebody shouted. Two seconds later Carol lay in the snow.

‘She ran right in front of me,’ the bus driver said later. ‘I couldn’t stop – there was no time.’

Carol’s face was white and her eyes were closed. Soon an ambulance came and took her body away.

Was she alive or dead?

* * *

At nine o’clock the next morning the conductor was ready to begin the rehearsal. He opened his music and the orchestra started to play. Suddenly his hands stopped moving and the music stopped at once.

‘Harpist!’ the conductor shouted angrily. ‘What’s the matter with you? Are you sleeping? You begin to play here.’

‘Excuse me, Mr Rinaldi,’ said someone at the back of the room. ‘The harpist is not here.’

Everyone turned and looked at the harp at the back of the orchestra. It was true. There was nobody in the harpist’s chair.

‘Well, where is she?’ asked the conductor. There was no answer. ‘We can’t wait for her,’ he said. ‘We must have this rehearsal without her. Where is Alan? He can speak some Czech.’

Alan stood up.

‘Can you go to the hotel and look for her there?’ the conductor asked. ‘Then come back here at once – with or without her.’



‘Can you go to the hotel and look for her there?’

Alan left. Half an hour later he was back.

‘She’s not at the hotel,’ he said. ‘I spoke to two or three people in the hotel, and they say that Carol wasn’t there at breakfast this morning. And they think that she didn’t sleep in her room last night.’

‘I don’t like this,’ said the conductor. ‘Carol is never late for rehearsals, and she knows that these concerts are important for us. I think we must tell the police.’

‘Shall I do it now?’ Alan asked.

‘Yes,’ said the conductor. ‘Please go now.’

Nobody understands Carol

Carol slowly opened her eyes. Her head hurt. She closed her eyes again.

A man said something. What was it?

‘Carol,’ she heard. ‘Carol, can you hear me?’

‘I can hear you,’ Carol said. ‘But I don’t want to open my eyes. My head hurts. Who are you?’



'Who are you?' asked Carol.

'It's me, Giorgio Rinaldi, the conductor of the orchestra.'

'Mr Rinaldi?' Carol opened her eyes again. Her head didn't hurt so much this time.

'What are you doing in my bedroom?' she asked angrily. 'What's happening?'

'This isn't your bedroom,' said Mr Rinaldi. 'It's a hospital in Prague. You had an accident yesterday. Can you remember anything about it?'

Suddenly Carol remembered everything. The old town ... the Christmas trees in the shop windows ... Christmas presents ... Jan ... *Jan!*

She sat up.

'Jan! Where's Jan?' she asked Mr Rinaldi.

'Please, Mrs Vlach,' said a woman quietly. 'Don't get

excited. Lie down again.'

Carol turned her head. It hurt again. Near the door of the room she saw a woman in a white coat – a doctor.

'But I must see Jan,' Carol said. 'Where is he? I must find him ... I can't ... Oh, dear.' She put her hand to her head.

'Who's Jan?' the doctor asked Mr Rinaldi quietly.

'Her husband,' he answered. He took Carol's hand. 'Listen, your husband is coming. We told him about the accident. He's on a plane from London now.'

'On a plane? Why? He's here in Prague. I saw him in the street, near the old town. I called out to him, and he saw me, but he didn't stop ... He just walked away from me. Please find him ... please ... I must talk to him ... I must...'

The doctor moved nearer to the bed.

'Jan is coming soon, Mrs Vlach,' she said. 'Please don't get excited. It's not good for you. Now, lie down again and close your eyes. You must sleep, and I know you're feeling very tired.'

Carol lay down and closed her eyes. The doctor was right. She was tired. But why didn't they listen? Why didn't they understand? Jan was in Prague, and she must find him ... talk to him ...

The doctor looked at Mr Rinaldi and spoke very quietly. 'Let's leave her now, please. She needs to sleep. You can come back later.'

Mr Rinaldi and the doctor left the room. They closed the door quietly, and then looked at Carol through the window

in the door.

‘She’s going to be all right,’ said the doctor. ‘She just needs to sleep for a time. There’s nothing wrong with her.’

‘Yes, there is!’ said Mr Rinaldi. ‘She thinks her husband is in Prague. But I spoke to him on the telephone three hours ago and he was in Oxford. I’m afraid she’s ill – very ill.’

