

2.3 Sonia

2.3.1

A woman in her fifties. He didn't like to generalize, but he thought she looked like a typical Czech country woman of that age. A bit plain.

In this country, women in their fifties often seemed old already. They were thinking about grandchildren, wearing comfortable shoes, and had old-fashioned hairstyles.

But what was she doing here? She didn't look intellectual. She looked like she had come in by accident. Or maybe she wanted to use the toilet for free, he thought. Yes, that's probably it. She couldn't afford a restaurant. Prague is expensive. Or maybe she just didn't want to pay for a public toilet.

Assess, he reminded himself. He could assess people.

For a moment, he wondered if he should let her use the toilet in the back. He wouldn't **turn her away**. She chose this shop because it wasn't busy. And she probably thought the owner would be a kind old man, like his uncle was, and would **take pity** on her.

James felt a bit sorry for her. It wouldn't hurt me, would it? I'll let her use my toilet. Why not?

"Are you looking for something specific?" he asked in a professional tone, trying not to **embarrass** her.

Curious Questions

- a) What did James think the woman wanted when she came to his bookshop?
- b) How old did James think the woman was?
- c) Why did James feel sorry for her?

2.3.2

She looked at him. She didn't say anything. Was she embarrassed? Maybe she expected to meet a **nerd** and not a tall, young-looking blond handsome guy. James guessed he was about five years younger than her. But anyone who didn't know him might think he was just thirty-five.

"English?" he asked carefully.

Could he be wrong? Was she a foreigner? Maybe some eccentric intellectual pretending to be an ordinary woman so she wouldn't get overcharged.

She frowned. She didn't say anything and turned her back on him. Then she slowly walked toward the door.

"Are you looking for someone?" he tried again.

Maybe she really did come to see his uncle. She might not know he had **passed away**. James would feel sorry if she just left **disappointed**. Maybe she was a nice woman.

She turned around slowly. "Yes, I am," she nodded and pressed her lips together, looking offended.

"My uncle, Mr. Strejček, who used to run this shop, has passed away. I'm sorry. I inherited the place. I'm his son... I mean, his **sister's** son."

"Five years and look what it does to a person, huh," she sighed.

Curious Questions

- d) Do you think that James was being kind or arrogant when he judged her appearance? Why?
- e) Have a guess! Who is this woman?

2.3.3

Five years was like a magic number for James.

For five years, he lived without any memory of his past in Czechia. But she couldn't know that.

Maybe she meant that his uncle had been sick for five years. Before he died. That was something James didn't know...

He hadn't really cared much about the details of his uncle's death. One day, his mother told him that her brother had died in Prague and that she had to go there for the funeral. And to settle the estate.

Before he knew it, she was already organizing the trip, searching for the best flight, packing the suitcases. She made sure to pack warm winter clothes. She knew it was snowing and freezing in Prague in January. She had lived there most of her youth. Until one day when she decided to stay in Australia.

His mother had been a successful gymnast once, but about the age of twenty-four, her career was coming to an end. She picked a rich older man and lived a good life in Australia. She was strong. Determined. That's how he remembered her. Maybe he got something from her. She wasn't afraid of anything. But what for? A suitcase full of fur coats and boots, and **by the time she reached the airport, she was just a memory.**

"I didn't live here. I didn't know my uncle. I don't know if he was sick." He said this, trying to explain why he didn't understand what she was talking about.

"He was an old man, of course, he was sick. And he was **nasty and mean**, too. I just don't understand why you didn't recognize me."

Learning tip

Before he knew it – než se stačil rozkoukat, než si stačil uvědomit, co se děje
by the time she reached the airport, she was just a memory –
románový styl vyjádření, konzultuj českou verzi pro přesný smysl

2.3.4

The past? Has the past just come back? He was so confused that the first thought in his mind wasn't '*who is she*,' but – just like with Julie – '*why didn't she come sooner?*'

Is this some kind of conspiracy that they left him in the dark for five years, and now people are slowly starting to appear?

On the other hand, this woman – what could he ever have to do with her? A woman who knows (that) it's been five years but acts like she doesn't know about his accident and memory loss. It felt like a "Candid camera" prank. If he wasn't in his own shop, where he knew every corner, he would definitely start looking around for a hidden camera.

He looked her over and shook his head. Could she have been his uncle's girlfriend? His uncle wasn't married. Why couldn't he have a girlfriend? That old fellow!

James was both surprised and a little disgusted. His uncle might have had a pretty young girlfriend. He would have been almost eighty now, and this woman was a generation younger – practically a young **chick**.

