

The Interview

Her name was Ms. Finch. Preposterously short with an angry, blunt brown bob and owlish eyeglasses dwarfing her petite face, she was old enough to be retired but clearly cantankerous enough to not go quietly into the night. Brian felt himself withering underneath her hawkish stare as he slipped into one of the stiff-backed chairs in the center of the spartan room. Ms. Finch perched on the edge of the other, the tips of her brown Oxfords barely grazing the worn beige carpet.

“Mr. Nelson, your file indicates that you have gone through four different job interviews over the last ten days, yet you have failed to secure actual employment,” she said brusquely, settling back into her chair and primly folding her hands on top of the clipboard in her lap. “If your slovenly appearance today is any indication of the seriousness with which you’re approaching your job search, then I can understand perfectly well why Flowers on First had no desire to hire you as a delivery driver.”

Nausea accompanied the heat spreading through his body. He knew it had been a mistake to go straight from soccer practice to the career counseling session, but he surmised that showing up in cleats would be better than tardiness. He began to explain himself, but Ms. Finch pinched her lips together into an angry beak.

“I’m not interested in excuses, Mr. Nelson,” she said, feathers visibly ruffled. “But I would like to know why someone with your grade point average and extensive list of after-school activities is having such a hard time finding part-time employment.”

The tiny woman’s interrogation reignited the excruciating feeling of helplessness that had plagued Brian during his four failed interviews. “I-I-I clam up,” he stammered, keeping his eyes trained on the carpet.

He waited for the inevitable scolding, but Ms. Finch merely bobbed her head and made a brief notation on her clipboard. She appraised him at length once more, the inquisitive tilt of her head giving her the appearance of a curious wren. A gentler version of her voice broke the generous silence. “I’m not so different from you, Mr. Nelson. I too am apt to ‘clam up,’ as you say, during situations that I find intimidating or stressful.” She read the disbelief etched into his face and said somberly, “I apologize for being so presumptuous about your situation. Most of the teenagers who find their way into my office fail in their

attempts at employment because they simply aren't expending the effort to present themselves in a professional manner. I'm afraid your age and your attire led me to assume you fit the stereotype."

Brian explained the reason for his cleats and shorts, and Ms. Finch nodded gravely. "Punctuality is of utmost importance, Mr. Nelson, and I commend you for yours, but may I suggest keeping an alternative outfit on hand for such occasions? Splendid. Now let us get to work."

Questions

1. Who is the main character of "The Interview"? How do you know?
2. What is the problem faced by the main character?
3. How does the author characterize Ms. Finch? Cite details from the text to support your answer.
4. Predict the outcome of Brian's next job interview. Use logical reasoning and evidence from the text to support your answer.

Vocabulary List

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. preposterously
2. cantankerous
3. brusquely
4. slovenly
5. reignited
6. excruciating
7. inevitable
8. presumptuous

Context Clues

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1) “**Preposterously** short with an angry, blunt brown bob”

a. slightly; moderately b. crookedly c. ridiculously or excessively d. realistically or expectably

2) “she was old enough to be retired but clearly **cantankerous** enough to not go quietly into the night”

a. uncooperative; stubborn b. afraid; frightened c. ill or diseased d. needy or poor

3) “yet you have failed to secure actual employment,” she said **brusquely**”

a. calmly; evenly b. kindly or gently c. questioningly d. sharply or bluntly

4) “If your **slovenly** appearance today is any indication of the seriousness with which you’re approaching your job search”

a. clean; orderly b. colorful or bright c. messy or untidy d. unusual or odd

5) “The tiny woman’s interrogation **reignited** the excruciating feeling of helplessness”

a. smothered; snuffed out b. justified; ennobled c. rekindled; restarted d. decreased

6) “The tiny woman’s interrogation reignited the **excruciating** feeling of helplessness”

a. painful or agonizing b. slight; minimal c. forgotten d. unexpected; surprising

7) “He waited for the **inevitable** scolding”

a. final or terminal b. continuous c. cruel or heartless d. certain; unavoidable

8) “I apologize for being so **presumptuous** about your situation.”

a. uncaring; indifferent b. overconfident or smug c. ignorant d. harsh; mean