‘Listen,’ said the doctor. ‘She had a bad hit on the head in the accident, but she didn’t break anything and her head is all right. We looked at it very carefully. She’s going to be OK after a good sleep.’

your concerts. I understand that. But please go away now. Eat something. Have a sleep. Then come back later this afternoon. You can't do anything now.'

'All right,' said Mr Rinaldi. But he was not happy.

'Poor Carol,' he thought. 'And my poor orchestra. How can I find another harpist before tonight's concert?'

Some visitors for Carol

Two hours later a tall man arrived at the hospital. He asked to see the woman in yesterday's street accident. He didn't know her name. The doctor came downstairs.

'Who are you?' she asked the man.

'My name is Pavel Brychta. I saw the accident and I called the ambulance. Is the woman all right? I just wanted to know that. I was afraid she was dead.'

The doctor smiled. 'Would you like to see her? She's much better now.'

'Yes, please,' answered Pavel.

'Then come with me.'

They went upstairs in the lift and walked along to Carol's room. At the door they stopped and looked in through the window.

'She's sleeping,' said the doctor.

'But she looks well,' said Pavel. 'Yesterday she looked so white! I was afraid for her.'

Just then Carol opened her eyes and saw a man through the window in her door.

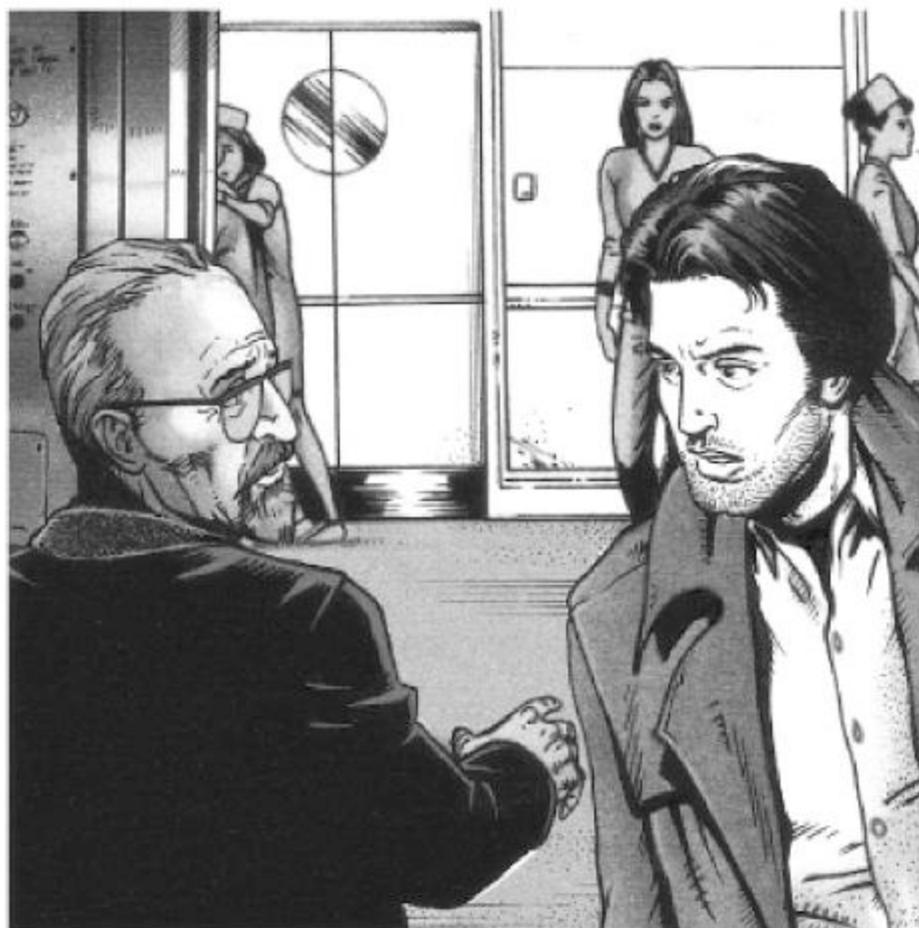
She sat up. ‘Jan!’ she shouted. ‘Jan!’

‘Oh dear!’ the doctor said. ‘Not again! She hit her head in the accident and she’s confused about some things. She thinks that you are her husband from England.’