Yeah, she could fit his uncle perfectly. A strange man with a dusty antique shop in the front and a secret love nest in the back. And when she said he was "nasty and mean," maybe she meant that he got some stranger to inherit everything, and she got nothing.

Maybe she's here to **claim** something.

Learning tip

He looked her over – prohlédl si ji (od hlavy k patě, zhodnotil ji pohledem) / pozor na záměnu: He looked over her – podíval se přes ni, na něco za ní

chick – tady ve významu "kost, roštěnka, zajíček"

2.3.5

From the beginning, James didn't like the idea that he was the one to inherit all the property.

First of all, his mother was the one who inherited it, being the **next of kin**. She became rich when her husband died. She knew how to handle it.

No, she wasn't **greedy**. She was entitled to this property in Prague because of the restitution after the **Velvet Revolution in '89**. She left everything to her brother. She was well-off and didn't want to go back to Czechoslovakia anyway. Also, she might have felt some guilt because her older brother stayed behind in that horrible communist regime and was even politically persecuted because of her emigration. At least, that's how James remembered the family history in short.

If there was someone who had taken care of his uncle when he was at his worst, who lived with him and then received nothing, James was ready to give that person **a fair share**.

He really wanted to remember the past, and all that "asset," as his mother used to say, felt useless to him. He would trade half of it just to find out more about the missing year.

A moment ago, this woman said he didn't recognize her. So, they **must have known** each other. Perhaps, from now on, he **wouldn't need to** rely only on Julie's version of the past. She could only describe what happened when they were together, anyway. He knew what he did when he was with her, but the rest of the time, it was like he didn't exist.

James was shocked when the woman told him that she was his sister.

Learning tip

first of all – především

the next of kin – nejbližší příbuzný

2.3.6

"I never had a sister," he replied without thinking.

"Why do you say that? You promised me that... Oh, now you're ashamed of me. I see. You're just like mom was – only caring about yourself. It makes me so angry that I'm always the one to suffer." Tears began to shine in her eyes.

She wanted to run away, but she couldn't. She needed him. She needed his money. She stayed and kept **humiliating** herself until she let it all out. He tried a few times to stop her and explain that he didn't remember anything, but she was too upset and **kept going**.

He froze when she said that he never even came to see her son while she was in prison. That was too much.

"Enough!" he shouted.

She was shocked.

"Anything what you're saying about me... or us," he corrected himself quickly, "I cannot remember. It might be true, but I don't remember any of it. How do you mean, *prison*? I've been living here like a prisoner for five years, with no memories. The only proof that the lost year really happened is this stupid bookstore and this scar." He ran his hand through his hair, which had already grown enough to hide the scar.

Now it was her turn to **freeze**.

Learning tip

She kept going – odvod' si smysl podle vzoru, který při praktickém tréninku znáš z mých zpráv: keep going!

2.3.7

"You... you really don't remember me then? Because something happened to you, and... you were injured? Did you lose your memory? Really?" She started to understand.

"Yeah." He replied nervously.

He glanced at his watch. It was four in the afternoon, long before closing time. Was he really going to break his strict routine today? Why not? He had been sticking to it so carefully, just to stay safe. And now, his sister was here. Sister! Now, maybe **he'd** finally learn everything **he'd** been wanting to find out. Maybe **he'd** be able to live a normal life again.

He pulled a key out of his pocket, made sure no one was still browsing the shelves, and quickly went up the stairs. He turned the sign on the door to "closed" and locked.

"We need more time for this." He kept looking at her, still in shock. His sister – and he had thought that she was his old uncle's girlfriend.

They sat at the reading table, facing each other. Neither of them knew who should start, or what to say. James broke the silence first.

"I had an accident. I remember when and why I came to Prague, but after that, nothing. Everything from then until the accident is gone. And I don't really know anyone here, so I haven't been able to find out anything about myself in five years."

He paused and then prompted her, "Now it's your turn."

Learning tip

He'd – běžné zkracování v angličtině, jak v písemné tak mluvené podobě, může znamenat **he would** nebo **he had** (v předminulém čase) - význam závisí na kontextu

2.3.8

"I came to see you about a month after you settled in Prague. I introduced you to my family. We kept in touch for a while. You promised that you would take care of us. Then it happened. It was my fault. I have two people **on my conscience**. I went to jail. I just got out now."

So that's what she meant by "five years, what it does to a person," as she said at the beginning. She meant herself – that prison had changed her so much that even her own brother didn't recognize her.

