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 pa
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.