‘Shall I go?’ asked Pavel.

‘Perhaps it’s better – yes,’ answered the doctor.

She went into Carol’s room and closed the door. Pavel walked slowly back to the lift. Then the lift door opened and a man ran out, with some beautiful red flowers in his arms. He looked at the numbers of the rooms and then went quickly into Carol’s room. He didn’t see Pavel. But an older man came slowly out of the lift next. He saw Pavel, and stopped suddenly. Pavel stopped too.



He saw Pavel, and stopped suddenly.

‘I’m sorry,’ said the old man. ‘My eyes aren’t very good ... I thought ... You see, you look—’

‘Yes, I know,’ said Pavel. ‘I saw your friend.’

‘He’s not my friend – he’s my son. Please, tell me, what is your name?’

‘Pavel Brychta.’

The old man looked very afraid. His face went white, and his mouth opened and closed, but he said nothing.

Now Pavel was afraid.

‘You don’t look very well,’ he said. ‘Would you like to sit down? And shall I call a doctor? There’s a doctor in this

room here ...’

‘Please ...’ said the old man. ‘My son is in that room. Please take me to him.’

Pavel took the old man’s arm.

* * *

In Carol’s room Jan put the red flowers on the bed and took his wife’s hands.

‘Oh, my love, are you all right?’ he said. ‘I can’t understand it. Why did you run in front of a bus? How did it happen?’

Carol didn’t answer his questions.



'Who - is - that?'

'Jan?' She looked up into his face. 'You *are* Jan? Tell me that you're Jan.'

'Of course I'm Jan! What are you talking about?'

The doctor came up to the bed. 'Wait a minute,' she said. 'You told me that your name was Pavel Brychta. Are you Mrs Vlach's husband, or not?'

Just then Carol looked behind Jan. She saw Pavel with Jan's father through the window of her door. Her eyes got bigger and bigger.

'Who - is - that?' she said.

Jan and the doctor turned and saw Pavel.

‘My God!’ said Jan. ‘I don’t know!’

The doctor looked back at Jan’s face. ‘Two men, but only one face,’ she said quietly.

Then Jan’s father opened the door of Carol’s room and the two men came in.

Jan stood up. He looked at his father. ‘Who is this man?’ he asked.

‘His name is Pavel Brychta,’ answered his father. ‘Please bring me a chair and some water. I need to sit down before I can answer your question.’

Jan got a chair for his father and the doctor gave him some water. Then she left the room quietly.

about a twin brother!’ He turned to Josef. ‘Dad, why didn’t you tell me?’

‘It’s a long story,’ said the old man. ‘It begins many years ago when a young man went to Prague University. He was there for seven years, and in his last year he met a beautiful young woman.’

His eyes turned to the photo.

‘She was so beautiful! Of course, the young man fell in love with her, and they got married in 1956. But things were difficult in Prague then. People were not happy and they were not free. Lenka and I, and a lot of our friends, wanted to change things. But it was dangerous work. The Russians knew about us and they watched us all the time. Then you two boys were born on a wonderful day in June 1957.’

‘But you went away,’ Pavel said angrily. ‘Your wife died, and you left the country. You went away to England and began a new life. You didn’t write, you didn’t telephone. You weren’t interested in me – your son!’

Josef’s face was very sad. ‘Pavel,’ he said. ‘I thought you were dead. Look. I must show you something.’ From behind the photo of his wife he took out a letter, and gave it to Pavel.

things got more and more dangerous for Lenka and me. Our friends told us: “Leave, before the Russians get you. Get away to Austria, and then to England.” We didn’t want to leave Czechoslovakia, of course; it was our home. But we couldn’t stay. Our friends helped us, and Jan and I got across the border on the day before Christmas, December the 24th. It was night. There was no moon, and we got to Austria all right through the fields and the snow. But the next night ...’



'Leave, before the Russians get you.'

'December the 25th,' said Pavel. 'My grandmother told me the day. My mother died in a hospital bed in Prague, she said.'

'Lenka died in the snow, on the road at the border,' Josef said. 'She was so near Austria ... so near us ... with you, Pavel, on her back ...'

The old man's voice stopped, and again, he put his head in his hands.

The music must come first

For some minutes nobody in the room said anything. They looked at the old man in his chair, and they all thought about a snowy night in 1957.