"What's your name?" He asked.

"Sonia."

But even when she said her name, it didn't **ring a bell**. He didn't remember her at all, just like he didn't remember Julie or Adele. He treated everyone like he was meeting them for the first time in his life. It **must have been** hard for them.

And it was terrible for him to realize that the only two people close to him had **faced** huge challenges in trying to come to him after his accident and help him remember.

One had no legs; the other was in prison. I can't believe this, he thought.

Someone **must have hated** me a lot! Yet he knew that whoever had injured him that day couldn't have planned these events that followed.

"I'm sure you've told me all this before, but I really need to hear it again. Could you repeat it for me, please? **How come** I have a sister? Did mum emigrate to Australia and leave you behind? Did you stay with your dad? Were they married?"

Learning tip

on my conscience – na svědomí

jail = prison

to face something – čelit něčemu

how come? – jakto?

2.3.9

She laughed. "You may have lost your memory, but you're still the same. I've only known you for a short time, but I remember you asking me *exactly* the same question before. Exactly the same." She seemed to relax. "And I'm sorry about shouting. I know you're not like mother. I didn't know what had happened to you."

"Neither do I," he sighed.

It seemed that they could be friends. They just needed to go over everything again. He would learn again what he had already known before. It was such a strange story, and he wondered if he had lost his memory **on purpose**.

Maybe, when his mind shut down, his **subconscious** decided to erase things he didn't want to remember. Maybe he didn't want to know that his mother had left Czechoslovakia while pregnant, leaving behind her daughter, husband, and father. She had also left her brother behind and just disappeared.

The divorce had been handled in their absence. It was then easier for Sonia and her father to act like she never existed. Sonia had been six years old. She had to **cope with it**.

Meanwhile, James was born in Australia and raised by a man he called "dad," even though they weren't related. When he tried to remember his Australian father, nothing came to mind. Just a faded photo. No feelings. Maybe they didn't live together. Maybe it was just a formality so James could be officially Australian and have a better life. Maybe his *dad* was just helping out a pregnant immigrant.

Learning tip

subconscious – podvědomí

cope with it – zvládnout to, nějak se s tím vyrovnat a jít dál

2.3.10

He tried to remember his first year in Prague, but he started to believe he had lost a lot more of his memories. There were parts of his life in Australia missing. But that didn't matter now. Now, he had to learn everything about his family from Sonia.

Hesitantly, he asked, "And our father – is he alive?"

"Not anymore. He died last year. I couldn't even go to his funeral. And I didn't know you didn't go either. My boy was only seventeen." Her voice trembled. She had her own painful memories.

James didn't want to trouble anyone by digging into the past. Just as he didn't want to constantly remind Julie about her legs. But everything was connected. There was no escape.

"Did I know him?"

"You really don't remember? I envy you! I'd love to forget the last five years. Forget everything! I wouldn't care about the past. It would be such a **relief** to forget it all."

"That's easy to say when you know what you want to forget. Maybe, that's what I wanted. I just don't know now. Do you think it was a mistake? I don't think I wanted to forget anything. Yeah, the stuff with mum and all that... it's not nice to find out I've been living a lie for my whole life. But I'm glad I know now. And I'm glad I have someone in this world. Why would I want to forget you, my family? No, it was just a stupid coincidence. Anyway, about dad..."

Curious Questions

- f) What happened to Sonia's and James's mother?
- g) Why did Sonia said she had two people on her conscience?
- h) Did James change his routine that day to have mor time to talk with Sonia?
- i) Do you understand why their mother left Czechoslovakia without her family?

2.3.11

"You met him. You talked a bit. He was angry at our mom for taking you away. But not at you. He knew she was pregnant and that you were his. When you met, he was happy to see you. You look a lot like him."

"I'd like to visit his grave," he said.

And again, he realized he didn't know where his Australian dad was buried. Probably where his mom was. Mom was buried only symbolically, since there **wasn't much left of her**. Just a gold inscription on a gravestone.

"Do you know what happened to our mom?" he asked.

"You told me back then. She deserved it."

He wasn't even angry at her for saying that. What had happened to their mom hurt less than what she had done to Sonia. It was the six-year-old girl, abandoned by her mother, speaking now. Sonia had suffered her whole life because of it. While the one who caused it, their mom, had died in a car explosion. A gas line blew under the road, and it was over in seconds.

Instead of attending her brother's funeral on the other side of the world, James's mom ended up **six feet under**. And James had to quickly pack up, and after one funeral in Melbourne, rush to organize another one in Prague.

