

## Pilot Captured by the Japanese, 1942 · Sharon Olds

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.