Then Pavel turned to Jan.

‘Let’s forget 1957 for now,’ he said quietly. ‘For me, this is a wonderful day. I have no family in Prague. My grandmother died many years ago. But now I have a brother, a father ...’ He looked at Carol in her bed, and smiled. ‘And a sister.’

and when I was older, I changed it and took my mother's name.' He turned to his father. 'I was an angry young man then, but now ...'

'No,' said Josef. 'Don't change it. It's a very good name. And you are Lenka's son.'

Suddenly the door opened, and Mr Rinaldi came in.

'Carol,' he said, 'the doctor says that you are better. Is it true? You look wonderful. Can you play in the concert tonight? You see, I can't find another harpist, and without a harp the music—'



Suddenly the door opened, and Mr Rinaldi came in.

He saw everyone for the first time, and stopped.

‘Oh, I’m sorry,’ he said quickly. ‘I see you have friends here. But, you see, it’s important. It’s an important concert for my orchestra and—’ He stopped again. ‘Why are you all laughing at me?’

Jan stopped laughing first.

‘Mr Rinaldi,’ he said, ‘you are the right man for Prague, the city of music. The music must come first!’

‘Carol ...’ Mr Rinaldi began.

Carol turned to Jan. ‘I feel very well now and I’d like to play tonight. But I want all my family to come to the concert – my husband, my new brother, and their father. Can you all come? Please say yes!’

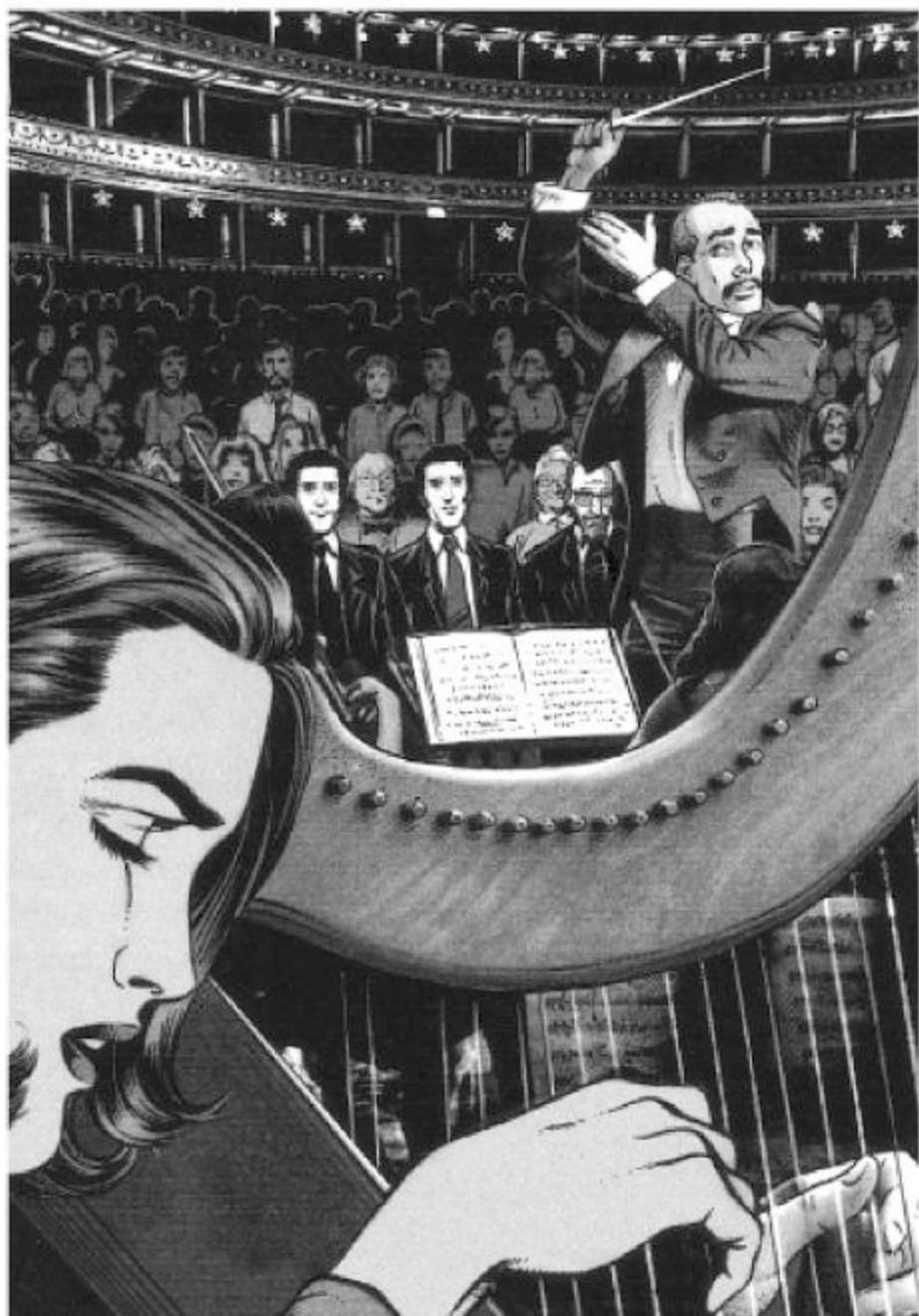
Jan looked at his father.

