

## Short back and sides

It's fine, Stan's hair. His wife, Vera, says:  
"He gets it from his mother.  
They were all fine haired, her side."

He's soft-skinned, too. Big hands  
with liver spots. They tremble, agitate  
an invisible test tube, like a chemist.

Big ears, lobes like small ox-tongues.  
He likes his hair cut short.  
Curious to be holding his head still,

gentling the clippers in the back of his neck,  
hearing the buzz, feeling light hairs fall.  
*I've eaten snake*, he says. *A python*.

He could butcher anything the lads brought in.  
He'll not eat curry. *When you smell that  
you know you're closing on a village*.

On Recon. they'd take the headman's son.  
Shackle him on the bonnet of the Jeep.  
*See, if no one made a fuss we'd know*

*no Japs was up the trail. Drive him for a bit  
then let him off.* The skin of his scalp is fragile,  
scissors cold on the pink of the skull.

His goalkeeper's hands beat a soft  
tattoo against his knee, When he remembers  
he clasps them like a handshake, or a prayer.

In jungle once, he came upon a pal  
pinioned to a tree, opened up from throat to groin,  
his piled entrails at his feet, a black buzz of flies.

*I've never told our Vera that.* I tidy round his neck.  
I'll shake the teatowel outside on the step,  
watch the hair blow, like dandelion clocks.

His hand have freed themselves.  
He has forgotten them.