No wonder he didn't want to go back to Australia. He didn't have anyone here, but he didn't have anyone there either.

And the antique shop had charmed him.

Learning tip

wasn't much left of her – moc z ní nezbylo

six feet under – pod drnem

2.4 Better Memories

2.4.1

"If you told me that you were pregnant, why would I get mad? We were **dating**, we're both adults and single. Why would I yell at you? I don't think I would have acted like that!"

He realized he was now asking the kind of questions that Dana would tell him to ask. He hadn't spoken to Dana since, but he had thought about her a lot. Slowly, he started to notice gaps in Julie's storytelling.

At first, he believed that she was simply sharing what she remembered. But soon, he began to think that she was **deliberately** skipping some information. Sometimes, it even felt like she was twisting the story because it didn't make sense.

Whenever he wanted to learn more about the past, she would **steer** the conversation in another direction. She often talked about the past willingly, but then she described **odd** little details, as if she was inventing a story just for him. As if she was writing a novel.

Learning tip

deliberately – schválně, úmyslně, záměrně

odd = unusual, irrelevant (ale také to má význam "liché číslo" - takže vždy sleduj kontext a nepoužívej jen prostý překlad)

2.4.2

"And why did you tell me that in the car? Why didn't you wait for a better moment?"

"Because I couldn't keep it to myself anymore. I needed to tell you that I had an **abortion**. I thought you should know. That's what I told you. And that's why you got mad."

That made more sense. I could definitely imagine getting very angry. Not that I was ready to be a father, but I wouldn't want to be told like it wasn't any of my business.

"You know I want to know what happened. Why don't you just tell me everything?"

"Please try to understand. After seeing how angry you were, I didn't want to bring it up. And it didn't change what happened next. I told you, and it's over. It can't be undone. So why not make your memories of the past a little better? I must live with it, why should you?"

Better memories. What the hell does that mean?

"So, I got mad. And I **pulled over** by the woods where it happened, right? But why did I stop there?"

"You just needed to calm down. You didn't want to drive angry. You got out of the car to get some fresh air. It was nice out there. It had rained, and the air smelled of damp **pine needles**..."

Was she trying to make his memories nicer again?

"Why are you talking about pine needles?"

"I heard that smells could help bring back memories. Maybe if you imagine it, something will come back. Can't you remember anything?"

Learning tip

to pull over – zastavit u kraje silnice (když řídíš auto)

2.4.3

He saw the **steering wheel** and the wet road ahead. He wanted to step on the **gas**, but instead, he hit the **brake** and pulled over. Yes, that felt right. That part was true. He wanted to get out of the car.

Then, in the **rear-view mirror**, he saw someone. They weren't alone in the car. There was someone in the back.

"Who was with us?" he asked.

"Why would anyone be with us?" she replied.

"Julie, don't mess with me. There was someone sitting in the back. I saw them."

"You remember?" she said, sounding surprised. "That's amazing! It's working. The details. The pine needles. See?"

"I just got a glimpse. I saw someone in the mirror. Who was it?"

"They were **hitchhikers**."

He shook his head. This was one of those gaps, one of the inconsistencies. "And you told me about the baby while there were strangers in the car?"

"They weren't with us anymore."

"Then who did I see?"

"I don't know. I think you're mixing things up. We were already alone."

"So, what happened next?"

"I don't know."

Learning tip

steering wheel, gas, rear-view mirror, hitchhikers – zkus odhadnout význam slov týkajících se cestování autem

2.4.4

She was avoiding the question again. Was she trying to gain more time?

"You said you remembered," he pressed.

"I only remember that we were going to get the boat. And what I said in the car. And that you pulled over. But something happened to both of us after that. I don't want to remember it. It's enough that I have to live with it now."

He reminded himself: Be careful!

He couldn't push her like that. Sure, someone hit him in the head, but they broke her legs and threw her into the river. Of course, she didn't want to remember.

"I promise if I remember anything, I won't tell you things that will hurt you. But I need to know what happened to me. I can't allow that someone else knows, and I don't."

"Wouldn't it be better to just let it go? Nothing will change now. We're back together, right? And I'm sure we would have been happy then too. Although I still would have my legs..."

He felt a chill. Was she trying to manipulate his feelings again?

She hugged him and started to tease him. He liked the way she did, even after weeks of almost daily sex. They still took their time. But tonight, her performance disturbed him a bit.

