Pilot Captured by the Japanese, 1942

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They are holding his arms, bringing him off the plane, leading him away. The black blindfold covers his eyes. Their white gloves hook around the leather of his flying-jacket, lapels turned back, sheepskin lining exposed like an inner layer of the body. His arms dangle. His mouth is open in a half-smile, still hoping to be liked. The guards look down, lips curled. They are touching something they would rather not touch. They are ashamed to be seen with a man who has surrendered, a man who has let himself be taken alive. He towers between them, smiling as if telling a joke. They lead him on his long American legs to his forty months alone in a tiger cage. He preferred life to honor: now let him taste it slowly, by itself, this thing he sets above all else, this life.