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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.