

Stuck

Ozzy

stuck pennies in Huey's door, wedging it shut, and we all stood in the hallway and laughed as he tried to get out. Serinson and Crater built a wall of beer cans and set it outside Gregg's door so he crashed into it on his way to the shower the next morning. Butthead and No-neck tied a rope to the handle of two doors across the hallway from each other so no one in either room could get out, and I have to say I found the shouts amusing, quizzical and comical at first, growing increasingly angry, until the entire dorm was filled with the word fuck.



On Sundays Simpson wandered the perimeter of the tennis courts collecting lost balls; late Sunday night, from his third floor window, he and I aimed them at the cars below us in the lot, setting off the alarms, shattering the one night of stillness on campus. Devins threw Skoal packets in the washers and dryers in the community laundry, and Jenkins filled the soap dispensers with mayonnaise. Every night someone flooded the sinks, and every morning some new witticism like "Here I sit broken-hearted" had been scrawled on the toilet stalls.

When Pace passed out we drew a penis on his face. When Stevenson slept we shaved him, then short-sheeted his bed. Davids we ducted-taped his wrists and ankles together, and the only thing that kept us from taping shut his mouth was we were afraid he might choke on his own vomit, drunk as we all were.

What

we didn't do was go to class. I'll say it was because we were too tired from constantly watching our backs, or maybe it's that we only have so much creativity inside us, and when we use it coming up with ways to attack others, we forget to expand ourselves. It's also possible we had given up. Or were so busy trying to lock someone else in that we shut ourselves out, too busy attacking to protect.

That first semester we had all been friends. It was only in the winter, when the First Gulf War began, that we tried to hurt each other. This was after watching the news every night: the bombs over Baghdad, the Tomahawk missiles flying in from the Red Sea. We didn't know then how war would loom over our adult lives, how we'd move from one war to another without even realizing we'd moved. No wonder we were too tired to go to class, or care. No wonder we built so many walls, shut so many doors. It would be years before I quit sabotaging others, and still more before I realized there's no end to the creativity we can control, it's only that there's a limit to how much emotion we can handle. I'll prove it to you now. Tell me, when's the last time you remembered we were still at war?

Paul Crenshaw is a writer and essayist. His essay collection "This One Will Hurt You" was published by The Ohio State University Press in spring 2019. Other work has appeared in Best American Essays, Best American Nonrequired Reading, The Pushcart Prize, anthologies by Houghton Mifflin and W.W. Norton, Oxford American, Tin House, Brevity, North American Review, and Glimmer Train, among others.