

Extract: INDIGNATION (a novel by Philip Roth)

About two and a half months after the well-trained divisions of North Korea, armed by the Soviets and Chinese Communists, crossed the 38th parallel into South Korea on June 25, 1950 ... I entered Robert Treat, a small college in downtown Newark ... I was the first member of our family to *seek*¹ a higher education. None of my cousins had gone beyond high school, and neither my father nor his three brothers had finished elementary school. “I worked for money”, my father told me, “since I was ten years old”. He was a neighbourhood *butcher*² for whom I’d delivered orders on my bicycle all through high school, except during baseball season and on the afternoons when I had to attend interschool matches as a member of the debating team. Almost from the day I left the store – where I’d been working sixty-hour weeks for him between the time of my high school graduation in January and the start of college in September – almost from the day that I began classes at Robert Treat, my father became frightened that I would die.

Maybe his fear had something to do with the war, which the U.S. forces ... had immediately entered to *bolster*³ the efforts of the ill-trained and underequipped South Korean army; maybe it had to do with the heavy casualties our troops were sustaining ... Or maybe the fear had to do with his financial worries: the year before, the neighbourhood’s first supermarket had opened only a few blocks from our kosher butcher shop, and sales had begun steadily *falling off*⁴ ... Whatever the cause or mix of causes fueling the abrupt change in his previously benign paternal behaviour, he manifested his fear by *hounding*⁵ me day and night about my whereabouts. Where were you? Why weren’t you home? How do I know where you are when you go out?

Questions

1. Which pair of adjectives best describe the narrator based on the information in the first paragraph?
 - a) Hard-working and ambitious
 - b) Serious and hard-working
 - c) Intelligent and studious

¹ Seek: to try to find or get something

² Butcher: a person who sells meat

³ Bolster: to reinforce or support

⁴ Fall off: to decrease in quantity or quality

⁵ Hound: to chase, pursue or pester someone persistently

COMPREHENSION B2: 1



2. Why does the narrator describe both his father and cousins' level of education?
 - a) To explain his father's chosen profession
 - b) To draw a contrast between himself and the other male members of his family
 - c) To underscore the uniqueness of his decision to go to college

3. In the second paragraph, why does the narrator list many possible motives for his father's recent behaviour?
 - a) To highlight the complexity of the situation.
 - b) To explore his bafflement at his father's change in behaviour
 - c) To emphasize the stress his father is under.

4. Which adjective best describes how the narrator feel about his father's behaviour?
 - a) appreciated
 - b) smothered
 - c) concerned

SEE ANSWERS OVERLEAF



COMPREHENSION B2: 1

Answers

1. a
2. c
3. b
4. b