

Duet, by Ron Koertge

Winston and Betsy have been dating for a long time, and truly care about each other. Winston really wants to have sex with Betsy, but she is not ready to do this. The two decide that perhaps sex and emotion can be separated, and therefore both of them can get what they want. Betsy arranges to have Winston get together with her best friend, Patsy, because Patsy also wants to experiment sexually. In the end, Winston decides that waiting for Betsy is what he really wants to do, and he leaves Patsy without having sexual intercourse with her.

Trashback, by Alden R. Carter

Kenneth Bauer is a football player who likes to play the class clown. He continually makes jokes, annoying his teachers and friends, and making enemies of his victims. When he is given an assignment to complete as punishment, he tries to be funny and creates a story that is in poor taste. His girlfriend gets him to delete this story, and to empty the computer “trash” to remove any record of its existence. A short time later, Kenneth is called into the principal’s office where he discovers that his reputation may be damaged because of the story he thought he deleted. A bit of detective work reveals that one of his frequent victims has retaliated by retrieving the offensive document, and he wants an apology or he will send this document to various other computers, further destroying Kenneth’s reputation. In the end, Kenneth realizes that bullying is not a joke, and he changes his behaviour.

X-15s, by Jack Gantos

The unnamed narrator is trying to get into a gang. He feels a need for protection and companionship, and is willing to do what is necessary to be accepted. The initiation task that he and several others must complete is to return to the gang clubhouse with a dead pet, and the last person back will have to eat something dead. When his attempts to kill his own family pet, a cat, fail, the narrator returns to the clubhouse and pretends that he has a dead cat. He is forced to fight another boy to be accepted, which he does willingly. In the end, he struggles with his conscience because he knows that what he is doing is wrong, but he really wants to be part of this gang.

Wishing It Away, by Rita Williams-Garcia

Belinda Tobias is an “invisible” woman. No one seems to notice or care about what happens to her. She skips school, shoplifts, engages in frequent sexual activities with her boyfriend, gets pregnant, and no one even notices or reacts. Belinda herself barely seems to notice what is happening to her. She thinks that she can “wish it away”, or ignore her problems. After she delivers her baby at home, alone, Belinda places the infant in a dumpster near her former boyfriend’s home. The next morning the police, neighbours, and boyfriend arrive at Belinda’s door to accuse her of abandoning the baby, and she is arrested.

Confession, by Gloria D. Miklowitz

Jim James, known as JJ, joins together with his friends Danny, Carlos, and Bruno to create a club called The Protectors. They are angry about the power the gangs have in their school and neighbourhood, and are determined to stop them. They believe that they can persuade and negotiate, in other words, use their heads instead of guns and knives to make their points. First they sneak into the school and set fire to the lockers belonging to the drug dealers, destroying the drugs stored there. They manage to avoid getting caught or seen, so no one knows who did this. Next, they decide to damage the property of another gang, to show them how it feels to be the victims of vandalism. They take screwdrivers and spray paint to the cars belonging to the Pitbulls. Unfortunately, they are seen and surrounded by the gang members. Danny, who has promised not to use the gun he brought, shoots Samboy Parks to stop being attacked. All four of The Protectors are taken into custody by the police.

Stranger, by Walter Dean Myers

Cassie Holliday is a strong student at high school. She works hard and has plans for the future. When her mother tells her she will have to fend for herself, Cassie is overwhelmed by the task, and decides to take “a little something” to ease things. She begins to take more and more drugs to stop the hurt she feels, and soon the drug use takes over her life. When Cassie sees a stranger in the mirror in her apartment, she thinks that someone is stalking her. This person, who really is Cassie herself, becomes the focus of her fears. Her life spirals out of control, as Cassie tries to hold on to what is normal, refusing to admit to herself the serious problem that she has.

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