You are going to read an extract from a novel. For questions **1-6**, choose the answer (**A**, **B**, **C** or **D**) which you think fits best according to the text.

6

Alex North felt uncomfortable. With little time to pack, she'd forgotten her professional suit jacket. So she was wearing flat black boots, dark denim jeans, a long sleeve white T-shirt and fawn shawl; she looked more like a protestor than a journalist. Tiredness added to her misery. As she made her way home last night, she had expected to be enjoying a Saturday morning lie-in. But after a panicky 2 a.m. phone call from her editor Gerome, a tense cab ride to the hospital and then an 8 a.m. plane from Heathrow to Prague, her day was far off course. She'd had little rest on the plane; after embarrassing herself by flinging out an arm in her sleep and hitting the crew-cut young American sitting next to her, she sat awake and rigid for the rest of the flight.

Bernie was meant to be in Prague covering this story. 'It all boils down to this, my dear,' he had said last (*line 16*) night during their evening out with the others from the office. 'If I can get a really good story at the international conference, I might actually retire. Job done. Go home. It's that important.' Bernie left earlier than Alex, keen to go over his notes and finish packing. Alex stayed out with the rest of her colleagues, and she'd barely made it into bed when Gerome had called to pass on the terrible news. Bernie was in hospital. His wife said he collapsed when he got home. The doctors diagnosed a stroke. Alex was so horrified that the Prague conference, and the large number of protestors expected to turn up there, was the last thing on her mind. But Gerome insisted she go in Bernie's place. He told her to get a good night's sleep, knowing full well she would get dressed and rush to visit Bernie.

Bernie Cook and his wife Laura had been like parents to Alex since she arrived in London from Australia four years ago. 'Aren't you a bit old to be a trainee?' was the first of many questions Bernie asked. Alex explained that journalism wasn't her first career choice. She tried her hand at accounting, but found her office job was torture. Her three-year communications degree was far more satisfying, but left her jobless and penniless at age 28. So off to London it was, with a traineeship at the UK's best investigative daily newspaper, living in the city's smallest, cheapest flat and sustained by a weekly roast dinner at Bernie and Laura's.

Anyone overhearing Alex and Bernie talking would never think there was a 30-year age difference. Bernie's passion for political debate – and conspiracy theories – kept Alex enthralled for hours. And his talent for journalism had rubbed off. Seeing him lying there unconscious, so still and frail, was a shock to Alex. Laura looked visibly withered, leaning over Bernie's face as if frightened she might

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miss something if she glanced away. She barely looked up long enough to give Bernie's iPad to Alex so she could study his notes for the assignment.

Alex pretended to feel confident as she hurried across Charles Bridge towards the conference venue – Prague Castle. She was staying near the Old Town Square, in the predictably modest hotel booked by Bernie. Alex had politely endured the hotelier's gossip; Bernie always said the people were the best thing about Prague. But Alex loved the pastel feel of the city, the swans on the river and the winding cobbled streets. She knew her way around, having visited once before with a forgettable ex-boyfriend. She recalled being more impressed with Prague than with him. It was no wonder the relationship petered out like all the others.

1 In the first paragraph, what do we learn about Alex?
- **A** She was excited at the prospect of working in Prague.
- **B** She was feeling better after sleeping on the plane.
- **C** She was worried her clothes were unsuitable for work.
- **D** She had known it was going to be a busy night.

2 What does 'it all boils down to this' on line 16 mean?
- **A** as far as I am aware
- **B** this is the only problem
- **C** what annoys me is this
- **D** to sum up the situation

3 When Alex's boss rang her
- **A** he expected her to do everything he said.
- **B** he told her to go to the airport immediately.
- **C** he said she had to cover the story in Prague.
- **D** he wanted her to go to Bernie and Laura's house.

4 Why did Alex become a journalist?
- **A** She was an unemployed graduate looking for work.
- **B** She was attracted by the high salaries in London.
- **C** Bernie had encouraged her to do the same job as him.
- **D** That was what she had always wanted to be.

5 What upset Alex at the hospital?
- **A** Laura's attitude towards her.
- **B** Bernie's notes about the conference.
- **C** What Bernie said when she arrived there.
- **D** The contrast with how Bernie usually was.

6 How did Alex feel when she arrived in Prague?
- **A** She was sad her ex-boyfriend wasn't there with her.
- **B** She was glad to be there again.
- **C** She was sure she would do a good job there.
- **D** She liked the luxury accommodation she had there.

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