‘Are you all right, dad? Or are you feeling tired now? Shall we all go to Mr Rinaldi’s concert?’

‘Free tickets, of course, for all Carol’s family,’ said Mr Rinaldi quickly.

‘Christmas music in Prague again,’ Josef said slowly. ‘And with my two sons. Wonderful, wonderful ...’ He smiled happily at Jan and Pavel.

‘How can we say no?’ he asked.



harp a musical instrument with many strings, played with the fingers

harpist a person who plays the harp

hurt to feel pain

lie (past tense **lay**) to put your body flat on something, e.g. a bed, the ground

lift (*n*) a kind of large 'box' that takes people up and down in a high building

loud not quiet; with a lot of noise

moon the big round thing that shines in the sky at night

music when you sing or play an instrument, you make music

orchestra a group of people who play musical instruments together

police people who look for bad people and send them to prison, and who help when dangerous things like accidents happen

poor when you say 'poor', you are feeling sorry for somebody

present something which you give to somebody at Christmas, on birthdays, etc.

rehearsal when you practise music, etc. before you do it in front of other people

sad not happy

shoot (past tense **shot**) to send a bullet from a gun and kill or hurt somebody

shout (*v*) to speak or call out very loudly

snow rain which is very cold and white; it comes down slowly and lies on the ground

tears water which comes from the eyes

terrible very, very bad

turn to move your body round

twin one of two children who are born of the same mother at the same time

university a place where people go to study after they leave school

violin a small musical instrument with four strings

violinist a person who plays the violin

wet not dry; full of water

Christmas in Prague

ACTIVITIES

- 2 Jan's mother lives in Oxford with her son.
- 3 Josef often talks about his wife.
- 4 Josef has a photograph of Jan's mother in his pocket.
- 5 Carol plays the guitar.
- 6 Carol wants to go to Prague for Christmas.

5 What are the family secrets in the story? Can you guess? Tick one box for each sentence.

- | | YES | NO |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 Someone in the family is dead. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 Someone in the family is alive. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 Someone in the family is in prison. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 Someone in the family has got a lot of money. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5 You guess! _____ | | |

ACTIVITIES

While Reading

Read Chapter 1. Underline the mistakes in this paragraph and then correct them.

It is midday. This is Czechoslovakia and the year is 1967. Across the fields is the German border. In a house, a man and a woman are talking. The woman holds a baby girl in her arms. She puts on a black coat and a black hat. They leave the house and walk slowly out of the village. The man says goodbye and the woman begins to run. The baby opens his eyes and is very quiet. At the trees, the woman turns left and soon she is at the river. She sees a black car but the men in the car do not see her.

Read Chapters 2 and 3, then answer these questions.

Who

- 1 ... wanted to go to Prague to play in some concerts?
- 2 ... was writing a new book?
- 3 ... talked about Prague but never wanted to go there?
- 4 ... went shopping in Prague?
- 5 ... looked at Carol in the street, but didn't smile?
- 6 ... couldn't stop because there was no time?
- 7 ... was angry because Carol was not at the rehearsal?

Before you read Chapter 4, can you guess what happens?

Tick one box for each sentence.

- | | YES | NO |
|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 Carol is dead. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 Carol is in hospital, but she can't remember anything. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 Carol is in hospital and she is going to be OK. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Read Chapters 4 and 5. Choose the best question-word for these questions, and then answer them.

