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In Defense of My Involvement with the Victim

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In Defense of my Involvement with the Victim // Benjamin Sales

First things first, I want to say that I accept absolutely no responsibility for what happened. It was tragic, there is no doubt about that, no one could possibly deny the overwhelming tragedy of it all. But it was still an accident nonetheless. Well, perhaps accident isn't the right word. I think that there was a certain amount of inevitability involved in the situation. Right from the beginning (and please don't misunderstand me when I say this) to some extent she *had it coming*. In any case, you can't burden me with the blame; I'm not guilty of anything.

I mean, what would you have had me done otherwise? Or at what point would you have had me intervene? There was no single time when I could have made a difference. Surely you can't blame me for laughing when it first began, when it was all just a big joke. We were just children then, and none of us could predict how the situation might develop. You can't blame children for being naïve. And then, later, when no one would sit with her or even speak to her, would you have had me ostracise myself from the others by interacting with her? And suffer with her – two pariahs instead of one? It wouldn't have done any good. By the time the name-calling got really out of hand there was nothing I could do to stop it progressing. It was too therapeutic, too cathartic for us to have someone we could hate so unconditionally, and who received our hate so *well*. And to be clear, I wasn't even the one who came up with the names, and, while I do admit that from time to time I might have used them, I always took care to make sure that she wasn't in earshot when I did. And the names were funny, for the most part. I'm sure that if she had fostered a different outlook she could have seen the humour in them. But we all know that she wasn't one to see the comedy in her circumstances.

And that, I think, is the best explanation for why the situation unfolded so neatly into its sad conclusion: she played the role of the sufferer too well. Now I'm not saying that I endorse this view, but I hope you realise that there is a particular consensus amongst my peers which understands that the only real person to blame in all that happened was the victim herself. They say that a different person would have reacted better, that anyone else would never have teared up and whimpered in such a wholeheartedly

pathetic way. And it is undeniably true that she had a knack for it, that she could make the staunchest pacifist want to hurl abuse at her just to see her flinch in the brilliant way only she could, and to do it again and again because she was so wanting of it. She thrived as the victim, it was something about her eyes, how beautiful and round and wet they got. And the way her red lips would pout and tremble, and her whole face would begin to flush... She revelled in the abuse, and we couldn't help but give it to her. Anyone could tell that she was asking for it.

So I do confess that some things may have been said by me, and some physical contact might have been made, but that involvement hardly warrants blame. I don't even identify with those actions any more. And everybody knows that a full and proper conception of blame requires that the actions be autonomous, and autonomy requires a schema of acceptance and identification of actions as one's 'own', an integration of effective will into a performative agency which-

What do you *mean*: 'It doesn't matter.'? Of course it matters; of course it counts for *something*. Of course it does.

And besides, it was so awfully long ago...