Maybe Dana was right. Julie could tell him anything, and he'd believe it. Hook, line, and sinker, he thought. He mentally patted himself on the back for mastering this new Czech phrase.

True or false?

- j) Julie said that she had ended her pregnancy before the accident.
- k) Julie said that smells could help James bring back his memories.
- l) James was sure that no one else was in the car with them.

2.4.5

The sex was amazing as always, but tonight he couldn't sleep afterwards.

He felt like **w**aking up from a long dream. He couldn't remember everything yet, but his mind was clearing. Was she really manipulating him? How could he let her fool him for so long?

Every conversation they had about the past was similar. She always had a nice story, but when it came to the accident, she stopped talking.

At first, she said she didn't remember. He believed her because he didn't remember either.

Then, she started saying she remembered little parts of the trip, and together they filled in the gaps.

But every time, she mentioned her legs, it was a signal for him to **drop the subject**. He respected her pain. But what if it wasn't just pain? What if she was hiding something from him?

Could *she* have hit him with something heavy? He thought maybe she could, but she wasn't tall enough. Unless he was sitting or kneeling. What if he *was*?

He shuddered at the thought. Someone had hit him, but why would *she* do that? And what happened next? Did she really run far, jump into the river, breaking her legs? That didn't make much sense. He was overthinking. She didn't deserve such doubt.

But still, by hiding things, she made him wonder.

Strategy tip

První věta říká, že nemohl usnout. Hned další věta říká, že mu připadalo, jako by se probouzel z dlouhého snu – chápeš, na co se tato věta odkazuje? Celá tahle sekce by mohla být z románu vypuštěná a celkový příběh by to nijak nezměnilo. Proto čteš román, jehož součástí jsou i filozofické otázky – aby ses učila vnímat příběh přirozeně, a nejen učebnicově účelové věty.

2.4.6

She told him about their past, but she didn't mention going to see Dana. She didn't say she had seen him there. If she went to see the same therapist **by chance**, wouldn't that be the first thing to mention?

She was surprised when he told her that he had noticed her standing across the street a few weeks before she came to see him. She had an easy explanation, but wasn't it just a **convenient** excuse?

He never asked Dana what they had talked about. What if Dana knew everything, but he didn't want to listen? Either way, Dana was right. It was all strange. Very strange.

He finally remembered the important words from that day. That "maybe Julie blamed him for what happened to her". And if she didn't blame him for what happened, maybe she blamed him for the fact that he only had a small scar on his head while she lost her legs.

It seemed to him that he had only closed his eyes, and he woke up again in the middle of the night, remembering something else. The man in the back seat. It wasn't a hitchhiker.

At some point, James remembered a hand on his shoulder from behind. The person was talking to James, and that hand on his shoulder symbolized trust, friendship, or partnership. He could sense it. He couldn't explain it or remember what the man had said. But it was definitely a man, or maybe a boy, and it wasn't a stranger.

Learning tip

by chance – náhodou (je to vlastně opak od deliberately, section 2.4.1)

convenient excuse – vhodná, šikovná výmluva (pozor na význam v kontextu; nelze to použít ve významu "šikovný člověk", takže nikdy nepoužívej jen prostý překlad jednoho slovíčka a vnímej použití v souvislostech)

2.4.7

The first time a memory like that appeared, he tried not to fall asleep and hoped to remember more.

Now, it seemed more likely that memories came while he was sleeping, as his brain rested. So, this time he didn't try to force it. Instead, he closed his eyes, **snuggled** closer to Julie, and just wanted to sleep again.

The motion, the fact that he wanted to be closer to her, even though he had been thinking that he couldn't trust her, surprised him. Subconsciously, he still wanted to be with her. He'd be happy if all the strange things she was telling him were true, instead of having to admit that she was **deceiving** him. That she was manipulating him with – as Dana said, "God knows what intentions."

No, it couldn't be that! It was all strange because it was incomplete. Because he didn't understand the full picture. He didn't understand why Julie described everything in such detail. He thought she did it to distract him, but perhaps she hoped the details would help him remember. The smell of pine needles. And she was right. He remembered, at least a little. She was helping him.

Her long hair brushed against his cheek. He finally fell back asleep.

Character Focus

Popiš vzhled, vlastnosti nebo chování těchto postav:

- Julie
- Sonia
- Tony
- Marian

Who is who?

Na další stránku vkládám obrázky, jak si představovaly vzhled některých postav předchozí účastnice. Poznáš, kdo je kdo? A který rys tu postavu prozrazuje?