Why / What / How

- 1 ... did Carol feel when she woke up in hospital?
- 2 ... did Mr Rinaldi think that Carol was very ill?
- 3 ... was it a difficult time for Mr Rinaldi?
- 4 ... did Carol shout 'Jan' when she saw Pavel through the window in her door?
- 5 ... did Jan bring for Carol?
- 6 ... did the doctor say about Jan and Pavel?

Read Chapters 6 and 7. Put these sentences in the correct order, and complete them. (Use as many words as you like.)

- 1 Carol played in the concert and her family _____.
- 2 Pavel changed his name because _____.
- 3 Pavel found that he had a father, a brother _____.
- 4 Stanislava said Pavel was dead because _____.
- 5 Stanislava told Pavel that his mother died _____.

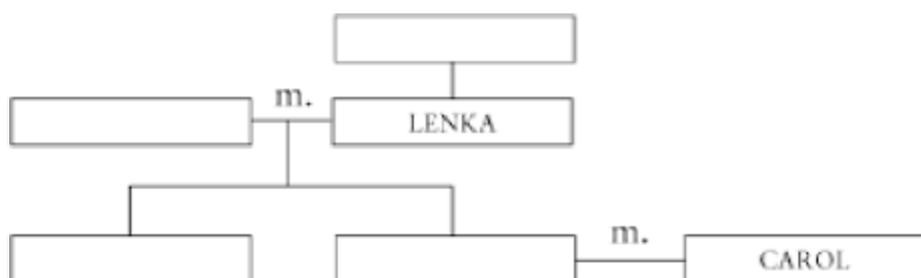
ACTIVITIES

After Reading

1 Fill in the names in this family tree, and then write ten sentences about the people. Use these words.

father, mother, son, grandmother, brother, wife, husband

Example: *Josef is Jan's father.*



2 What happened in 1956 and 1957? Match these halves of sentences and join them with these words.

and / because / but / so

- 1 Josef and Lenka got married
- 2 Josef and Lenka wanted to change things in
Czechoslovakia
- 3 Josef and Lenka couldn't stay in Czechoslovakia
- 4 Josef carried Jan across the border on 24th December
- 5 Lenka tried to cross the border with Pavel on 25th
December
- 6 Stanislava didn't want to lose Pavel
- 7 _____ she told Josef that his wife and son were dead.
- 8 _____ after that they went to England.

- 9 _____ had two sons, Jan and Pavel.
10 _____ it was dangerous.
11 _____ people were not free or happy.
12 _____ the guards shot her.

3 Mr Rinaldi telephoned Jan to tell him about Carol's accident. Write out the conversation in the correct order and put in the speakers' names. Rinaldi speaks first (3).

- 1 _____ 'An accident? What happened?'
2 _____ 'Carol! It's Carol, isn't it? Tell me, quickly!'
3 _____ 'Hello? Mr Vlach? This is Mr Rinaldi, from the orchestra.'
4 _____ 'Yes, I'm afraid I have some bad news for you.'
5 _____ 'In hospital? But why? Is she ill?'
6 _____ 'Oh no! I must come at once. I'm going to catch the next plane to Prague. Please tell her that I'm coming.'
7 _____ 'She had a little accident in the street yesterday.'
8 _____ 'Yes, it's Carol. She's in hospital, but she's going to be all right, Mr Vlach, I promise you.'
9 _____ 'She ran in front of a bus and the bus hit her.'
10 _____ 'Yes. What is it? Is something wrong?'

4 Here is a new illustration for the story. Find the best place in the story to put the picture, and answer these questions.

The picture goes in Chapter _____.

- 1 Who is the woman in the bed and why is she in hospital?

2 Why is she shouting?

3 Why is the man there?

Now write a caption for the illustration.



Caption: _____

5 Imagine that Stanislava wrote a different letter and told Josef the true story. Use these words to complete her letter. (Use each word once.)

alive, baby, back, border, but, dangerous, daughter, dead, didn't, guards, have, her, him, new, stay, tell, with, write

I write to ___ you, Josef, that your wife is ___. On Christmas night the ___ shot her on the road at the ___. She carried Pavel – your ___ son, and my grandson – on ___ back, but the guards ___ shoot him. Your wife is