

villanelle for the wound

The last time I saw Josh at school, his head was shaved. His skull was stapled shut. He'd liked this boy, and when the boy found out about it, he spit on him. Then 8 months later, out of nowhere, he clubbed him with a metal pipe. Our drama teacher, Mr. Franklin, said, *Remember that forever children; that's what hatred looks like.* But I saw the wound; it didn't look like hatred. It looked more like a mouth.

Wide open mouth, blood rusted gate that let the dreadful animals of lust escape. How dare he speak of it out loud?
Didn't he know what waited just outside the walls for boys like us? Did he forget?
The last time I saw Josh at school, his head was shaved. His skull was stapled shut. He'd liked a boy, and when the boy found out

he spit on him. He shouldered him against the wall of lockers. The boy, whose name was **THOMAS RIVERS** was convicted of two counts felony assault, but skipped the murder rap with something that they called the gay panic defense. In his panic he left a teenage boy for dead. *Remember that forever children; that's what hatred looks like.* But I saw the wound; it didn't look like hatred. It looked more like a mouth

with tarnished metal sutures for its teeth, a white and puckered scalp for lips, a murder-dazzled brain just barely balanced on its tongue. a loud and punch drunk mouth that babbled languages of dumbstruck fog and held its smile for my eyes, unbearable; a jagged riverbed.
The last time I saw Josh at school, his head was shaved. His skull was stapled shut. He'd liked this boy, and when the boy found out

it was from somebody Josh trusted. Some girl whose razorwired name is lost to us, who probably thought it would be funny *funny did you hear about it? Josh, the gay kid, thinks you're cute. He likes you. He told me.* Jealous girl, jeering hive, blistering of ants, a vicious swarming red. *Remember that forever children; that's what hatred looks like.* But I saw the wound; it didn't look like hatred. It looked more like a mouth.

The mouth I kissed instead of David's mouth. Instead of Tim or Adam's mouth. The mouth that swallowed flirt and risk and take and spouted plumes of dreadful silence. We men who love men's bodies know this mouth, its whispered menace, its venomous spit, its fevered breath.
The last time I saw Josh at school, his head was shaved. His skull was stapled shut. He'd liked a boy. The boy found out.

and I remembered that forever. What it looked like. Hatred. Like a mouth.

