

## IT'S OK

Elleke Boehmer

His face was calm, rinsed of expression, when he stood facing my train, when he confronted me straight on, his legs braced across the rails.

The next minute his blood shot up against the windscreen in a tall spray, incredibly thick, incredibly high. So much blood. It ran back in strands along the wiper. By then, of course, I'd stopped the train.

I dealt with the aftermath like completing a tax return. I described the blood-jet across the windscreen to the police. Incredibly thick, I said, incredibly tall. Before the blood began running back down the glass, I told them, I'd stopped the train.

It was the selfsame blood, said the police, he had so much feared but, as it happened, had no reason to fear. He'd taken an AIDS test three weeks before and had been driven mad by the anxiety of awaiting the result. That day he'd decided he could wait no longer. He felt sure of the test's outcome, and couldn't face telling his parents.

Now, in my dreams, he comes drifting towards me like a past lover, a lover you don't leave but are left by and cannot forget. Always you're teased by the magic that could've been, the promises lost, and so I awake with wetted cheeks. I see his face, clearly, the dip in his hairline, the cheeks pulled tight by his focus on my train.

At the inquest I saw again in my mind's eye, as in my dream, that unblinking focus. There were photographs of him, younger, happier, but my image was clearer. The coroner said he was gay, gay like me, and I began to weep. I wept for the missed opportunity of his life, and the single missed opportunity of that moment before he died. When he looked into my eyes, waiting for the blood-jet, I wish

I could've signalled ... not *don't* – by then my train had him in sight.  
No, not *don't*, but rather, Mate, my friend, I wish I could've signalled,  
You, your death, your love, it's cool. Take this with you. Your  
blood, your life, it's all OK, it's fine, it's good.

## FIVE ACRES

Jesse Patrick Ferguson

1. Corroded pitchfork, upright: signpost to a garden weary of straight borders. 2. Wooden wheelbarrow, upturned, composting itself behind the implements shed. 3. Defunct '50s-era John Deere tractor, perhaps worth something to a collector uninterested in running the thing. Bigger than the tiny house. 4. Old split-rail fences: whatever once they fenced has long since split. 5. New husband, happily righting our new home. Check.

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Steven was no longer sporting the dapper argyle sweaters and tweed sports coats that had so impressed at the Starbucks. They'd both been married once before, so their meeting was casual, no sex-kids-home pressure. In the checkout, ordering his café americano, he'd flashed her his big been-there-done-that smile. Nice teeth.

So she'd switched from tea with milk to americanos, and each time they met in the café (first floor in the building where she works as a secretary) her heart would beat a little faster for the day. Months passed with walks down St Catherine Street and conversation about the place forty-five minutes outside the city. He'd had his eye on it: on its small cedar-shingle house, its five acres of land, its room for a second wife. She'd agreed to set eyes on it in the spring, and that was that.

In daydreams that winter she'd opened and closed the old-fashioned wooden cupboards, painted white with blue trim. She'd fitted things inside, humming a tune to herself against the hush of the surrounding fields, the deeper silence inside. But arriving now for the first time, with the contents of her apartment in the truck, her

too-many clothes and too-many books in their hopelessly large boxes, she stood looking at the cupboard doors painted a dull dark brown. It would take too many coats to make them white, she thought, while the harsh sound of metal striking metal entered through the open door. If she'd gone to the window, she'd have seen Steven at work with a pinch bar, wrenching what could be a rusted cart axle from the clinging soil of their five acres.