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The Interview

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For four long years, Ralph Hanson had been dredging up bright remarks with which to embarrass the interviewer and now his brief moment was finally at hand.

He strolled into the office and placed his papers in front of the captain at the desk. The officer rose, offered his hand and at the same time waved vaguely with the left one in the direction of the other chair. Perfunctorily, Hanson shook the proferred hand and dropped rather loosely into the indicated chair.

A quick smile appeared on the captain's face and he stated mechanically "I'm an R.O.T.C. instructor and I'm required to give each entering freshman a little talk on the benefits of the R.O.T.C. program." He paused, and glancing at the smirking figure seated across from him ventured, "Are you, by chance, a veteran?"

Hanson's grin became wider, "Yes, by chance, I am."

The captain suddenly seemed ill at ease. "Well, I have to give you this talk anyway." A probing finger crept stealthily inside his shirt collar.

Hanson's rejoinder served only to heighten the awkwardness of the situation. "I know you do." His jaw twitched with the effort of maintaining that grimace upon his features.

The captain spoke rapidly now, looking at his desk top rather than at Hanson. Every time he glanced upwards he met that fixed smile. Presently, he stumbled, mispronounced a word and catching himself, looked at Hanson for encouragement. There was none forthcoming.

The ghastly smile was still present, but a careful observer might have noticed that it had slipped ever so slightly. It slipped still more as the captain continued, paused, and clearing his throat, lurched onward with an anguished frown upon his almost livid countenance.

At last the speech was over! The captain looked at a point somewhere over Hanson's left shoulder as he shook his hand in dismissal. Hanson disengaged his hand and shuffled out in a rather disturbed state of mind. The experience hadn't been nearly as satisfying as he had hoped it would be. He felt horrible. The expression on the
captain’s face, when he had looked upon Hanson’s painted smile, had been one of sheer physical pain.

Slowly, Hanson walked out of the building. Pity was a new emotion to him, yet he was almost sure that was what he was feeling for the captain. Strange, but in all the novels he had ever read about ex-G.I.s, they had always felt somewhat exalted after humiliating an officer in just such a predicament.

Hanson’s eyes brushed his watch. The cafeteria was open by now and he knew that his Air Force buddies would be there, downing coffee. His pace quickened. Maybe he would just change a few facts and make a big deal out of the whole mess. The idea appealed to him. This could make a pretty funny story if a guy knew how to tell it the right way.

Confessional . . .

Blacked robed men—their silence voices,
Like pathetic winds that probe
Thru scavenger picked angling streets
By night, images of bleeding swords—
That bleeding rust,
And dust flowers pressed in leather books,
Where virtuous must evokes a cozy smile.

Father leisure up the receding aisles!
Father, black against the marble wall,
Approach me upright coffin’d here.
Father hurry, hear me now!
We’ll syllable my life and breathe a lamb
And burn it writhing up and be reborn,
Father! black against the marble wall.

. . . John McClure

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