

## My Uncles and Aunts in Bulgaria

Desislava rested her chin in her palm, her elbow pressed gently against the cool wooden windowsill. Outside, the street in England moved in its usual rhythm—cars passing in steady lines, a red bus sighing to a halt, neighbours walking briskly with their heads tucked into scarves.

It was familiar. It was hers.

But as she stared out, her thoughts wandered somewhere else entirely.

Somewhere warmer.

Somewhere softer.

Somewhere that smelled faintly of baked bread and woodsmoke.

She did not remember everything. Not clearly. Not perfectly. She had been only four when her family moved from Bulgaria to England. Her memories were not whole pictures, but fragments—like pieces of glass catching the light.

A laugh. A voice. A feeling.

A scent.

She closed her eyes for a moment.

And there it was again—the rich, comforting smell of banitsa, fresh from the oven, its flaky layers warm and golden. She could almost hear the gentle clatter of plates, the low murmur of voices speaking quickly in Bulgarian, rising and falling like music she no longer fully understood but still somehow knew.

Her village had been called Koprivshitsa.

She had learned to say it again properly only a few years ago, carefully shaping each syllable as though it might break if she rushed.

Koprivshitsa.

It had been small, she thought. Or perhaps she had simply been smaller.

She remembered narrow cobbled streets and houses painted in soft blues and warm ochres. She remembered chickens wandering freely, pecking at the ground as though they owned it. Somewhere, always, there had been the distant ringing of a bell—or perhaps that was something she had imagined later.

But one memory stood more clearly than the rest.

Her uncle, Petar.

He had been tall—very tall, in her mind—and strong in the way that only grown-ups seemed to be. She remembered climbing onto his shoulders, her small hands gripping his head as she lifted herself higher and higher.

“Now you are taller than the mountains,” he had said, laughing.

And for a moment, she had believed him.

She had stretched her arms wide, the wind brushing past her face, the air different somehow—sharper in winter, filled with the scent of snow and smoke; softer in summer, carrying the sweetness of wildflowers and ripening fruit.

Desislava opened her eyes.

The English street returned to her—orderly, grey, steady.

And she smiled.

Because she loved it.

She loved the neat rows of houses, the quiet hum of life, the way everything seemed to follow a rhythm she understood. She loved her school, her friends, the way her teacher said her name carefully, trying to get it right.

England was not a place she felt lost in.

It was home.

And yet—

There was something else, too.

Not a longing exactly. Not sadness.

Something gentler.

Like a thread that had never quite been cut.

She glanced at the small photograph on the table beside her. A group of smiling faces, gathered closely together. Her uncles and aunts, their expressions bright and unguarded. Behind them, the faint outline of hills she could not fully remember—but somehow recognised.

She reached out and touched the edge of the frame.

She did not wish to leave England.

She did not wish to return to something she barely knew.

But she understood, now, that she did not have to choose.

England held her present—its streets, its routines, its quiet certainty.

Bulgaria held something else.

A warmth. A memory. A beginning.

Her heart, she thought, was large enough for both.

Outside, the bus pulled away, and the street carried on.

Desislava remained at the window a moment longer, smiling—not at what she had lost, but at what she still carried.

## Comprehension Questions

**1. What is the main purpose of the opening paragraph?**

- A) To describe the setting in Bulgaria
- B) To show she dislikes her surroundings
- C) To introduce her family
- D) To establish Desislava's connection to England.

**2. What is suggested by the description of Desislava's memories as "fragments"?**

- A) They are unimportant
- B) They are incomplete and selective
- C) They are entirely imagined
- D) They are recent

**3. Why is the word "Koprivshitsa" given emphasis in the text?**

- A) It is difficult to pronounce
- B) It symbolises her effort to reconnect with her past
- C) It is the only thing she remembers clearly
- D) It is unusual to the reader

**4. How does the memory of Uncle Petar contribute to the text?**

- A) It highlights her close emotional connection to the past
- B) It shows her fear of heights
- C) It introduces conflict in the story
- D) It explains why she left Bulgaria

**5. What is implied by the phrase "as though they owned it" (referring to the chickens)?**

- A) The village is disorganised
- B) The animals are valued highly
- C) The setting feels natural and unstructured
- D) The villagers are careless

**6. Why does Desislava smile when returning to the English street?**

- A) She prefers it to Bulgaria
- B) She feels relieved to be away from her past
- C) She recognises it as her true home
- D) She finds it amusing

**7. What is the significance of the photograph?**

- A) It reminds her of what she has forgotten
- B) It reinforces her emotional link to her family and heritage
- C) It makes her feel sad
- D) It shows how much her family has changed

**8. What is the central idea of the text?**

- A) The importance of remembering childhood
- B) The difficulty of moving between countries
- C) The ability to belong to more than one place
- D) The contrast between city and village life

## **Answers**

1. D – The paragraph focuses on England and her familiarity with it
2. B – “Fragments” suggests incomplete, partial memories
3. B – Careful pronunciation shows reconnection with identity
4. A – The memory shows emotional warmth and connection
5. C – Suggests a natural, free and unstructured setting
6. C – She smiles because she recognises England as home
7. B – The photo connects her emotionally to her family and heritage
8. C – The text shows she belongs to both places