Summary

When she finds out that her boyfriend has been unfaithful, journalist Katy Sullivan decides to take up her editor’s offer to go to the besieged city of Sarajevo to report on the war between the Serbs, the Bosniaks and the Croats. She flies to Belgrade and is driven to Sarajevo by British UN peacekeeping forces. She stays in the same hotel as all the other journalists.

She soon makes friends with Carla Bosisio, an attractive Italian TV journalist, and Colin Northcott, a British TV cameraman. Shortly after her arrival, she is taken out by Carla to meet some of the people who are suffering in the siege. She files a piece on Nataša, a widowed mother of four, and the conditions in which she is living. Her editor, Caryl Jones, is pleased with it.

Later she is taken to see a saxophone quartet playing in a cellar music club. She is attracted by the soprano sax player Željko because of his good looks and the way he plays. He explains that he plays because he has to, because it is a way of being alive.

After a few weeks, Katy agrees to Carla’s suggestion that they go and interview some Serb soldiers, and so she, Carla and a cameraman, Alberto, are driven up to the Serb positions on the hill above Sarajevo. Before they meet the General, they are attacked by a group of young Serbian soldiers, who are reprimanded by their officers. The Serbian officers try to convince the reporters that what they are doing is right, and that justice is on their side. Just before she leaves, Katy meets an American mercenary called Jack Hickton and accepts his invitation to see another side of the war the following day.

Hickton takes her to the top of a deserted hotel. They see two little girls carrying water. Hickton shoots them both dead. Katy is horrified and runs blindly out into the city, where she is shot at by snipers. She is saved by an old man on a moped who takes her back to the hotel. Later she files a piece on the death of the two girls, which makes the front page of the paper. Later still, Carla comes to find her. She is upset because her friends Imrana and Vlada and 14 others have been killed by a shell at Željko’s concert.

Next morning, Katy searches for Željko and eventually finds him playing on the concert hall steps. He tells her he will play there at six o’clock for 16 nights, in memory of each of the 16 people killed at the concert. He takes her inside the ruined concert hall where he used to play when he was at university. She comforts him after he breaks down in tears, and later they make love.

Two weeks later, just before six o’clock, the reporters gather on their hotel roof. The US ultimatum to the Serbs to stop shelling the city is due to end at six and they want to see what will happen. The Serbs have ignored it and continued their attacks on the city. As the ultimatum ends, three American jets launch a rocket attack on the Serbian gun positions. In the silence following the attack, which had lasted less than five minutes, they hear Željko playing his sax. Katy stands up to celebrate but is shot by two sniper bullets.

The final scene sees Katy recovering in a London hospital. Her mother and brother have visited, and then Colin Northcott comes to be with her. He tells her that she is pregnant with twins. They are Željko’s children, and Katy immediately makes a symbolic connection between the twins and the two little girls she saw shot in Sarajevo. She also realises that even in war, life and love go on.

Before reading

1. Two little girls in white dresses running along the pavement in front of a damaged building with plastic over the windows instead of glass and boarded-up doors. Student’s own answer, but the contrast between the two images (e.g. ugliness and beauty, life and destruction, joy and sadness) may be noted.

2. Katy. She is a young reporter who has just arrived in Sarajevo as a war correspondent and becomes emotionally involved in the lives of the people in the besieged city.
Solo Saxophone  Jeremy Harmer

3. They are newspaper or TV journalists or cameramen.
4. Student’s own answer.
5. That the story takes place in Sarajevo during the war between different ethnic groups in the 1990s.

Check your reading

Overture

1. The reporter Katy Sullivan; an unnamed soldier.
2. In a room on the fifteenth floor of a hotel in Sarajevo; it is a mess.
3. Two children.
4. He shoots the children dead.
5. She is horrified and runs down the stairs crying.

Chapter 1

1. a) Benjamin to Katy; b) Caryl Jones to Katy; c) Caryl Jones to Katy; d) Paul to Katy; e) the neighbour to Katy; f) Katy to the neighbour; g) Katy’s mother to Katy.
2. Student’s own answer.
3. To discuss the future with Paul.
4. Student’s own answer (she’ll decide by herself what she wants to do).

Chapter 2

1. Go to be a reporter in Sarajevo.
2. a T; b F; c T; d F; e T; f T
3. Student’s own answer.

Chapter 3

1. 1 d; 2 e; 3 a; 4 c; 5 b

Chapter 4

1. c – f – a – e – b – d

Chapter 5

1. a) the shower; b) Katy; c) the restaurant food; d) the hotel bar.
2. Colin Northcott, a TV cameraman.

Chapter 6

1. Carla; b) Carla’s husband; c) Carla, Alberto and Haris; d) Haris; e) Nataša.

Chapter 7

1. The thought of the emails she’d received from Caryl Jones and Benjamin.
2. To apologise for being rude.
3. To go and listen to music with him and Carla that evening.

Chapter 8

1. b
2. a
3. c
4. It comforted them and took their fear away.
5. She had studied music and played the piano.
6. True: a / b / d / g / h

Chapter 9

1. True: a / b / e

Chapter 10

1. d – b – g – a – f – h – c – i – e
2. He treats them politely and well.

Chapter 11

1. It’s a clear, sunny day.
2. General Dragomir Milošević.
3. They go and eat.
4. That they want peace, and for their people not to be destroyed.
5. They shell Sarajevo.
6. That it is not what the Serbs would like the world to hear.
8. She agrees to meet Hickton in Sarajevo.
Solo Saxophone  Jeremy Harmer

Chapter 12

1. It consists of memories of her parents, mixed up with images of the journalists and the war; she's on a lake that turns into the sea; her father, who turns into the General, is rowing; the boat starts sinking.

2. Taking ‘Uppers’ (drugs).

3. In the 'Overture' at the start of the book.

4. Željko’s saxophone.

Chapter 13

1 d; 2 f; 3 a; 4 e; 5 c; 6 b

Chapter 14

1. a) Carla; b) Imrana and Vlada; c) Željko; d) Benjamin; e) Katy’s story about the girls; f) Carla; g) Željko.

Chapter 15

1. a) Željko; b) the market; c) a café; d) Željko would play at the old concert hall at six o’clock.

2. He will play at six o’clock every day for 16 days, one day in memory of each person who was killed.

3. She loves his music and what he is doing with it.

4. Student’s own answer, but Željko promotes such notions as beauty, humanity and a love of life in the midst of the ugliness, brutality and hatred associated with war.

Chapter 16

1. They have no family or home life.

2. The end of the American ultimatum to the Serbs to stop shelling the city.

3. Up onto the roof of the hotel.

4. He’d lost his job; he’d stayed because he loves Katy.

5. They fired rockets at the Serbian guns.

6. A bird song and Željko’s saxophone.

7. She was hit by two sniper bullets.

Coda

1. In hospital in London.

2. Her mother, her brother, Colin.

3. She is in Rome; nobody knows where he is.

4. That she is pregnant with twins.

5. Željko’s.

6. There is a connection to the two girls who were shot.